

# Russia 'Novichok' Hysteria Proves Politicians and Media Haven't Learned the Lessons of Iraq

The current state of anti-Russia hysteria is reminiscent of earlier dark chapters of American history, including the rush to war in Iraq of the early 2000s and McCarthyism of the 1950s, Patrick Henningsen observes.

By Patrick Henningsen

If there's one thing to be gleaned from the current atmosphere of anti-Russian hysteria in the West, it's that the US-led sustained propaganda campaign is starting to pay dividends. It's not only the hopeless political classes and media miscreants who believe that Russia is hacking, meddling and poisoning our progressive democratic utopia – with many pinning their political careers to this by now that's it's too late for them to turn back.

As it was with Iraq in 2003, these dubious public figures require a degree of public support for their policies, and unfortunately many people do believe in the grand *Russian conspiracy*, having been sufficiently brow-beaten into submission by around-the-clock fear mongering and official fake news disseminated by government and the mainstream media.

What makes this latest carnival of warmongering more frightening is that it proves that the political and media classes never actually learned or internalized the basic lessons of Iraq, namely that the cessation of diplomacy and the declarations of sanctions (a prelude to war) against another sovereign state should not be based on half-baked intelligence and mainstream fake news. But that's exactly what is happening with this latest Russian 'Novichok' plot.

Admittedly, the stakes are much higher this time around. The worst case scenario is unthinkable, whereby the bad graces of men like John Bolton and other military zealots, there may just be a thin enough mandate to short-sell another military conflagration or proxy war – this time against another nuclear power and UN Security Council member.

Enter stage right, where US President Donald Trump announced this week that the US is moving closer to war footing with Russia. It's not the first time Trump has made such a hasty move in the absence any forensic evidence of a crime. Nowadays, hearsay, conjecture and social media postings are enough to declare war. Remember last April with the alleged "Sarin Attack" in Khan Sheikhoun, when the embattled President squeezed off 59 Tomahawk Cruise missiles against

Syria – a decision, which as far as anyone can tell, was based solely on a few YouTube videos uploaded by the illustrious White Helmets. Back then Trump learned how an act of war against an existential enemy could take the heat off at home and translate into a bounce in the polls. Even *La Résistance* at CNN were giddy with excitement and threw their support behind Trump, with some pundits describing his decision to act as “presidential.”

As with past high-profile western-led WMD allegations against governments in Syria and Iraq (the US and UK are patently unconcerned with multiple allegations of ‘rebel’ terrorists in Syria caught using chemical weapons), an identical progression of events appears to be unfolding following the alleged ‘Novichok’ chemical weapon poisoning of retired British-Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, Wiltshire on March 4.

Despite a lack of evidence presented to the public other than the surreptitious “highly likely” assessments of British Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, President Trump once again has caved into pressure from Official Washington’s anti-Russian party line and ordered the expulsion of 60 Russian diplomats – whom he accused of being spies. Trump also ordered the closure of the Russian consulate in Seattle, citing speculative fears that Russia might be spying on a nearby Boeing submarine development base. It was the second round of US expulsions of Russian officials, with the first one ordered by the outgoing President Obama in December 2016, kicking out 35 Russian diplomats and their families (including their head chef) and closing the Russian Consulate in San Francisco, with some calling it “a den of spies”.

Trump’s move followed an earlier UK action on March 14th, which expelled 23 Russian diplomats also accused of being spies. This was in retaliation for the alleged poisoning of a retired former Russian-British double agent in Salisbury, England.

### **The ‘Collective’ Concern**

It’s important to understand how this week’s brash move by Washington was coordinated in advance. The US and the UK are relying on their other NATO partners, including Germany, Poland, Italy, Canada, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Estonia and Lithuania – to create the image of a united front against perceived ‘Russian aggression.’ As with multilateral military operations, multilateral diplomatic measures like this are not carried out on a whim.

Aside from this, there are two seriously worrying aspects of this latest US-led multilateral move against Russia. Firstly, this diplomatic offensive against Russia mirrors a NATO collective defense action, and by doing so, it tacitly

signals towards an invocation of Article 5. According to AP, one German spokesperson called it a matter of 'solidarity' with the UK. Statements from the White House are no less encouraging:

"The United States takes this action in conjunction with our NATO allies, and partners around the world in response with Russia's use of a military grade chemical weapon on the soil of the United Kingdom – the latest in its ongoing pattern of destabilizing activities around the world," the White House said. "Today's actions make the United States safer by reducing Russia's ability to spy on Americans, and to conduct covert operations that threaten America's national security."

What this statement indicates is that any Russian foreign official or overseas worker in the West should be regarded as possible agents of espionage. In other words, the Cold War is now officially back on.

Then came this statement: "With these steps, the United States and our allies and partners make clear to Russia that its actions have consequences."

In an era of power politics, this language is anything but harmless. And while US and UK politicians and media pundits seem to be treating it all as a school yard game at times, we should all be reminded that this is how wars start.

The second issue with the Trump's diplomatic move against Russia is that it extends beyond the territorial US – and into what should be regarded as the neutral zone of the United Nations. As part of the group of 60 expulsions, the US has expelled 12 Russian diplomats from the United Nations in New York City. While this may mean nothing to jumped-up political appointees like Nikki Haley who routinely threaten the UN when a UNGA vote doesn't go her way, this is an extremely dangerous precedent because it means that the US has now created a diplomatic trap door where legitimate international relations duties are being carelessly rebranded as *espionage* – done on a whim and based on no actual evidence.

By using this tactic, the US is casting aside decades of international resolutions, treaties and laws. Such a move directly threatens to undermine a fundamental principle of the United Nations which is its diplomatic mission and the right for every sovereign nation to have diplomatic representation. Without it, there is no UN forum and countries cannot talk through their differences and negotiate peaceful settlements. This is why the UN was founded in the first place. Someone might want to remind Nikki Haley of that.

On top of this, flippant US and UK officials are already crowing that Russia should be kicked off the UN Security Council. In effect, Washington is trying to

cut the legs out from a fellow UN Security Council member and a nuclear power. This UNSC exclusion campaign has been gradually building up since 2014, where US officials have been repeatedly blocked by Russia over incidents in Syria and the Ukraine. Hence, Washington and its partners are frustrated with the UN framework, and that's probably why they are so actively undermining it.

Those boisterous calls, as irrational and ill-informed as they might be, should be taken seriously because as history shows, these signs are a prelude to war.

Also, consider the fact that both the US and Russia have military assets deployed in Syria. How much of the Skripal case and the subsequent fall-out has to do with the fact that US Coalition and Gulf state proxy terrorists have lost their hold over key areas in Syria? The truly dangerous part of this equation is that the illegal military occupation by the US and its NATO ally Turkey of northeastern Syria is in open violation of international law, and so Washington and its media arms would like nothing more than to be history's actor and bury its past indiscretions under a new layer of US-Russia tension in the Middle East.

### **Another WMD Debacle?**

Is it really possible to push East-West relations over the edge on the basis of anecdotal evidence?

Former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, highlighted the recent British High Court judgement which states in writing that the government's own chemical weapons experts from the Porton Down research facility could not categorically confirm that a Russian 'Novichok' nerve agent was actually used in the Salisbury incident. Based on this, Murray believes that both British Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, and Britain's deputy UN representative Jonathan Allen – have all lied to the public and the world when making their public statements that the Russians had in fact launched a deadly chemical weapons attack on UK soil. Murray states elaborates on this key point:

"This sworn Court evidence direct from Porton Down is utterly incompatible with what Boris Johnson has been saying. The truth is that Porton Down have not even positively identified this as a 'Novichok', as opposed to "a closely related agent". Even if it were a 'Novichok' that would not prove manufacture in Russia, and a 'closely related agent' could be manufactured by literally scores of state and non-state actors.

"This constitutes irrefutable evidence that the government have been straight out lying – to Parliament, to the EU, to NATO, to the United Nations, and above all to the people – about their degree of certainty of the origin of the attack.

It might well be an attack originating in Russia, but there are indeed other possibilities and investigation is needed. As the government has sought to whip up jingoistic hysteria in advance of forthcoming local elections, the scale of the lie has daily increased.”

Murray has been roundly admonished by the UK establishment for his views, but he is still correct to ask the question: how could UK government leaders have known ‘who did it’ in advance of any criminal forensic investigation or substantive testing by Porton Down or an independent forensic investigation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)?

One would hope we could all agree that it’s this sort of question which should have been given more prominence in the run-up to the Iraq War. In matters of justice and jurisprudence, that’s a fundamental question and yet, once again – it has been completely bypassed.

Murray is not alone. A number of scientists and journalists have openly questioned the UK’s hyperbolic claims that Russia had ordered a ‘chemical attack’ on British soil. In her recent report for the New Scientist, author Debora MacKenzie reiterates the fact that several countries could have manufactured a ‘Novichok’ class nerve agent and used it in the chemical attack on Russians Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury.

“British Prime Minister Theresa May says that because it was Russia that developed Novichok agents, it is ‘highly likely’ that Russia either attacked the Skripals itself, or lost control of its Novichok to someone else who did. But other countries legally created Novichok for testing purposes after its existence was revealed in 1992, and a production method has even been published.”

The New Scientist also quotes Ralf Trapp, a chemical weapons consultant formerly with the OPCW, who also reiterates a point worth reminding readers of – that inspectors are only able to tell where molecules sampled in Salisbury have come from if they have reference samples for the ingredients used.

“I doubt they have reference chemicals for forensic analysis related to Russian CW agents,” says Trapp. “But if Russia has nothing to hide they may let inspectors in.”

Even if they can identify it as Novichok, they cannot say that it came from Russia, or was ordered by the Russian government, not least of all because the deadly recipe is available on Amazon for only \$28.45.

It should be noted that a substantial amount of evidence points to only two countries who are the most active in producing and testing biological and

chemical weapons WMD – the United States and Great Britain. Their programs also include massive ‘live testing’ on both humans and animals with most of this work undertaken at the Porton Down research facility located only minutes away from the scene of this alleged ‘chemical attack’ in Salisbury, England.

### **Problems with the Official Story**

If we put aside for the moment any official UK government theory, which is based on speculation backed-up by a series of hyperbolic statements and proclamations of Russian guilt, there are still many fundamental problems with the official story – maybe too many to list here, but I will address what I believe are a few key items of interest.

The UK police have now released a statement claiming that the alleged ‘Novichok’ nerve agent was somehow administered at the front door of Sergie Skripal’s home in Wiltshire. This latest official claim effectively negates the previous official story because it means that the Skripals would have been exposed at home at the latest around 13:00 GMT on March 4th, and then drove into town, parking their car at Sainsbury’s car park, then having a leisurely walk to have drinks at The Mill Pub, before ordering and eating lunch at Zizzis restaurant, and then finally leaving the Zizzis and walking before finally retiring on a park bench – where emergency services were apparently called at 16:15 GMT to report an incident.

Soon after, local police arrived on the scene to find the Skripals on the bench in an “extremely serious condition.” Based on this story, the Skripals would have been going about their business for 3 hours before finally falling prey to the deadly WMD ‘Novichok’. From this, one would safely conclude that whatever has poisoned the pair was neither lethal *nor* could it have been a military grade WMD. Even by subtracting the home doorway exposure leg of this story, the government’s claim hardly adds up – as even a minor amount of any real lethal military grade WMD would have effected many more people along this timeline of events. Based on what we know so far, it seems much more plausible that the pair would have been poisoned at Zizzis restaurant, and not with a military grade nerve agent.

When this story initially broke, we were also told that the attending police officer who first arrived on the scene of this incident, Wiltshire Police Detective Sgt. Nick Bailey – was “fighting for his life” after being exposed to the supposed ‘deadly Russian nerve agent’. As it turned out, officer Bailey was treated in hospital and then discharged on March 22, 2018. To our knowledge, no information or photos of Bailey’s time in care are available to the public so we cannot know the trajectory of his health, or if he was even exposed to the said “Novichok’.

In the immediate aftermath, the public were also told initially that approximately 40 people were taken into medical care because of “poison exposure”. This bogus claim was promulgated by some mainstream media outlets, like Rupert Murdoch’s Times newspaper. In reality, no one showed signs of “chemical weapons” exposure, meaning that this story was just another example of mainstream corporate media fake news designed to stoke tension and fear in the public. We exposed this at the time on the UK Column News here:

To further complicate matters, this week we were told that Yulia Skripal has now turned the corner and is in recovery, and is speaking to police from her hospital bed. If this is true, then it further proves that whatever the alleged poison agent was which the Skripals were exposed to – it was not a lethal, military grade nerve agent. If it had been, then most likely the Skripals and many others would not be alive right now.

Unfortunately, in this new age of state secrecy, we can expect that most of the key information relating to this case may be sealed indefinitely under a national security letter. In the case of Porton Down scientist David Kelly, the key information is sealed (hidden) for another 60+ years (if we’re lucky, we might get to see it in the year 2080). This means that we just have to take their word for it, or to borrow the words of the newly crowned UK Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson – any one asking questions, “should just go away and shut up.” Such is the lack of decorum and transparency in this uncomfortably Orwellian atmosphere.

While Britain insists that it has ‘irrefutable proof’ that Russia launched a deadly nerve-gas attack to murder the Skripals, the facts simply do not match-up to the rhetoric.

### **The Litvinenko Conspiracy**

It’s important to note that as far as public perceptions are concerned, the official Skripal narrative has been built directly on top of the Litvinenko case.

In order to try and reinforce the government’s speculative arguments, the UK establishment has resurrected the trial-by-media case of another Russian defector, former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko, who is said to have died after being poisoned with radioactive polonium-210 in his tea at a restaurant in London’s Mayfair district in late 2006.

Despite not having any actual evidence as to who committed the crime, the British authorities and the mainstream media have upheld an almost religious belief that the Russian FSB (formerly KGB), under the command of Vladimir Putin,

had ordered the alleged radioactive poisoning of Litvinenko.

The media mythos was reinforced in 2016, when a British Public Inquiry headed by Sir Robert Owen accused senior Russian officials of ‘probably having motives to approve the murder’ of Litvinenko. Again, this level of guesswork and speculation would never meet the standard of an actual forensic investigation worthy of a real criminal court of law, but so far as apportioning blame to another nation or head of state is concerned – it seems fair enough for British authorities.

Following the completion of the inquiry, Sir Robert had this to say: “Taking full account of all the evidence and analysis available to me, I find that the FSB operation to kill Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr Patrushev and also by President Putin.”

Contrary to consensus reality (popular belief), Owen’s inquiry was not at all definitive. Quite the opposite in fact, and in many ways it mirrors how the Skripal case has been presented to the public. Despite offering no evidence of any criminal guilt, Owen’s star chamber maintained that Vladimir Putin “probably” approved the operation to assassinate Litvinenko. Is “probably” really enough to assign guilt in a major international crime? When it comes to high crimes of state, the answer seems to be yes.

According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, that UK inquiry was “neither transparent nor public” and was “conducted mostly behind doors, with classified documents and unnamed witnesses contributing to the result...”

Zakharova highlighted the fact that two key witnesses in the case – Litvinenko’s chief patron, a UK-based anti-Putin defector billionaire oligarch named Boris Berezovsky, and the owner of Itsu restaurant in London’s Mayfair where the incident is said to have taken place, had both suddenly died under dubious circumstances.

The British authorities went on to accuse two Russian men in the Litvineko murder – businessman Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun. Both have denied the accusations. Despite the lack of any real evidence, the United States Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control blacklisted both Lugovoi and Kovtun, as well as Russian persons Stanislav Gordievsky, Gennady Plaksin and Aleksandr I. Bastrykin – under the Magnitsky Act, which freezes their assets held in American financial institutions, and bans them from conducting any transactions or traveling to the United States.

Notice the familiar pattern: even if the case is inconclusive, or collapses due



to a lack of evidence, the policies remain in place.

Despite all the pomp and circumstance however, Owen's official conspiracy theory failed to sway even Litvinenko's own close family members. While Litvinenko's widow Marina maintains that it was definitely the Russian government who killed her husband, Alexander's younger brother Maksim Litvinenko, based in Rimini, Italy, believes the British report "ridiculous" to blame the Kremlin for the murder of his brother, stating that he believes British security services had more of a motive to carry out the assassination.

"My father and I are sure that the Russian authorities are not involved. It's all a set-up to put pressure on the Russian government," said Litvinenko to the Mirror newspaper, and that such reasoning can explain why the UK waited almost 10 years to launch the inquiry his brother's death.

Maxim also said that Britain had more reason to kill his brother than the Russians, and believes that blaming Putin for the murder was part of a wider effort to smear Russia. Following the police investigation, Alexander's father Walter Litvinenko, also said that he had regretted blaming Putin and the Russian government for his son's death and did so under intense pressure at the time.

For anyone skeptical of the official proclamations of the British state and the mainstream media on the Litvinenko case, it's worth reading the work of British journalist Will Dunkerly here.

With so many questions hanging over the actual validity of the British state's accusations against Russia, it's somewhat puzzling that British police would say they are still 'looking for similarities' between the Skripal and Litvinenko cases in order to pinpoint a modus operandi.

The admission by the British law enforcement that their investigation may take months before any conclusion can be drawn also begs the question: how could May have been so certain so quick? The answer should be clear by now: she could not have known it was a 'Novichok' agent, no more than she could know the 'Russia did it.'

## **A Plastic Cold War**

Historically speaking, in the absence of any real mandate or moral authority, governments suffering from an identity crisis, or a crisis of legitimacy will often try and define themselves not based on what they stand for, but rather what (or who) they are in opposition to. This profile suits both the US and UK perfectly at the moment.

Both governments are limping along with barely a mandate, and have orchestrated

two of the worst and most hypocritical debacles in history with their illegal wars in both Syria and Yemen. With their moral high-ground a thing of the past, these two countries require a common existential enemy in order to give their international order legitimacy. The cheapest, easiest option is to reinvigorate a framework which was already there, which is the Cold War framework: *Reds under the bed. The Russian are coming, etc.*

It's cheap and it's easy because it has already been seeded with 70 years of Cold War propaganda and institutionalized racism in the West directed against Russians. If you don't believe me, just go look at some of the posters, watch the TV propaganda in the US, or read about the horrific McCarthyist blacklists and political witch hunts. I remember growing up in America and being taught "never again" and "we're past all of that now, those days of irrational paranoia are behind us, we're better than that now." But that madness of the past was not a fringe affair – it was a *mainstream* madness, and one which was actively promoted by government and mainstream media.

You would have to be at the pinnacle of ignorance to deny that this is exactly what we are seeing today, albeit a more plastic version, but just as immoral and dangerous. Neocons love it, and now liberals love it too.

Dutifully fanning the flaming of war, Theresa May has issued her approval of the NATO members diplomatic retaliation this week exclaiming, "We welcome today's actions by our allies, which clearly demonstrate that we all stand shoulder to shoulder in sending the strongest signal to Russia that it cannot continue to flout international law."

But from an international law perspective, can May's 'highly likely' assurances really be enough to position the west on war footing with Russia? When Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn asked these same fundamental questions on March 14th, he was shouted down by the Tory bench, and also by the hawkish Blairites sitting behind him.



Afterwards, the British mainstream press launched yet another defamation campaign against Corbyn, this time with the UK's Daily Mail calling the opposition leader a "Kremlin Stogie", followed by British state broadcaster the BBC who went through the effort of creating a mock-up graphic of Corbyn in front of the Kremlin (pictured above) apparently wearing a Russian hat, as if to say he was a *Russian agent*. It was a new low point in UK politics and media.

Considering the mainstream media's Corbyn smear alongside the recent insults hurled at Julian Assange by Tory MP Sir Alan Duncan who stood up in front of Parliament and called the Wikileaks founder a "miserable worm", what this really says is that anyone who dares defy the official state narrative will be beaten down and publicly humiliated. In other words, dissent in the political ranks will not be tolerated. It's almost as if we are approaching a one party state.

Would a UN Security Council member and nuclear power really be so brazen as to declare *de facto* war on another country without presenting any actual evidence or completing a genuine forensic investigation?

So why the apparent rush to war? Haven't we been here before, in 2003? Will the people of the West allow it to happen again?

As with Tony Blair's WMD's in 2003, the British public are meant to take it on faith and never question the official government line. And just like in 2003, the UK has opened the first door on the garden path, with the US and its 'coalition' following safely behind, *shoulder to shoulder*. In this latest version of the story, Tony Blair is being played by Theresa May, and Jack Straw is being played by Boris Johnson.

On the other side of the pond, a hapless Bush is hapless Trump. Both Blair and Straw, along with the court propagandist Alastair Campbell – are all proven to have been liars of the highest order, and if there were any real accountability or justice, these men and their collaborators in government should be in prison right now. The fact they aren't is why the door has been left wide open for the exact same scam to be repeated again, and again.

Iraq should have taught us all to be skeptical about official claims of chemical weapons evidence, and to face the ugly truth about how most major wars throughout history have waged by the deception – and by western governments. What does it tell us about today's society if people still cannot see this?

That's why it was wrong to let Blair, Bush and others off the hook for war crimes. By doing so, both the British and Americans are inviting a dark phase of history to repeat itself again, and again.

It's high time that we break the cycle.

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# Iran's Missile Strike Adds to Syrian Crisis

For the first time in 30 years, Iran fired missiles from its territory – in a strike against ISIS in Syria, putting down a marker that Iran won't tolerate more terror attacks against Tehran, Patrick Henningsen explained at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wire.

By Patrick Henningsen

On June 19, Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced that it had fired several missiles at ISIS positions in the Deir Az Zor province in Syria. The reason given for this unprecedented military strike was retaliation for double terrorist attacks which struck Tehran two weeks ago. Readers should not underestimate the significance of this event.

According to a statement issued by the news agency for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Sepahnews, "Multiple medium-range missiles were fired from the Iranian provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan, and a large number of terrorists were killed and their weapons were destroyed."

Regarding the alleged ISIS attack, which killed 13 people and wounded 50 others, the Revolutionary Guard added, "The spilling of any pure blood will not go unanswered."

Make no mistake about it – this was a major media event. It's been 30 years since Iran has fired missiles at targets outside of its own borders. Iranian television featured images of the IRGC missiles being launched at night.

The IRGC has also warned that more missile strikes will follow should ISIS militants plot any future attacks on Iran. "If they carry out a specific action to violate our security, definitely there will be more launches, with intensified strength," said General Ramazan Sharif of the IRGC (also cited by AP).

Fars News Agency added, "The IRGC warns the Takfiri terrorists and their regional and trans-regional supporters that they would be engulfed by its revolutionary wrath and flames of the fire of its revenge in case they repeat any such devilish and dirty move in future."

This latest move by Iran is worrying for a number of reasons. Justified or not, Iran's launch from its western provinces, over Iraqi airspace and into Syria

will most certainly heighten tensions in an already tense Syrian theatre. If the situation escalates, the question of who has the upper hand may not matter should the situation descend into all-out war involving the U.S.

### **Syria: A Crowded Theatre**

Iran's missile strike took place on June 18, targeting an ISIS command center located near the embattled city of Deir Az Zor, a key choke point on the road to the ISIS-held city Raqqa in northeastern Syria. This area is currently a hive of international military activity featuring a host of players – the Syrian Army, Russia, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah militia and opposing U.S., U.K., Australia, France, Turkish and German forces positioned alongside numerous U.S.-allied (and paid for) militias like the Kurdish SDF, YPG militias – all presumably camped in the region to “defeat ISIS.”

Add to this the problem of U.S. having repeatedly attacked Syrian military forces in a manner that has aided the strategic advances of ISIS. Following from this point, it should be well-known by now, based on successive U.S. aggressions inside Syria, that the Pentagon is probing both Syrian and Russian defenses, testing their level of patience, perhaps in the hope that either Syria or Russia might retaliate against a U.S. aircraft or U.S. support positions on the ground.

In the event that the U.S. loses a single aircraft, or loses one member of its combat team to the hands of a Syrian or Russian military asset, then Washington will no doubt seize on this event as an “act of aggression,” initiate its media machine to begin consensus-building internationally, ramping-up military operations on par with Iraq in 2003. This would be the excuse that the U.S.-led Coalition has been needing in order to blow the Syrian theatre open into a wide regional or possibly, *world-wide war*.

The missile strike by Iran could be a mid-term game changer in the sense that it places Iran squarely into the frame of fighting international terrorism, and ISIS. Up until this point, parties in the U.S. led by the neoconservative right, the Trump White House, and the sister lobbies of Israel and Saudi Arabia – have tried hard to enforce a strict party line that Iran is somehow, “The number one state sponsor of terror on the planet,” despite the fact that no evidence is ever presented to back-up this sensational geopolitical plank.

### **Benefiting Saudi Arabia**

One of the main beneficiaries of this talking point is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which gains on two fronts; the “Iranian terror” line deflects from Saudi Arabia's own sordid role in supporting and funding armed militants, terrorist groups (including active factions in Syria) and radical mosques worldwide. This

dovetails well with the Trump Administration's current embrace of Saudi Arabia as an ally in the "War on Terror" and the simultaneous casting-out of Gulf state Qatar from the U.S.-led Coalition's inner circle in Middle East military and diplomatic affairs.

But that has provoked counter-moves. This week, Turkish troops were deployed to Qatar in a show of support for Qatar by Ankara. This is just another signal that the geopolitics of the region and around Syria, is getting more complicated by the day.

However, Washington and Riyadh's efforts to bracket Qatar with "state sponsor of terror" Iran will be even more difficult following the twin-terror attacks against Tehran and Sunday's retaliatory missile strike. For this reason, the IRGC believes that Saudi and the U.S. are linked to the Tehran attacks.

The FT explains: "However a statement from the Revolutionary Guards linked the 'brutal attack' [on Tehran] to Donald Trump's visit last month to Riyadh, where the US president singled out Iran for fuelling 'the fires of sectarian conflict and terror'.

"'This terrorist act took place a week after a joint meeting between the US president and head of a reactionary regional country [Saudi Arabia] which has been a constant supporter of terrorism,' the statement said. 'The fact Isis claimed responsibility proves that they [Saudi Arabia] were involved in the brutal attack.'"

Despite all of this, Trump has placed all his chips on Saudi Arabia as Washington's only major Arab partner in the region. Does Washington really think Saudi Arabia is of high moral standing in the region? You can blame the Saudi decline in popularity for a number of reasons – supporting Wahhabi extremism, beheading Shia clerics, or Saudi's ability to buy their seat at the head of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, or cynically *acquiring* the U.N. Women's Rights chair. Perhaps Washington is over-estimating Saudi Arabia's position in the Middle East.

### **Tehran Attack: Who Did It?**

Another interesting but under-reported component of this story has to do with the reason for Iran's missile retaliation. Although ISIS apparently claimed credit for the Tehran attacks on June 6, other evidence suggests that another well-known international terrorist entity might have been involved.

After events in Tehran, the U.S.-backed regime change terrorist proxy, the MEK (Mojahedin-e Khalq) was named by senior Iranian politician Mr. Hamid-Reza Taraghi, as a partner in the terrorist attacks. This theory gains a bit more

credence following a statement from former member of the MEK, Massoud Khodabandeh, who has stated that ISIS drew on MEK “expertise” for the terror attacks on Tehran. Certainly, the MEK have been active in carrying out operations inside of Iran for decades now, while ISIS has not. Massoud Khodabandeh’s analysis of the attacks is stunning, and raises two essential points:

“The targets selected by ISIS were sites constantly targeted by the MEK. The Iranian Parliament and its members had always been primary targets for the MEK since the 1980s. The group had managed to assassinate several members of the Parliament and tried to plant a bomb there at one point. They were unsuccessful and some members were killed by security forces while other terrorist teams were arrested. Similarly, after Ayatollah Khomeini’s shrine was created, Massoud Rajavi, the late MEK leader, announced that ‘Khomeini’s grave must be exploded’. It became a mantra among MEK members which they would chant in indoctrination sessions. The MEK tried unsuccessfully to send terrorist teams there in 1991 and 2002.”

“While ISIS and the MEK have the same interests in attacking Iran, ISIS could have caused much greater anti-government fear and hatred among the civilian population in line with its regime change agenda if they had bombed a civilian target like transport infrastructure or a shopping mall. They could have done more damage by targeting the Revolutionary Guards whose forces are in Syria. Instead, the ISIS targets matched those which had been constantly under attack by the MEK for thirty years.”

The MEK factor is extremely worrying because it signals a new leg in Washington’s asymmetric war in the region. History shows us that when great powers sow this level of chaos, the chances for a multi-country conflagration becomes more likely.

### **Apportioning Blame**

Regardless of where blame is apportioned in this case, Iran seems to have accepted the claim by ISIS for these attacks on Iranian soil, effectively giving Tehran an internationally recognized green light to act unilaterally against ISIS assets inside Syria.

For those who subscribe to the school of thought that implicates Saudi Arabia and the U.S. for aiding and supporting ISIS covertly, then Iran has not only called their bluff, but co-opted their own “anti-ISIS” narrative too.

Presently, Iran has military assets deployed in Syria at the invitation of the government in Damascus, so it’s certain that both Damascus and Moscow were aware

of Iran's missile strike in advance, but not the U.S. – once again demonstrating that without significant ground assets deployed in the region the U.S. cannot really control the situation around Raqqa. This means that Washington, no matter how hard its media machine can spin, are simply not able to dictate facts on the ground in Syria.

Clearly, Iran seized an advantage here, but how this plays out in terms of increased tensions with the U.S.-led Coalition in Syria remains to be seen.

The most worrying aspect of this development is the timing. On the same day as Iran fired missiles into Deir Az Zor province in Syria, a U.S. F/A-18E Super Hornet shot down a Syrian SU-22 fighter jet near Raqqa. Washington claimed it as an act of "collective self-defense" as the Syrian jet had dropped bombs "near US-backed forces." As a result of this overt act of aggression by the U.S., the Russian Defense Ministry announced that it is halting its "Deconfliction" cooperation with its U.S. counterparts set out in their bilateral Memorandum on the Prevention of Incidents and Ensuring Air Safety in Syria.

Add to this the fact that each day the U.S. continue to kill more Syrian civilians during their supposed "anti-ISIS" strikes in Raqqa, and it's not difficult to see that the U.S. position is becoming increasingly isolated in the Middle Eastern theatre, leaving its only two remaining solid partners as a pair who themselves are now widely regarded as rogue states in the region: Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The scene has now been set for a wider war. All it will take is a small spark between the two major opposing geopolitical forces or their allies.

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## An Oscar for a Propaganda Flick

Hollywood activists prefer their human rights causes blessed by the U.S. government, which contributed to the dubious Oscar for "The White Helmets" propaganda flick, writes Patrick Henningsen at 21st Century Wire.



By Patrick Hennigsen

In your average lifetime, everyone will get to see his or her share of war propaganda films. In America, it's a kind of sacred tradition, where Hollywood does the job of revisionism, paving over an otherwise uncomfortable history with a new coat of stain. It's necessary – not just to make us feel better about ourselves, but also to cover-up any inconvenient truths and high crimes of the state.



To be honest, when I first heard about “The White Helmets” film being promoted by Netflix, I wasn’t surprised at all because ever since the Syria conflict began in 2011, the establishment media has gone out of its way to falsely promote it as a “civil war” and have used the NGO known as the White Helmets, which calls itself the “Syria Civil Defense,” as its primary media protagonist in furthering that narrative.

The fact that a documentary about *The White Helmets* received an Oscar simply confirms what a glorious bubble the entertainment industry resides in, and how easy it is these days for a documentary film to be used for the purposes of propaganda and made to reinforce a mainly U.S.-U.K. foreign policy project.

To Hollywood, it's a feel-good documentary, designed to make us feel good about a dirty war in Syria. But this is a level of distortion that would make even Joseph Goebbels's head spin.

In his essay published at Global Research, Dr. T.P. Wilkinson explains the liberal obsession with cosmetic revisionism: “The ‘wrong war’ thesis is elemental to what Carroll Quigley called ‘liberal imperialism’ in his history of the Anglo-American establishment. Liberal imperialists, to which the *faux gauche* (the descendants of Fabianism) also belong, do not oppose empire. They simply want it to be more aesthetically appealing, and lost wars are most un-aesthetic. So what is the liberal imperialist's answer to unappetizing military defeats? It is cosmetic surgery.”

Expensive war propaganda in Hollywood is nothing new. High-profile films like

“Zero Dark Thirty,” “American Sniper” and “Argo” were all released to much fanfare. Each of them fulfilled a role in forming a more perfect American narrative, and in some cases completely rewrote history altogether. But these were meant to be theatrical releases so naturally there’s a generous dose of artistic license taken by the director. Nothing unusual there. It’s what Hollywood does. These films also had some distance between the present day and wars which had already lapsed.

A veneer of integrity is always important. Hollywood still purports to put a lot of currency in the truth. During this year’s Oscars, *The New York Times* ran a TV ad for the first time since 2010 entitled, *“The truth is. . .”* This campaign is meant to decry *fake news* and its ugly cousin “alternative facts” to show what high standards the mainstream media has – which demonstrates the delusional world the in which the establishment exists.

Earlier this month, I wrote an exposé showing exactly how the *New York Times* has been America’s perennial leader in running fake news for the purposes of advancing a war agenda. It’s ironic that this Times advertisement would run on a night when an Oscar would be given to one of the most egregious propaganda films of all time.

### **Happy Hollywood**

Last Sunday night, “The White Helmets,” directed by Orlando von Einsiedel and Joanna Natasegara, took home an Academy Award for best documentary short. But this was not a conventional documentary film. The footage was provided by a terrorist-affiliated NGO based in Turkey, operating in Syria, and which is primarily funded by the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Office, the Netherlands, and other NATO members and Gulf states to the tune of over \$150 million and whose chief remit is producing U.S.-led “coalition” propaganda images for mass media consumption. The film, funded and distributed by Netflix, seems to be an extension of that remit. [Watch the film’s trailer [here](#).]

Normally we think of documentaries as films that are supposed to speak *truth to power*, but this film does the opposite. It reinforces an Anglo-American establishment power structure responsible for one of the most violent, dirty wars in modern history. It reinforces a collection of lies placed on heavy rotation by the political and media establishments since the conflict began.

In every way, Syria is the *wrong* war. However, for the U.S. and the U.K., there’s much at stake – the legacies of two paradigmatic political figures, Barack Obama and David Cameron, along with the reputations of other architects of the West’s dirty war on Syria, like former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and British Foreign Minister William Hague.

Back when the war was getting started, both Clinton and Hague were busy front-running their “Friends of Syria” whistle-stop tour around the Middle East and Europe, securing Gulf cash commitments while grooming their hand-picked “opposition” government-in-exile, holding court in various five-star hotels in Paris, London and Istanbul.

The U.S. had tried this only a year earlier with Libya, and at the time in 2011-2012, they had every reason to believe that the Libyan formula could be repeated in Syria. Those hopes were dashed by early 2013, when it became apparent that Libya was officially a failed state.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of extremist foreign fighters and jihadi soldiers of fortune began pouring into Syria. It was an invasion. This was the West’s proxy army, ready to decapitate the government, dismember the state and destabilize the region – with the full blessing of Washington D.C. and its partners.

The Troika of Washington-London-Paris then doubled down by pouring billions of dollars in lethal weapons to various fighting groups laying in wait in Turkey and Jordan, as well as those already active in Syria. There were a number of well-documented arrangements, but one of the most successful working models was for the CIA and its European NATO partners illegally supplying the weapons funneled through Jordan and Turkey – and all paid for by Saudi, Qatari cash.

All the while, the public was told by the U.S.-led “Coalition” all of this was for the “moderate rebels” in Syria. These were meant to be the “freedom fighters” that Ronald Reagan referred to back in the 1980s. As it turned out, these “freedom fighters” in Syria were a chip off the old block from the violent, psychopathic U.S.-backed and CIA-trained paramilitary death squads, which would wreak havoc and terrorize El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras.

In Syria, they are much worse in fact, as they employed a potent brand of warped, radical Salafi and Wahabist religious fervor as the central axis of their self-styled, Medieval nihilistic raison d’etre. Yes, these are the moderates, backed by the U.S., U.K., France, Turkey, Germany, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, every other NATO member state, and of course, Israel, which has skillfully stayed out of the media firing line. It’s a collective project. The mission: “regime change” in Syria – to overthrow by force – the government in Damascus.

As dirty wars go, none is filthier than this one. As the U.S. and the U.K. ran point on public relations for this criminal enterprise, their big challenge was selling it to their electorates. In order to justify the dirty war, a narrative

had to be constructed and maintained. This required a relentless negative public relations campaign demonizing the Syrian government and all of its agencies. The following original talking points were therefore reinforced:

–Syria’s peaceful “Arab Spring” uprising happened in 2011, and was violently squashed by the government.

–Assad is a brutal dictator, and is illegitimate.

–The Syrian government and its armed forces are deliberately killing their own people.

–The U.S.-NATO and Gulf-backed armed “rebel” opposition is legitimate.

–Syrian and Russian Airforce are only killing civilians, and not militant and terrorists.

–Terrorists do not exist in Syria or are only a tiny element opposed by the “moderate rebels” and other Syrians “fighting for freedom.”

–Therefore, Assad must be removed from power and replaced with a U.S.-approved government.

Add to this, the entrance of Russia in the fall of 2015 at the lawful invitation of Damascus, and Russia was added to the demonization campaign.

These talking points were then repeated and recycled, over and over, and held up as justification for U.S.-led, crippling economic and diplomatic sanction against the Syrian state and the destructive policy of flooding the region with arms.

In the summer of 2014, an added bonus for the U.S. was inserted into the mix – the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Sham). The appearance of ISIS allowed the U.S. to fly air sorties over Syria, allegedly to fight ISIS, although after two years the U.S. had produced little if any verifiable progress in “defeating” ISIS. In truth, the U.S. had hoped that ISIS, along with the other Al Qaeda affiliates, would somehow do the job of destabilizing Syria and overthrowing the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

Meanwhile, on-script Western media operatives and politicians alike still referred to the jihadists as “rebels” and “armed opposition” – violent radical terrorist groups like Jabbat al Nusra (Nusra Front), Ahrar al Sham, Nour al-Din al-Zinki, Jaish al-Fatah (The Army of Conquest), along with some radical remnants of Sen. John McCain’s beloved “Free Syrian Army.” This was all part of the public relations con.

## The 'White Helmets'

But that wasn't enough. Washington and London needed a face for the evening news. They needed to *personalize* the conflict in order to help maintain the illusion of a "civil war" in Syria. This is where the White Helmets come in. A merry band of men, comprised of "ordinary citizens, from bakers to teachers to painters," all donning the White Helmets to save humanity in this moment of turmoil.

Raed Saleh, the group's spokesman, says his organization is guided by a verse in the Qu'ran: "To *save one life* is to save all of humanity." No doubt a beautiful line, but like so many aspects of the White Helmets – it's been applied cosmetically.

Who would dare be so insensitive as to challenge such a perfect story? For war planners in Washington and London, the White Helmets provided the P.R. cushion they needed to help sell a filthy proxy war to Western audiences. By creating and managing their own "first responder" NGO, the U.S., U.K. and its other stakeholder partners have been able to leverage public sympathies – enough to keep the project going, until the war was either won or lost, or until someone caught on to the scam.

In 2014, a number of independent researchers in the West began to detect the White Helmets' unmistakable stench of dupery. Cory Morningstar's article, "SYRIA: AVAAZ, PURPOSE & THE ART OF SELLING HATE FOR EMPIRE" (April 2014). In an article in *Counterpunch* in April 2015, Rick Sterling summarized the White Helmet roll-out and basic agenda: "In reality the White Helmets is a project created by the UK and USA. Training of civilians in Turkey has been overseen by former British military officer and current contractor, James Le Mesurier. Promotion of the program is done by 'The Syria Campaign' supported by the foundation of billionaire Ayman Asfari. The White Helmets is clearly a public relations project which has received glowing publicity from HuffPo to Nicholas Kristof at the NYT. White Helmets have been heavily promoted by the U.S. Institute of Peace (U.S.I.P.) whose leader began the press conference by declaring 'U.S.I.P. has been working for the Syrian Revolution from the beginning.'"

There was also the work of researcher Petri Krohn's notable wiki site "A Closer Look at Syria," which cracked the facade. They were followed by extensive investigations by Vanessa Beeley who has since produced a formidable volume of research and analysis on the White Helmets and other similar NGO projects, all of which are readily available on *21st Century Wire*.

Any researcher working on a White Helmets documentary would have had access to all of this information, through a simple key word search.

Interestingly, mainstream media defenders of the White Helmets such as Michael Weiss, a senior fellow at NATO's own propaganda think tank the Atlantic Council, as well as editor at the dubious *Daily Beast*, claim that criticism of the White Helmets is a Russian plot organized by Putin himself. Weiss's conspiracy theory is expected considering his employer's affiliation, but such typical hyperbolic accusations belie the fact that the first individuals to expose this pseudo NGO are not Russian, but rather independent writers and researchers from the U.S., Canada and Great Britain and why not – because it's *their* tax dollars that are funding the White Helmets.

It's also worth noting that in December 2016 when the Nusra terrorist hold over East Aleppo was collapsing, it was Michael Weiss who was responsible for circulating bogus reports, including that women in East Aleppo were committing "mass suicide" to avoid "mass rape" by Assad's soldiers.

"Seventy-nine of them were executed at the barricades. The rest – everyone under 40 – were taken to warehouses that look more like internment camps. They face an unknown fate," Weiss said. "This morning 20 women committed suicide in order not to be raped."

Weiss's source for these sensational reports: *terrorists* in East Aleppo. This was just one of many fake news stories disseminated in the mainstream media. Weiss then went on to repeat the fabricated story to a global mainstream audience on CNN's Don Lemon Show.

In reality, and according to countless first-hand on-the-ground eyewitness testimonies collected by 21WIRE and other media outlets, as the Syrian Army began liberating East Aleppo, the so-called "moderate rebels" promoted by Weiss and other Western media operatives were using residents as human shields, and in some cases shooting residents who attempted to flee terrorist enclaves prior to government forces liberating the eastern half of the city.

### **Dramatic Video**

With direct funding to the White Helmets from U.S.-led Coalition countries already well in excess \$150 million – international stakeholders expect a return on their investment. That return comes in the form of dramatic "search and rescue" videos, some of which may have even been produced in Turkey and which were then sent in a highly coordinated fashion to the editorial desks of CNN, NBC, BBC, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian and others. At no time have any of these Western or GCC-based "journalists" ever queried the authenticity of the staged video and photographic productions supplied by the White Helmets.

Mainly, their videos have been produced to promote a “No Fly Zone” or “Safe Zones” in Syria by creating the false impression that somehow Syrian and Russian air forces are targeting civilians in a *Blitzkrieg* fashion, using crude “barrel bombs.” Outside of the White Helmets propaganda, there is scant evidence of these “barrel bombs” – supposedly homemade explosive devices – allegedly dropped by the “Assad Regime” every day, according to the White Helmets. (No mainstream journalist ever seems to wonder why – with a source of modern munitions supplied by Russia – the Syrian military would have to resort to building homemade improvised bombs.)

In the run-up to the White Helmets’ failed Nobel Peace Prize bid in October, CNN even went so far as to plant a fake story about a “barrel bomb” hitting a “White Helmets Center” in Damascus.

But the media hype has had a downside. Increasing attention has also meant that some people are beginning to question the group’s incredible claim that it had somehow saved 60,000 lives since it started in late 2013. In one letter first published at Canadian Dimension, retired academic John Ryan, PhD, a retired professor of geography and senior scholar at the University of Winnipeg, challenged this narrative, saying:

“It is the White Helmets themselves who have claimed that they have rescued 60,000 civilians; this has not been verified by any other source. Despite such a classic conflict of interest, searching for independent evidence and disqualifying self-serving claims from belligerent parties in Syria has been ignored in much of the western media. As such, this claim by the White Helmets without any verification is next to meaningless.”

Despite the questions, the group continued to raise this figure by about 10,000 every two months. They now claim to have “Saved over 82,000 lives” since they were formed in 2013. Where are the list of names, dates, times, locations and medical reports – so as to corroborate and cross-reference the casualties with the alleged Syrian and Russian airstrikes? What’s the problem – can’t \$150 million buy a little bit of administration for the White Helmets?

At no point have they ever been able to produce any data to back up their outlandish numbers claims – so we can only conclude that this claim, like so many other claims by the group, are fraudulent. But when has Hollywood ever let facts and data get in the way of a good war propaganda story?

In addition, the White Helmets claim that they have trained some 3,000 “volunteers” throughout Syria, and yet their training facility is actually located in neighboring NATO member state Turkey, on the outskirts of the city of Gaziantep. This is the same Gaziantep that’s been described in reports as

“the home to ISIS killers, sex traders...”

### **‘Civil Defense’ Fraud**

Vanessa Beeley’s investigation eventually took her to Syria, where she was able to track down the REAL Syria Civil Defense organization. The U.S. and U.K. creation of the “White Helmets” required that they steal the name “Syria Civil Defense” from a real existing civil defense group based in Syria. Unlike the fraudulent Western construct, the real Syria Civil Defense was founded 63 years ago and is a registered member of the International Civil Defense Organization (ICDO) based in Geneva.

For the real Syria Civil Defense you dial “113” inside Syria. The White Helmets have no such number because they are not a real “search and rescue” organization. Their whole existence is a fraudulent construct.

Beeley spoke at length to the real Syria Civil Defense and what the crew told her was shocking. During the “rebel” (terrorist) invasion in 2012 of East Aleppo, future members of the White Helmets arrived accompanied by armed terrorists to attack the real Syria Civil Defense headquarters. They stole equipment, killed and kidnapped real civil defense volunteers as part of their operation to loot and destroy the existing institution.

Real civil defense workers also detailed how terrorist “Hell Cannon” attacks had besieged the Old City of Aleppo, which lies right on the border with the Al Nusra front lines and was a regular target for the rebels’ continuous indiscriminate attacks against residents. Resident testimonies have echoed the same story: while Hell Cannons terrorized the civilians of Aleppo, the White Helmets did nothing – probably because they were with the terrorists who were launching these attacks.

Terrorist Hell Cannons use an assortment of containers – gas canisters, water heater tanks packed full of explosives, glass, metal and any other limb-shredding materials – these were fired indiscriminately into civilian neighborhoods throughout Aleppo. These crude artillery guns also just happen to have the exact destructive footprint as the alleged “barrel bombs” which the White Helmets and Western media are repeatedly saying are being fired by the “The Regime” (Assad) against civilians.

If the White Helmets are to be believed, Assad’s “barrel bombs” have an impact the equivalent of 7.6 on the Richter scale. This outrageous claim was actually made by White Helmets founder James Le Mesurier on CNN. In fact, 7.6 on the Richter scale is the equivalent of a hydrogen bomb, we begin to get a picture of the scale of the lies which the Western narrative has been spinning to justify



this dirty war.

Preserving this and other key pieces of fiction is central to the U.S., U.K. and George Soros-funded public relations management of the White Helmets – and essential to their entire Syria narrative which has been described by American writer Rick Sterling as something akin to a “Feel Good Hoax.”

Forget about actual “search and rescue.” That’s not the primary function of this “NGO.” If you need to know one priority for the White Helmets, it’s this: marketing. A central part of the marketing campaign is images of men with beards looking up at the sky – presumably waiting for the next “barrel bomb,” or the media’s favorite term, the “double tap” (apparently, this is when a sinister Assad or Putin pilot returns immediately after an airstrike just to have another crack at the White Helmets).

In most of their videos, you will also see a large number of bearded men in jeans and T-shirts just standing around on the sidelines, always watching the camera, or looking busy – as if they are cognizant that filming is taking place. When we showed some of these videos to *real* first responders we were normally met with shoulder shrugs and cynical laughs.

People who actually work in this trade will tell you that filming on a first responder call is a luxury no worker really has – aside from maybe a GoPro helmet cam. It’s just not something anyone in their right mind would think about very much if there were really people in need of assistance – and yet, this is all the White Helmets seem to do, all day, every day. They film and produce well-edited emotive videos.

Another aspect real first responders will point out to us is that most of the time, the White Helmets often look like they don’t know what they are doing – indicating either a lack of training or experience – which seems to at least contradict their lofty claims of rescuing 82,000 people in 3½ years – certainly that would provide more experience for 2,900 “volunteers” than any other search and rescue worker on the planet.

The White Helmets claim they were only operational in early 2014, so that’s an average of 75 persons per day, everyday. Considering the amount of people they claim to have trained, spread out over Syria, and where actual air sorties have been flown – it seems like a near mathematical impossibility.

As the White Helmets provide no incident data for the alleged 82,000 persons saved, there is no way to validate their sensational narrative. In other words, the White Helmets mythology and pantomime is not very credible to any serious observer. But it seems to be good enough for a Netflix audience, and sadly, good

enough for the Academy, too.

The other mandatory feature in the White Helmets marketing imagery where men with beards are running to or from a scene, they're always carrying children over their shoulder. Again, when we showed many of these images to actual rescue workers, we were met with puzzled looks.

Firstly, why does 99 percent of the White Helmets marketing imagery only feature small children? Are there not any adults out of the "82,000 saved" to be rescued from the rubble?

Also, you will rarely, if ever see the \$150 million British-trained rescue crew ever use a spinal injury backboard – opting instead to just yank the children by the arm and throw them over the shoulder. When we showed these images to real first-responder workers, they were deemed not credible.

So it's safe to conclude that the White Helmets only care about one thing: *pictures and videos* – wired via satellite to CNN, the New York Times, or the BBC's news desk.

### **'Smart Power' and the NGO Complex**

Still, despite the group's obvious links to the U.S. and U.K. governments, and to known extremists and terrorists – the Western media continues to accept this NGO as if it were a legitimate 'Civil Defense' organization. The pseudo NGO strategy is part of an over-arching Western strategy which is related to the term "Smart Power" (following on from *Soft Power*) where Western governments create shadow state organizations designed to co-opt and ultimately usurp actual state agencies – in effect weakening the real civil body by replacing it with a fake version of the original.

In the calculus of war planners in the U.S., U.K. and France, even if they were unsuccessful in toppling the Assad government in Damascus, these fake NGOs would still be operational in "rebel" areas in the hopes that they might be viewed as legitimate civil organizations and would then replace the real ones.

After five years, the U.S. or European authorities could then cite these organizations as legitimate deliverers of public service, thus giving Western governments a much-needed foothold in governance inside the target nation, in this case, Syria.

Similar projects have been undertaken to replace municipal police forces with the "Free Syrian Police," as well as Western and GCC-sponsored projects in terrorist-held Idlib to create uniformed civil cleaning staff, and so on. Why doesn't Netflix make a documentary exposing that? If they did, that would be

real filmmaking; instead what we get is more public relations promotion for a failed Western foreign policy.

By now, it should be obvious how this propaganda cycle has been functioning, although apparently, not obvious enough for Netflix's award-winning filmmakers Joanna Natasegara and Orlando Von Einsiedel. The fact that their beloved White Helmets stole their "Syria Civil Defense" name from an existing, legitimate and internationally recognized first-responder agency should be cause for alarm.

For any journalist researching the White Helmets, you would think the first port of call would be to speak to the official certified civil defense body. This is what 21WIRE and Beeley did. Why didn't Natasegara and Von Einsiedel bother to check this obvious line of inquiry? The fact they didn't might be proof that the intention on their film was not to make a legitimate documentary, but rather to glorify to U.S.-led narrative of the "moderate opposition."

By definition, Natasegara and Von Einsiedel's work cannot rightly be called journalistic but *propagandistic*. By promoting a pseudo "NGO" funded by Western governments and by giving succor to extremists, their film is directed *against* the Syrian people – which exactly characterizes the U.S. and U.K. foreign policy in Syria since 2011.

If Natasegara and Von Einsiedel deserve any reward today it should really be the *Leni Riefenstahl Award* for Best Propaganda Film.

But even Nazi war propaganda filmmaker Riefenstahl could hardly imagine propaganda on this scale – a third-sector NGO and integrated media arm attached to dozens of governments, paramilitary military units, intelligence agencies, hundreds of corporate media outlets, and with a multi-million dollar crowd-funding facility.

If nothing else, the White Helmets operation is impressive in its scope. It's the West's template for building a Shadow State in target nations. If it's successful in Syria, this formula will be recreated in other marginal hot zones around the globe. That's why the White Helmets are being guarded so closely by the Western establishment.

### **Doubts over Authenticity**

Boston Globe columnist Stephen Kizner was one of a number of serious journalists who expressed disappointment over the Academy's selection, writing on Twitter: "Congratulations to al-Qaeda and Syrian jihadists for the #Oscar given to a film about their PR outfit, the White Helmets.

There is also the problem of the obvious staging in many of the White Helmets' supposed video rescues accompanied by highly misleading editing. In the so-called "Rag Doll" clip, we first see two separate views of the three men working on the rescue site – and then the edit suddenly cuts to the miraculous rescue of charming little 4-year-old girl – supposedly emerging from under tons of concrete and rubble from a collapsed building. Miraculously, she is not crying and looks immaculate, while holding an equally clean rag doll.

Then the edit cut jumps, and a little 3-year-old boy suddenly appears from the exact same spot. Both children appear to have sustained no injuries, nor any visible cuts or bruises, and no *dust*. Not bad for being buried under tons of concrete, gravel and dust. Incredible, but par for the course in the completely improbable "first-responder" reality show that is the White Helmets.

After reviewing this video, it's difficult to deny that it has all the hallmarks of a staged production piece, designed to tug at the hearts of a Western public – conditioned to accept this "first responder" narrative as *sacrosanct*, for fear of appearing callous in the face of this media-driven, multi-million dollar **"No Fly Zone"** public relations campaign. This is not the only fraudulent video released by the White Helmets, but even the existence of one fraudulent rescue video should be grounds to question all the group's material.

Again, the whole purpose of these video and photos is to influence public opinion against the Syrian and Russian governments. Therefore, the core mission of the White Helmets media campaign is influence Western and Gulf audiences.

## **Syrian Curveballs**

Back in 2003, one man became emblematic of the campaign of WMD lies that helped fabricate the U.S. and U.K. case for invading Iraq. He became known as "Curveball."

In Syria, the West has been developing a new generation of "curveballs" – on call and ready to deliver whatever the U.S. State Department or the British Foreign Office need in order to grandstand in front of the U.N. Security Council or on the floor of Parliament.

The New York Times reported that during March and April of 2015, the White Helmets claimed that at least 20 "barrel bombs" containing chlorine were dropped in six towns in northwestern Syria. It almost sounded as if the U.S. and U.K. were so desperate to establish Assad as crossing the "red line" against chemical weapons use that they would go so far as to fabricate a case that chlorine bombs were used by "the regime."

As the Times reported: “Frustrated with the Security Council’s impasse over the issue, rescue workers and doctors are now working to bring evidence of chlorine gas attacks directly to the French, British and American governments for testing. The aim is to give states a solid basis for action against the attacks, in the Security Council or through quieter diplomatic pressure, said James Le Mesurier, the British director of a nonprofit group, Mayday Rescue, that trains and equips the White Helmets, Syrian volunteers supported by the British, Danish and Dutch governments.”

At the time, White Helmet founder Le Mesurier was heavily involved in trying to fashion together a chemical weapons case against the Syrian government.

In 2015, the Times wrote: “Going directly to governments that have pushed for Mr. Assad’s ouster creates its own challenges. His allies may dismiss their evidence as politically tainted and can point to recent chlorine attacks in Iraq for which the government there blamed insurgents, not to mention the discredited American claims of an Iraqi chemical weapons program that were used to justify invading Iraq. To deter allegations of tampering or falsification, Mr. Le Mesurier and three Syrian doctors involved said they systematically documented the chain of custody from collection to handover. They have plenty of cases to work with. Since March 16, in Idlib alone, the White Helmets have documented 14 attacks with 26 suspected chlorine barrels that sickened scores of people.”

(Although U.N. investigators spoke to several eyewitnesses who denounced one of the “chlorine attack” stories as “staged,” the White Helmets’ campaign of overwhelming U.N. investigators with “evidence” that was hard to verify – and with Western powers pushing for U.N. confirmation – succeeded in getting the U.N. to blame the Syrian government for at least a couple of these cases, which enabled the Western mainstream media to resume its “war crimes” drumbeat against the Assad government.)

Similarly, in September 2016, the White Helmets were instrumental in trying to assign blame for an incident where a U.N. aid convoy was attacked outside of the town of Urm al-Kubra, west of Aleppo. As if by magic, the White Helmets were the first on the scene recording among the flames. 21WIRE later reported that the White Helmets had helped to stage the said ‘Russian bombing’ scene.

The Western mainstream media, Secretary of State John Kerry, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power and others cited the case as “proof” of Russian and Syrian guilt. (The U.N. also accepted the video “evidence” presented by the White Helmets in blaming the Syrian government for the attack.)

**Hollywood ‘Change Agents’**

One of the White Helmets documentary's biggest advocates was Hollywood actor George Clooney. In the run-up to the Oscars, Clooney, along with his wife – celebrity human rights lawyer, Amal Clooney – personally campaigns on behalf of the film. Clooney's interest was more than just that of a liberal activist. AP reported that Clooney is in the process of producing a feature-film version of the "White Helmets."

He said: "The White Helmets are the heroes. So if I can help them out at all, and people can know about it, in any way possible, that's a good use of celebrity, I think."

As a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Clooney seems to relish his role of celebrity humanitarian. Unfortunately, fellow members of the Council include an impressive line-up of war criminals and other dignitaries, like former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, as well as a chief architect of the collapse of Libya and the dirty war in Syria, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

However, judging by Clooney's devotion to the White Helmets, it's pretty clear that he is either ignorant of what he is supporting or worse – he is using his public profile to push a Deep State agenda.

In September 2016, Clooney managed to get an audience with John Kerry and the U.S. State Department to promote his new "anti-corruption" NGO called, The Sentry. Not surprisingly, the establishment's globalist information outlet the *Daily Beast* was on hand (along with a prime segment which aired on CNN) to get the word out.

Daily Beast editor John Avlon wrote: "Getting Americans to care about human-rights atrocities half-a-world away is hard. Getting them fired up about confronting the corruption that fuels those slaughters is an order of magnitude harder. But that's what actor George Clooney and human-rights activist John Prendergast are aiming to do with their new project, The Sentry."

The Sentry, is supposed to help the poor people of South Sudan by "taking aim at government corruption." Clooney goes on to demonize the South Sudanese government as utterly corrupt and deserving of prosecution before the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

What Clooney will not tell his fawning public is the CIA's role in fomenting unrest in Sudan prior to its rather convenient partition in 2010. We say *convenient* because splitting the country effectively cut-off port access and therefore oil pipeline access for South Sudan of which China has been a major

partner on the exploration of energy. This was followed by a dirty war in South Sudan with much of the evidence pointing to the CIA.

*TeleSur English reports:* “The CIA is using a mercenary warlord named Riek Machar, who has a long history of ethnic massacres and mass murder to his credit, to try and overthrow the internationally recognized government of President Salva Kiir for the crime of doing business with rivals of Pax Americana, the Chinese.”

Again, we hear the familiar tropes about “child soldiers” and “mass rape,” and how, “we must act now” – all part and parcel of the neocolonial “helpless Africa” narrative.

Clooney’s partner John Prendergast delivers the emotive plea: “The war erupted, it was a fire that just raged across the land...They’ll use attack helicopters. They’ll use rape as a tool of war. They’ll recruit child soldiers and go in and send them as cannon fodder into villages to kill people. The worst human-rights abuses being committed in the world. And this is what South Sudan has dealt with because of this fallout between these thieves over the last 2½ years.”

(Clooney also played a key role in splitting Sudan into two parts through his earlier demonization of Sudan’s government over the conflict in Darfur. Well-organized Western protests against alleged “genocide” in Darfur set the stage for the U.S.-led effort to carve oil-rich South Sudan away from Sudan although by doing so the U.S. made it impossible for South Sudan to get its oil to market, thus creating the hardship that then contributed to the new conflict in South Sudan, a good example of how human-rights “do-gooders” can cause more harm than good.)

Interestingly, Clooney’s Sentry Project is nested under the globalist think tank, the Center for Advanced Defense Studies and bankrolled by John Podesta’s Center for American Progress, a Washington D.C.-based think tank with ties to the military-industrial complex. (The Podesta Group lobbying firm was famous for its pay-to-play tactics, getting governments to pony up millions of dollars in exchange for access to the Clintons, an example of the kind of corruption common in Washington.)

Peace activist and author David Swanson outlined Sentry’s precarious connections to America’s defense industry here. We also can point out that the policy of “evicting Chinese influence” from Africa was included in the military directives outlined in US AFRICOM immediately after its official launch in 2007-2008. Similarly, billions of dollars in direct Chinese investment in Libya was thwarted by NATO’s illegal abuse of U.N. Resolution 1973 which led to the complete collapse of the Libyan state.

We can see that Clooney's celebrated "crusade against corruption" is very likely part of a public relations smokescreen to conceal U.S. clandestine efforts to isolate Chinese interests in the now divided territory of Sudan, while nudging forward U.S. and transnational corporate policy in South Sudan, with the ultimate goal of "regime change" in that country, too.

You can't help but be reminded here of another similar Deep State public relations ploy centered around the exact same location back in 2012. There's no better example of how Hollywood's do-gooder wars are waged than "Kony 2012," described in *Atlantic Magazine* as a viral video campaign, which "reinforces a dangerous, centuries-old idea that Africans are helpless and that idealistic Westerners must save them."

Like with Clooney's Sentry Project, "Kony 2012" leveraged the power of media and celebrity to manufacture public consent through an emotive public appeal and collected millions in public donations in the process. In this case, the antagonist was the illusive warlord Joseph Kony, leader of the Lords Resistance Army. The only problem was, at the time in 2012, no one had actually seen Kony in six years.

Still, the campaign lobbied President Obama to deploy U.S. forces to Uganda to "find Kony" under the justification of "saving the children." Despite the collapse of the project following a very public meltdown by the charity's founder, Jason Russell, the U.S. still went and deployed U.S. military assets to Uganda under an expansion of US AFRICOM operations in Africa. Mission accomplished.

The genius of this was that it concealed the genocide and crimes against humanity carried out by President Obama's good friend and Uganda's "President for Life" Yoweri Museveni, whose crimes have since been well-documented in powerful independent non-CIA film production called a "Brilliant Genocide." It turns out that Museveni is guilty of all the things and more – which the West had laid on the ghost of Kony.

Of course, the irony of this is mostly lost on Hollywood's humanitarian jet-set, all of whom thought "Kony 2012" was such a great idea when it was first launched. What "Kony 2012" achieved on an "activist" and public relations level is exactly what "The White Helmets" documentary is doing now – an expensive smokescreen to hide the real horrors of a conflict, namely, the destructive policies of Western governments and their local "partners" fomenting trouble and strife.

In the case of Syria, it's the U.S., U.K., Turkey, France and GCC support of violent, armed extremists – who the White Helmets are exclusively embedded with.



The cynical use of the classic American gospel hymn, “When the Saints Go Marching In” as the documentary’s theme song by filmmakers Natasegara and Von Einsiedel speaks to level of manipulation of the narrative.

Regarding the White Helmets project, Clooney revealed something else in his rhetoric when he remarked that as a celebrity, “I can’t change policy ... but I can make things louder.” This is an example of the *power-activist* political set in Hollywood.

We find similar language in an interview with White Helmets director Joanna Natasegara in 2016, at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in Malaysia while promoting her Oscar nominated film “Virunga” and its new foundation. Natasegara refers to herself as an “Impact Producer” (aka “Change Agent”) using documentaries to make a big impact by reinforcing or pushing a narrative.

In many ways, this is antithetical to the whole process of filmmaking, especially in the research and discovery stages, and in the investigative aspects of historical documentary filmmaking – which is about documenting events but also about looking below popular political narratives to gain deeper insights, and not pushing political or policy outcomes.

Power-activism is personified by numerous online marketing campaigns calling for a No Fly Zone in Syria. At the Oscar ceremony, both Natasegara and Von Einsiedel called for “an end to the war in Syria” – a sentiment that everyone can agree on – but it rings hollow given their P.R. support for a direct Western military intervention under the guise of a “No Fly Zone.”

Compare that to the words of U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, and Tima Kurdi, the aunt of three-year-old Alan Kurdi who washed-up on a beach to become the face of the tragic face of the migrant crisis. Both Gabbard and Kurdi appeared on global media calling for the U.S. and its Coalition allies to STOP sending arms, cash and support to extremists and terrorist “rebels” in Syria. Only this can bring an end to the war and allow refugees to return to Syria, said both Gabbard and Kurdi.

This plea is *real* and reflects the facts on the ground, as opposed to the fake narrative constructed by Natasegara and Von Einsiedel, which carefully whitewashes all clandestine involvement by U.S., U.K. and its partners which have aided in the systematic destruction of Syria over the last six years, not to mention the needless deaths of hundreds of thousands.

It is no coincidence that many members of the White Helmets have extremist ties and that this fact is being covered-up by Natasegara and Von Einsiedel who are

literally portraying the group as “saints” – revealing the level of deception involved in this story.

### **More Propaganda**

We can see Natasegara’s modus operandi with making the White Helmets film; it’s not so much about documenting history in the conventional sense, so much as it is about “making an impact” politically – on behalf of the governments who created the White Helmets, which veers into the area of propaganda again.

On the surface, Natasegara appears to be waging the classic international liberal crusade by fighting against mining, oil and poaching in the poor, permanently “developing” countries like the Congo. No one will argue that the level of corruption in African countries can be extreme in some cases, but what are the real causes of institutional corruption in those lands?

Little attention is paid to stopping corrupt officials at the corporate level in London, Belgium, New York or Washington. In fact, many of the biggest corporate donors to these “good causes” projects are connected to the very same corporate behemoth that activists purport to be fighting against.

This cycle of power-activism feeds into the cycle of neocolonialism – in what researcher Cory Morningstar so rightly refers to as “the wrong kind of green.”

As it turns out, the International Anti-Corruption Conference is funded by Transparency International (T.I.), one of the main players in the globalist “anti-corruption” syndicate, which is very much linked to the work of Hollywood activists like Clooney. In the past, T.I. has been accused of cooking its own books in its anti-corruption investigations, including an incident in 2008 where the organization used falsified data to try and frame the Chavez government in Venezuela during one of T.I.’s anti-corruption investigations. This is a good example of NGO *smart power* being used to undermine a target nation. Clooney and Natasegara are just two of the many public faces who represent this network.

Back in 2016, when the “Panama Papers” story broke, based on purloined documents from a law firm, the mainstream media utterly failed in analyzing what they were really looking at. Yes, there’s plenty of corruption and shady shell companies in Panama (but no word of the giant offshore corporate maze located in Delaware), but was the endgame of that supposedly independent “investigation”?

Amid all the mainstream media hype and “anti-corruption” grandstanding, researcher James Corbett was one of the few people who asked the right question: “So why does this new mega-leak seemingly only expose those in the State Department crosshairs or expendable others and not a single prominent American politician or businessman?” (LISTEN to my full interview last year with James

Corbett here)

### **'Citizen Journalists'**

Natasegara also goes on about using "activists" and "citizen journalists" to achieve the desired "impact." Here she is alluding to the scores of Syrian "activists" and the White Helmets who have supplied Western media outlets with the images our governments want in order to reinforce the official narrative. Natasegara is promoting the exact tool she utilized in the deceptive Netflix project in which all of the alleged stock "rescue" footage was supplied by the White Helmets themselves.

Natasegara claims to have trained 21-year-old White Helmet "activist" Khaled Khatib in Turkey before sending him into Syria to shoot much of the footage. NPR claims that he "risked his life" to shoot the film for Netflix. Khatib was later blocked from entering the U.S. to attend the Oscar ceremony in Los Angeles. So the Netflix producers had no way of independently verifying what they've been given – effectively relying on Al Qaeda-affiliated individuals to supply them with made-to-order "rescue" footage. How can they call this a documentary?

In this case, it didn't seem to matter to Joanna Natasegara and her co-producer Orlando Von Einsiedel whether it's real or staged, so long as the White Helmets narrative was achieved.

Despite the claims by Netflix producers, Natasegara and Von Einsiedel, the purpose was to reinforce the U.S.-led Coalition's fake Syrian narrative, which has never resembled the facts on the ground. The U.S.-U.K. establishment could not have hand-picked better tools for this job than Natasegara and Von Einsiedel.

If they were real filmmakers interested in the truth, they would have paused to question why this group was founded by a senior British Military intelligence officer, James Le Mesurier; why it is based in Turkey and not Syria; and why the group only operated exclusively in Al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria), Ahrar al Sham (another Al Qaeda affiliate) and ISIS-held areas in Syria; why are White Helmets members routinely pictured with weapons and with terrorists. The answer is simple to anyone with half a brain and who is being honest: the White Helmets are composed mainly of partisan extremists.

Still, all of this is noticeably missing from Natasegara and Von Einsiedel's storybook version of the White Helmets, which is inexcusable considering how there's no shortage of readily available evidence pointing directly to White Helmets' ties to terrorists.

One has to assume that the filmmakers knew about the extremist links and the

U.S.-NATO funding of the group but chose to ignore this in favor of producing their expensive piece of propaganda. And as we saw this week, both were all too happy to lap up their Academy Award – even though the fiction they created has aided further *legitimizing* U.S.-led Coalition-backed terrorism in Syria.

One of the saddest parts of this whole story is that the power of marketing and propaganda means that tens of thousands of unwitting members of the public have been duped into donating their hard-earned money for this dubious NGO. If the wider public knew what Aleppo residents already know – that the White Helmets function as a support group alongside known terrorists groups like Al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, Nour al-Din al-Zinki, ISIS and others (all known extremist groups operating inside of Syria), the White Helmets would not be celebrated as humanitarian but rather condemned as a multimillion-dollar fraud, customized by the West to give cover to the illicit practice of arming and supporting “rebel” terrorists by the US, UK, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others.

By all accounts, White Helmets video-and-photo propaganda has been instrumental in aiding in the recruitment of new terrorists – new fighters from the West, Middle East and Asia – who see the contrived news reports and believe the false narrative being portrayed by mainstream media news agencies.

In this way, you could say that because the mainstream Western media is not vetting any of this material and has defaulted into a Western foreign policy bias, these major media outlets are complicit in helping recruit more terrorists internationally. In other words, they are providing material support and comfort to known violent, religious extremists terrorists.

Lastly, to see the White Helmets’ fundamental terrorist connection, one need look no further than to its ‘President’ Raed Saleh. Last month, 21WIRE investigative journalist Vanessa Beeley reported on White Helmet leader Raed Saleh’s close partner, Mustafa al-Haj Yusef, leader of the White Helmets center in the Al Nusra-occupied city of Khan Shaykhun, Idlib. The photographic evidence clearly demonstrates the close relationship that Saleh shares with his friend and colleague Yusef, and apparently with the armed militant seen standing behind the two White Helmet leaders.

On June 1, 2014, White Helmet deputy Yusef called for the shelling of civilians during elections in Damascus. He declares that this murderous act would be the “greatest declaration of revolution.” Are these the words of a “neutral, impartial, humanitarian”? Here we can see the White Helmets calling for direct violence against civilians who are doing nothing more than exercising their right to vote – in their own country. [See the full story here.]

So to even suggest that the White Helmets are “*unarmed and neutral civilian volunteers*” is tantamount to fraud. The fact that filmmakers Natasegara, Von Einsiedel and Netflix are using this false statement in their film and public relations material demonstrates outright deception on their part.

If Netflix were to take this issue seriously, after reviewing readily available evidence they would remove this film from their distribution chain, and Natasegara and Von Einsiedel should return their award to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[For more on this topic and photos showing White Helmet connections to terror groups, go to <http://21stcenturywire.com/2017/03/02/forget-oscar-give-the-white-helmets-the-leni-riefenstahl-award-for-best-war-propaganda-film/>]

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