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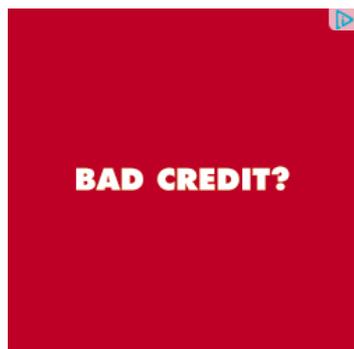
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Is The Western Media Promoting War on Syria?

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Global Research, September 01, 2013

Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: Media Disinformation, US NATO War Agenda
In-depth Report: SYRIA: NATO'S NEXT WAR?

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As the United States threatens to target Syrian militarily, how can we expect the military strikes to be covered?

First, there are very few US or western journalists stationed in Syria , and many of the citizen reporters on the ground have become casualties, and/or have been intimidated and forced to leave.

That assures poor coverage of those who will be hurt or become predictable and disposable "collateral damage."

A front page New York Times article on Friday reporting on Syria, carries no dateline and was filed from Beirut. The Times explains that mainstream journalists cannot work freely in Syria, and contends that social media offers better coverage.

The paper quotes Absi Smesem, Syrian journalist, as saying, "There are no objective sources of information on either side, neither with the regime nor the rebels .We need to get out of this Facebook phase, where all we do is whine and complain about the regime," he said.

Writing on Salon, in a piece picked up by Mediachannel.org, Patrick L Smith indicts western "lapdog media," asking,

"When was it that journalists began thinking of themselves as national security operatives? It is getting unbearable, this errand-boy act in the face of power. If journalists did their jobs properly we would get into fewer messes such as Syria and would be more nationally secure. As it is now, the press is a defective piece in the democratic mechanism."

There will likely be western reporters embedded on – American naval ships – expected to unleash "tomahawk "cruise missiles, but they realistically tell us except some technical details as the missiles lift off in in flashes. They certainly cannot report on expected civilian casualties and other likely collateral damage.

(The very use of the nickname "Tomahawk" is considered offensive to Native Americans who also resented the Navy Seals referring to Osama bin Laden as "Geronimo" in the raid that killed him. This use of racial stereotyping comes just days after the President, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, spoke at a ceremony praising the late Martin Luther King Jr, also an eloquent critic of U.S. militarism, a fact omitted in his remarks.)

The debate in the media and in Congress on the coming war is intensifying and seems to have forced President Obama to delay his promised "limited" missile attacks. He now says he going to wait for Congressional approval as dissent among legislators grows.

As a candidate in 2007, he said that unless the country is threatened presidents must win Congressional support for war like actions. As President, he seemed to have abandoned that earlier position until noisy protests on the right and left—and the actions of the British Parliament—led him to announce that he will now seek Congressional approval.

This development has more to do with anti-Obama Congressman in The Tea Party and other groups than demands by the press, although liberal and left critics have made made the planned missile strikes a bi-partisan cause.

The media coverage itself has become an issue too. Example: [the Young Turks TV news show](#) indicting news outlets for promoting war on Syria as it did for war on Iraq. In a heavily watched segment on YouTube, they challenged media cheerleading.

Liberal publications like Huffington Post also focus on media flaws, while conservative media dwell on the Obama's reluctance, until today to bring his war appeal to a Republican-dominated Congress where more and more voices challenge unilateral military action and cite public opinion

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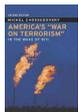
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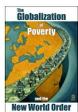
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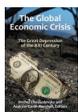
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polls to back them up.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) notes: “One tendency in the corporate media seemed to be to jump to the conclusion that the chemical attacks were launched by the Assad regime, while admitting that perhaps this was not yet proven.” Suggestions that the “rebel forces” used sarin gas have not been proven either.

As the bombs and missiles are readied for use against preselected targets, we have Secretary of State Kerry, a one time anti-war activist, formerly a leader of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, is leading the rhetorical charge for war.

The often-hawkish [Washington Post](#) reported, “Secretary of State John F. Kerry says President Obama is determined to hold Syria accountable for using chemical weapons and will decide soon how to respond. Kerry called Syria’s actions “a moral obscenity.” On Friday, he said he has “high confidence” that Assad “s regime is responsible. That sounds like faith-based reasoning since the actual facts cited were thin.

This is a unilateral determination on the part of the United States, to rush to war, even as UN inspectors who were in Syria, have yet to report the findings of their investigation. They are expected to confirm chemical weapons were used without saying who used them. UN Secretary General Ban is calling for a resumption of diplomacy and to let the inspectors finish their jobs

The Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, citing their government’s intelligence services, insist that the Syrian government has been using chemical weapons all along, and speculates that there was some internal military screw-up in Syria that led to the recent mass gassing incident that was clearly not in its interest to be associated with.

Syria officially denies all responsibility, and, in the last day called on the UN to probe what they say are gas attacks by rebel forces. They accuse the Saudis of supplying chemical weapons to the militias they back.

As UN Secretary General calls on the US to take a diplomatic route, the reverberations of the British Parliament nixing U.K. involvement, widely seen as a “set back” to Prime Minister David Cameron’s government, is cited in the U.S. debate. Former British PM Tony Blair’s “dodgy” (i.e. misleading) dossier” justifying British backing of the Iraq War was widely referenced in the debate.

France’s former conservative government was among the biggest critics of US policy then, but now, under a nominal Socialist government, is backing Obama’s decision to go ahead with a bombing raid that experts say is expecting to be targeting 38 sites,

Others say that the West’s rush to war is intended to pre-empt any finding of responsibility by Syrian “rebels,” and, also, to try to alter the strategic balance of the internal military conflict that had running against the “rebel” offensive fighting the Assad government.

The United States initially called the UN involvement “too late,” a clear effort to pre-empt its relevance and ignore its findings.

This conjures up George Bush giving Saddam and his sons an ultimatum to leave Iraq in 48 hours. When the UN does not jump to Washington’s orders, it often become dispensable and ignored.

“Too late” on what calendars? The [UN inspectors were fired upon](#) before they could even get into position in rebel held territory.

Who did it? Was the Syrian government that invited them the culprits, or, more likely, the self-styled “rebels. Who would have the most to gain by delaying an investigation? The “rebels,” said to include 6000 jihadis from Al Qaeda and like-minded groups that would certainly have more of an interest in the keeping the question of responsibility muddled.

The chemical warfare controversy mushroomed just as US backed “rebels,” trained in Jordan, were being infiltrated into Syria. This calls into question President Obama’s claim that the missile attack he has authorized does not have any “regime-change” mission.

The US outrage over the use of chemical weapons is also selective and being questioned. [Foreign Policy Magazine](#) reported that the CIA now admits the the US was complicit when [Saddam Hussein used nerve gas](#):

“The U.S. government may be considering military action in response to chemical strikes near Damascus. But a generation ago, America’s military and intelligence communities knew about and did nothing to stop a series of nerve gas attacks far more devastating than anything Syria has seen, Foreign Policy has learned.”

So far, memories of the fabricated Iraq War rationalizations have hung over the issue, as has massive used by American forces of chemical agents like Napalm and Agent Orange in Vietnam. Canada’s CBC wonders if any one will ever be able to confirm who used the gas.

Reported the NY Times, “The White House faces steep hurdles as it prepares to make the most important public intelligence presentation since February 2003, when Secretary of State Colin L.



Powell made a dramatic and detailed case for war to the United Nations Security Council using intelligence — later discredited — about Iraq's weapons programs."

The best known UN weapons inspector at that time, former Swedish foreign minister Hans Blix, has just written in the Guardian that the US does not have the right to attack Syria.

"Unlike George Bush in 2003, the Obama administration is not trigger-happy and contemptuous of the United Nations and the rules of its charter, which allow the use of armed force only in self-defence or with an authorisation from the security council. Yet Obama, like Bush and Blair, seems ready to ignore the council and order armed strikes on Syria with political support from only the UK, France and some others," he says.

Such action could not be "in self-defence" or "retaliation", as the US, the UK and France have not been attacked," he adds. "To punish the Assad government for using chemical weapons would be the action of self-appointed global policemen — action that, in my view, would be very unwise."

Iraq war critics are now saying that the protests back then, might be what influenced the government now. Writes [David Swanson](#), "Opposition to a U.S.-led attack on Syria is growing rapidly in Europe and the United States, drawing its strength from public awareness that the case made for attacking Iraq had holes in it.

A majority in the United States, still very much aware of Iraq war deceptions, opposes arming the "rebel" force in Syria, so heavily dominated by foreign fighters and al Qaeda. And as many as 70 percent in recent polls oppose U.S. military action in Syria."

This point of view had been all but missing in most press accounts but a new round of protests against the illegal nature of the planned attacks, held this weekend in London and Washington may put the issue more forcefully on the news agenda, even as the New York Times has run an op-ed calling for Washington to act even if it is illegal. It has since waffled editorially on the morality and logic of the planned attacks.

The Obama Administration has been scrambling to find support. Van Jones, a former Obama appointee who he forced out of his post after his history as a radical was questioned, is now an on-air commentator on CNN's new version of "Crossfire" and seems to be carrying official favor with an [endorsement](#) of Obama's decision to strike Syria, the first voice on "the left" to do so.

More telling is that many members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans want Congress called back into session and are threatening to vote against the attack. Writes Kevin Zeese: "The irony of the Obama presidency may hinge on whether he attacks Syria. He began his presidency prematurely winning the Nobel Peace Prize and could end it being impeached for starting an illegal war without congressional or UN approval — violating both domestic and international law."

Facts and arguments are being marshaled on all sides with Israeli intelligence claiming that it overheard phone conversations of Syrian Generals discussing their involvement. The Wall Street Journal [examined](#) the Israeli role concluding there is still no conclusive evidence.

An explosive potential angle in all this is that one of the media's most powerful players now has an apparent self interest in encouraging a conflict that may rearrange existing borders.

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray [reveals](#) that Rupert Murdoch (along with Dick Cheney) is an investor and advisor to company named Genie Energy (NYSE: GNE, GNEPRA), that the government of Israel has awarded its subsidiary, Genie Israel Oil and Gas, Ltd., an exclusive petroleum exploration license covering 396.5 square kilometers in the Southern portion of the Golan Heights, a currently Israeli occupied zone.

(The SEC reported: "In November 2010, GOGAS sold a 0.5% equity interest to Rupert Murdoch for \$1.0 million paid with a promissory note. The note is secured by a pledge of the shares issued in exchange for the note. The note accrues interest at 1.58% per annum, and the principal and accrued interest is due and payable on November 15, 2015.")

I have not seen this connection explored in any major media outlet.

Washington is increasingly being isolated. China has urged a diplomatic resolution, the Arab League opposes military action, NATO is on the sidelines, and most of the Iraq-era "coalition of the willing," except France and Israel, have not rushed to be supportive.

At the same time, Russia is dispatching its own war ships to the region while its Intelligence service is offering counter-evidence that the so-called "rebels," not the government, are to blame. Russia's Putin is increasingly denouncing Obama's stated intent to lob cruise missiles on to Syrian targets and demanding that he submit what evidence he has to the UN.

National Public Radio's Greg Myre went back to examine earlier attacks of the type being considered to "punish" U.S. adversaries and enemies, claims they were largely unsuccessful, and fears they may lead to counter-attacks.

He writes, "The Obama administration and several before it have seen limited attacks as a way to send a tough message without drawing the U.S. into a larger conflict.

But critics say such strikes rarely, if ever, inflict serious damage or change the behavior of those

targeted. And worse, limited U.S. military action has been followed by some of the deadliest attacks against American targets over the past three decades.”

Critics also fear that the Obama Administration will not let “the facts get in the way” of its decision to attack Syria. This war is supposedly modeled on the the earlier US attack on Kosovo. Most news accounts don’t remind readers that that went on for 78 days although this one is being sold as quick, surgical and not aimed at regime change.

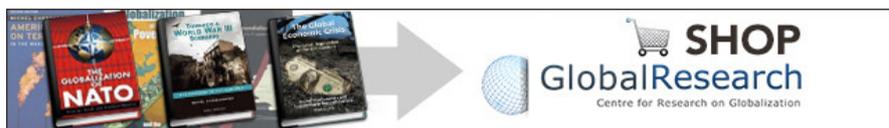
They also don’t note that in 2013, according to the Institute of Public Accuracy, the House of Representatives, by a vote of 213 to 213, failed to give the President the constitutionally required authorization he needed to carry on the air war against Yugoslavia.

Today, Obama’s promise of bombing for peace—to uphold his “red line,” a phrase with origins in Israeli propaganda—rings hollow to many, while most experts (mostly from center and right think tanks) quoted in “mainstream” news papers say Obama’s threatened display of limited military muscle can not alter the conflict, and certainly not resolve it.

This press analysis itself has lacked balance and diversity because critics on the anti-war left are seldom quoted.

These issues may be urgent, but in late summer, with newsrooms downsized for vacations, and the public soaking up the last rays of summer or watching the U.S. Open tennis championships, the troubling issues of a new war have only barely registered, even as a majority of the public who are following the coverage of the build-up to war are ‘agin, it while, true to form, a a majority of the pundits seem to be cheering it on.

New Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at newsdissector.net and edits [Mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org). Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org



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