

1. База данных советских агитплакатов:
http://www.glavagosudarstva.ru/index.php?option=com_phocagallery&view=category&id=2:2009-10-03-13-27-33&Itemid=120
2. Антиалкогольные плакаты: <http://www.adme.ru/social/antialkogolnye-plakaty-iz-sssr-353255/>
3. <http://xreferat.ru/80/73-1-rossiyskiiy-i-zarubezhnyiy-opyt-razvitiya-social-noiy-reklamy.html>
4. Современная соцреклама <http://ekabu.ru/other/37938-protiv-pyanyx-zarulem.html>

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС: ЕДИНСТВО ВО МНОГООБРАЗОВАНИИ

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MILITARY INTERVENTION AND SYRIA: MOVING TOWARDS AN OPEN AGGRESSION?

Introduction

The Syrian civil war has been ongoing for nearly two years now, this conflict is extremely violent and perpetuated by various foreign interests backing the various sides directly involved. As with Libya, there was an initial attempt to allow the United States and its allies a free hand to wage an open military campaign against the Bashar al-Assad regime and aiding the various insurgent and terrorist forces aligned against him through the United Nations Security Council. Although, it is likely that this would be conducted under the guise of humanitarian intervention that was intended to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, an act of a good global citizen within the framework of Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

This article starts with the premise that mass media and journalism in the West is not acting in the capacity as a fourth estate (a check and balance against the abuses and excesses of the state), but rather to promote a narrow set of policy

interests by the state. For example, the advancement of the notion of regime changes through a concerted information war effort, which has been proclaimed by the United States and its allies in the Syrian civil war. To do this, public support needs to be shaped and then harnessed in order to present the facade of public consensus.

Mass media play a vital role as they permit audiences that are remote from events, such as this civil war, to connect with it. However, this is done through a very carefully chosen strategy of pathos rhetoric, labelling and descriptions in order to manage how the public view and respond to the different actors.

In order to reveal these manipulations it is necessary to deconstruct the so-called popular view of the Syrian conflict, which casts Assad and his forces as the villains in this story, and the insurgents/terrorists aligned against him as the heroes. There is an increasing trend to try and present this conflict as entering the final phase, and that regime change is inevitable. At the same time, there is a concerted effort to try and rally public opinion in to accepting direct military intervention in this war. As such, there needs to be a justification for this move. There are two discernible tracks, one is the 'humanitarian' line and invokes the notion that this is done for the good of the Syrian people. The other is the 'containment' track that focuses upon the idea that urgent military action is needed to prevent effects and threats from going beyond the Syrian borders, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and the regionalisation of the war provide two such examples.

Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

This article uses various information sources that include theoretical and conceptual literature on media, communication and armed conflict. Other sources used are media articles and reports by think tanks and other organisations. The media articles have been sourced through news aggregate services and via targeted internet searches for particular events or topics. It is intended to analyse the media and other public material from the point of view of propaganda, and its potential

influence on targeted publics in order to try and advance the ultimate goal of achieving regime change in Syria.

Philip Taylor described propaganda as being a deliberate communication ploy to attempt to influence the way that a target audience thinks and behaves, which benefits the agenda of the originator of the message (Taylor 2003: 6). However, propaganda is usually effective only when an audience is not aware it is being targeted. Should it become aware of the fact, they may seek to go in another direction than in the one they were being steered. Propaganda can be used in the context of ‘facilitating’ the democratic process by influencing public opinion on policy. This issue has been raised by the prominent public relations scholars Edward Bernays and Walter Lippmann in the 1920s. Walter Lippmann speaks of the divide between what he terms as ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ That is, the ruling elite of a country (insiders) and the citizenry (outsiders). The insiders possess the expertise and knowledge for running a country and the citizens (at best) are partially informed about the affairs of state and are manipulated by the insiders (Lippmann, 1927). By keeping the citizens partially informed or uninformed they are easier to influence in terms of their opinions held.

Within this context, the role and nature of public opinion and its management has become a critical issue within the political sphere. This is owing to the nature of modern politics that rests upon the notion of working with the perception of public consent (McNair, 2007). In the context of war and the relationship between politics and journalism, Sarah Oates observes that there has been a “marked decrease in openness and freedom of information in the coverage of international conflicts.” And the decisive factor that determines the nature of the conflict’s coverage is the way in which states choose to frame the named conflict (Oates, 2009: 113).

Oates also makes some revealing remarks concerning the political (governmental) point of view concerning media coverage of conflicts. Evidence exists that mass media provide “quite limited” and “biased” information on conflicts, yet they are still criticised and condemned by the state for not showing

enough faith or commitment to the cause (of war) (Oates, 2009: 129). This implies that the state seeks to create a balance (in its favour) whereby public information is used to support policy. This demonstrates the considerable influence of politics in shaping commitment and resolve in initiating and prosecuting armed conflict (Simons (B), 2012).

The question is how to realise intended policy through the use of perception management and other forms of manipulation? This is answered, to an extent, by Michael Ignatieff who discusses this issue within the frame of terrorism. Although, this is equally true for armed conflict in general.

The first challenge that a terrorist emergency poses to democracy is to this system of adversarial justification. The machinery of legislative deliberation and judicial review grinds slowly. Emergencies demand rapid action. Hence they require the exercise of prerogative. Presidents and prime ministers have to take action first and submit questions later. But too much prerogative can be bad for democracy itself (Ignatieff, 2005: 2).

Although related to the context of terrorism, armed conflict in general creates the emergence of emergency or a crisis. By reality and by perception there is a threat to values (human life or an ideology for example), an urgent call for action in order to meet the threat, and a shortage of time in which to act. This situation creates an ideal environment reducing civil liberties and rolling back democracy. A concrete example is the United States involvement in its military action against Gaddafi's forces in Libya, the length of the operation violated the US Constitution. Yet there have been no repercussions for the Obama administration and limited public outcry. Traditional mass media have been failing in their duty to public interest in favour of a narrow range of political interests.

The emergence of new and social media has shifted the time frame of news reporting and made the process more open (to scrutiny and criticism). Initially this new form did cause a lot of concern for governments (Gowing, 2009). A good example of this was the emergence of groups such as Wikileaks, Media Lens and others that have challenged the opaque world of news production. An important

observation made regarding the role of information and communication during or immediately preceding war (information war) is intended to mobilise the public as spectators of the conflict and not as active participants on the battlefield (Tumber & Webster, 2006: 165). This means their consent (or at least lack of resistance) to engaging in or continuation of a war is required to provide a sense of legitimacy, and not the public being actively involved in the physical fighting.

How is this 'consent' achieved through the use of information and communication? The answer can be found in part through the use and effect of rhetoric. Three types of rhetoric are of interest within the frame of this article – *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. *Ethos* concerns the dimension whereby the credibility of the orator is intended to be the means of persuading the audience. A logical and sound argument serves as the basis for *logos*. The use of emotion, both positive and negative, is the basis for persuasion in *pathos* (Tuman, 2010: 38-39; Simons, 2006: 580-581). Use of definitions and labels is important as they create an environment of apparently agreed upon perceptions and understandings. In some way, it makes the world around us much more clear and easy to understand (Tuman, 2010: 46). The word *apparent* is used to denote that the process of arriving at the agreed upon definitions and labels is not an equal one, the state with media collaboration is in a much better position to determine this than the public owing to access to means of mass communication.

A label is not a neutral act as it carries with it a set of values and expectations when invoked. And thereby gives greater context and meaning to the environment in which it is located. When successfully applied, labels and definitions also have an effect of narrowing the permitted discourse concerning a person or an event. Tuman notes that “definitions and labels create possibilities for empowering people, causes, issues, and movements or taking away power from the same” (Tuman, 2010: 47). This is most evident within the Syrian conflict, where communication from the US and its allies are directed at empowering the insurgent forces, the case for direct military intervention (but through use of labels or descriptions such as Responsibility to Protect or protecting the civilian population

to create the facade of lack of underlying national interest) and for disempowering the cause of Assad and the Syrian security forces. It also creates the situation where those opposed to military intervention or supporters of Assad are accused of supporting tyranny or mass murder, thereby becoming victims of labelling themselves. The rhetoric used against them has no firm basis for truth other than the pathos or ethos that is being used by those with vested interests and the likely agenda (policy) of regime change.

Deconstructing the ‘Popular’ Understanding of the Syrian Conflict

The vision that is promoted by the United States and its allies is that the insurgency against Bashar Al Assad is done by democratically minded forces and that the revolution (now civil war) originated spontaneously by domestic (within Syria) actors that are seeking freedom from oppression.¹ Syria was lumped together in a branded series of revolutions called the *Arab Spring*, which was meant to convey hope and progress across the Middle East/North African against selected regimes that were designated for change.

Journalists and politicians paint a very simplistic picture of the conflict for the global audiences, which are intended to garner public opinion in favour of the Anti-Assad forces, which include a number of terrorist organisations.² Insurgents are characterised as the underdogs, but democratic and freedom seeking. Assad and the governmental forces are portrayed as corrupt, only self-serving, brutal and dictators (Simons (a), 2012). War crimes and atrocities are generally blamed on Assad and the government forces, those committed by the forces aligned against Assad are often glossed over or ignored by the corporate media and politicians in the West. A fog is deliberately created around this conflict in order to generate an

¹ *Why Syria Matters*, USA Today, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012/09/27/why-syria-matters-from-arab-spring-to-assad-regime-and-us-impact/57848088/1>, 27 September 2012 (accessed 17 February 2013); Overview, Syria – Uprising and Civil War, The New York Times, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html?s=newest&>, no date given (accessed 14 February 2013); Turkel, O., *Syria After the Arab Spring: What is Happening, and What is Going to Happen?*, The Journal of Turkish Weekly, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/op-ed/2951/-syria-after-the-arab-spring-what-is-happening-and-what-is-going-to-happen.html>, 15 March 2012 (accessed 17 February 2013)

² Staff Writers, *Zarqawi's Legacy: Jihadist Rebels in Syria*, UPI, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2013/01/09/Zarqawis-legacy-Jihadist-rebels-in-Syria/UPI-98601357754164/, 9 January 2013 (accessed 17 February 2013)

emotional effect. The figure of 60-70000 casualties is given for the number killed during the conflict so far. What this large figure hides are those killed by insurgent forces and government security forces killed. Without expressly stating this, the impression is that this is the number of civilians killed by the Syrian government forces.¹

The role of perception in the propaganda war and its affect upon international opinion is very important. There is a lot at stake, which makes the temptation of using fake or false material greater. Various videos showing beatings, killings and various forms of destruction are prevalent on the internet, which are designed to generate sympathy or hatred for one side or the other. One photo that was circulated in the international press was alleged to have been taken in the wake of a massacre in the town of Houla in May 2012, in fact was taken in Iraq in 2003. Another video that was circulated for one year in Syria featured a beheading by a chainsaw, it was alleged that Gaddafi's forces were responsible. However, the crime was carried out by drug lords in Mexico five years earlier.² This makes the 'fog of war' even thicker, and also demonstrates that journalists are not doing their basic professional duties, such as the verification of information and other material.

The opposition forces have been accepted by various Western countries as being the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. Various leaders of the Syrian opposition in exile have repeated promises that the future Syria will guarantee equal rights to all Syrians regardless of religion or ethnicity.³ The insurgent and terrorist forces claim to represent the Syrian people, many of whom do not trust them (with good reason). Yet very little, other than some feeble

¹ Wagner, D., *The Dark Side of the Free Syrian Army*, The Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/dark-side-free-syrian_b_2380399.html, 31 December 2012 (accessed 8 January 2013)

² Shelton, T., *The Most Disturbing Fake Videos Making Rounds in Syria*, Global Post, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/syria/121109/fake-syria-videos-images>, 12 November 2012 (accessed 18 February 2013)

³ Barnard, A., *Syrian Rebels Find Hearts and Minds Elusive*, The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/16/world/middleeast/syrian-opposition-finds-hearts-and-minds-are-elusive.html?pagewanted=all>, 15 January 2013 (accessed 16 January 2013)

superficial attempts at exploring policy platforms, do not get to the root of why there is a lack of trust.

A lot of evidence is already circulating that undermines the Western narrative of the existence of a peaceful, democratic and unified resistance to Assad. For instance, one only needs to look at countless horrific videos available on YouTube to understand the true nature of the Free Syrian Army and those other forces fighting Assad to realise the fallacy of those hollow statements - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt_0KHDlods and the following video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU98OEdCsnE> are two examples of the many war crimes that have been committed. These war crimes have generally gone unchallenged by Western media or politicians that continue to portray these Anti-Assad forces as being democratic and inclusive. In the first video, a large number of modern and brand new American made small arms are readily seen, and only two Kalashnikovs, which seems to cast doubt upon the official US government claims that no weapons are being supplied to the insurgent and terrorist forces, and only non-lethal supplies are being given.¹ Yet it is simultaneously admitted that they ‘indirectly’ arming the Anti-Assad groups.

Propaganda and opinion continues to saturate Western coverage of the conflict, for example, on 13 February 2013 at 2200 on TV4 news in Sweden, an interview was conducted by Swedish journalists with an armed group who tried to demonstrate their good treatment of prisoners of war. A number of prisoners were shown, and one in particular was focussed upon. ‘George’ was identified as a Christian, and was participating in ‘voluntary’ Koran education, commenting that he read the holy book now. These journalists failed in their journalistic duty by not asking basic questions. One pertinent question that immediately comes to mind would be what is the likely consequence of a prisoner refusing to participate in this training? The likely answer would be summary execution, such as is seen in the numerous videos previously discussed.

¹Schmitt, E., *CIA Said to be Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition*, The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>, 21 June 2012 (accessed 17 February 2013)

In order to reduce any perceived threat, the insurgent and terrorist forces operating in the Syrian conflict are referred to with the blanket term as *Opposition Forces* (to Assad), those sources that the Western media quotes without any checks or balances (such as verification) are referred to as being *Opposition Activists*. In many cases there is no critical view of their activities or possible issues of conflict of interest. For instance, what is the agenda and affiliation of the ‘opposition activists’? In addition to the above mentioned war crimes being committed by the ‘opposition forces’, there are other acts that suggest a less than democratic observance by these groups. Human Rights Watch has been documenting a number of cases in Syria, committed by the ‘opposition forces’, whereby historical and religious sites that belong to other groups have been deliberately destroyed or looted after those areas were abandoned by the government forces.¹ These actions hardly agree with the rhetoric of those insurgents that claim that they represent the interests of all peoples and groups in Syria (an inclusive and open approach to society), in fact there are a number of parallels here with the destruction of the ancient Buddha statues in Afghanistan!

Moving Towards the ‘End Game’?

A number of key narratives have appeared in the Syrian civil war, which are intended to serve as informational support for the anti-governmental forces fighting in Syria and to support (i.e.) legitimise the support of those forces by Western and Middle Eastern states. They are intended to serve as a ‘moral compass’ to the international publics (to prompt support for those terrorist and insurgent forces), to entertain the unthinkable (provoking and then becoming directly involved in a civil war in the region) when the public is war wary, and to give the impression that the Assad regime is on the point of collapse (so therefore, why support a ‘dead’ man?).

Syria is a Threat to Regional Stability

¹ Syria: Attacks on Religious Sites Raise Tensions, Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/23/syria-attacks-religious-sites-raise-tensions>, 23 January 2013 (accessed 24 January 2013)

Many remarks have been made that suggest Syria is the source of intentional and unintentional regional instability. One line of argument is that this is a conscious and deliberate act by Assad and the Syrian government in order to draw attention away from their desperate situation. Another line of argument is that this spread of instability is not intentional or deliberate, but a result of the conflict spilling over borders from Syria to her neighbours. Therefore, the logic goes, efforts are needed to resolve the crisis sooner than later in order to prevent a wider regional conflict/instability. This is in spite of the basic fact that those who claim rhetorically that they are seeking to resolve this conflict are in fact indirectly and directly involved in exacerbating the conflict by arming and supplying the insurgents.

Blame for the possible regionalisation of the Syrian conflict is laid with Assad, who is portrayed as losing power and being desperate (therefore dangerous and unpredictable according to the follow-on logic). “With every month that passes, Syria’s neighbours become more edgy and the risk of contagion from the conflict grows. [...] A regionalisation of the conflict looks increasingly impossible to prevent because there is no end in sight for Syria’s war.”¹ It is interesting to note that the civil war in Syria, which is perpetuated by numerous foreign interests, is compared to a contagion. Blame for the possible regionalisation is assigned to the ongoing civil war in Syria, and not the various interests that manage to keep the conflict alive.

Turkey has been actively involved in supporting the Syrian insurgent forces with safe havens, weapons and other supplies, they have also been sheltering a large number of Syrian refugees and was one of the countries that actively called for military intervention in Syria. But there have been a number of costs for the support, which has witnessed increasing instability in the country. A columnist for the newspaper *Milliyet*, DoganHeper wrote that “Turkey’s Syria policy has failed [...] It has turned our neighbours into enemies. We have been left alone in the

¹Khalaf, R., *Israel and Assad Raise Stakes on Syria*, *The Financial Times*, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/aab3be8e-6e16-11e2-983d-00144feab49a.html#axzz2LHWORf78>, 3 February 2013 (accessed 4 February 2013)

world.”¹ The theatrical facade of the deployment of Patriot missile batteries to Turkey was meant to demonstrate that Syria was a threat to Turkey, without mentioning the various measures the Turkish government had engaged in to undermine the Assad regime, which is portrayed by the media as being legitimate (retaliation by Syria is not legitimate according to their logic). To illustrate this point, the shooting down of a Turkish reconnaissance jet in Syrian airspace was seen as being a provocation by the Syrians, and not by the Turks for violating Syrian airspace in the first instance.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have all been involved in supplying men, arms and material to various armed factions in Syria. The Iranian interests are generally characterized as being to support their national interests by keeping their ally alive, which gives access to Lebanon and the possibility to launch attacks against Israel.² The Persian Gulf States are recruiting and building up Sunni militias to fight against Assad’s forces. This is not condemned in itself as being a blatant act of interference in a civil war, but as merely ill-advised as it is likely to further increase sectarian tensions in Lebanon as well as Syria.³ The level of reporting is inconsistent and not objective, some states have a ‘legitimate’ right to interfere in another state’s internal conflict and others do not. Yet there is no attempt to justify why this is so.

Western politicians have been voicing ‘concerns’ about possible spillover effects of the civil war too. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius stated publicly after an air raid by the Syrian Air Force on the Palestinian refugee camp Yarmuk (in Damascus) that “we must do everything to avoid anything that could lead to a regional flare-up.” Labelling the attack as ‘scandalous’ and accusing Assad of

¹ Arango, T., *Turkish Public Sours on Syrian Uprising*, The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/world/europe/turks-weary-of-leaders-support-for-syria-uprising.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, 18 September 2012 (accessed 13 February 2013)

² Staff Writers, *Slaying Hints Iran Hikes Backing for Assad*, Space War (UPI), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Slaying_hints_Iran_hikes_backing_for_Assad_999.html, 14 February 2013 (accessed 15 February 2013)

³ Staff Writers, *Syria: Iran, Saudis Beef up Rival Militias*, Space War (UPI), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Syria_Iran_Saudis_beef_up_rival_militias_999.html, 28 January 2013 (accessed 29 January 2013)

wanting to inflame the situation.¹ The outrage seems to be less than genuine, especially in light of the level of foreign interference in Syria and France's involvement in Libya and other conflict zones. However, it is the intended appearance that is meant to count.

One of the countries stands to be a significant loser in the Arab Spring process is Israel. The predictable secular dictators on her borders are steadily being replaced more radical and religiously oriented rulers (of now volatile and extremely unstable states). One of Israel's chief concerns is the arsenal of the Syrian military (including chemical weapons) falling in to the 'wrong' hands. The former head of Mossad, Ephraim Halevy noted that "From all standpoints, it would have preferred that this conflict had not broken out in the first place, and for Israel to continue to enjoy the absolute quiet along the armistice lines drawn between the two states following the (1973) Yom Kippur War."² Other neighbouring countries are being affected too.

Lebanon is a country that has been torn by violence in the recent past and continues to be in a very volatile state. A number of articles have accused Syria of stoking tensions there for the benefit of the Assad regime. The assassination and funeral of Brigadier-General Wissam al-Hassan, the head of Lebanon's internal security forces sparked gun battles between various militias. Of interest was an observation that there were more political and Islamic flags than national ones at his funeral.³ This is indicative of a growing sectarian divide and radicalisation that can once again ignite more fully. Jordan has also experienced violence and instability as a result of the war on the other side of its border. In spite of the prevailing narrative of Assad's responsibility for the destabilising situation, a Fox News article actually laid the blame with insurgents (trying to enter Syria from

¹Staff Writers, *End is Near for Regime of Syria's Assad: France, Space War*, http://www.spacewar.com/reports/End_is_near_for_regime_of_Syrias_Assad_France_999.html, 16 December 2012 (accessed 8 January 2013)

² Staff Writers, *Israel Preparing for Post-Assad Syria Chaos*, Space War (AFP), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Israel_preparing_for_post-Assad_Syria_chaos_999.html, 4 February 2013 (accessed 13 February 2013)

³Alami, M., *Syria's Civil War Spills Over into Lebanon*, USA Today, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2012/10/22/lebanon-erupts-in-fighting/1649839/>, 22 October 2012 (accessed 19 February 2013)

Jordanian side of the border) killing a Jordanian soldier. In spite of this the State Department issued the statement that “the onus for this kind of violence rests squarely on the Assad regime.”¹ In effect, this makes the Syrian government responsible not only for their actions, but for those forces opposing them too!

Assad is Finished

There is a lot of effort, which borders along the lines of Psyops or disinformatsiya,² focussing on the supposed instability (and therefore ‘imminent collapse’) of the Assad regime. An example of this appeared in January 2013 in *Albawaba*, which alleged that Assad and his family were living onboard a warship that was guarded by Russians. The conveyed idea is that it is no longer safe for Assad and his family on Syrian soil, and that he has no trust in the reliability of Syrian security forces ability to protect him or the environment he is in. However, this ‘tip’ was given by intelligence sources to a Saudi Arabian newspaper.³ Given that Saudi Arabia is one of the countries actively engaged in seeking to overthrow Assad, this information should be treated with great caution as it suits their political agenda to try and magnify the possibility of the Assad regime’s ‘imminent’ collapse owing to the notion and role played by intangible elements in war. Other governments, for instance, may be more inclined to back what they perceive to be the winning side in the conflict. Thus intangible elements can be converted in to more tangible actions and results.

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Syria Brief (July 2012) is typical of Western ‘analysis’ of the situation in the conflict (and with similar

¹*Syria’s Civil War Spills Violence Across Borders into Jordan, Lebanon*, Fox News (AP), <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/10/22/jordanian-soldier-killed-in-clash-with-militants-trying-to-slip-into-syria/>, 22 October 2012 (accessed 19 February 2013)

²Psyops is short for the term psychological operations, which is directed against enemy forces to disrupt their decision making capacity and in this instance the unity of Syria’s political and military elite. Disinformatsiya is the intentional spreading of false or misleading information by an organisation in order to influence the decision making process of the intended target audience that would benefit the agenda of the originator.

³*He’s on a Boat! Bashar al Assad Allegedly Living on a Russian Warship*, Editor’s Choice, *Albawaba*, www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/assad-russia-ship-463592, 15 January 2013 (accessed 18 January 2013)

echoes to the analysis and predictions of Gaddafi's 'imminent' fall that came much later than first predicted. This as much about affecting Assad's intangible assets as it is about reporting 'news' or 'facts'. For external audiences, if they believe in a collapse they are more likely to commit to supporting the insurgents and renouncing support for Assad. This has the effect of creating the facade of legitimacy for those insurgent forces through creating an impact on international opinion. The situation is different for domestic actors, who are potentially likely to want to support what is perceived to be the winning side or at least to weaken their resistance to the insurgent forces by sapping the will to continue to fight.

One of the characterisations of Assad that surfaces, but without any substantiation, is that he is a weakling and a coward.¹ There is no direct evidence to support this claim, other than something that is uttered by those with an interest to see his regime overthrown. This is intended to erode support and belief among the people, administration and security forces in the leadership of Assad through the use of attempted labelling. Comparing Assad's situation with that of the Alamo is additionally, rather meaningless, but the effect is intended to be emotionally and not logically based.

A lot of opinion is presented on behalf of other parties in this conflict by Western politicians that are speaking on behalf of Syrians or other countries, such as Russia (with or without the knowledge or consent from these parties). A prime example of this was when the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, spoke in December 2012. "I think the end is approaching for Mr Bashar al Assad. [...] You have seen, even if it's controversial, even the Russians see it coming."² If subjected to critical analysis these words don't hold much weight, however, within a pathos laden environment it is less likely to be critically evaluated. For instance, Fabius speaks on behalf of Russia, but there is no effort made to substantiate this claim.

¹Zumwalt, J., *Awaiting Departure of Syria's 'Coward of the Alamo'*, UPI, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Analysis/Outside-View/2013/01/15/Outside-View-Awaiting-departure-of-Syrias-Coward-of-the-Alamo/UPI-88281358226240/, 15 January 2013 (accessed 16 January 2013)

²Staff Writers, *End is Near for Regime of Syria's Assad: France, Space War*, http://www.spacewar.com/reports/End_is_near_for_regime_of_Syrias_Assad_France_999.html, 16 December 2012 (accessed 8 January 2013)

The belief and effect lies in the potential power of ethos, power of persuasion given his position.

Weapons of Mass Destruction ... Again!

With echoes going back for the justification for invading, and then subsequently occupying Iraq, the issue of the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) has surfaced again with the various scenarios for directly attacking Syria. Media articles, reports and statements by political and military actors mostly allude to the presence and possible use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, and possible military responses to stave off their use or as a form of retaliation after their use.

One of the most detailed accounts of chemical weapons and various possible military options by the West can be found in RUSI's 2012 report the *Syria Briefing*. Paul Schulte contributes a section, Syrian Chemical Weapons Stocks: A Choice of Risks and Evils (pp. 20-27). Interestingly, this section notes that it would be extremely difficult to justify owing to the absent Iraqi WMDs in the wake of the US-led invasion in March 2003 (p. 26). There is extensive playing of different scenarios throughout the section, but ultimately concludes that the Syrian security forces are unlikely to use these weapons on the battlefield (p. 22). A number of matters become evident in the analysis of this section, air strikes may be costly owing to Syrian air defence systems and the results would be difficult to confirm, and this is an unpopular and risky reason for embarking upon direct military intervention.

A number of stories concerning the alleged presence and possible use of WMDs in Syria have been circulating through the mass media sphere, and the possible and calculated responses by various foreign actors. There were an increased number of these stories appearing in the media during the period December 2012 and January 2013. One such story covered the United Nations preparing to send chemical weapons kits to its monitors stationed in the Golan Heights monitoring mission. In the same article was a paragraph dedicated to an

accusation by the United States that it had intelligence showing “Syria was considering using its chemical weapons.”¹ President Obama made a rhetorical condemnation of such a move in spite of the fact that nothing had happened, and remembering 10 years ago the United States had ‘irrefutable’ intelligence evidence of WMDs in Iraq, which proved to be false. Yet there was no critical review or alternative information offered, the statement was received and repeated without any due journalistic rigour.

This ‘news’ started a flurry of symbolic rhetoric and more questions than answers. In late November 2012, Israeli satellite imagery showed what *appeared* to be chemicals in preparation for what was thought to be their military use. The uncertainty soon disappeared from the information that was transformed in to a certainty. In connection with the chemical weapon threat, the Pentagon has even publicly stated that at least 75000 troops would be needed to ‘secure’ the stocks. The New York Times article also expressed doubts about the measures taken by the Syrian authorities to secure WMD stocks from Islamist extremists.² Yet there is no reflection on the consequences of the West and its allies of arming those same insurgent groups that may just capture those chemical weapons, let alone placing all responsibility on the shoulders of any one national leader.

In January the State Department was even forced to refute an allegation that Syria had used chemical weapons in December 2012. The basis of this story was a supposedly leaked State Department report that made the claim. The Foreign Policy magazine used this for the basis of a “compelling case” that Syrian government forces had used poison gas. The spokeswoman for the State Department, Victoria Nuland, stated “that report from Foreign Policy did not accurately convey the anecdotal information that we had received from a third

¹ Staff Writers, *UN Sending Chemical Weapons Kits to Syria Monitors*, Space Wars (AFP), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/UN_sending_chemical_weapons_kits_to_Syria_monitors_999.html, 17 December 2012 (accessed 8 January 2013)

² Schmitt, E. & Sanger, D. E., *Hints of Syrian Chemical Weapons Push Sets off Global Effort to Stop it*, The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/08/world/middleeast/chemical-weapons-showdown-with-syria-led-to-rare-accord.html?_r=0, 7 January 2013 (accessed 8 January 2013)

party regarding the alleged incident in Syria in December.”¹ The US started to quickly cool the rhetoric though, the Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta, tried to reassure that no ground troops would be sent to secure chemical weapons if the Syria government fell. “We are not working with options that involve boots on the ground,”² This may be an indication that the US does not consider the situation ripe for direct military involvement yet, in spite of possessing military superiority. There is a likelihood of losses of military hardware and personnel, plus the prospect of becoming entangled in yet another intractable insurgency.

Another very poor article that was based completely on hearsay and lacking in any sort of balance or scrutiny appeared in the Financial Times in January 2013. It accused Syria of harbouring up to 50 tonnes of unenriched uranium at an orchard where an alleged ‘secret uranium conversion site’ is located. A lot of unsubstantiated guesswork and rumours are generated about the site, which has a satellite views that shows some buildings and an orchard. Clearing of the orchard “for no apparent reason” and signs of defensive positions, together with possible signs of fighting are offered as ‘concrete proof’ of the sinister nature of the facility. The article even speculates as far as stating Iran may be intending to seize this alleged stockpile of uranium. In doing so, this article is bringing the spectre of the West’s long-time enemy into the picture for extra threat perception.³ The viewer comments were justifiably sceptical of the story, a number referring to the Iraqi WMDs some 10 years earlier.

This particular ‘news’ story attracted the attention of the media watcher News Unspun that critically analysed the story methodically, exposing the fallacies and poor standards of journalism. The editors of News Unspun were fairly polite in their final assessment of the article penned by Blitz.

¹ Staff Writers, ‘No Credible Evidence’ Syria Used Chemical Arms: US, Space War (AFP), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/No_credible_evidence_Syria_used_chemical_arm_s_US_999.html, 16 January 2013 (accessed 17 January 2013)

² Wong, K., *Panetta: No US Troops in Syria if Chemical Weapons Used*, The Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jan/10/panetta-no-us-troops-syria-if-chemical-weapons-use/>, 10 January 2013 (accessed 11 January 2013)

³ Blitz, J., *Fears Raised Over Syria Uranium Stockpile*, The Financial Times, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a450b660-5998-11e2-88a1-00144feab49a.html#axzz2LHWORf78>, 8 January 2013 (accessed 9 January 2013)

The ‘concerns’ Blitz reports on belong to his sources, so it is their judgement, and not just his, which is premised on fallacy. Blitz, however, has based his entire argument, without criticism, on the opinions of these officials, and has further developed them into a foretelling narrative, one which doesn’t stand up to even the slightest scrutiny.¹

The use of such stories as WMDs seems to be directed at wider international publics by trying to create an environment of fear that implies the threat could go beyond the borders of Syria. For fear to be successful, people need to believe that something bad can possibly happen (such as a dirty bomb or chemical weapon attack), and that this source of threat can touch them personally. If successfully achieved (instilling a sense of fear), then a state of pathos becomes the primary element of persuasion, which makes an audience easier to ‘manage’.

Options for Open Military Intervention

The last narrative to be discussed is the issue of an open military attack against the Assad regime in Syria. This would be a departure from the current policy of covert indirect support to those forces opposing the Syrian government and more aligned to the Libya scenario. However, direct military intervention is hedged as being something that is not desired by the international community owing to the Global War On Terrorism that has been ongoing for over a decade, and with no end in sight or significant positive results to show for the investment of military power, money and lives lost. Thus there is a tendency to try and deliver a sense of an involuntary move towards military intervention by the West and its allies.

For these reasons the question of some sort of western intervention in Syria has shifted from a predilection to stay out of the conflict in any physical sense to an awareness that intervention is looking increasingly likely. We are not moving towards intervention but intervention is certainly moving towards us. For western

¹ Editors, *Logical Fallacies: The Financial Times on Syria and Uranium Stockpiles*, News Unspun, <http://www.newsunspun.org/article/logical-fallacies-the-financial-times-on-syria-and-uranium-stockpiles>, 10 January 2013 (accessed 11 January 2013)

policy-makers the issue is rapidly resolving itself into questions over the purposes and most appropriate modes of intervention. Indeed, in some important respects, western intervention has already commenced (Clarke, 2012: 2).

A mantra seems to have been chosen, and being repeated often throughout the brief. *Intervention has chosen us*, which implies that the West is not consciously seeking to be directly involved with some form of military intervention. In other words, the appearance of any form of Western national interest in Syria and the removal of Assad (as opposed to the stressed Chinese and Russian national interest in blocking a Libya scenario for Syria at the UN Security Council¹) needs to be absent, and instead a reluctant, responsible global citizen acting in an unselfish manner is conveyed. This is complete nonsense, and can be quickly detected in the move away from the broad concept of whether to get directly involved or not to more specific issues of the exact nature of the planned intervention.

Media reporting on international conflicts carries with it an implicitly expressed judgement on the justness or contra of the use of military force. This is evident in the use of labels and descriptions that can in turn describe victims and perpetrators, legitimate and criminal acts of war, which is uneven and dependent upon the actor that is the subject of the article. On the one side of the equation, actions of the identified ‘bad guy’ are intended to evoke outrage. The other side of the coin, the actions of the named ‘good guy’ are justified and rationalised and portrayed as being legitimate.² There have been a plethora of opinion articles that have been urging the United States and its allies to become involved in direct military action against Assad as they had done against Gaddafi in Libya. The US motivations are promoted as being related to humanitarian concerns – to promote freedom and democracy. Urgency is often promoted as necessary to prevent a

¹Sen, A. K., *Russia, China Veto UN Resolution on Syria; More Than 250 Killed in Homs*, The Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/feb/4/assad-forces-commit-massacre-syrian-city/?page=all>, 4 February 2012 (accessed 14 February 2013)

²Editors, *Legitimising Violence in Reporting on International Conflict*, News Unspun, <http://www.newsunspun.org/article/legitimising-violence-in-reporting-on-international-conflict>, 4 February 2013 (accessed 4 February 2013)

greater human tragedy.¹ Although there is little to substantiate the claims of the opinion articles, only the words of the piece.

Another opinion article in the New York Times follows a similar vein, and is calling for an aggressive military approach to ‘solving’ the crisis. “It is time to alter the Syrian balance of power enough to give political compromise a chance and Assad no option but departure. That means an aggressive program to train and arm the Free Syrian Army. It also means McCain’s call to use U.S. cruise missiles to destroy Assad’s aircraft on the runway is daily more persuasive.”² There seems to be little or no reflection on the issues of legality and consequences of such actions, only the presumption that such actions are completely just.

Predictions have been circulating about the US eventually becoming involved directly in the armed conflict. For instance, the former lead State Department diplomat on Syria, Fredrik Hof, made such a prediction at a public event in Washington DC recently. “One way or the other, the United States is going to be sucked into this.”³ This statement clearly implies that direct involvement in the armed conflict would not be a conscious decision, but a matter of time and fate. However, other reports would seem to cast doubt upon the notion of the US as slowly and unconsciously drifting towards conflict. With echoes of the Libya campaign, General Dempsey told the Senate Armed Services Committee that “we have looked at a number of [military] options that could be involved here” in order to halt the killings of unarmed protesters by the Syrian security forces.⁴ This reveals a number of significant inconsistencies in US statements and actions. Firstly, they are not arming insurgent forces, but only providing non-lethal

¹Shaikh, S., *Preventing a Syrian Civil War*, The New York Times, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/opinion/preventing-a-syrian-civil-war.html>, 12 October 2011 (accessed 13 February 2013)

² Cohen, R., *Intervene in Syria*, The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/05/opinion/global/roger-cohen-intervene-in-syria.html>, 4 February 2013 (accessed 14 February 2013)

³Sen, A. K., *Ex-State Dept. Official: US Will Get ‘Sucked In’ to Syria War*, The Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/feb/8/ex-state-dept-official-us-will-get-sucked-syria-wa/>, 8 February 2013 (accessed 11 February 2013)

⁴Wong, K., *US Prepares Basic Plans to Attack Syria*, The Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/mar/7/us-prepares-basic-plans-attack-syria/?page=all>, 7 March 2012 (accessed 13 February 2013)

aid. Yet in the first You-tube video link provided in this article, new American made weapons are clearly visible. On top of this, provisional plans for invading Syria have been drawn up. This has the effect of making official US statements seem to be neither consistent nor credible.

In addition to the US plans for intervention, the United Nations seems to be in the process of preparing the way to creating contingency plans to send an international military force in to Syria in the event of the Syrian government's collapse according to a statement received from the UN Peacekeeping Chief HerveLadsous. The article stated that he [Ladsous] confirmed that "the United Nations is drawing up contingency plans to send a possible international force to Syria if the government collapses, but the UN peacekeeping chief gave no details."¹ However, the practical ability for the UN to achieve this seems to be unclear. For instance, the nature of the military force and pledges of manpower, material and finances by member states makes this proposition seem like a very difficult task to achieve.

Conclusion

In spite of the historical legacy of the Fourth Estate role played by Western journalism, there is little to no evidence (among the articles that have been scrutinised in this article) of the mass media playing an independent or critical role in analysing the war in Syria. Articles appearing in the mass media tend to agree with and develop the narratives and argumentation advanced by Western politicians and others that have a definite set of narrow interests in Syria and the attempted act of regime change.

Contemporary wars are composed of two elements that exist simultaneously, the physical fighting that is present on the battlefield and the information war that is directed to combatants and non-combatants alike. The physical fighting aspect is experienced and the effects of the information war are perceived by those that are exposed to these elements. An important aspect to information war to consider is

¹ Staff Writers, *UN Sending Chemical Weapons Kits to Syria Monitors, Space Wars* (AFP), http://www.spacewar.com/reports/UN_sending_chemical_weapons_kits_to_Syria_monitors_999.html, 17 December 2012 (accessed 8 January 2013)

that perception often trumpets reality when it comes to shaping and influencing opinion. What is perceived may not necessarily be true in the real sense, but it is what a target audience is likely to react to.

Simplistic narratives have been orchestrated by politics and perpetuated in the mass media. The way in which the 'reality' is constructed leaves no room for middle ground or compromise. Assad is personified as being the picture of evil and brutality, willing to slaughter his own people for private gain (staying in power). The insurgent and terrorist forces that are aligned against him are pictured as fighting for Syria, democratic and an inclusive force for good, and Syria's bright future post-Assad. When this depiction is subjected to critical analysis, the façade soon crumbles, and reveals that a lot of information that contradicts this image is excluded from the news. This adheres to Philip Taylor's principle that if one is to tell a lie, it is best to leave information out rather than tell a deliberate lie.

In order to shape and harness the power of public opinion in order to realise pre-determined policy there must be some sort of basis to generate and influence a target audience. In this regard, the use of a very specific system of rhetoric, descriptions and labels are used to shape public perception of the conflict. Rhetoric used in reporting varies depending on who the subject of the reporting is at the time. When describing and reporting on the actions of Assad and those allied to him there is a distinct tendency to use pathos, in order to try and illicit an emotional response from the media consumer. The desired response, given the nature of the labelling and descriptions falls among the negative emotions (loathing, hate, anger ... etc.). The actions of the insurgents, US and its allies are hedged in logos. Their actions, no matter how reprehensible are explained and justified in a calm and logical fashion.

There has been a call and an attempt to generate the demand for direct foreign military intervention by the West in Syria. Two broad avenues have been used. The first is to try and justify the demand and need to protect Syrian civilians against the Assad regime. That is the West is engaging in an act of an unselfish and a good global citizen that is enacting its R2P. A second means is the attempt to

portray Syria as a threat to neighbouring countries and even the West, and therefore there is a sense of urgency to stop this from happening. The stories concerning WMDs illustrate this particular attempt well.

The final point to make is the issue of ‘inevitability’ that permeates Western media reporting. That is Assad and his regime is finished, so therefore why support him anymore as it is a futile exercise. By painting an ‘end game’ scenario in Syria, the idea is twofold. It is firstly, to try and convince Syrian supporters of Assad to give up resistance and join the ‘new’ Syria. And secondly, to influence those countries that have not shown support for the insurgents to do so, to ensure that they are not left in the cold. The fact that this ‘inevitability’ is taking so long to be realised and against all predictions, drives the desire to get more deeply involved in overthrowing Assad by all means, including direct military intervention. Like other branded revolutions in the past, the Arab Spring is proving no different in terms of the large scale instability in the wider region being caused in the name of ‘democracy’ being ‘promoted’ from foreign sources. This may be the final inevitability and verdict of these revolutions.

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РАСШИРЕНИЕ РОЛИ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ПАРТИЙ В СИСТЕМЕ МЕСТНОГО САМОУПРАВЛЕНИЯ

В последние несколько лет в отечественном законодательстве наметилась тенденция на усиление роли политических партий на региональном и местном уровнях. С одной стороны это связано с тем, что политические партии должны выйти из пределов «Садового кольца», с другой стороны через партии, можно осуществлять контроль над