

The Fraud of the White Helmets. An Impressive Piece of Propaganda

Hollywood buys into yet another lie

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I actually forced myself to watch the documentary [The White Helmets](#), which is available on Netflix. It is 40 minutes long, is of high quality cinematographically speaking, and tells a very convincing tale that was [promoted as](#) “the story of real-life heroes and impossible hope.”

It is overall a very ., so much so that it has won numerous awards including the Oscar for Best Documentary Short this year and the White Helmets themselves were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. More to the point, however, is the undeniable fact that the documentary has helped shape the public understanding of what is going on in Syria, delivering a Manichean tale that depicts the “rebels” as always good and Bashar al-Assad and his government as un-redeemably evil.

It has been [reliably reported that](#) celebrities like George Clooney, Justin Timberlake and Hillary Clinton really like the White Helmets documentary and have promoted it with the understanding that it represents the truth about Syria, but it is, of course, not the whole story. The film, which was made by the White Helmets themselves without any external verification of what it depicts, portrays the group as “heroic,” an “impartial, life-saving rescue organization” of first responders. Excluded from the scenes of heroism under fire is the White Helmets’ relationship with the al-Qaeda affiliated group Jabhat al-Nusra and its participation in the torture and execution of “rebel” opponents. Indeed, the White Helmets only operate in rebel held territory, which enables them to shape the narrative both regarding who they are and what is occurring on the ground. Because of increasing awareness of the back story, there is now a growing movement to petition the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to revoke the Oscar based on the complete and deliberate misrepresentation of what the White Helmets are all about.

Exploiting their access to the western media, the White Helmets have *de facto* become a major source of “eyewitness” news regarding what has been going on in those many parts of Syria where European and American journalists are quite rightly afraid to go. It is all part of a broader [largely successful “rebel” effort](#) to manufacture fake news that depicts the Damascus government as engaging in war crimes directed against civilians.



White Helmets on Netflix (Source: Netflix)

The White Helmets have certainly saved some lives under dangerous circumstances but they have also exaggerated their humanitarian role as they travel to bombing sites with their film crews trailing behind them. Once at the sites, with no independent observers, they are able to arrange or even stage what is filmed to conform to their selected narrative. They have consistently promoted tales of government atrocities against civilians to encourage outside military intervention in Syria and bring about regime change in Damascus. The White Helmets were, for example, the propagators of the [totally false](#) but propagandistically effective claims regarding the government use of so-called “barrel bombs” against civilians.

The [White Helmets](#) were a largely foreign creation that came into prominence in the aftermath of the unrest in Syria that developed as a result of the Arab Spring in 2012. They are currently [largely funded](#) by a number of non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as governments, including Britain and some European Union member states. The United States has directly provided \$23 million through the USAID (US Agency for International Development) as of 2016 and almost certainly considerably more indirectly. Max Blumenthal has [explored in some detail](#) the various funding resources and relationships that the organization draws on, mostly in Europe and the United States.

Former weapons inspector Scott Ritter [has described](#) how the White Helmets are not actually trained to do the complicated rescue work that they depict in their self-made videos, which have established their reputation by ostensibly showing them in action inside Syria, rescuing civilians from bombed out structures, and providing life-saving emergency medical care. As an expert in Hazardous Materials handling with New York Task Force 2 USAR team, Ritter reports that

“these videos represent de facto evidence of dangerous incompetence or, worse, fraud... The bread and butter of the White Helmet’s self-made reputation is the rescue of a victim—usually a small child—from beneath a pile of rubble, usually heavy reinforced concrete... The techniques used by the White Helmets are not only technically wrong, but dangerous to anyone who might actually be trapped... In my opinion, the videos are pure theater, either staged to impress an unwitting audience, or actually conducted with total disregard for the wellbeing of any real victims.”

Ritter also cites the lack of training in hazardous chemicals, best observed in the videos provided by the White Helmets regarding their activity at Khan Sheikhun on April 4th. He notes

“As was the case with their ‘rescues’ of victims in collapsed structures, I believe the rescue efforts of the White Helmets at Khan Sheikhun were a theatrical performance designed to impress the ignorant and ill-informed... Through their actions...the White Helmets were able to breathe life into the overall narrative of a chemical weapons attack, distracting from the fact that no actual weapon existed....”

But perhaps the most serious charge against the White Helmets consists of the evidence that they [actively participated in the atrocities](#), to include torture and murder, carried out by their al-Nusra hosts. There have been [numerous photos](#) of the White Helmets operating directly with armed terrorists and also celebrating over the bodies of execution victims and

murdered Iraqi soldiers. The group has an excellent working relationship with a number of jihadi affiliates and is regarded by them as fellow “mujahideen” and “soldiers of the revolution.”

So by all means let’s organize to revoke the White Helmets’ Oscar due to misrepresentation and fraud. It might even serve as a wake-up call to George Clooney and his fellow Hollywood [snowflakes](#). But the bigger take-away from the tale of the White Helmets would appear to be how it is an unfortunate repeat of the bumbling by a gullible U.S. government that has wrecked the Middle East while making Americans poorer and less safe.

A group of “moderates,” in this case their propagandists, is supported with weapons and money to overthrow a government with which Washington has no real quarrel but it turns out the moderates are really extremists. If they succeed in changing regime in Damascus, that is when the real nightmare will begin for minorities within Syria and for the entire region, including both Israel and Saudi Arabia, both of which seem intent on bringing Bashar al-Assad down. And the truly unfortunate fact is that the Israelis and Saudis apparently have convinced an ignorant Donald Trump that that is the way to go so the situation in Syria will only get worse and, unless there is a course correction, Washington will again richly deserve most of the blame.

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