



Media Manipulation and Syria's « White Helmets », Deceive 'Right Livelihood' and CodePink

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Manipulation of public perception has risen to a new level with the emergence of powerful social media. Facebook, Twitter and Google are multibillion dollar corporate giants hugely influencing public understanding.

Social media campaigns include paid 'boosting' of Facebook posts, paid promotion of Tweets, and biased results from search engines. Marketing and advertising companies use social media to promote their clients. U.S. foreign policy managers hire these companies to influence public perception to support U.S. foreign policy goals. For example, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made sure that Twitter was primed for street protests in Iran following the 2009 election. She insured that Twitter was ready to spread and manage news of protests following the election and strange killing of a young woman. (p 423, Hard Choices hardback).

The results of media manipulation can be seen in the widespread misunderstanding of the conflict in Syria. One element of propaganda around Syria is the demonization of the Syrian government and leadership. Influenced by the mainstream and much alternative media, most in the West do not know that Bashar al Assad is popular with most Syrians. There were three contestants in the [Syrian presidential election](#) of June 2014. Turnout was 73% of the registered voters, with 88% voting for Assad. In Beirut, the streets were clogged with tens of thousands of Syrian refugees marching through the city to vote at the Syrian Embassy. Hundreds of Syrian citizens from the USA and other western countries flew to Syria to vote because Syrian Embassies in Washington and other western capitals were shut down. While John Kerry was condemning the Syrian election as a "farce" before it had even happened, a marketing company known as The Syria Campaign waged a campaign to block knowledge of the Syrian election. Along with demonizing President Assad, they launched a campaign which led to [Facebook censoring information](#) about the Syrian election.

The Syria Campaign was created by a larger company named "Purpose". According to their own website they ["incubated"](#) The Syria Campaign.

The major achievement of The Syria Campaign has been the branding and promotion of the "White Helmets". The "White Helmets", also known as "Syria Civil Defense", began with a British military contractor, James LeMesurier, giving some rescue training to Syrians in Turkey. Funding was provided by the US and UK. They appropriated the name from a real Syria Civil Defense.

The “White Helmets” are marketed in the West as civilian volunteers doing rescue work. On 22 September 2016 it was announced that the [Right Livelihood Award](#), the so called “Alternative Nobel Prize”, is being given to the US/UK created White Helmets « for their outstanding bravery, compassion and humanitarian engagement in rescuing civilians from the destruction of the Syrian civil war. »

The Right Livelihood organizers may come to regret their selection of the White Helmets because the group is not who they claim to be. In fact, the White Helmets are largely a propaganda tool promoting western intervention against Syria. Unlike a legitimate rescue organization such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent, the “White Helmets” only work in areas controlled by the armed opposition. As shown in [this video](#), the White Helmets pick up the bodies of individuals executed by the terrorists, they claim to be unarmed but are not, and they falsely claim to be neutral. Many of the videos from AlQaeda/terrorist dominated areas of Syria have the “White Helmets” logo because the White Helmets work in alliance with them. This primarily a media marketing tool to raise public support for continuing the support to the armed opposition as well as the demonization of the Syrian government.

The Rights Livelihood [press release](#) says the White Helmets “remain outspoken in calling for an end to hostilities in the country.” That is false. The White Helmets actively call for US/NATO intervention through a “No Fly Zone” which would begin with attacks and destruction of anti-aircraft positions. Taking over the skies above another country is an act of war as [confirmed](#) by US General Dempsey. The White Helmets have never criticized or called for the end of funding to extremist organizations including Nusra/AlQaeda. On the contrary, White Helmets is generally embedded with this organization which is defined as “terrorist” by even the USA. That is likely why the head of the White Helmets, Raed Saleh, was [denied entry](#) to the USA.

The foreign and marketing company origins of the White Helmets was [exposed](#) over one and a half years ago. Since then, Vanessa Beeley has revealed the organization in more depth in articles such as [Who Are the White Helmets?](#) and [War by Way of Deception](#).

Despite these exposes, understanding of the White Helmets is limited. Many liberal and progressive people have uncritically accepted the propaganda and misinformation around Syria. Much of the progressive media has effectively blocked or censored critical examinations amid a flood of propaganda about “barrel bombs” dropped by the ‘brutal dictator’ and his “regime”.

In the last week, Netflix started showing a 40 minute documentary movie about the “White Helmets”. It is actually a promotion video. A substantial portion of it takes place in Turkey where we see trainees in hotel rooms making impassioned phone calls to inquire about their family in Syria. The “family values” theme is evident throughout. It’s a good marketing angle, especially effective with females. The political message of the video is also clear: after a bombing attack “It’s the Russians they say they are fighting ISIS but they are targeting civilians”. The movie includes video previously promoted by the White Helmets such as the “Miracle Baby” rescue. It’s debatable whether this incident is real or staged. The video includes self promoting proclamations such as “You are real heroes”. While no doubt there are some real rescues in the midst of war, many of the videos purporting to show the heroes at work have an unrealistic and contrived look to them as revealed [here](#).

“Alternative media” in the West has sadly echoed mainstream media regarding the Syria conflict. The result is that many progressive individuals and groups are confused or worse.

For example the activist group CodePink recently issued a media release [promoting](#) the Netflix White Helmets propaganda video.

The White Helmets video is produced by Grain Media and Violet Films/Ultra-Violet Consulting. The latter advertises itself as a [marketing corporation](#) specializing in social media management, grant writing, crowd building and campaign implementation. The only question is who paid them to produce this video.

There is growing resistance to this manipulation and deception. In response to a petition to give the Nobel Peace Prize to the White Helmets, there is a [counter petition](#) at Change.org. The Right Livelihood Awards have just been announced and there will soon be a petition demanding retraction of the award to the White Helmets.

The story of the White Helmets is principally a “feel good” hoax to manipulate public perception about the conflict in Syria and continue the drive for “regime change”. That’s why big money was paid to “Purpose” to “incubate” The Syria Campaign to brand and promote the White Helmets using Facebook, Twitter, etc.. That’s why big money was paid to create a self-promotional documentary. The judges at Rights Livelihood were probably influenced by the documentary since critical examination of facts around Syria is so rare. It’s a sad commentary on the media. As Stephen Kinzer recently [said](#),

“Coverage of the Syrian war will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the American press.”

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