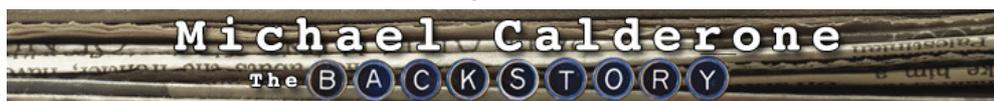


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As Syria Attack Looms, Few U.S. News Outlets Report From Damascus

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NEW YORK -- When Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem held a [news conference Tuesday](#) in the capital city of Damascus, Wall Street Journal reporter Sam Dagher asked about the government's reaction to reports of chemical weapons use.

Dagher, who [reported](#) Monday from Homs, Syria, stood out at Tuesday's presser: He was the only U.S. newspaper reporter to pose a question. Dagher also appears to be the [only U.S. newspaper reporter](#) in Damascus.

Meanwhile, CNN's Frederik Pleitgen, who sat down Tuesday for an exclusive interview with Syria's information minister Omran al-Zoubi, has the distinction of being the only TV correspondent from a U.S. network in the capital.

For days, media [war drums](#) have been beating in network studios and [across op-ed pages](#), with prominent columnists and commentators calling on President Barack Obama to strike Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in retaliation for a [a horrific chemical attack](#). The question in the U.S. media Tuesday wasn't *if* an attack takes place, but *when*. U.S. officials anonymously hinted at [Thursday](#).

Social media has played a significant role the world's understanding of Syria's long-running civil war that's resulted in more than 100,000 deaths. But journalists still serve a vital function in trying to independently verify the competing claims from government officials and rebel leaders, while gaining perspective from the ground amid the heightened war rhetoric of "red lines" and [target lists](#).

"People here in Damascus are afraid of the U.S. getting more involved and that possibly tipping the scales in this conflict," Pleitgen told The Huffington Post in an email Tuesday "The vast majority of people we speak to want stability more than anything else in order to preserve their way of life. Government officials seem to now understand how serious the U.S. is about military action. Their tone has certainly become more reserved, even as they continue to say they would retaliate if America attacks."

Pleitgen also spoke to what he'd like to bring to the Syria story from a somewhat unique position right now among Western journalists:

"I think, especially at the beginning of this conflict, it was often portrayed as though it was the Assads and their military against the people. But there are many here who support the regime even though they are very critical of it. They are afraid of the alternative, and afraid of losing their very secular and open way of life. I think that Syrians, no matter which sect they belong to, see themselves as Syrians first and that social fabric is currently being destroyed. That's the tragedy I hope to convey in my reporting from Damascus -- to help viewers understand why it's important for the international community to preserve this nation, regardless of who will lead it in the future."

The Associated Press has also continued to operate out of Damascus. On Tuesday, reporter Lee Keath [wrote](#) of the "thin veneer of normalcy" in Damascus -- rare glimpse at how Syrians are dealing with the two-and-a-half year conflict.

The Syrian conflict has been [especially difficult to cover on the ground](#). In 2012, [28 journalists were killed in Syria](#), according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Kidnapping is [a persistent threat](#).

Janine di Giovanni, a veteran war correspondent, recently [addressed the spate of kidnappings](#) and wrote that "Syria must be reported."

"It is the lynchpin on which the region's security lies," di Giovanni wrote. "A larger, proxy war is at stake. Human rights abuses are happening everywhere inside, and every day."

To tell the story of what's happening in Syria, journalists have two basic options, each with benefits and drawbacks.

Journalists can report from Beirut, Lebanon, or from along the Syrian border and occasionally enter the country illegally, often with the help of rebel contacts. Some incredible reporting has been done this way, including [Le Monde journalists](#) spending two months in Syria to report on the use of chemical weapons in May.

Still, the threats of kidnapping by al Qaeda-linked fighters, and being held for ransom, is a major concern. The New York Times published [a harrowing story](#) Friday about an American photographer who was kidnapped and managed to escape captivity after seven months.

Despite the risks, journalists still cross the border in pursuit of the story. NBC News' Richard Engel, who was [kidnapped and freed in Syria](#) last December, briefly [crossed into Syria Monday night](#) before heading back into Turkey.

There's also the official route, which is the only way to report from Damascus. News organizations can seek a Syrian government visa, but requests are often turned down and, even if issued, are only temporary.

The Washington Post hasn't been able to secure one for more than a year, according to foreign editor Douglas Jehl.

New York Times foreign editor Joe Kahn said the paper does not have have a staff reporter in Damascus, but has worked "with good stringers in Damascus and around Syria who have been integral to reporting efforts."

Kahn added that the Times has had some reporters and photographers in Damascus on visas in recent months. But he said the visas "are not always granted on demand and are not open-ended."

The Wall Street Journal seems to have had more success than some other newspapers in obtaining government visas.

Bill Spindle, Middle East bureau chief for the Journal, said the paper has simply applied like other news outlets and "in most cases they've given them to us." He said Dagher has been inside Syria for roughly a year.

Even with a visa, Pleitgen acknowledged the restrictions on reporting in Damascus. While there isn't a government minder following the CNN crew, he said, the journalists only have permission to film in government-controlled parts of Damascus.

"Filming with the military can be frustrating, so we often have to independently make our way to the front line to get access to Assad's troops," Pleitgen said. "By and large, it is not too bad on the streets of Damascus as many people are willing to talk to us in the center of town. Things get more difficult on the outskirts close to rebel-held territory."

Another difficulty, he said, is in dealing with Syrian ministries, which often lack a spokesman or someone designated to deal with the press.

"When it comes to working with the media," Pleitgen noted, "Syria does not have a culture of transparency."

CORRECTION: This article originally labeled CNN's Frederik Pleitgen as the only western TV journalist in Damascus, a description used on air by the network. However, [France 24](#), a French TV network, is also on the ground in Damascus.

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250 words

COMMUNITY PUNDITS

1/1



Steamboater

POLITICAL PUNDIT · 4,739 Fans

· Forget hope. Agitate.

3

Journalists have the option of saying no if a news outlet asks them to go into a war zone and they should. Those who do go are putting their lives on the line and as frightened as they probably are have a huge spine, especially since they're going into a war zone armed only with a cameraman and a microphone or just a pad, pencil, tape recorder and/or laptop. You've got to hand it to these very...

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Macros27

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· Don't be no cloud on a sunny day

14

Well CNN and the others are very busy covering the important story of Miley Cyrus twerking.

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FAVE

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MORE

28 AUG 3:49 PM



Ingarose

260 Fans

· Unity in Diversity - Share

8

CNN America no longer covers news, CNN International still does if one can get it.

REPLY

FAVE

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28 AUG 4:25 PM



Irkitated

25 Fans

4

To be fair... There are about 15 articles about her down the far right hand side

of Huffington post

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:57 PM



10 COMMENTS BY 11 PEOPLE

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MarianoRenatoPacifico
 42 Fans

6

Why do we attack Syria? Why not let France do it? Or European Union? Why it has to be us? Why?

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:03 PM


Ingarose
 260 Fans

· Unity in Diversity - Share

10

Because we an empire and empires become very arrogant in their powers. Empires no longer care about the people who live in their empires but only about the powerful and rich elites.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:26 PM


yoyodyne666
 421 Fans

· Just here to spool you up.

4

You had me at "why do we attack Syria?". Why does anyone? Let them duke it out themselves, beats the heck out of the carnage that starting WWIII will bring.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 5:01 PM



16 COMMENTS BY 15 PEOPLE

Read Conversation →


eschew obfuscation
 209 Fans

· Pithy repartee for those astute few so inclined.

14

Illiterate flunkies

It's "BY WHOM?"

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:42 PM


fatigued
 3 Fans

· small human

1

First thing I noticed. Pathetic.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 7:51 PM


fatafalena
 74 Fans

1

Thank you.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 8:04 PM



18 COMMENTS BY 14 PEOPLE

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American in Asia
 178 Fans

5

The American journalists should get out of Syria instanter. Let Al Jazeera do the reporting.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 3:10 PM


Borris Banter
 41 Fans

4

Al Jazeera is owned by Qatar government. One of the groups paying, supplying and supporting the mercenaries and Jihadists. Qatar wants to build a pipeline through Syria.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 3:26 PM



Nicko
413 Fans · Flower Power

2

At least that way it would be more honest than what you're finding on MSN.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:37 PM



21 COMMENTS BY 10 PEOPLE

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CSmith476
SUPER USER · 157 Fans · Educator and Humanist

7

"Syria Must Be Reported--But By Who"

**by whom. "Who" is only used in the Nominative Case (the subject).

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 11:35 PM



Dancenowzen
SUPER USER · 1,948 Fans

1

yes thank you!!!

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 29 AUG 12:24 AM



Dosadi
POLITICAL PUNDIT · 3,700 Fans · Political agnostic

1

I thought I was the only one who noticed.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 30 AUG 12:48 PM



hardknocks
220 Fans · the future is unwritten

3

"As Syria Attack Looms, Few U.S. News Outlets Report From Damascus".....what relevance does this have?

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 3:33 PM



Claudia L
1,333 Fans · Time is the seed of the Universe

1

I thought they were testing the site to see if Chemical weapons were used. They IMPLY they were used but there is no mention of the outcome of the tests. Why is that?

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 5:29 PM



CapSen
1,118 Fans · Empathy. The faculty to feel what the other feels.

1

In a democracy, having INFORMED citizens making choices has some relevance.

Just sayin'.

That has been the whole problem in the US for decades, if not longer.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 9:26 PM



14 COMMENTS BY 9 PEOPLE

Read Conversation →



CIPHERWISE

193 Fans · No damned reason for it - it's just POLICY

1

Syria has had a ban on foreign reporters being in the country for months. Every night on the evening news, every network has broken their laws and smuggled in reporters from Turkey, got the rebel side of the latest and returned to Turkey in time for the evening news.

Biased reporting? Have always had the impression that there were two sides to a story!

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:00 PM



Adam L Brinklow

SUPER USER · 605 Fans · Writer, editor, critic.

3

"Have always had the impression that there were two sides to a story!"

"Syria has had a ban on foreign reporters."

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"Have always had the impression that there were two sides to a story!"

"Syria has had a ban on foreign reporters."

.

"There were two sides to a story!"

"Ban on foreign reporters."

Sigh.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 6:08 PM



Craig Schultz

557 Fans · Jonah and Ahab had different perspectives

"Ban on foreign reporters."

CipherWise's words.

Do you take anonymous comments on the Internet as facts?

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 6:42 PM



11 COMMENTS BY 6 PEOPLE

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fitley

SUPER USER · 2,258 Fans

4

Shouldn't there be official death counters? Because I'm sure there must be a number of how many people must be killed to avenge the deaths of people who were gassed. But shouldn't civilians killed count for more because it wasn't their fault or should the not be counted at all. These are issues that need to be worked out. Oh wait usually we don't count civilians at all. Nevermind.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 8:45 PM



Amy Lane Adams

16 Fans

america don't like the world finding out stuff like that

might make them look like a sick dictatorship

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 11:56 PM



george martini

1,297 Fans · I wasn't always this introverted.

Being a death counter probably isn't a highly prestigious type of job.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 29 AUG 12:54 AM



5 COMMENTS BY 4 PEOPLE

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**srivers**

1,290 Fans

· "Honesty is the best politics." - Stan Laurel

3

CNN gave up news quite some time ago.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 5:24 PM

**Amy Lane Adams**

16 Fans

1

gave up news
for stomach turning american propaganda

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 11:57 PM

**Humanoid3000**

12 Fans

2

we don't need boots on the ground that is what the UN peace keeping forces are for. all the USA should be doing is advacacy and support. we need voting protection, jobs, a living wage, healthcare for all, highter education, end to student loans, equal justice for all, immigration now for 11 million people, end to stop & frist, trayvons law being past, no to a government shutdown, help for the... [Read More](#)

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 3:20 PM

**June25**

879 Fans

1

I thought we paid the UN to shoot at us.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 4:03 PM

**Rosanne Smithe**

SUPER USER · 324 Fans

· Liberalism is a Dental Disorder

UN "Peace" keeping forces generally split when hostilities begin. We already have 5000 boots on the ground in Jordan, training and arming jihadis. We have troops on the ground in yemen and a "secret" base in Saudi. Barry needs another distraction, because his faithful might realize that he hasn't really done anything. A few vacations for sure, although they cost the taxpaers billions, they were well worth it for Dear Leader.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 28 AUG 10:27 PM



5 COMMENTS BY 5 PEOPLE

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