

Western media lie about Syria - eyewitness reports

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Global Research, August 09, 2011

[Russia Today](#) 29 April 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)



A photo released by the Syrian Arab news Agency (SANA) on April 27, 2011, shows one of 6 coffins of a killed member of either the army or security forces being taken from the October Military hospital in Damascus to their towns and villages for burial, following several days of unrest (AFP Photo)

While media reports paint a picture of the situation in Syria as a mass public uprising brutally suppressed by the dictatorial government, the events are viewed in a totally different way by those living there.

RT caught up with Anhar Kochneva, director of a Moscow-based tourist firm specializing in the Middle East. She often travels to Syria, and stays in touch with hundreds of people in the region. She shared what her contacts say about the unfolding unrest and who they blame for the spreading violence.

RT: *What's happening in Syria? What have you seen? And that are the Syrians saying?*

Anhar Kochneva: Not even once did I come across anyone who would in any way support these riots; and mind you, in the line of my job, I deal with all sorts of people. There are many vehicles with the president's portraits driving the streets throughout the country - ranging from old, barely moving crankers to brand new Porsches and Hummers. You can't force people into hanging up portraits. It means that people, irrespective of their status and income, support the president rather than the rebellion. I saw quite a number of young people walking or driving around with Syrian flags. How can you force a young person hanging out with friends to wave flags? I think it's difficult too. If you understand the mentality of the Syrians you can tell there is a sincere impulse from a forced obligation.

On March 29, I saw a rally in Hama to support the president - indeed, many thousands of men and women, with their children, and entire families went out. The streets were flooded with people. It was quite a shock to see Al-Jazeera presenting rallies in support of the president as if they were protests against him. It was just as surprising to see the Israeli websites post photos and videos of supporters' rallies with comments saying those were opponents of the regime. There you have people holding portraits of Bashar al-Assad and flags, and we're told that these people are against him.

RT: *The media reports mass anti-government rallies.*

AK: There's a powerful misinformation swell going on. On April 1, the media reported a large anti-governmental rally in Damascus. I was in Damascus on that day. This rally never happened - I didn't see it, and neither did the locals.

On April 16, Reuters news agency wrote that 50,000 opponents of the regime took to the streets of Damascus, and that they had been dispersed with tear gas and batons. Damascus' residents realize that such a rally could not take place in the city unnoticed. How many policemen would it take to disperse it? And how come nobody saw it except Reuters? Five hundred people in the streets of Damascus are a large crowd. Reuters broadcast their material around the world, including Russia. One source lies, and then this lie is like a snowball rolling downhill creating a fake reality, and picking up rumor and speculation.

People in Syria watch the footage. What do they see? A picture allegedly from Yemen. A picture allegedly from Egypt. A picture allegedly from Syria. But the pictures all show people dressed in the same fashion. People in Syria can tell their fellow countrymen from their neighbors - both by their faces and their clothes.

There are videos on the internet showing how amateur footage of the so-called riots is made. There's a parked car and nothing's going on around. And there's a man standing next to it throwing rocks. And people around are taking pictures.

There are a lot of staged videos. A Lebanese can tell the difference between footage taken in Lebanon and that taken in Damascus at a glance. And they show footage from Tripoli, or footage taken several years ago in Iraq, and say it is unrest in Syria.

There are many online forums for women in Arab countries. Women share information following TV reports on 'mass unrests'. Women write - what's happening outside your window? And they reply: we looked down from the balcony, and didn't see anything that the TV was talking about.

Presently, a lot of young unarmed policemen get killed. The media propaganda immediately labels them as victims of the regime. I repeat, policemen are unarmed. The Syrian police are not too good with guns, because nothing like this has happened here for a long time. But the killed rookies are reported as either victims among the protestors, or as policemen who refused to shoot at their fellow countrymen, depending on the editors' preference. Goebbels' words seem to be true: the bigger the lie, the more easily they believe it.

RT: *But why are policemen dying if there are no mass protests?*

AK: Policemen die because they get shot by those who know that they are unarmed.

RT: *Who shoots policemen?*

AK: They talk a lot about it in Syria. Rumor has it that trained commandos came across the border from Iraq. People in Syria are well-aware that after the US occupied Iraq, they formed special squads there. They were killing people, stirring up conflicts between the Shiite and Sunni communities, and between Muslims and Christians; they were blowing up streets, markets, mosques and churches. Those terrorist attacks targeted civilians rather than the occupying regime.

Not long ago, they caught three such commandos in the outskirts of Damascus, when they were randomly shooting at people. They turned out to be Iraqis.

Syrian TV showed footage of somebody shooting at policemen and passers-by from bushes and rooftops. They occasionally get caught, and they either turn out to be Iraqis, or they

admit that they were paid for it. Such militants were detained in Deraa and Latakia. They had US-made weapons.

The Lebanese security service intercepted several cars carrying weapons as they were coming into Lebanon. One such car was stopped coming from Iraq. There were American weapons in those cars too. Also there are reports about detained people who had large sums of money with them – with US dollars. These people carried expensive satellite phones that cannot be tapped by the Syrian security service.

In Syria, it is no longer a secret to anyone that the Americans have an unhindered opportunity to recruit and train the commandos in Iraq, and then send them wherever they want.

Hilary Clinton has already stated that if Syria cuts its relations with Iran and withdraws its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, the demonstrations would stop the next day. They don't even bother to keep secret the hand instilling riots in Syria.

There's plenty of evidence of foreign interference.

Finally, people say protestors are brought in from afar for the rallies. Those people speak and look differently from the locals. Nobody in the neighborhood knows them. Who rents the buses and finances the delivery of these people? The question stands.

The former Syrian Vice-President Abdel Halim Khaddam had initiated the riots in the coastal regions. He had plundered half of the country. He was involved in corruption schemes and finally fled to the West. It was he who tried to accuse Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of assassinating the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The Syrians firmly believe that Sayed Hariri had personally given a villa to Abdel Halim Khaddam for spreading this version of Rafic Hariri's murder. But when that version fell apart and was not confirmed, the villa was taken away. Today, those who shot at cars in Baniyas are shouting: "We don't want Bashar. We want Abdel Halim!"

There are peaceful and cultured opposition members in Baniyas who have been against al-Assad's regime for many years. But they are shocked by what's going on and do not support Khaddam at all. They say: "He's a thief. He who stole most calls to fight corruption and thievery."

RT: *What role are Syrian emigrants playing in the Syrian destabilization?*

AK: It's an open question. There was a leak claiming that Dan Feldman, Hillary Clinton's special representative for the Middle East, met representatives of the Syrian opposition in Istanbul in mid-April and suggested the tactics for assassinations of civil and military officials. In less than three days, on April 19, several military officials had been brutally killed in Syria. Not only were they attacked and shot dead, some victims of the attacks, including three teenage children of a Syrian general, who were in a car with him, were cut to pieces with sabres.

Murders committed with a high degree of brutality are aimed at intimidating the population. The news that children had been cut to pieces served that purpose quite well.

RT: *Media reports used to say that the riots started after the arrest in the city of Deraa, in southern Syria, of several children writing anti-government slogans? Is it really so?*

AK: All the children had been released very quickly. Moreover, the government-owned Syrian newspapers published the release orders.

RT: *Have the troops been brought into Deraa?*

AK: Yes, troops are there. After an Islamic emirate had been proclaimed in Deraa, the local residents asked the government for help. Troops have been brought in. I've just seen the videos. The demonstrators published them on the internet and shortly after erased them. But people made copies. There are soldiers, and people come to them and talk peacefully. Nobody shoots anyone.

RT: *Is there a sentiment in Syria that if it gets rid of Hamas support and the Palestinians and strike a peace deal with Israel, all the riots will end immediately?*

AK: No, there's no such sentiment. There's consolidation of society. The people are sticking together because they see that the enemy is extremely dangerous. For instance, previously I never heard anything except pop music and the recital of the Koran on the radio when I rode in a taxi. Now, patriotic music is coming from all cars. When Bashar al-Assad was speaking on television, the people who were listening to him at the market applauded him. You cannot force people to applaud a president who speaks on television.

RT: *What has the public mood been in recent days?*

AK: People are afraid of going out. In some regions, people risked their lives to record with a secret camera how unidentified persons sneaked into a car, moved off and started shooting in all directions. This is how they are sowing panic in residential areas.

Bandits blocked a bridge on the road near the coast. Soon, the military pushed them back. One of my Syrian contacts told me: "you don't need many people to plunge the country into trouble."

Putting five people on a major road would be enough to paralyze the whole area. People are unable to deliver foodstuffs or reach hospitals. And the whole country is in shock because of a handful of bandits.

Now, Syrian television is making live broadcasts from various parts of Damascus and other cities for people to see how the situation is unfolding and how life is getting back to normal, whatever the Western media show.

It's noteworthy that bandits intentionally tried to rouse hatred among various communities. Recently, a sheikh was insulting the Druze, particularly women, in an address to the residents of the south. This video is being broadcast by the foreign media and is advertised on the internet. Nothing like that ever happened in Syria before. Provocations failed in Damascus though attempts were made to set religious communities against each other. Provocateurs lack support in rural areas too - the sowing campaign has started there.

The most massive demonstrations in Dera gathered 500 people. But they say 450 people have been killed.

RT: *Has the government launched any reforms?*

AK: The government has lifted martial law and has allowed the staging of authorized rallies

if permission for them is obtained five days ahead. Foreigners have been allowed to buy real estate. The Kurds have been granted citizenship. The Kurdish population didn't have it before for a number of historical reasons. The government is opening business courses for women in northern Syria. Many provincial governors have been dismissed. Unfortunately, in some cases they were honest people. Like those who refused to free criminals from prison for bribes and had been targeted by smear campaigns in public for it.

RT: *Have the number of flights to Syria been cut?*

AK: There are no tickets for Syria. We wanted to dispatch a group of tourists to Syria but there were no air tickets to Damascus for April 30. But Russians are not fleeing from Syria. I have full information about it for my job.

Nadezhda Kevorkova, RT

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