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[Red Alert: What seeing the war in Syria taught me about US/Western government and media propaganda \(/archives/featured-articles/2022/march/29/red-alert-what-seeing-the-war-in-syria-taught-me-about-uswestern-government-and-media-propaganda/\)](/archives/featured-articles/2022/march/29/red-alert-what-seeing-the-war-in-syria-taught-me-about-uswestern-government-and-media-propaganda/)

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tuesday march 29, 2022

The Syrian war was the first fully observed conflict on social-media and the ability to connect directly with Syrians real time as they were experiencing the crisis was unprecedented. This created a unique opportunity to get unfiltered information directly from all sides of the conflict to gain insights and understanding. The results have helped shake off the control by conventional news media over foreign events reporting and analysis. While this has created some chaos, valuable lessons have been (or should have been) learned.

I began researching Syria and the war there in late 2012, and have made seven extended journeys traveling around during the war from 2016 through 2019, meeting with hundreds of Syrians from different backgrounds, walks of life, and opinions as a 100 percent non-affiliated, unpaid, and self/crowd-funded, independent citizen-journalist.

It became clear that what's been happening in Syria was not a spontaneous, organic, popular uprising against a tyrant, but a proxy regime-change attempt war in the works since the mid 2000's against the quite popular Assad. This effort was spearheaded by the US, UK, France, and Israel, using Sunni violent fundamentalists and extremists (unpopular with the majority of Syria's Sunni population as well as minority groups) armed and funded by the West and regional allies of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar to start the violence and do the dirty work. The basic character of the rebel groups was apparent from the beginning: Syrian and non-Syrian fighters most Westerners would call terrorists and be screaming for their government to crush if the same heavily armed groups had taken over their cities, towns, and suburbs by massacring, beheading, torturing, kidnapping, and raping.

Syrians often remarked to me that before the war their country was "almost a paradise." The middle class was the largest economic sector and growing. Religious harmony was the norm and Christians there were doing well. International investment was increasing as were the tourists. Women were equal or outnumbering men in the universities and present

in leadership roles in nearly all aspects of society. Syria had made the “Top 5” list of the world’s most personally safe countries. President Assad had brought the Internet into the country and kept it open throughout the war and the people there knew all that was being said in the West about the crisis.

This doesn’t mean Syria was perfect and Assad beloved by all Syrians. There were and are many problems there which are directly attributed to the government with corruption always being number one on the list of grievances. These internal issues have been exacerbated by the war.

Now, after 11 years of war, 90 percent of Syrians are poor, many are starving; the economy is shattered. Between the fighting, US/Western sanctions, loss of production capability (though an impressive number of factories have been rebuilt), shortages of electricity and fuel, the black market and smuggling, dearth of employment opportunities, Covid-19, and the economic meltdown in Lebanon, the situation seems destined to remain desperate for the foreseeable future. The pressure by the US and most allies continues including increased sanctions, and three on-going illegal occupations: US has seized control over 1/3 of the country (the part with the richest oil fields); Turkey holds much of the north; and Israel is still occupying the Golan while making routine air strikes in Syria with no condemnation. There are numerous terrorist groups including ISIS cells and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the al Qaeda affiliate) to get rid of in the northeast and Idlib.

As for Russia’s role in Syria, I’ve watched it closely – including observing some Russian military operations personally in Deir Ezzor, Homs, and Palmyra. Russia and Iran are in Syria legally, asked to join in the fight against ISIS and al Nusra by the Syrian government.

From 2011 through 2015 the situation was dire. In 2012 the US resolution at the UN called for President Assad to step down and both Russia and China vetoed it. The US and UK responded with “fury” according to The Guardian, while Syrians were out in the streets cheering. When Russian troops came in September of 2015, the priority was to put a stop to ISIS operations in the northeast. Massive ISIS oil convoys were taking the stolen oil up to Turkey, bringing the terrorist army equally massive amounts of money to use for their rampages while, according to a leaked, verified audio tape of John Kerry speaking with the Syrian opposition, the US was “watching ISIS grow” hoping the pressure would get Assad to negotiate. Instead, an appeal was made to Putin and answered. Within a few months, the ISIS oil convoys had been reduced significantly, cutting that cash flow.

By the end of 2016 total chaos had been replaced with more established battle lines and though violence was still occurring everywhere, there was some order. Palmyra was liberated from ISIS in the spring of 2016, after which the Russians and Syrians put on an orchestra concert to rededicate the spectacular archaeological site to culture; Western

governments and media were not enthusiastic. It fell again to ISIS and many of the most important buildings were destroyed by the terrorists. The battles for Palmyra would have been the perfect opportunity to actually use chemical weapons – to protect that prized site and with ISIS forces isolated in the desert, however the fighting raged with conventional weapons and casualties were very high. In December 2016, Aleppo was freed from the terrorist groups that had been holding the eastern half of the city for years by the Syrian Army and its allies – with the ones fighting the terrorists being treated as though they were worse than ISIS in western media. The terrorist groups backed by the US and allies included the likes of Nour al din al Zenki that grabbed the young boy, Abdullah Issa, out of hospital with the IV still in his arm and beheaded him in the back of a truck on video while laughing. Al Zenki had received advanced weapons and other support by the US.

By October of 2017 when I was in Palmyra, Deir Ezzor and al Mayadeen, most of that area was freshly liberated from ISIS by the combined Syrian, Russian, Iranian, Iraqi, and Hezbollah forces. ISIS was still all around but its backbone of cities down the Euphrates had been severed. In Homs, I observed the transportation of armed groups twice from the Al-Waer suburb, overseen by the Russians. In addition, Russian de-mining efforts have insured relative safety for civilians returning to their homes after areas have been liberated.

To summarize, in my experience the Russians have indeed been effective in the fight against ISIS and al Qaeda while displaying professionalism, precision, and minimizing civilian casualties. The US has been using ISIS as a pretext for its own completely illegal occupation of the entire northeast third of Syrian lands, and has often been helping or working directly on behalf of the al Qaeda affiliate and similar terrorist groups.

However, the US/Western media is still saying the same things they've said since 2012, if anything entrenching deeper in the assertions of the US and other western governments. All major articles and stories are still about “the tyrant Assad killing his own people”; and the great majority of the Syrian people who supported their leader and army were made invisible. That support ranged from total devotion to begrudging acceptance because the alternative, Syria falling to the terrorists promoted by the West, was unthinkable. Anyone offering evidence and opinion different from that of the accepted narratives isn't just ignored – they're treated as enemies and attacked by the media.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is still in the early stages and although I've been tracking the situation since 2014, I certainly don't to know all of what's happening or will happen. To sort fact from fiction from all sides will be a painstakingly long process yet there is great urgency to avoid as much devastation as possible. War is painful, the most painful thing. It truly does hollow out souls as it lays waste to lands and lives and I hate it all, but I've seen the wall go up already which prohibits looking at the other side, hearing what their grievances and concerns are. That wall protects the easy to memorize, constantly repeated, approved talking points: “pre-meditated”, “unprovoked”, “unjustified” and that wall is

already considerably taller, deeper, and wider than it's been about Syria. For me, this is when the red light starts flashing, the alarm begins sounding, and I'm on full alert for more gross oversimplifications, exaggerations, unproven allegations, and outright falsehoods.

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