

What's really happening in Syria: a consumer fraud lawyer's mini-primer

By Robert Roth

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*This work is dedicated to the memory of
Abdullah Tayseer Al-Issa
and Father Frans van der Lugt*

The U.S./NATO line

If you try to follow events in the mainstream media (MSM), you may have noticed that they routinely refer to Syrian president Bashar al Assad as a “brutal dictator”. Assad is supposed to have responded to peaceful protests with repressive violence and by “killing his own people”. The U.S., UK, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar continue to maintain that “Assad must go”.

I disagree with all of that, as I’ll explain in this article. I spent 25 years prosecuting lies in commerce for the people of New York and Oregon. I prepared this primer to help you cut through the lies and get at the truth about Syria.

It’s still quite possible that a nuclear war could arise from careless U.S./NATO confrontations with Russia in Syria. President Trump has indicated he favors a cooperative relationship with Russia, but he faces continuing pressure from the Deep State, neocons, and apparently, Congress and the media, to continue the New Cold War that was initiated in Ukraine. And the demonization of Russian president Putin and of Russia itself has been going on for some time and shows no sign of letting up.¹ So in addition to the suffering of the Syrian people, which has been horrific and continues as I write, the conflict in Syria also poses a serious threat to all of us.

Apart from this introduction and some other brief statements of my own, most of this article is a string of excerpts from the excellent work of other people I find persuasive and citations or links to sources for further information and analysis. To insure you can access the sources, full URLs are provided for most of them. You can also follow most of the links by going to a slightly earlier version of this mini-primer posted at <https://www.newcoldwar.org/whats-really-happening-syria-consumer-fraud-lawyers-mini-primer/>.

International law, morality, and the sovereignty of the people

Since Syria has not threatened the United States in any way, let alone attacked us, our government has no right to try to overthrow the Syrian government. The UN Charter prohibits pre-emptive aggression against other sovereign states unless the UN Security Council authorizes it. The United States signed the UN Charter, so as a treaty, it is the “Supreme Law of the Land” under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution. So the U.S. attempt to overthrow the government of Syria violates U.S. as well as international law.

The effort to overthrow the Syrian government is also immoral, because of the suffering and death it has caused and because of its destabilizing effect, which causes even more suffering and death and has assisted the rise of ISIS.

The effort to overthrow Assad is an arrogant interference with the sovereignty of the Syrian people, who have a right to choose their own government. In this case, they have chosen their government overwhelmingly: Syria’s president Bashar al Assad is not only the democratically elected leader of his country but has at all times, both before the violence began and throughout the conflict, been immensely popular within Syria. This popularity would be impossible to explain if the violence that began in March 2011 was initiated by the government. I try to show here that the violence was initiated by elements who pushed aside peaceful protestors and committed a great many murders and then managed, through manipulation of the big media, to blame that on the Syrian government.

The Syrian government

Although the effort to overthrow the Syrian government is unlawful, many Americans seem to feel it’s okay to interfere

with foreign governments that are said to oppress their own people. I don't claim that the Syrian government is perfect, but again, it's up to the Syrian people to choose their government.

Washington has a history of undermining and overthrowing governments that don't play ball with U.S./Western corporations and investors. And Islamic fundamentalists like the Muslim Brotherhood, al Qaeda, ISIS, and others pose continuing threats to stability in the Middle East. So I've come to believe that a government in the Middle East may have to be authoritarian to some degree in order to stay in power. And in Syria there is tolerance for different viewpoints, religions and ethnicities, such that a certain amount of what might be called "repression" of some forms of dissent seems to be a fair trade-off, and one that most Syrians clearly prefer.

In the years before the present conflict began in 2011, the Syrian government tried to institute constitutional reforms, thus becoming less repressive. But that effort has been undermined by the attempt to overthrow it by force and violence.

Sectarian vs. secular government; not a civil war

A basic conflict is between those who want a **sectarian** (religious) government, which would also be repressive, in different ways, and a **secular** (nonreligious) government, such as Syria now has. The conflict in Syria has never been a war between competing Islamic sects, or even a civil war. Rather, it is a war waged by some Syrian rebels and a great many foreigners, who want to overthrow the legitimate government and, with it, Syria's secular, inclusive and tolerant society and to establish a radical Islamic government and society. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the U.S. itself have

been backing those extremists as part of their effort to dominate the Middle East and control its energy resources.

By the way, I'm now 70, but I still remember what it felt like to be 12 years old. Wait – what does that have to do with the war on Syria, and this article? My answer may be what it's all about, from the viewpoint of Syrians, most of whom have remained in Syria, despite the war.

In late September, a U.S.-Russia agreement called for the supposedly “moderate rebels” in Syria to separate themselves from al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front (sometimes called al Qaeda’s Syrian “franchise”). Al Qaeda, as you may recall, is the organization formerly led by Osama bin Laden that is said to have brought down the Twin Towers in New York. The U.S. and Russia would then cooperate in attacking the Nusra Front and ISIS (also known as ISIL, or Daesh).

Unless you're a terrorist, what's not to like about such an agreement? Well, the problem was that the “moderate rebels” refused to follow the U.S.-Russia agreement and separate from the terrorists, and instead renewed their alliance with them. In particular, Nour al-Din al-Zinki--reportedly one of the largest factions in Aleppo--said they were joining a broad alliance dominated by the Nusra Front.

If you've followed me this far, you're probably still wondering what this has to do with remembering what it's like to be 12 years old. The connection is this: Nour al-Din al-Zinki recently filmed themselves taunting and then beheading a 12-year-old boy.

I've seen one of the photos of the boy circulated by al-Zinki, and the image haunts me. He doesn't even look 12 years old; I would guess 10 or 11. He has what looks like intra-venous tubing hanging from one arm; I understand he'd been receiving medical treatment when he was kidnapped. He was

taunted by a group of men, who then laid him face-down in the back of a pickup truck, tied his hands behind his back, and as he whimpered, one of them ran a large knife across his throat and cut off his head.

I couldn't make such a thing up, and I wouldn't if I could. My nightmares are not that bad. But these al-Zinki guys – or should I say, monsters, or devils – not only did all this but made a video of themselves doing it and reveled in their atrocity.

Imagine, if you will, being captured, taunted and beheaded by demons two or three times your size. You can read about it, get a link to the group's You Tube video, and see a screenshot from that at <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/07/21/us-backed-syrian-moderates-behead-12-year-old/>.

His name was Abdullah Tayseer Al-Issa. The photo that haunts me shows Abdullah closer up, looking quite small and fragile. It's posted in **CIA Rebels Behead Kid And Other U.S. Successes in Syria** by [Moon of Alabama](#), 19 July 2016, at <http://www.moonofalabama.org/2016/07/cia-rebels-behead-kid-and-other-recent-us-successes-in-syria.html>.

So here's what I think: Most Syrians, as I mentioned, have stayed in Syria, seeking the protection of their government and army. They want to maintain their tolerant, secular society. But as that's being shredded by jihadist violence and mayhem, they're also terrified that their country will be taken over by ghouls like the al-Zinki jihadists who beheaded that boy, and that they and their families and loved ones will then face similar fates.

Some of them want government reform. But they don't back the terrorists to get it. In fact, they're glad to see those Rus-

sian planes in the sky, invited by their government, and they back the Syrian Arab Army and Bashar Assad. Many probably think Assad and the army are being a little too nice to the terrorist opposition that has invaded their country. ²

You won't know what to make of this suggestion, if you think most Syrians are trying to get out of their country and go to Europe. Media sensationalism and inadequate reporting, or suppression of the truth, about the "immigrant crisis" faced by many European countries may give you that impression. But in fact, as reported by Tim Anderson (in *The Dirty War on Syria*, Chapter 14), most Syrians have chosen to remain in Syria under the protection of their government and Army:

... The online 'war of maps' miss this[:] When commentators [speak] of how much 'territory' one or other Islamist group controlled, they generally [do] not observe that the Government [has] maintained control of the great majority of the populated areas and most of the displaced population sought refuge in those government controlled cities. By 2015 black-outs and shortages were worse, but schools, health centres, sports facilities were functioning. While life was hardly normal, everyday life did carry on. People were surviving, and resisting. This reality was hardly visible in the western media, which has persistently spread lies about the character of the conflict. In particular, they have tried to hide NATO's backing for the extremist groups, while trumpeting the advances of those same groups and ignoring the Syrian Army's counter-offensives.

Fact check one: there never were any 'moderate rebels'. A ... genuine political reform movement was displaced by a Saudi-backed Islamist insurrection, over March-April 2011. ... Years later ordinary Syri-

ans call all these groups ‘Daesh’ (ISIS), ‘terrorists’ or ‘mercenaries’, not bothering with the different brand names. ... Genocidal statements by ‘moderate rebel’ leaders underline the limited difference between the genocidal ‘moderates’ and the genocidal extremists. FSA leader Lamia Nahas wrote: ‘the more arrogant Syria's minorities become I become more certain that there should be a holocaust to exterminate them from existence and I request [God's] mercy upon Hitler who burned the Jews of his time and Sultan Abdul-Hamid who exterminated the Armenians’ (The Angry Arab 2015). ... The genocidal fervour of these ‘moderates’ is no different than that of Nusra or ISIS. The character of the armed conflict has always been between an authoritarian but pluralist and socially inclusive state, and Saudi-style sectarian Islamists, acting as proxy armies for the big powers.

Fact check two: almost all the atrocities blamed on the Syrian Army have been committed by western-backed Islamists, as part of their strategy to attract more foreign military backing. Their claims are repeated by the western media, fed by partisan Islamist sources and amplified by embedded ‘watchdogs’, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The Syrian Army has indeed executed captured terrorists, and the secret police continue to detain and probably mistreat those suspected of collaborating with terrorists. But this is an army which enjoys very strong public support. Syrian people know their enemy and back their Army. The armed gangs, on the other hand, openly boast of their atrocities.

Then who started the war?

Determining how the initial disturbances occurred, in March 2011, and grew into the present conflict is complicated by the fact that at first, it was not always clear who was engaging in violence. The government tried to downplay the violence so as to maintain order and the morale of the Syrian Arab Army, as many of the first victims were Syrian soldiers.

Who can you trust to tell the truth?

All this raises the question of whom to believe. Those trying to overthrow the Syrian government have waged almost incredibly sophisticated and effective propaganda warfare right from the beginning, so there is conflicting “evidence” on many of the critical events. But I believe a great deal of the “evidence” dished out by the mainstream media was actually fabricated by the terrorists. More on that further below.

I have identified sources that seem to me credible, for example, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.; Australian professor Tim Anderson; commentator and analyst Sharmine Narwani (all, and others, quoted below); and Father Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch Jesuit priest who was murdered in Homs, Syria in early 2014.³ Father van der Lugt wrote in January 2012:

Most of the citizens of Syria do not support the opposition. Even a country like Qatar [which had spent billions to finance foreign terrorists in Syria] has stated this following an opinion survey. Therefore, you also cannot say that this is a popular uprising. The majority of people are not part of the rebellion and certainly not part of the armed rebellion. What is occurring is, above all, a struggle between the army and armed Sunni groups that aim to overturn the Alawite regime and take power.

“From the start the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels.⁴

Provocateurs

I’m also inclined to believe some of the evidence I rely on here because of the similarity with situations I know of elsewhere. For example, I studied the coup in Ukraine in some detail and am persuaded that the snipers firing in Maidan Square were provocateurs who shot both police and protesters in order to foment more violence. (I wrote about this, and the Ukraine situation more generally, at www.healingjustice.wordpress.com.) So when I see claims of similar conduct in Syria, it has a plausibility based in part on how it seems to follow the same pattern the U.S. has used to destabilize and overthrow governments in other countries.⁵

The current situation and articles reporting and discussing it, are presented at the end of this article. But first:

Background

U.S. interference in the domestic affairs of Syria began in 1949. The details are reported in an excellent article by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Mr. Kennedy provides a great many important facts and comments and also identifies many of his sources, which I skip here for the sake of brevity. I quote only a few paragraphs for historical background and context.

Mr. Kennedy is no fan of Bashar al Assad and refers to him in uncomplimentary terms. But he clearly explains the motives of the governments that want to overthrow the Assad government, mainly Assad’s refusal to allow the construc-

tion of a pipeline through Syria for the transport of natural gas to Europe, a project desired by Qatar and its Gulf and Western allies.

From Robert F. Kennedy, Jr, 'Why the Arabs don't want us in Syria', March 1, 2016:⁶

In part because my father was murdered by an Arab, I've made an effort to understand the impact of U.S. policy in the Mideast and particularly the factors that sometimes motivate bloodthirsty responses from the Islamic world against our country.

... During the 1950s, President Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers — CIA Director Allen Dulles and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles — rebuffed Soviet treaty proposals to leave the Middle East a neutral zone in the Cold War and let Arabs rule Arabia. Instead, they mounted a clandestine war against Arab nationalism ... particularly when Arab self-rule threatened oil concessions. ...

The CIA began its active meddling in Syria in 1949. ... Syrian patriots had declared war on the Nazis, expelled their Vichy French colonial rulers and crafted a fragile secularist democracy based on the American model. But in March 1949, Syria's democratically elected president, Shukri-al-Quwatli, hesitated to approve the Trans-Arabian Pipeline, an American project ... [I]n retaliation ... the CIA engineered a coup replacing al-Quwatli with the CIA's handpicked dictator, a convicted swindler named Husni al-Za'im. ...

... The Syrian people again tried democracy in 1955, re-electing al-Quwatli and his National Party. Al-Quwatli was still a Cold War neutralist, but, stung by American involvement in his ouster, he now leaned

toward the Soviet camp. That posture caused CIA Director Dulles to send his two coup wizards, Kim Roosevelt and Rocky Stone, to Damascus. ...

But ... CIA money failed to corrupt the Syrian military officers. The soldiers reported the CIA's bribery attempts to the Ba'athist regime. In response, the Syrian army invaded the American Embassy, taking Stone prisoner. After harsh interrogation, Stone made a televised confession of his roles in the Iranian coup and the CIA's aborted attempt to overthrow Syria's legitimate government. The Eisenhower White House hollowly dismissed Stone's confession as "fabrications" and "slanders," a denial swallowed whole by the American press, led by the New York Times and believed by the American people. ...

Of course, the Russians, who sell 70 percent of their gas exports to Europe, viewed the Qatar/Turkey pipeline as an existential threat. ... In 2009, Assad announced that he would refuse to sign the agreement to allow the pipeline to run through Syria "to protect the interests of our Russian ally."

... Soon after [that] ... the CIA began funding opposition groups in Syria. It is important to note that this was well before the Arab Spring-engendered uprising against Assad.

Bashar Assad's family is Alawite, a Muslim sect widely perceived as aligned with the Shiite camp. ... Before the war started, according to [journalist Seymour] Hersh, Assad was moving to liberalize the country. ... Assad's regime was deliberately secular and Syria was impressively diverse. The Syrian government and military, for example, were 80 percent Sunni. Assad maintained peace among his diverse

peoples by a strong, disciplined army loyal to the Assad family, an allegiance secured by a nationally esteemed and highly paid officer corps, a coldly efficient intelligence apparatus and a penchant for brutality that, prior to the war, was rather moderate compared to those of other Mideast leaders, including our current allies. According to Hersh, “He certainly wasn’t beheading people every Wednesday like the Saudis do in Mecca.”

... By the spring of 2011, there were small, peaceful demonstrations in Damascus against repression by Assad’s regime. ... However, WikiLeaks cables indicate that the CIA was already on the ground in Syria.

...

The idea of fomenting a Sunni-Shiite civil war to weaken the Syrian and Iranian regimes [and thus] to maintain control of the region’s petrochemical supplies was not a novel notion. ... A damning 2008 Pentagon-funded Rand report ... recommended using “covert action, information operations, unconventional warfare” to enforce a “divide and rule” strategy. ...

... Two years before ISIL throat cutters stepped on the world stage, a seven-page August 12, 2012, study by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, obtained by the right-wing group Judicial Watch, warned that ... “the Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood and AQI ([Al-Qaeda Iraq,] now ISIS), are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria.”

Using U.S. and Gulf state funding, these groups had turned the peaceful protests against Bashar Assad toward “a clear sectarian (Shiite vs. Sunni) direction.”

...

Not coincidentally, the regions of Syria occupied by the Islamic State exactly encompass the proposed route of the Qatari pipeline. (Emphasis added.)

... Beginning in 2011, our allies funded the invasion by AQI [Al-Qaeda Iraq] fighters into Syria. In April 2013, having entered Syria, AQI changed its name to ISIL. According to Dexter Filkins of the New Yorker, “ISIS is run by a council of former Iraqi generals. ... Many are members of Saddam Hussein’s secular Ba’ath Party who converted to radical Islam in American prisons.” ...

But then, in 2014, our Sunni proxies horrified the American people by severing heads and driving a million refugees toward Europe. ...

Tim Anderson’s Book, *The Dirty War on Syria*

A professor in Australia has written a book that tells the whole story in depth. Tim Anderson’s *The Dirty War on Syria: Washington, Regime Change and Resistance* can be ordered at <https://store.globalresearch.ca/store/the-dirty-war-on-syria-washington-regime-change-and-resistance-pdf/>.

You can read the introductory chapter and table of contents at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-dirty-war-on-syria/5491859>. Prof. Anderson’s book is short, clear, and illustrated with helpful poster-like issue summaries (one of which appears below), and develops a much more detailed analysis than I can provide here.

Summary/overview:

The U.S. effort to undermine Assad, and to overthrow his government and replace it with one more friendly to U.S. and Western investors, was to be the latest installment of the overall U.S. program, pursued consistently since the end of World War II, to control the world in the interests of U.S. elites, including the military-industrial complex, multinational corporations generally and their investors, and the hegemony-hungry political leadership.⁷

To summarize the situation briefly, this graphic is from Prof. Anderson's preface to his book:⁸

<h2>The Dirty War on Syria</h2>	
<p>Washington and its allies try another 'regime change', in Syria. A fake 'revolution' uses Islamist gangs, during an 'Arab Spring'. The western media constantly lies about this covert, dirty war.</p>	
<p><small>FSA terrorists throwing post office workers off a building in Aleppo</small></p>  <p><small>Syrian Rebels Execute Tribal Leaders</small></p>	<p>A political reform movement is driven off the streets by Islamist violence. 'Free Syrian Army' slaughters minorities and government workers.</p>
<p>Saudi and Qatari backed Islamists carry out a series of massacres, falsely blaming them on the Syrian Army and President Assad.</p>	 <p><small>How Saudi Wahabism is the Fountainhead of Islamist Terrorism</small></p> 
	<p>Most of Syria's opposition backs the state and army against terrorism. Washington calls a puppet exile group 'the Syrian opposition'.</p>
<p>Washington (using Saudis, Qatar, Turkey, Israel) backs all the armed Islamist groups, pretending some are 'moderate rebels'.</p>	 <p><small>3,000 FSA Fighters Defect to ISIS in the Galamoun Mountains</small></p> <p><small>Free Syrian Army rebels defect to Islamist group Jabhat al-Nusra</small></p>
	<p>A resistance coalition rallies to Syria. Iran, Hezbollah, Iraq and Russia join the Syrian Army in destroying western backed terrorist groups.</p>

Further excerpts from the preface of *The Dirty War On Syria*:

... The British-Australian journalist Philip Knightley pointed out that war propaganda typically involves 'a depressingly predictable pattern' of demonising the enemy leader, then demonising the enemy people through atrocity stories, real or imagined (Knightley 2001). Accordingly, a mild-mannered eye doctor called Bashar al Assad became the 'new evil' in the world and, according to consistent western media reports, the Syrian Army did nothing but kill civilians for more than four years. To this day, many imagine the Syrian conflict is a 'civil war', a 'popular revolt' or some sort of internal sectarian conflict. ...

... After the demonisation of Syrian leader Bashar al Assad began, a virtual information blockade was constructed against anything which might undermine the wartime storyline. Very few sensible western per-

spectives on Syria emerged after 2011, as critical voices were effectively blacklisted...

Excerpts from chapter five of *The Dirty War On Syria*:

Bashar al Assad and Political Reform:

President Hafez al Assad [father of the current president, Bashar al Assad] had brought three decades of internal stability to Syria, after the turmoil of the 1960s. ... There were substantial improvements in education and health, including universal vaccination and improved literacy for women. Between 1970 and 2010 infant mortality fell from 132 to 14 (per 1,000), while maternal mortality fell from 482 to 45 (per 100,000). ... (Sen, Al-Faisal and Al-Saleh 2012: 196)⁹ Electricity supply to rural areas rose from 2% in 1963 to 95% in 1992 (Hinnebusch 2012: 2) Traditions of social pluralism combined with advances in education drove the human development of the country well ahead of many of the more wealthy states in the region.

Nevertheless, ... the system built by Hafez al Assad ... also remained an authoritarian one-party system U.S. intelligence observed that the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood's insurrections in the early 1980s was welcomed by most Syrians. (DIA 1982, vii) Yet, after that ... 'The feared Syrian secret police' were ever vigilant for Zionist spies and new Muslim Brotherhood conspiracies, but this meant they also harassed a wider range of government critics. (Seale 1988: 335) ... On top of this, there was resentment at the corruption built on cronyism through Ba'ath Party networks. Bashar faced all this when he came to the top job.

... At the start of the millennium, Bashar al Assad ... was widely seen as an agent of reform, but ...[t]here were no dramatic political reforms, despite the widespread complaints of corruption (Otrakji 2012). However his socio-economic reforms involved giving new impetus to mass education and citizenship, with a controlled economic liberalisation which opened up new markets, yet without the privatisations that had swept Eastern Europe. He released several thousand political prisoners, mainly Islamists and their sympathisers (Landis and Pace 2007: 47) ... Despite the market reforms, Syria maintained its virtually free health and education system. State universities also remain virtually free, to this day, with several hundred thousand enrolled students. ...

With the rallies of February-March 2011 there was a further burst of political activity. ...Most of the domestic opposition groups ... did not support either armed attacks on the state or the involvement of foreign powers. Most remained in Syria and some ... rallied to the government. Others, while not supporting the government, backed the state and the army. ...

What became known in western circles as ‘the opposition’ were mostly exiles and the Islamists who had initiated the violence.

... Informed critics have observed that the violent conflict in Syria has always been between a pluralist state and sectarian Islamists, backed by the big powers. ... (Ramadani 2012).

A Turkish poll in late 2011 showed Syrians ... 91% opposed [to] (and 5% supportive of) violent protest (TESEV 2012). Ramadani reconciles these two

trends by suggesting that, after the initial movement away from the Government in 2011, ‘popular support shifted back’ when Syrians saw the sectarians and the Saudi-Qatari cabal behind the violence (Ramadani 2012). ...

... Despite their anti-Syrian bias, some western sources exposed other ‘false flag’ massacres. [Examples omitted; see the original.] The August 2013 chemical weapons incident in East Ghouta was widely blamed on the Assad Government. Yet all independent evidence exposed this as yet another ‘false flag’. [¹⁰]

... Syria’s strongest secular tradition is embedded in the Army. With about half a million members, both regulars and conscripts, the army is drawn from all the country’s communities (Sunni, Alawi, Shiia, Christian, Druze, Kurd, Armenian, Assyrian, etc), which all identify as ‘Syrian’. ...

[M]ost of the several million Syrians, displaced by the conflict, have not left the country but rather have moved to other parts under Army protection. This is not really explicable if the Army were indeed engaged in ‘indiscriminate’ attacks on civilians. A repressive army invokes fear and loathing in a population, yet in Damascus one can see that people do not cower as they pass through the many army road blocks, set up to protect against ‘rebel’ car bombs.

... Syrians know that their Army represents pluralist Syria and has been fighting sectarian, foreign backed terrorism. This Army did not fracture on sectarian lines, as the sectarian gangs had hoped, and defections have been small, certainly less than 2%.

The Syrian Election of 2014

[M]any western nations declared Syria's [2014] elections 'fixed', before they were held. ... These were the same governments trying to overthrow the Syrian Government (Herring 2014). The Washington-run Voice of America falsely claimed that Syria 'would not permit international observers' (VOA 2014). In fact, over a hundred election observers came from India, Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa, Iran and Latin America, along with non-official observers from the U.S.A and Canada (KNN 2014; Bartlett 2014). ...

The international media recognised the massive turnout, both in Syria and from the refugees in Lebanon, with some sources grudgingly admitting that 'getting people to turn out in large numbers, especially outside Syria, is a huge victory in and of itself' (Dark 2014). Associated Press reported on crowds of tens of thousands, in a 'carnival like atmosphere' in Damascus and Latakia, with 'long lines' of voters in Homs (FNA 2014a). AP ... concluded that President Assad had 'maintained significant support among large sections of the population' (FNA 2014b). ...

Bashar al Assad won this election convincingly, with 88.7% of the vote (AP 2014). Hassan al Nouri and Maher Hajjar gained 4.3% and 3.2% respectively (Aji 2014). With a 73.4% turnout (or 11.6 million of the 15.8 million eligible voters), that meant he had 10.3 million votes or 64% of all eligible voters. Even if every single person who was unable to vote was against him, this was a convincing mandate. ... Associated Press reasonably concluded that Assad's support was not just from minorities, but had to do with his legacy of opening up the economy, his sup-

port for women, the real benefits in education, health and electricity and, last but not least, the President's capacity to move decisively against the sectarian armed groups (AP 2014).

Eva Bartlett provides further details in [Deconstructing the NATO Narrative on Syria, Oct 10, 2015](http://dissidentvoice.org/2015/10/deconstructing-the-nato-narrative-on-syria/)
(<http://dissidentvoice.org/2015/10/deconstructing-the-nato-narrative-on-syria/>):

Million Person Marches. On March 29, 2011 (less than two weeks into the fantasy 'revolution') [over 6 million people](#) across Syria took to the streets in support of President al-Assad. In June, a reported hundreds of thousands marched in Damascus in support of the president, with a [2.3 km long Syrian flag](#). In November, 2011 (9 months into the chaos), masses again [held demonstrations](#) supporting President al-Assad, notably in Homs (the so-called "capital of the 'revolution'"), Dara'a (the so-called "birthplace of the 'revolution'"), Deir ez-Zour, Raqqa, Latakia, and Damascus.

Mass [demonstrations](#) like this have occurred repeatedly since, including in [March 2012](#), in [May 2014](#) in the lead-up to Presidential elections, and in [June 2015](#), to note just some of the larger rallies.

In May 2013, it was [reported](#) that even NATO recognized the Syrian president's increased popularity. "The data, relayed to NATO over the last month, asserted that 70 percent of Syrians support" the Assad government. At present, the number is now at least 80 percent.

The most telling barometer of Assad's support base was the [Presidential elections](#) in June 2014, which

saw 74 percent (11.6 million) of 15.8 million registered Syrian voters vote, with President al-Assad [winning 88 percent](#) of the votes. The lengths Syrians outside of Syria went to in order to vote [included flooding](#) the Syrian embassy in Beirut for two full days (and walking several kilometres to get there) and flying from countries with closed Syrian embassies to Damascus airport simply to cast their votes. Within Syria, [Syrians braved](#) terrorist mortars and rockets designed to keep them from voting; 151 shells were fired on Damascus alone, killing 5 and maiming 33 Syrians...

The Syrian Constitution and the process of political reform

The following is taken from Stephen Gowans' article, '[What the Syrian Constitution says about Assad and the Rebels](#)', May 21, 2013, https://gowans.wordpress.com/2013/05/21/what-the-syrian-constitution-says-about-assad-and-the-rebels/#_blank. See the article for the sources cited in bracketed footnotes below, and for many additional details of the new Syrian constitution.

In response to protestors' demands, Damascus made a number of concessions that were neither superficial nor partial.

First, it cancelled the long-standing abridgment of civil liberties that had been authorized by the emergency law. The law, invoked because Syria is technically in a state of war with Israel, gave Damascus powers it needed to safeguard the security of the state in wartime, a measure states at war routinely take. Many Syrians, however, chafed under the law, and

regarded it as unduly restrictive. Bowing to popular pressure, the government lifted the security measures.

Second, the government proposed a new constitution to accommodate protestors' demands to strip the Ba'ath Party of its special status, which had reserved for it a lead role in Syrian society. Additionally, the presidency would be open to anyone meeting basic residency, age and citizenship requirements. Presidential elections would be held by secret vote every seven years under a system of universal suffrage.

Here was the multi-party democracy the opposition was said to have clamored for. A protest movement thirsting for a democratic, pluralist society could accept the offer, its aspirations fulfilled. The constitution was put to a referendum and approved. New parliamentary multi-party elections were held. Multi-candidate presidential elections were set for 2014. A new democratic dawn had arrived. The rebels could lay down their arms and enjoy the fruits of their victory.

Or so you might expect. Instead, the insurrectionists escalated their war against Damascus, rejecting the reforms, explaining that they had arrived too late. Too late? Does pluralist democracy turn into a pumpkin unless it arrives before the clock strikes twelve? Washington, London and Paris also dismissed Assad's concessions. They were "meaningless," they said, without explaining why. [7] And yet the reforms were all the rebels had asked for and that the West had demanded. How could they be meaningless? Democrats, those seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and the Assad government, could hardly be blamed for concluding that 'democracy was not the driving force of the revolt.' [8]

Origins of the conflict

The above-quoted article by Eva Bartlett rebuts the U.S./NATO/MSM (mainstream media) version in some detail. Moving from the demonstration of President Assad's continuing popularity, Ms. Bartlett's article provides links to investigative reports by Professor Tim Anderson, Sharmine Narwani, and others, regarding the origins of the current conflict and the effort to discredit Bashar al Assad's government. Excerpts of particular interest:

...From the beginning, in Dara'a and throughout Syria, armed protesters were firing upon, and butchering, security forces and civilians. Tim Anderson's '[Syria: how the violence began, in Daraa](#)' pointed out that police were killed by snipers in the March 17/18 protests; the Syrian army was only brought to Dara'a following the murder of the policemen. Additionally, a storage of protesters' weapons was found in Dara'a's al-Omari mosque.

Prem Shankar Jha's, '[Who Fired The First Shot?](#)' described the slaughter of 20 Syrian soldiers outside Dara'a a month later, 'by cutting their throats, and cutting off the head of one of the soldiers.' ...

In '[Syria: The Hidden Massacre](#)', Sharmine Narwani investigated the early massacres of Syrian soldiers, noting that many of the murders occurred even after the Syrian government had abolished the state security courts, lifted the state of emergency, granted general amnesties, and recognized the right to peaceful protest.

The April 10, 2011 [murder](#) of Banyas farmer Nidal Janoud was one of the first horrific murders of Syrian civilians by so-called "unarmed protesters." Face

gashed open, mutilated and bleeding, Janoud was paraded by an armed mob, who then hacked him to death.

Father Frans Van der Lugt—the Dutch priest living in Syria for nearly 5 decades prior to his April 7, 2014 assassination by militants occupying the old city of Homs—[wrote](#) (repeatedly) of the ‘armed demonstrators’ he saw in early protests, ‘who began to shoot at the police first.’

May 2011 video footage of later-resigned Al Jazeera journalist Ali Hashem shows fighters entering Syria from Lebanon, carrying guns and RPGs (Hashem stated he’d likewise seen fighters entering in April). Al Jazeera refused to air the May footage, telling Hashem to ‘forget there are armed men.’ [See: Sharmine Narwani’s ‘[Surprise Video Changes Syria “Timeline”](#)’ at http://english.alkhbar.com/blogs/sandbox/surprise-video-changes-syria-timeline#_blank] Unarmed protesters?

In the case of Daraa, and the attacks that moved to Homs and surrounding areas in April 2011, the clearly stated aim was once again to topple the secular or “infidel-Alawi” regime. The front-line U.S. collaborators were Saudi Arabia and Qatar, then Turkey.¹¹

From Sharmine Narwani, How narratives killed the Syrian people:¹² (from [RT.com](http://www.rt.com), [March 23, 2016](https://www.rt.com/op-edge/336934-syria-war-conflict-narrative/), <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/336934-syria-war-conflict-narrative/>)

... **How words kill**

Four key narratives were spun ad nauseam in every mainstream Western media outlet, beginning in March 2011 and gaining steam in the coming months.

- The Dictator is killing his “own people.”
- The protests are “peaceful.”
- The opposition is “unarmed.”
- This is a “popular revolution.”

... With the benefit of hindsight, let’s look at these Syria narratives five years into the conflict:

We know now that several thousand Syrian security forces were killed in the first year, beginning March 23, 2011. We therefore also know that the opposition was “armed” from the start of the conflict. We have visual [evidence](#) of gunmen entering Syria across the Lebanese border in April and May 2011. We know from the testimonies of impartial observers that gunmen were targeting civilians in acts of terrorism and that “protests” were not all “peaceful”.

The Arab League [mission](#) conducted a month-long investigation inside Syria in late 2011 and reported:

“In Homs, Idlib and Hama, the observer mission witnessed acts of violence being committed against government forces and civilians that resulted in several deaths and injuries. Examples of those acts include the bombing of a civilian bus, killing eight persons and injuring others, including women and children, and the bombing of a train carrying diesel oil. In another incident in Homs, a police bus was blown up, killing two police officers. A fuel pipeline and some small bridges were also bombed.”

... Furthermore, we also now know that whatever Syria was, it was no “popular revolution.” The Syrian army has remained intact, even after blanket media coverage of mass defections. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians continued to [march](#) in unreported demonstrations in support of the president. The state’s institutions and government and business elite have largely remained [loyal](#) to Assad. Minority groups – Alawites, Christians, Kurds, Druze, Shia, and the Baath Party, which is majority Sunni - did not join the opposition against the government. And the major urban areas and population centers remain under the state’s umbrella, with few exceptions.

A genuine “revolution,” after all, does not have operation rooms in Jordan and Turkey. Nor is a “popular” revolution financed, armed and assisted by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the U.S., UK and France.

From Prem Shankar Jha, Who Fired the First Shot?:
([Hands Off Syria Sydney, Feb 27, 2014](#),
http://www.handsoffsyriasydney.com/articles/who-fired-the-first-shot/#_blank)

Who Fired the First Shot?

... Syrians whom I interviewed in October 2012 in Damascus ... [told this] story[:] Assad had sincerely wished to start the transition to democracy a decade earlier, but was forced to postpone the changeover repeatedly by the growing turmoil in Syria’s neighbourhood —the U.S.’ invasion of Iraq in 2003; the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri and the concerted bid to force Syria out of Lebanon in 2004; Washington’s decision to break diplomatic relations with Damascus in 2005; Israel’s attack on Lebanon in 2006, its blockade of Palestine

in 2007, and its bombing of Gaza in 2009. Faisal Al Mekdad, Syria's vice minister for foreign affairs and its former permanent representative at the UN, summed up Assad's dilemma as follows: "Each of these events reminded us of the need for unity in the face of external pressures and threats, and forced us to postpone democratization for fear of setting off fresh internal conflicts and forcing adjustments when we could least afford them".

Was there a spontaneous protest and was it peaceful? ... Syrians I talked to in October 2012, and resident diplomats concurred, that there had been no spontaneous popular upsurge against the regime in Syria, and that the civil war was a fructification of plans for regime change that had been hatched much earlier and brought forward because the opportunity provided by the 'Arab Spring', and western liberals' ecstatic response to it, was too good to miss.

Damascus first became aware of the conspiracy when trouble broke out on March 18, 2011 in Dera'a, a small city astride the Syria – Jordan border. A peaceful demonstration demanding some political changes in the local administration and lowering of diesel prices turned violent when shots were fired killing four persons. The international media, led by the Qatar-based Al Jazeera, and the Riyadh-based Al Arabiya television channels immediately accused Assad's forces of firing into the crowd to disperse it.

The Syrian government's version of what had happened was entirely different. The first shots, it claimed, were fired on March 18 ... by armed men who had infiltrated the procession and, at a pre-determined moment, began to shoot at the security police. **That is why, of the four persons killed on**

that day, one was a policeman. However, according to Dr Mekdad, what convinced the government that the Dera'a uprising was part of a larger conspiracy was what happened when the police sent for reinforcements. Armed men ambushed one of the trucks as it entered Dera'a and killed all the soldiers in it. [Emphasis added.]

The Syrian government chose not to publicise this for fear of demoralizing its soldiers. But ... [i]ncontrovertible confirmation came a month later when 'peaceful protesters' stopped an army truck outside Dera'a and again killed all the 20 soldiers in it. But this time they did so by cutting their throats. This was the sanctified method of killing that the 'Afghanis', as the Afghanistan-returned Jihadis were called in Algeria, had used to kill more than ten thousand villagers during two years of bitter insurgency after the First Afghan war. It was to be seen over and over again in Syria in the coming months.

The Syrian government again chose to remain silent, and the only whiff of this event in the media was a rebel claim that they had captured and burnt an armoured personnel carrier. But in Damascus the U.S. Ambassador, Robert Ford, told a group of Ambassadors that included the Indian ambassador, that the Syrian insurgency had been infiltrated by Al Qaeda. He had come to this conclusion because, in addition to cutting throats, the insurgents had cut off the head of one of the soldiers. ...

... [T]he insurgents, now labeled and recognized by the west as the "Free Syrian Army" followed a set pattern of attack: This was to descend without warning on small towns, Alaouite villages and small army and police posts in hundreds, overwhelm them. After

they surrendered, the insurgents would kill local officials, civilians they deemed to be pro-Assad and soldiers who would not desert to them, and claim that these were in fact deserters whom the government forces had executed after a successful counter attack. Two such episodes captured worldwide attention in 2011.

In Jisr al Shugour, a medium sized town in the northern border province of Idlib, *the international media reported, based upon rebel claims*, that the government had brought in not only tanks but also helicopters to bomb the town from the air – the first resort to air power against ‘protestors’. When some soldiers, who were disgusted by the indiscriminate carnage, attempted to defect the Syrian troops killed them. The indiscriminate firing forced civilians to flee to nearby villages. Some crossed over to Turkey. [Emphasis added.]

This claim captured the headlines in the western media for days, but the story pieced together by a diplomat whom the Syrian government took to Jisr-al Shugour when the town had been recaptured, was however very different. In the beginning of June 2011 some five to six hundred fighters of the Free Syrian Army suddenly laid siege to the town for 48 hours. When the army sent in reinforcements the rebels, who had mined a bridge on the approach road blew it up as a truck was passing over it, killed the soldiers and cut the only access to the town by road. Two days later, when they overwhelmed the garrison, instead of taking them prisoner they killed all of them, many by cutting their throats, threw their bodies into the Orontes river, and later posted videos claiming that these were army defectors whom the Syrian forces had killed.

This was corroborated two months later by a resident of the town who came to the Indian embassy to get a visa. According to him between 500 and 600 rebels had descended upon the town from Turkey. On the way they stopped a bus, shot six of its passengers and spread the word that the army had done it. Many people believed them, were enraged and stood by as the hunt for fleeing soldiers and supporters of the government began. Some joined in the hunt. In all, he said, the number of soldiers and government supporters killed and dumped in the Orontes was not 120 but close to 300. This was the first of dozens of similar war crimes by the FSA.

From Sharmine Narwani, Syria: The hidden massacre
(RT.com, May 7, 2014 <http://on.rt.com/052xod>)

Just recently a Tunisian jihadist who goes by the name Abu Qusay, told Tunisian television that his “task” in Syria was to destroy and desecrate [mosques](#) with Sunni names (Abu Bakr mosque, Othman mosque, etc) in false-flag sectarian attacks to encourage defection by Syrian soldiers, the majority of whom are Sunni. One of the things he did was scrawling pro-government and blasphemous slogans on mosque walls like “Only God, Syria and Bashar.” It was a “tactic” he says, to get the soldiers to “come on our side” so that the army “can become weak.”
...

A member of the large Hariri family in Daraa, who was there in March and April 2011, says people are confused and that many “loyalties have changed two or three times from March 2011 till now. They were originally all with the government. Then suddenly changed against the government – but now I think

maybe 50% or more came back to the Syrian regime.”

The province was largely pro-government before things kicked off. According to the UAE paper The National, “Daraa had long had a reputation as being solidly pro-Assad, with many regime figures recruited from the area.”

... HRW [Human Rights Watch] admits “that protesters had killed members of security forces” but caveats it by saying they “only used violence against the security forces and destroyed government property in response to killings by the security forces or...to secure the release of wounded demonstrators captured by the security forces and believed to be at risk of further harm.”

We know that this is not true – the April 10 shootings of the nine soldiers on a bus in Banyas was an unprovoked ambush. So, for instance, was the killing of General Abdo Khodr al-Tallawi, killed alongside his two sons and a nephew in Homs on April 17. That same day in the pro-government al-Zahra neighborhood in Homs, off-duty Syrian army commander Iyad Kamel Harfoush was gunned down when he went outside his home to investigate gunshots. Two days later, Hama-born off-duty Colonel Mohammad Abdo Khadour was killed in his car. And all of this only in the first month of unrest. [Emphasis added.]

In 2012, HRW’s Syria researcher Ole Solvag told me that he had documented violence “against captured soldiers and civilians” and that “there were sometimes weapons in the crowds and some demonstrators opened fire against government forces.”

But was it because the protestors were genuinely ag-grieved with violence directed at them by security forces? Or were they “armed gangs” as the Syrian government claims? Or – were there provocateurs shooting at one or both sides?

[More on provocateurs:] ... Discussion about the role of provocateurs in stirring up conflict has made some headlines since Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet’s leaked phone [conversation](#) with the EU’s Catherine Ashton disclosed suspicions that pro-west snipers had killed both Ukranian security forces and civilians during the Euromaidan protests.

Says Paet: “All the evidence shows that people who were killed by snipers from both sides, among policemen and people from the streets, that they were the same snipers killing people from both sides...and it’s really disturbing that now the new (pro-western) coalition, they don’t want to investigate what exactly happened.”

A recent German TV [investigation](#) the sniper shoot-ings confirms much about these allegations, and has opened the door to contesting versions of events in Ukraine that did not exist for most of the Syrian conflict – at least not in the media or in international forums. ...

Since early 2011 alone, we have heard allegations of “unknown” snipers [targeting](#) crowds and security forces in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. What could be more effective at turning populations against authority than the unprovoked killing of un-armed innocents? By the same token, what could bet-ter ensure a reaction from the security forces of any

nation than the gunning down of one or more of their own? ...

An alternative approach, from Stephen Gowans:

I have presented here a somewhat detailed account of direct evidence, including eye-witness accounts, and analysis from sources I find credible, regarding the violence that began in March 2011. By identifying what I take to be the actual sources of that violence, I try to show that it did not arise from any widespread dissatisfaction with the government or “revolutionary distemper,” and was not initiated by the Syrian government, but by violent Islamists who tried to and failed to incite a popular uprising. Stephen Gowans draws a similar conclusion but from a different angle, arguing that there simply was no widespread dissatisfaction from which the current conflict could have grown, or as Gowans puts it, “The Revolutionary Distemper in Syria ... Wasn’t.” A brief excerpt illustrates Gowans’ approach:

There is a shibboleth in some circles that ... the uprising in Syria ‘began as a response to the Syrian government’s neoliberal policies and brutality,’ and that ‘the revolutionary content of the rebel side in Syria has been sidelined by a hodgepodge of Saudi and Qatari-financed jihadists.’ This theory appears, as far as I can tell, to be based on argument by assertion, not evidence.

[An impressive photo of a huge demonstration in 2011 supporting Syria’s secular Arab nationalist government that appears in Gowans’ article is omitted here.]

A review of press reports in the weeks immediately preceding and following the mid-March 2011 outbreak of riots in Daraa—usually recognized as the

beginning of the uprising—offers no indication that Syria was in the grips of a revolutionary distemper, whether anti-neo-liberal or otherwise. On the contrary, reporters representing Time magazine and the New York Times referred to the government as having broad support, of critics conceding that Assad was popular, and of Syrians exhibiting little interest in protest. At the same time, they described the unrest as a series of riots involving hundreds, and not thousands or tens of thousands of people, guided by a largely Islamist agenda and exhibiting a violent character. [Author's note: I understand an exception to this is Hama where there were large protest demonstrations.]

Time magazine reported that two jihadist groups that would later play lead roles in the insurgency, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, were already in operation on the eve of the riots, while a mere three months earlier, leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood voiced “their hope for a civil revolt in Syria.” The Muslim Brothers, who had decades earlier declared a blood feud with Syria’s ruling Ba’athist Party, objecting violently to the party’s secularism, had been embroiled in a life and death struggle with secular Arab nationalists since the 1960s, and had engaged in street battles with Ba’athist partisans from the late 1940s. (In one such battle, Hafez al-Assad, the current president’s father, who himself would serve as president from 1970 to 2000, was knifed by a Muslim Brother adversary.) The Brotherhood’s leaders, beginning in 2007, met frequently with the U.S. State Department and the U.S. National Security Council, as well as with the U.S. government-funded Middle East Partnership Initiative, which had taken on the overt role of funding overseas overthrow organizations—a task the CIA had previously done covertly.

URL: <https://gowans.wordpress.com/2016/10/22/the-revolutionary-distemper-in-syria-that-wasnt/>

What about the sarin gas attack?

It remains commonplace to accuse Assad of the sarin gas attack of August 2013 (as recently as the December 22, 2016 issue of *The New York Review of Books*, discussed below under “The current situation”), even though it has been shown that the attack was most likely a “false flag” attempting to frame Assad for the work of terrorist rebels aided by Turkey. (See Seymour Hersh, **The Red Line and the Rat Line: Obama, Erdoğan and the Syrian rebels**, *London Review of Books* [Vol. 36 No. 8 · 17 April 2014](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-m-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line), pp 21-24, online: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-m-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line>.) There are further discussion and citations on this topic above, text at endnote 10. Seymour Hersh provided further information last April, in an interview tied to Hersh’s new book, *The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*. The following is taken from that interview, which is posted at [AlterNet](http://www.alternet.org/world/exclusive-interview-seymour-hersh-dishes-saudi-oil-money-bribes-and-killing-osama-bin-laden) <http://www.alternet.org/world/exclusive-interview-seymour-hersh-dishes-saudi-oil-money-bribes-and-killing-osama-bin-laden>:

Let me talk to you about the sarin story [the sarin gas attack in Ghouta, a suburb near Damascus, which the U.S. government attributed to the Assad regime] because it really is in my craw. In this article [in *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>] that was this long series of interviews [of Obama] by Jeff Goldberg...he says, without citing the source (you have to presume it was the president because he’s talking to him all the time) that the head of National Intelligence, General [James] Clapper, said to him very early after the

[sarin] incident took place, "Hey, it's not a slam dunk."

You have to understand in the intelligence community—Tenet [Bush-era CIA director who infamously said Iraqi WMD was a “slam dunk”] is the one who said that about the war in Baghdad—that's a serious comment. That means you've got a problem with the intelligence. As you know I wrote a story that said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs told the president that information the same day. I now know more about it.

The president's explanation for [not bombing Syria] was that the Syrians agreed that night, rather than be bombed, they'd give up their chemical weapons arsenal, which in this article in the Atlantic, Goldberg said they [the Syrians] had never disclosed before. This is ludicrous. Lavrov [Russia's Foreign Minister] and Kerry had talked about it for a year—getting rid of the arsenal—because it was under threat from the rebels.

The issue was not that they [the Syrians] suddenly caved in. [Before the Ghouta attack] there was a G-20 summit and Putin and Bashar met for an hour. There was an official briefing from Ben Rhodes and he said they talked about the chemical weapons issue and what to do. The issue was that Bashar couldn't pay for it—it cost more than a billion bucks. The Russians said, 'Hey, we can't pay it all. Oil prices are going down and we're hurt for money.' And so, all that happened was we agreed to handle it. We took care of a lot of the costs of it.

Guess what? We had a ship, it was called the Cape Maid, it was parked out in the Med. The Syrians

would let us destroy this stuff [the chemical weapons]... there was 1,308 tons that was shipped to the port...and we had, guess what, a forensic unit out there. Wouldn't we like to really prove—here we have all his sarin and we had sarin from what happened in Ghouta, the UN had a team there and got samples—guess what?

It didn't match. But we didn't hear that. I now know it, I'm going to write a lot about it.

Guess what else we know from the forensic analysis we have (we had all the missiles in their arsenal). Nothing in their arsenal had anything close to what was on the ground in Ghouta. A lot of people I know, nobody's going to go on the record, but the people I know said we couldn't make a connection, there was no connection between what was given to us by Bashar and what was used in Ghouta. That to me is interesting. That doesn't prove anything, but it opens up a door to further investigation and further questioning.

The current situation (as of January 31, 2017):

I've outlined "from the ground up," so to speak, my reasons for disbelieving the basic U.S. government line on Syria and much or all of what I see in the mainstream media. Of course, events continue to unfold, and so does the useful commentary.

As I write, the Syrian Government has reportedly driven the terrorists from Aleppo, but ISIS has meanwhile recaptured Palmyra. While President-elect Trump has indicated he would cooperate with Russia in combating terrorism – and presumably, abandon the U.S. effort to unseat Bashar al As-

sad – pressure continues from influential quarters to maintain opposition to Assad.

For example, late last month an item appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, arguing that both Russia and Syria have committed war crimes in the ongoing conflict, and that the Trump administration should increase pressure on Russia to curtail what the article calls Assad's atrocities. (Kenneth Roth, "What Trump Should Do In Syria," December 22, 2016 issue.) A detailed response would take up too much of my time and yours, but some answer seems warranted. Suffice it to say that the *NYRB* article is written by Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch (HRW) and that in my view, from having followed the Syrian conflict and related stories for some time, neither HRW nor Amnesty International has the credibility with me that they used to have. In particular, the *NYRB* piece trots out and repeats the old sarin gas story, now thoroughly debunked. Beyond that, I would point to this entire primer/essay as refutation of the work of that other man named Roth (no relation of mine, I'm glad to say). See especially the narrative immediately above, the interview with Paul Larudee immediately below, and the narrative and sources cited in endnote 13.

For another sign of the continuing nature of the U.S. threat to Syria, see Patrick Henningsen, '**New Obama Executive Action Opens Door to Unlimited Arms for Salafi Terrorists in Syria**', December 8, 2016, <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/12/08/breaking-new-obama-executive-order-opens-door-for-unlimited-arms-to-islamist-terrorists-in-syria/>; and for further indication of the continuing terrorist threat and the need for responsive action, see **Rep. Tulsi Gabbard Introduces Legislation to Stop Arming Terrorists**], December 8, 2016 Press Release, at <https://gabbard.house.gov/news/press-releases/video-rep-tulsi-gabbard-introduces-legislation-stop-arming-terrorists>.

Among the latest significant developments, Rep. Gabbard traveled to Syria and returned issuing renewed calls for an end to the regime-change war. For details, see **Is there is a future for Syria?: U.S. congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard speaks on U.S.-supported Al-Qaeda on Syrian soil**, on *Inside Syria Media Center*, Jan 29, 2017, at <https://en.insidesyriamc.com/2017/01/29/is-there-is-a-future-for-syria-u-s-congresswoman-speaks-on-us-supported-al-qaeda-on-syrian-soil/>, and **Veterans For Peace Endorses Gabbard's Stop Arming Terrorists Act**, January 27, 2017, <https://gabbard.house.gov/news/press-releases/veterans-peace-endorses-gabbard-s-stop-arming-terrorist-act>.

Here are some further excerpts from some of the most useful and informative recent materials:

* From Paul Larudee, 'The reporting on Syrian conflict is unusual for the extent of fabricated information' (August 31, 2016), <http://www.muslimpress.com/Section-opinion-72/105721-the-reporting-on-syrian-conflict-is-unusual-for-the-extent-of-fabricated-information>

Muslim Press: How do you analyze the operation to liberate Aleppo?

Paul Larudee: ... Of course, it's possible to carpet bomb East Aleppo into oblivion, but there is still a large civilian population there, so the Syrian government is not doing that, and they set up three areas for the civilians to leave the area. This is how the Syrian army has retaken most areas, such as Homs, Ghouta, Qalamoun, etc. It's why they have one of the lowest civilian/combatant casualty ratios of any war, even though the number of total casualties over five years is a great tragedy. ...

MP: What's your take on the media outlets that report the Syrian conflict? Do they portray a true image of the war with concrete facts and evidence?

Paul Larudee: More than 2500 years ago, the Greek playwright Aeschylus wrote, "In war, truth is the first casualty." This has not changed. As usual, the media are being used as instruments of war, and even the NGOs are providing false and biased information according to the source of their funding. However, I must say that **the reporting on Syria is unusual for the extent of fabricated information, including photos and videos that are no more than theater or are real but from totally different origins than reported. Some are reused from other places and sometimes not even Syrian.** Caveat emptor! [Emphasis added.]¹³

MP: Syrian Army has been accused of starving out the residents, using barrel bombs and chemical weapons against civilians. What could you say about this?

Paul Larudee: This is war. We have to be realistic. The Syrian government makes every effort to get civilians to leave a war zone, and offers support services to those who do. But some of them still don't leave, either because they are afraid of what might happen to their homes or because the terrorists use them as "human shields" and prevent them from leaving, or for their own reasons. In this case it is not unusual for government forces to besiege the area. This is less dangerous to the civilian population and to the soldiers (whose lives are also important) than sending the army in to fight door to door. Under these circumstances it is often difficult for the population to

get supplies. In some situations, the starvation has been real, as in Ghouta and the last days of Homs before liberation, but it has also been fabricated or exaggerated, as in Madaya. Keep in mind that the anti-government fighters do the same, as with the sieges of the towns of Foua and Kafarya, which have lasted for years.

The difference is that they often do not end with respect for the lives of the captured population. By contrast, when most of the civilian population has left, the government tries to end the siege peacefully, often by offering amnesty to the fighters. Those who refuse are then often attacked by aerial bombardment and other weapons of war that are most likely to spare the lives of the soldiers. This usually ends in surrender.

"Barrel bombs" are just simple gravity bombs that are made in Syria. They are not fundamentally different from other bombs dropped from aircraft except that they are much less expensive to produce and use, and must be dropped from helicopters because they would be less accurate from jet aircraft. The western media and governments hypocritically argue that "barrel bombs" are inhuman. Their governments use different bombs that are just as destructive or even more so, but they can demonize "barrel bombs" because they do not use them...

* **From "Standing By Syria,"** by Margaret Kimberley, at <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/09/16/standing-by-syria/>, reposted from the *Freedom Rider* column for Black Agenda Report:

Focusing on Assad's government and treatment of his people may seem like a reasonable thing to do. Most

people who call themselves anti-war are serious in their concern for humanity. But the most basic human right, the right to survive, was taken from 400,000 people because the American president decided to add one more notch on his gun. Whether intended or not, criticism of the victimized government makes the case for further aggression.

The al-Nusra Front may change its name in a public relations effort, but it is still al Qaeda and still an ally of the United States. The unpredictable Donald Trump may not be able to explain that he spoke the truth when he accused Obama and Clinton of being ISIS supporters, but the anti-war movement should be able to explain without any problem. Cessations of hostilities are a sham meant to protect American assets whenever Assad is winning. If concern for the wellbeing of Syrians is a paramount concern, then the American anti-war movement must be united in condemning their own government without reservation or hesitation.

* From **AP Exclusive: Assad blames U.S. for collapse of Syria truce** (September 22, 2016),
<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/48f66e4501a945b69bc5ec3c0066d964/ap-exclusive-assad-blames-us-syria-truce-collapse>:

The war has been defined by gruesome photos and video posted in the aftermath of bloody attacks or documenting the plight of children in particular. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, and once-thriving cities have been ravaged, with entire blocks reduced to rubble. The images have galvanized public opinion worldwide -- but [Syrian president Bashar] Assad, while acknowledging that the war had been "savage," said the accounts should not be automatically believed.

"Those witnesses only appear when there's an accusation against the Syrian army or the Russian (army), but when the terrorists commit a crime or massacre ... you don't see any witnesses," he said. What a coincidence." ...

Assad dismissed the U.S. account [of the U.S. attack on Syrian government troops], saying the attack targeted a "huge" area for more than an hour.

"It wasn't an accident by one airplane... It was four airplanes," Assad said. "You don't commit a mistake for more than one hour." ...

Asked about ... the use of indiscriminate weapons, Assad said there's no difference between bombs: "When you have terrorists, you don't throw at them balloons, or you don't use rubber sticks. ... You have to use armaments."

A full transcript of this AP interview with Syrian president Assad is at

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c6cfec4970e44283968baa98c41716bd/full-transcript-ap-interview-syrian-president-assad>

* **How might the war end?**

Mr. Assad believes the war could end quickly if foreign governments supporting the terrorists would withdraw their support. Responding to a question about when ... Syrians who fled the war can return, Assad said:

If we look at it according to the internal Syrian factors, I would say it's very soon, a few months, and I'm sure about that, I'm not exaggerating, but when you talk about it as part of a global conflict and a regional conflict, when you have many external factors

that you don't control, it's going to drag on and no one in this world can tell you when but the countries, the governments, the officials who support directly the terrorists. Only they know, because they know when they're going to stop supporting those terrorists, and this is where the situation in Syria is going to be solved without any real obstacles.¹⁴

* **More from "Why the Arabs don't want us in Syria"** by [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.](#), quoted above:

What is the answer? ... Using the same imagery and language that supported our 2003 war against Saddam Hussein, our political leaders led Americans to believe that our Syrian intervention is an idealistic war against tyranny, terrorism and religious fanaticism. ... But ... only when we see this conflict as a proxy war over a pipeline do events become comprehensible. ... The million refugees now flooding into Europe are refugees of a pipeline war and CIA blundering. ...

... Let's face it; what we call the "war on terror" is really just another oil war. We've squandered \$6 trillion on three wars abroad and on constructing a national security warfare state at home since oilman Dick Cheney declared the "Long War" in 2001. The only winners have been the military contractors and oil companies that have pocketed historic profits, the intelligence agencies that have grown exponentially in power and influence to the detriment of our freedoms and the jihadists who invariably used our interventions as their most effective recruiting tool. We have compromised our values, butchered our own youth, killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people, subverted our idealism and squandered our na-

tional treasures in fruitless and costly adventures abroad. ...

... Over the past seven decades, the Dulles brothers, the Cheney gang, the neocons and their ilk have ... deployed our military and intelligence apparatus to serve the mercantile interests of large corporations and particularly, the petroleum companies and military contractors that have literally made a killing from these conflicts.

It's time for Americans to turn America away from this new imperialism and back to the path of idealism and democracy. We should let the Arabs govern Arabia and turn our energies to the great endeavor of nation building at home. We need to begin this process, not by invading Syria, but by ending the ruinous addiction to oil that has warped U.S. foreign policy for half a century.

* From **Tim Anderson, *The Dirty War on Syria*, Chapter 14, "Toward A New Middle East":**

‘No foreign officials might determine the future of Syria, the future of Syria’s political system or the individuals who should govern Syria. This is the Syrian peoples’ decision.’ - Bashar al Assad, 2015

... Washington and its minions have been obsessive and intransigent in their aim to isolate and exclude President Assad from a future Syrian Government. ... **This futile demand really illustrates how little respect Washington has for international law.** [Emphasis added.] [T]he Geneva agreements of 2012 ... stress that ‘It is for the Syrian people to determine the future of the country’ (TASS 2015; UN 2012). That is a simple but fundamental point that Washington

does not want to understand. Russian President Putin is generally diplomatic to his western ‘partners’, however on one occasion he said: ‘Rise above the endless desire to dominate. You must stop acting out of imperialistic ambitions. Do not poison the consciousness of millions of people, like there can be no other way but imperialistic politics’ (Putin 2015). ...

Washington’s ‘Plan B’ for Syria has been a weakening and eventual dismemberment of the country. This is helpfully spelt out by a Brookings Institute paper of June 2015 (O’Hanlon 2015). This plan quite brazenly calls for Washington to break its ‘Syria problem’ into ‘a number of localised components ... envisioning ultimately a more confederal Syria made up of autonomous zones rather than being ruled by a strong central government’ (O’Hanlon 2015: 3). ...

... Russia, legally invited to Syria, repeatedly requested U.S. cooperation, thus calling Washington’s bluff. Washington ... had pretended not to own ISIS, failed to attack the terrorist group when Syrian towns were assailed and falsely pretended there was a fundamental difference between ISIS and the other ‘moderate rebels’. However Russia agreed with Syria that all the anti-government armed groups were sectarian terrorists. The U.S. refused to identify any of their ‘moderate rebel’ groups, so Russia [beginning in late September 2015] ... attacked them all. In face of this, the U.S. protested that their ‘moderates’ were being targeted, or that the Russians were ‘killing civilians’. ...

... Syrians, including most devout Sunni Muslims, reject that head-chopping, vicious and sectarian perversion of Islam promoted by the Gulf monarchies.

This is no sectarian or Shia-Sunni war, but a classical imperial war, using proxy armies.

* **On the battle for Aleppo**

Mainstream media coverage of Syria has lately focused on what the U.S. calls “war crimes” in the battle for Aleppo, Syria’s largest city. But most Western media never get any closer to Aleppo than Beirut, which is not even in Syria. For their information, these media often rely on the U.S. government or groups like the White Helmets, who get funding from the U.S. and others attempting to overthrow the Syrian government. As veteran journalist Patrick Cockburn points out:

Unsurprisingly, foreign journalists covering developments in east Aleppo and rebel-held areas of Syria overwhelmingly do so from Lebanon or Turkey. A number of intrepid correspondents who tried to do eyewitness reporting from rebel-held areas swiftly found themselves tipped into the boots of cars or otherwise incarcerated.

Experience shows that foreign reporters are quite right not to trust their lives even to the most moderate of the armed opposition inside Syria. But, strangely enough, the same media organisations continue to put their trust in the veracity of information coming out of areas under the control of these same potential kidnappers and hostage takers. They would probably defend themselves by saying they rely on non-partisan activists, but all the evidence is that these can only operate in east Aleppo under license from the al-Qaeda-type groups.

It is inevitable that an opposition movement fighting for its life in wartime will only produce, or allow to

be produced by others, information that is essentially propaganda for its own side. The fault lies not with them but a media that allows itself to be spoon-fed with dubious or one-sided stories.

For instance, the film coming out of east Aleppo in recent weeks focuses almost exclusively on heartrending scenes of human tragedy such as the death or maiming of civilians. One seldom sees shots of the 10,000 fighters, whether they are wounded or alive and well.” Patrick Cockburn, **“Why Everything You’ve Read About Syria and Iraq Could be Wrong,”** December 2, 2016 (posted at <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/12/02/why-everything-youve-read-about-syria-and-iraq-could-be-wrong/>.)

However, photo-journalist Vanessa Beeley recently traveled to Syria, including Aleppo, and has issued a two-part report, both exposing the so-called “White Helmets” and interviewing members of Syria’s real civil defense, that you can see and read at <http://www.mintpressnews.com/journey-to-aleppo-exposing-the-truth-buried-under-nato-propaganda/220563/> and <http://www.mintpressnews.com/journey-aleppo-part-ii-syria-civil-defense-aleppo-medical-association-real-syrians-helping-real-syrians/220817/>.

More than 1.5 million civilians live in government-held western Aleppo, including 600,000 who fled eastern Aleppo. The Aleppo Medical Association estimated that about 200,000 were living in terrorist-occupied eastern Aleppo, including 50,000 so-called “rebels” and their families, before the Syrian Army and its allies recently recaptured the whole of the city.

Government forces could have flattened eastern Aleppo long ago, but held back out of concern for civilians. Assad recently offered readjustment help to civilians leaving eastern Aleppo, and even to Syrian fighters who lay down their arms. But the insurgents continued pounding western Aleppo daily with weapons, including “hell cannons” firing gas canisters packed with explosives, glass, shrapnel and even chemicals. The terrorist bombardment of western Aleppo with such weapons caused horrific harm to civilians there, including children, but was seemingly invisible to the mainstream media.

* Analyst Pepe Escobar concludes that the U.S. is managing the siege of Mosul in such a way as to allow jihadists to escape Mosul so they can join the Islamic State fighters in Syria. Pepe Escobar, **The Aleppo / Mosul Riddle**, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/21/the-aleppo-mosul-riddle/> (October 21, 2016).

* * *

The myth of the “moderate rebels,” Assad’s continuing support in Syria, the real reasons for U.S. intervention in Syria, delusions still prevailing in official Washington and parroted by mainstream media, the ordeal of the Syrian people, and the risks the continuing conflict poses for world peace. Additional materials on these topics and others are listed here in chronological order by date of publication.

Eva Bartlett, **Liberated Homs Residents Challenge Notion of “Revolution,”** July 8, 2014, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/07/liberated-homs-residents-challenge-notion-of-revolution/>

[Prof. Tim Anderson](#), **Why Syrians Support Bashar al Assad**, Global Research, September 30, 2014,

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/why-syrians-support-bashar-al-assad/5405208>.

Mike Whitney, **Everything You Needed to Know About Syria in 8 Minutes**, October 30, 2015,

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/10/30/everything-you-needed-to-know-about-syria-in-8-minutes/>.

Prof. Tim Anderson, **Syria: ‘Moderate Rebel’ Massacres and Everyday Propaganda**, December 16, 2015, [Telesur](http://www.telesur.com);

<http://www.syriasolidaritymovement.org/2016/01/03/syria-moderate-rebel-massacres-and-everyday-propaganda/> January 3, 2016.

Mairead Maguire | (Inter Press Service), **Syrian Peace Groups: This is not a Civil War, it is a Set of Foreign Invasions**, January 5, 2016,

<http://www.juancole.com/2016/01/syrian-peace-groups-this-is-not-a-civil-war-it-is-a-set-of-foreign-invasions.html> and <http://peacenews.org/2016/01/05/syrian-peace-groups-this-is-not-a-civil-war-it-is-a-set-of-foreign-invasions/>.

[Stephen Gowans](http://www.gowans.com), **U.S. Role as State Sponsor of Terrorism Acknowledged in U.S. Congressional Research Service Report on Syria Conflict**, Global Research, January 11, 2016, [what's left](http://www.whatsleft.com) 10 January 2016,

<https://gowans.wordpress.com/2016/01/10/us-role-as-state-sponsor-of-terrorism-implied-in-us-congressional-research-service-report-on-syria-conflict/>.

Bouthaina Shaaban, **The Rise of ISIS and Other Extremist Groups: the role of the West and Regional Powers,** Jan 29, 2016, [Counter Punch](http://www.counterpunch.org),

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/01/29/the-rise-of-isis-and-other-extremist-groups-the-role-of-the-west-and-regional-powers/>

Philip Giraldi, **Delusions on Syria prevail in official Washington**, February 2, 2016,
<http://www.unz.com/article/an-improbable-solution/>.

'**Russian operation in Syria is our salvation**' – top Syrian Catholic bishop to RT, Published time: 18 Feb, 2016 21:25,
<http://on.rt.com/74vu>

Stephen Kinzer, **The media are misleading the public on Syria**, February 18, 2016,
<http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/02/18/the-media-are-misleading-public-syria/8YB75otYirPzUCnlwaVtcK/story.html?event=event25>

Vanessa Beeley, **Syria: Aleppo Doctor Demolishes Imperialist Propaganda and Media Warmongering**, June 15, 2016, <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/06/15/syria-aleppo-doctor-demolishes-imperialist-propaganda-and-media-warmongering/>

Eva Bartlett, **Western corporate media 'disappears' over 1.5 million Syrians and 4,000 doctors**,
<https://www.sott.net/article/325238-Western-corporate-media-disappears-over-1-5-million-Syrians-and-4000-doctors>, August 14, 2016

Alexander Mercouris, **Washington does the unthinkable, kills Syrian troops and helps ISIS**, September 18, 2016,
<http://theduran.com/as-moscow-complains-about-us-foot-dragging-washingtons-throws-a-tantrum-bombs-syrian-troops-and-helps-isis/>

Finian Cunningham, **Syria Shows U.S. Under Military Rule**, September 20, 2016,
<https://sputniknews.com/columnists/20160920/1045507773/syria-shows-us-under-military-rule.html>

Mike Whitney, **Rogue Mission: Did the Pentagon Bomb Syrian Army to Kill Ceasefire Deal?**, September 20, 2016, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/09/20/rogue-mission-did-the-pentagon-bomb-syrian-army-to-kill-ceasefire-deal/>

Vanessa Beeley, **Journey To Aleppo: Exposing The Truth Buried Under NATO Propaganda**, [September 20, 2016](http://www.mintpressnews.com/journey-to-aleppo-exposing-the-truth-buried-under-nato-propaganda/220563/), <http://www.mintpressnews.com/journey-to-aleppo-exposing-the-truth-buried-under-nato-propaganda/220563/> (Part I) and <http://www.mintpressnews.com/journey-aleppo-part-ii-syria-civil-defense-aleppo-medical-association-real-syrians-helping-real-syrians/220817/> (Part II).

Alexander Mercouris, **Making up the news: How the Western media misreported the Syrian convoy attack**, September 21, 2016, <http://theduran.com/making-news-western-media-misreported-syrian-convoy-attack/>

Felicity Arbuthnot, **Syria: Attack on Aid Convoy Kills Twenty, Destroys Aid, And Obliterates U.S. War Crimes in Support of ISIS-Daesh Terror Group?**, September 21 2016, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-attack-on-aid-convoy-kills-twenty-destroys-aid-and-obliterates-us-war-crimes-in-support-of-isis-daesh-terror-group/5547059>

Vanessa Beeley, **The REAL Syria Civil Defence Expose Nato's 'White Helmets' as Terrorist-Linked Imposters**, September 23, 2016, <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/09/23/exclusive-the-real-syria-civil-defence-expose-natos-white-helmets-as-terrorist-linked-imposters/>

RT.com, **Sunday, Sept 25, 2016**, **West still arming Al-Nusra in Syria, peace almost impossible, Russia's UN envoy tells Security Council mtg**

James W Carden, **How Libyan ‘Regime Change’ Lies Echo in Syria,**

<https://consortiumnews.com/2016/09/25/how-libyan-regime-change-lies-echo-in-syria/>, Consortium News, September 25, 2016 (The mainstream U.S. media has largely ignored a U.K. report on the West’s lies used to justify the Libyan “regime change,” all the better to protect the ongoing falsehoods used in Syria.)

Robert Parry, **New ‘group think’ for war with Syria/Russia,** *Consortium News*, Oct 5, 2016, <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/10/05/new-group-think-for-war-with-syriarussia/>

Diana Johnstone, **Destroying Syria: A Joint Criminal Enterprise,**

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/04/overthrowing-the-syrian-government-a-joint-criminal-enterprise/> (October 4, 2016), and **On Assad and Syria: a Reply to a Reader,** <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/06/on-assad-and-syria-a-reply-to-a-reader/> (October 6, 2016).

Mike Whitney, **Obama Stepped Back From Brink, Will Hillary?** (October 12, 2016),

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/12/obama-stepped-back-from-brink-will-hillary/> . Although this piece was written before the recent presidential election, I include it here because in it Mike Whitney develops what I think is a useful analogy:

The American people need to understand what’s going on in Syria. Unfortunately, the major media only publish Washington-friendly propaganda which makes it difficult to separate fact from fiction. The best way to cut through the lies and misinformation, is by using a simple analogy that will help readers to see that Syria is not in the throes of a confusing,

sectarian civil war, but the victim of another regime change operation launched by Washington to topple the government of Bashar al Assad.

With that in mind, try to imagine if striking garment workers in New York City decided to arm themselves and take over parts of lower Manhattan. And, let's say, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau decided that he could increase his geopolitical influence by recruiting Islamic extremists and sending them to New York to join the striking workers. Let's say, Trudeau's plan succeeds and the rebel militias are able to seize a broad swath of U.S. territory including most of the east coast stretching all the way to the mid-west. Then— over the course of the next five years— these same jihadist forces proceed to destroy most of the civilian infrastructure across the country, force millions of people from their homes and businesses, and demand that President Obama step down from office so they can replace him with an Islamic regime that would enforce strict Sharia law.

I would take issue with only one point: My understanding, largely from Steve Gowans' terrific piece, is that the original March 2011 protesters were some combination of Muslim Brotherhood jihadists and terrorists imported from Libya. So the jihadists were not sent later, but were already there from the start, and many were not indigenous to Syria; so I don't really think that combination of domestic and imported extremists can be fairly compared with hypothetical striking NYC garment workers. But if we clarify that point about the origin of the conflict, the analogy holds, and is highly illuminating.

Rick Sterling, **The 'White Helmets' controversy in Syria** (October 23, 2016),

<https://consortiumnews.com/2016/10/23/the-white-helmets-controversy/>

John Laforge, **U.S. Uranium Weapons Have Been Used in Syria** (October 28, 2016),

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/28/us-uranium-weapons-have-been-used-in-syria/>

Dan Glazebrook, **Syria: the U.S. Will Never Separate Its Fighters from Al Qaeda Because It Depends on Them** (November 7, 2016),

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/11/07/syria-the-us-will-never-separate-its-fighters-from-al-qaeda-because-it-depends-on-them/> (originally appeared in [RT.com](http://www.rt.com))

Roger Annis, **No to Western intervention in Syria and Ukraine, no to its left-wing apologists** (November 12, 2016), <http://rogerannis.com/no-to-western-intervention-in-syria-and-ukraine-no-to-its-left-wing-apologists/>

[Alexander Mercouris](http://theduran.com/heres-why-reports-of-intentional-hospital-bombings-in-syria-are-false/), **Here's why reports of intentional hospital bombings in Syria are false** (November 21, 2016), <http://theduran.com/heres-why-reports-of-intentional-hospital-bombings-in-syria-are-false/>

Patrick Cockburn, **Why Everything You've Read About Syria and Iraq Could be Wrong** (December 2, 2016), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/12/02/why-everything-youve-read-about-syria-and-iraq-could-be-wrong/>

Robert Parry, **How War Propaganda Keeps on Killing** (December 7, 2016), <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article45988.htm>

Louis Allday, **Controlling the narrative on Syria, published on MRZine, Dec 13, 2016**

<https://www.newcoldwar.org/controlling-the-narrative-on-syria/>

Aleppo Liberation Exposed Mainstream Media and Their Lies About Syria (December 16, 2016) (Radio Sputnik interview with Vanessa Beeley, investigative journalist and peace activist, who had just returned from the city), <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201612161048664425-aleppo-liberation-media-lies/>

Patrick Cockburn, **There's more propaganda than news coming out of Aleppo this week** (December 17, 2016), <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/aleppo-crisis-syrian-war-bashar-al-assad-isis-more-propaganda-than-news-a7479901.html>

'I saw no evidence of executions in Syria as reported by White Helmets & MSM sources' (interviews with Vanessa Beeley and Rick Sterling) (18 Dec, 2016), <http://on.rt.com/7y0e>

Mainstream Media on Syria and Russia; "Fake News," By [Joe Clifford](#), Global Research (December 18, 2016), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/mainstream-media-on-syria-and-russia-fake-news/5563257>

Dennis J Bernstein, **Extracting Aleppo from the Propaganda** (interview with photojournalist Eva Bartlett) (December 20, 2016), <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/12/20/extracting-aleppo-from-the-propaganda/>

Vanessa Beeley, **Dr Bouthaina Shaaban's Message to the West, 'Corporate Media has Caused Death and Destruction in Syria'** (interview) (December 20, 2016), [21st Century Wire](http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/12/20/syria-dr-bouthaina-shaabans-message-to-the-west-corporate-media-has-caused-death-and-destruction-in-syria/), <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/12/20/syria-dr-bouthaina-shaabans-message-to-the-west-corporate-media-has-caused-death-and-destruction-in-syria/>

Vanessa Beeley, **East Aleppo Video Diaries: Hanano Testimonies that Shatter Corporate Media Propaganda Myths** (December 22, 2016), <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/12/22/east-aleppo-video-diaries-hanano-testimonies-that-shatter-corporate-media-propaganda-myths/>

Tim Anderson, **Syria: The Diplomatic Endgame** (January 6, 2017), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-the-diplomatic-endgame/5566911>

Vijay Prashad, **After Aleppo: The State of Syria** (January 13, 2017), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/01/13/after-aleppo-the-state-of-syria/>

Tim Hayward, **How We Were Misled About Syria: the role of Medicin Sans Frontieres (MSF)**, (December 30, 2016), <https://timhayward.wordpress.com/2016/12/30/truth-a-casualty-neglected-by-medicins-sans-frontieres-msf-in-syria/>, and **How We Were Misled About Syria: Amnesty International** (January 23, 2017), <https://timhayward.wordpress.com/2017/01/23/amnesty-internationals-war-crimes-in-syria/>.

Resources to follow up and keep track:

Events are unfolding with such rapidity and complexity that it's hard to keep up in your spare time, as I have been. But I feel compelled to track what's happening as best I can, in part because I'm still afraid U.S. aggression and recklessness may lead to World War III and with it, the end of the world as we know it; and partly because I now feel for the Syrian people and the horrific ordeal they're being put through, largely by "my own" (U.S.) government and its allies, including the UK, France, and Australia, and Saudi Arabia and

Qatar, which I understand are among the most repressive regimes on Earth.

I wrote this article to help you develop your own understanding of the situation, independently of the mainstream media that are dominated by the U.S. perspective. To track developments going forward, I'd suggest looking for more from the authors of the articles I've cited, whose work is excellent. I've never met any of them, but I find their work persuasive and with some, I've had communication via email. In addition, many of the articles appear on websites that may be useful places to look for continuing updates. And I'm looking forward to Stephen Gowans' new book, *Washington's Long War on Syria*. See endnote 8 for pre-ordering information.

Among websites, I would especially recommend www.newcoldwar.org, as it covers well a broad range of topics, including the continuing conflict in Ukraine as well as material on Syria, and other issues related to what I believe is already a New Cold War, and the threat of escalation that poses.

Regarding Syria, this mini-primer was recently published at <http://www.syriasolidaritymovement.org/>, a site at which you can find a great deal of informative material including ongoing updates. And an extensive list of information resources is provided as Chapter 15 of Tim Anderson's book, *The Dirty War on Syria*, which as I mentioned is available at <https://store.globalresearch.ca/store/the-dirty-war-on-syria-washington-regime-change-and-resistance-pdf/>.

Notes:

¹ I use the terms Deep State or “shadow government” to refer to a collection of individuals and structures that appear to

have had substantial influence on the policies of several administrations, and to be in part responsible for the continuity of U.S. foreign policy from one administration to the next, especially since the Reagan administration. See, e.g., Mike Lofgren, **Anatomy of the Deep State** (February 21, 2014), at <http://billmoyers.com/2014/02/21/anatomy-of-the-deep-state/>. Ron Paul's much briefer statement regarding pressure on Trump from the Deep State and "shadow government" seems to me right on the money; see "Trump should resist neocon & shadow gov't influence to justify people's hopes – Ron Paul to RT" (11 Nov, 2016), at <http://on.rt.com/7upw>. (By the way, I take the recent efforts to discredit RT.com as a credible source of useful news and information to be disinformative, part of the larger effort to discredit Russian president Putin and apparently, Russia itself.) Paul Larudee's 4-page piece on the neocons (short for "neoconservatives," although their policies are anything but consistent with what has traditionally been called conservatism) identifies them and outlines their history and linkages with a number of so-called "think tanks." See "The Neocon in the Oval Office" (August 31st, 2016), at <http://dissidentvoice.org/2016/08/the-neocon-in-the-oval-office/>.

The hysterical allegations of Russian hacking to interfere with the recent U.S. election are a prime example of the baseless demonization of Russia. An organization of intelligence veterans who have the expertise to know point out that U.S. intelligence has the capability of presenting hard evidence of any such hacking and has not done so. Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity state bluntly: "We have gone through the various claims about hacking. For us, it is child's play to dismiss them. The email disclosures in question are the result of a leak, not a hack." They then explain the difference between leaking and hacking. See **U.S. Intel**

Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims (December 12, 2016), <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/12/12/us-intel-vets-dispute-russia-hacking-claims/>.

² See, for example, '**Russian operation in Syria is our salvation**' – **top Syrian Catholic bishop to RT**, Published time: 18 Feb, 2016 21:25, <http://on.rt.com/74vu>. By the way, Nour al-Din al-Zinki, the group responsible for the atrocity I describe, is part of the U.S.-backed Revolutionary Command Council and has received TOW anti-tank missiles courtesy of the CIA. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/u-s-vetted-and-armed-syria-terrorist-group-that-beheaded-boy-gave-them-tow-missiles/5537285>.

³ Full disclosure: In my youth I was trained in critical thinking and other skills in part by Jesuit priests at Fordham University in New York.

⁴ [Father Frans on the Syrian Rebellion: The “Protestors” Shot First](http://www.trans-int.com/wordpress/index.php/2014/04/14/father-frans-on-the-syrian-rebellion-the-protestors-shot-first/)
<http://www.trans-int.com/wordpress/index.php/2014/04/14/father-frans-on-the-syrian-rebellion-the-protestors-shot-first/>. Posted by [John Rosenthal](#)

⁵ I've just read an article that illustrates this point, about similar U.S. strategies in different countries, in greater detail. The countries involved are Libya and Syria, and the article is James Carden, **How Libyan ‘Regime Change’ Lies Echo in Syria**, September 25, 2016, posted at <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/09/25/how-libyan-regime-change-lies-echo-in-syria/>.

⁶ <http://www.politico.eu/author/robert-f-kennedy-jr/>. This article has been updated to identify Robert Kennedy as U.S. Attorney General. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is the president of

Waterkeeper Alliance. His newest book is *Thimerosal: Let The Science Speak*. A disagreement with Mr. Kennedy's argument is presented by Gareth Porter in **The War Against Assad Is Not A Pipeline War** (Sept. 21, 2016), at <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/37685-the-war-against-the-assad-regime-is-not-a-pipeline-war>

⁷ See, for example, Noam Chomsky, "The Right Turn in U.S. International and Security Policy," University of Colorado at Boulder (October 22, 1986), available from Alternative Radio, www.alternativeradio.org (1-800-444-1977); Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, (2003).

⁸ As I was finalizing this draft, I came across an article that does such a terrific job of reviewing the facts and evidence that I want to mention it here. My approach in this article is to review in some detail eye-witness and other accounts that show how the violence occurred, but for an insightful analysis taking a different approach, see Stephen Gowans, **The Revolutionary Distemper in Syria That Wasn't** <https://gowans.wordpress.com/2016/10/22/the-revolutionary-distemper-in-syria-that-wasnt/> (October 22, 2016). There's a great deal more in the article, but one of the main things it does is to argue that the violence that began in March 2011 was not a popular uprising, as there is absolutely no evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with the Assad government in Syria at that time. I'm very much looking forward to Gowans' book, *Washington's Long War on Syria*, forthcoming in April 2017. It can be pre-ordered at <https://gowans.wordpress.com/2017/01/04/washingtons-long-war-on-syria> .

Another useful overview and analysis that has just appeared is by Gary Leupp, **An Urgently Necessary Briefing on Syria**, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/10/14/an-urgently-necessary-briefing-on-syria/> (October 14, 2016).

⁹ In his book Prof. Anderson provides abbreviated citations in parentheses to sources that support the text, then at the end of each chapter, provides a detailed listing of each source. In this article I provide only the abbreviated citations; to get the full citation, please see the book, which is now available in both pdf and hard copy.

¹⁰ It appears the Damascus sarin gas attack was carried out by an opposition group with the goal of forcing the U.S. to directly attack the Syrian government. Soon after the event, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity issued a [statement](#) reporting “*the most reliable intelligence shows that Bashar al-Assad was NOT responsible for the chemical incident*”. Later on, Seymour Hersh wrote two lengthy investigations pointing to [Jabhat al Nusra with Turkish support](#) being culpable. Investigative journalist Robert Parry [exposed](#) the Human Rights Watch analysis blaming the Syrian government as a “junk heap of bad evidence”. [<https://consortiumnews.com/2014/04/07/the-collapsing-syria-sarin-case/>; see further, <https://consortiumnews.com/2014/01/21/human-rights-watches-syria-dilemma/>; <https://consortiumnews.com/2016/09/08/un-team-heard-claims-of-staged-chemical-attacks/>.] In the Turkish parliament, Turkish deputies presented documents showing that Turkey provided sarin to Syrian “rebels”. A detailed examination and analysis of all fact based stories is online at whoghouta.blogspot.com. Their conclusion is that “The only plausible scenario that fits the evidence is an attack by opposition forces.” Rick Sterling, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/09/06/socialists-supporting-nato-and-us-empire-a-response-to-ashley-smith/>. There is some further information above on pages 36-39.

¹¹ This last statement is taken from **History of U.S.-NATO’s “Covert War” on Syria: Daraa March 2011**, Chapter 4 of

Tim Anderson's book, which is posted at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/history-of-us-natos-covert-war-on-syria-daraa-march-2011/5492182>.

¹² <http://on.rt.com/77za> Published time: 23 Mar, 2016 17:27 Edited time: 23 Mar, 2016 19:58. Sharmine Narwani is a commentator and analyst of Middle East geopolitics. She is a former senior associate at St. Antony's College, Oxford University and has a master's degree in International Relations from Columbia University. Sharmine has written commentary for a wide array of publications, including Al Akhbar English, the New York Times, the Guardian, Asia Times Online, Salon.com, U.S.A Today, the Huffington Post, Al Jazeera English, BRICS Post and others. You can follow her on Twitter at @snarwani.

¹³ Regarding the fabrication and falsification of evidence, Rick Sterling did an exhaustive examination and analysis of one of the most famous items, the so-called "Caesar" photos. He summed it up this way: "The most highly publicized accusation of rampant torture and murder by Syrian authorities is the case of 'Caesar'. The individual known as 'Caesar' was presented as a defecting Syrian photographer who had 55,000 photos documenting 11,000 Syrians tortured by the brutal Assad dictatorship. At the time, among mainstream media only the Christian Science Monitor was skeptical, describing it as 'a well timed propaganda exercise'. In the past year it has been discovered that nearly half the photos show the opposite of what is claimed. The [Caesar story](#) is essentially a fraud funded by Qatar with 'for hire' lawyers giving it a professional veneer and massive mainstream media promotion." Mr. Sterling's full report, **The Caesar Photo Fraud that Undermined Syrian Negotiations: 12 Problems with the Story of Mass Torture and Execution in Syria**, can be viewed at <http://www.syriasolidaritymovement.org/2016/03/03/the->

[caesar-photo-fraud-that-undermined-syrian-negotiations/](#).

However, be forewarned, the report contains and reviews a great many ghastly photographs.

¹⁴ From **ALL OUT FIGHT FOR ALEPPO BEGINS - SAA Major Offensive - complete report**, Fort Russ News, J. Flores with collated and original sources, posted at <http://www.fort-russ.com/2016/09/breaking-all-out-fight-for-aleppo.html>.

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