

# Censorship in Canada? Vanessa Beeley's Talks on Syria

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

*Vanessa Beeley is a British journalist who was invited to Canada in the fall of 2019 to present talks in seven cities on the conflict in Syria. The sponsors of her speaking tour were several anti-war groups, including the Geopolitical Economy Research Group, the Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War, and Peace Alliance in Winnipeg.*

Beeley is an independent journalist and photographer who has worked extensively in the Middle East, including dangerous zones in Gaza, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and Syria. In 2017 she was a finalist for the prestigious Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. In 2018 the British National Council for the Training of Journalists named her as one of the 238 most respected journalists in the UK. In 2019 she was one of the recipients of the Serena Shim Award for uncompromising integrity in journalism.

Over a number of years, at considerable risk to her life, Beeley has travelled to Syria on several occasions to report on the conflict between the Syrian army and a variety of forces, largely foreign mercenaries, who are trying to overthrow the Syrian government. A [United Nations report](#) has stated that more than 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries may have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist groups.

In the course of her first-hand research on Syria, Beeley has also obtained information on the operations of the White Helmets, a supposedly “neutral, impartial and humanitarian” force dedicated to saving the lives of Syrian citizens in war zones.

In her various ensuing publications, with extensive documentation and photographic evidence, she has presented a compelling account of what is occurring in Syria. Fortunately, she is not alone in presenting such information. There are several other journalists who have done almost comparable first-hand accounts. These include Canada’s Eva Bartlett, and American journalists Max Blumenthal, Rania Khalek and Anya Parampil.

Because the reports of these few investigative journalists vary dramatically from what is presented by the mainstream media in the United States, Canada and much of Europe, a malicious and concerted campaign has developed to malign and discredit these journalists, largely in the interests of US foreign policy regarding Syria. For so-called “experts” and journalists who provide media cover to Syria’s jihadist insurgency, the three American journalists had crossed a line. The ensuing character assassination campaign against the three American “rogue” journalists has been revealed in [reportage](#) by MintPress News.

These three journalists point out that a number of Western reporters have gone to Islamist-

held regions in Syria and then presented views that the terrorists are justified in trying to overthrow the Syrian government. Because of this, Anya Parampil states that it is critically important to report on the life of ordinary Syrians not under terrorist control. According to Parampil:

This group of Syrians represents the vast majority of the country, despite the fact that we never hear from them in corporate media. It is my job, as a U.S. journalist with the privilege of working independently, to visit countries and speak to people impacted by the policies of Washington, particularly those who are excluded from the mainstream narrative. Unless we hear from these people, the U.S. public will be more willing to support military and economic war against the Syrian people. That is why CNN and other outlets act as though they're invisible. The media has been weaponized against the Syrian people.

Max Blumenthal commented:

"My ability to convey this reality back to the U.S. public was apparently such a threat to an unusually vocal echo chamber of regime-change fanatics that I was branded a Nazi ... Their attacks were part and parcel of the Western campaign to isolate Syrians from the rest of the world, and all because their government held off a multi-billion dollar proxy war that would have transformed their country into an even more harrowing version of Libya if it had succeeded."

As for Beeley, as soon as her Canada speaking tour was announced, *Huffington Post* was alerted and in short order two highly defamatory articles on her appeared. The *Post* reporters, [Emilie Clavel](#) and [Chris York](#), who have never been to Syria, present the standard mainstream media accusation that President Assad heads "the 21st century's most murderous regime" and was basically responsible for the war and for the bulk of the casualties. To support their views, they rely on other writers who claim "Beeley was the Syrian conflict's goddess of propaganda."

Beeley was scheduled to speak at the University of Montreal; when some criticism was voiced, a University spokesperson stated that "a university is a place of debates and one of its cornerstones is academic freedom." Yet, after the defamatory reports about Beeley came out, her talk was cancelled. The *Post*'s Chris York tweeted that "The University of Montreal has cancelled a planned talk by Vanessa Beeley after it was pointed out that she is a conspiracy theorist, not a journalist." Strange that after a US publication's blatant propaganda attack on an experienced war correspondent, the University of Montreal now appears not to be a place of "academic freedom."

After Montreal, Beeley was scheduled to speak in Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, Mississauga, Regina and Winnipeg. Despite concerted de-platforming efforts in all these cities, she did manage to present her talks. It was only in Montreal, Hamilton and Winnipeg that it was necessary to secure alternate venues because of the pressure to block her presentations.

Beeley's speaking tour ended in Winnipeg, and here she was denied a venue, at short notice, not only at the University of Winnipeg but also at the Winnipeg Millennium Library. On investigation, it turns out that the senior administration at the university had not been informed of Beeley's talk, so the decision to deny a venue was made at some lower level,

without proper authorization. As such, it would be unfair to blame the university for this matter.

In the case of the Millennium Library, a senior spokesperson stated that Beeley's proposed talk "would not comply with [the library's] guidelines." When pressed on the matter, the spokesperson said that in his personal opinion the contents of the proposed talk could be construed as "hate speech" and as such Beeley would not be permitted to speak there.

Beeley was finally booked to give her talk on December 12, with practically no public notice, at the Winnipeg Chilean Association on Burrows Avenue.

I find it ironic that people writing in the comfort and safety at their desks in the US, UK and Canada about the war in Syria and the White Helmets are given more credence by officials in some public institutions than journalists such as Beeley and others who actually go to Syria to see the situation first-hand.

I attended Beeley's highly informative session in Winnipeg and had a discussion with her before and after the talk. Her hour-long presentation was fully documented and supported by appropriate photographs. For anyone to criticize her presentation as "hate speech" is preposterous. It is a profound pity that Canadian university students and a wider section of the public were prevented from hearing her perspective.

I have always had a keen interest in foreign affairs and during my years of teaching at the University of Winnipeg, my courses often involved such matters. Since my retirement, I have had more time to devote to what is going on in the world. As such, during these years I have written and published a wide range of articles on a variety of issues, including matters involving Syria and the White Helmets.

In the case of the White Helmets, I immediately discovered that they operated only in areas held by Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra terrorist forces – and nowhere else in Syria. This being the case, how could they claim to be "neutral, impartial and humanitarian" when they were nowhere to be found in the rest of Syria?

The White Helmets organization was created and funded by US and British efforts back in March of 2013, with an initial input of \$23 million by USAID (US Agency for International Development). Since then they've received over \$100 million, including [at least CDN\\$7.5 million](#). Max Blumenthal has [explored in some detail](#) the various funding resources and relationships that the White Helmets draw on, mostly in the US and Europe. Overall, the [CIA has spent over \\$1 billion](#) on arming and training the so-called Syrian "rebels" who in actuality constitute a variety of Al-Qaeda forces.

A disturbing aspect of the White Helmets is their close association with Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra forces. In several cases their headquarters are in the same building with these terrorist groups. Videos are also available that show their gross disrespect for the dead bodies of Syrian soldiers (several White Helmets were filmed giving the victory sign while standing on a heap of dead Syrian soldiers on the way to being dumped in the trash).

If the White Helmets devoted their activities solely to save the lives of people caught up in war zones, that would be commendable and beyond reproach, but that is not the case. A major part of their activities is devoted to media reports and public relations, and it seems that this is what draws a significant portion of their funding while constituting the primary

reason for their creation. In fact, it appears the White Helmets use search and rescue activities as a cover-up to demonize Syrian President Assad and help terrorists overthrow the Syrian government.

As renowned journalist John Pilger [put it](#), the White Helmets are a “propaganda construct,” an Al-Qaeda support group, whose prime purpose is to try to put a veneer of respectability on the vile head-chopping terrorists in Syria.

Given all this, I was astounded to discover that in the late summer of 2016, the federal NDP had recommended to the federal government that Canada should nominate the White Helmets for the Nobel Peace Prize. In response to this I wrote an open letter to the NDP denouncing their ill-considered proposal. Fortunately, Stéphane Dion, our Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, ignored their request. My [open letter](#) was posted by *Canadian Dimension* and it was later reposted on two other sites.

Then in the summer of 2018 Canada announced that it would take in a sizeable number of White Helmets just before the terrorist area in which they operated was recaptured by the Syrian army. I [wrote an article](#) denouncing this questionable course of action.

I discussed how Philip Giraldi, a former counter-terrorism specialist and a former member of the CIA, in a [detailed article](#) stated that at the present time there is no bigger fraud than the story of the White Helmets. The story that’s been put forth is that with the Syrian army closing in on the last White Helmet affiliates still fighting in the country, the Israeli government, aided by the US, “[staged an emergency humanitarian evacuation](#)” of 800 White Helmet members, including their families, to Israel and then on to Jordan. Pleas were then put forth to resettle them in the US, Britain, Germany and other countries.

Near the end of 2015 I wrote [an article](#) that presented the background on the various terrorist groups, going back to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan. I will cite a concluding paragraph:

When ISIS beheaded two American journalists, there was outrage and denunciation throughout the West, but when the same ISIS beheaded hundreds of Syrian soldiers, and meticulously filmed these war crimes, this was hardly reported anywhere. In addition, almost from the very beginning of the Syrian tragedy, al-Qaeda groups have been killing and torturing not only soldiers but police, government workers and officials, journalists, Christian church people, aid workers, women and children, as well as suicide bombings in market places. All this was covered up in the mainstream media, and when the Syrian government correctly denounced this as terrorism, this was ignored or denounced as “Assad’s propaganda.”

Being aware of this background, nothing that Beeley stated in her talk surprised me. What she stated was just an update to what I had already known. What was new to me was her account of the recent death of [James Le Mesurier](#), a former British military officer, who founded the White Helmets in 2014. He was found dead in Istanbul this past November 11 and it is still uncertain if he was murdered or if he committed suicide. Almost immediately afterwards, Beeley wrote a [lengthy and well-researched article](#) about his mysterious death. I would like to include a reference to this, especially as an example of the quality of Beeley’s research and writing style. And yet this is the person who is accused of presenting hate speech and not worthy of being heard.

The thought has occurred to me that since my views on Syria and the White Helmets are identical to those of Beeley, suppose I proposed to give a talk at a Canadian university or public library. Would I, as a retired professor and senior scholar, be blocked in the way that Beeley was? Given the precedent of what happened to her, why should I be treated any differently?

Frankly, I can hardly believe what has happened. To me it is outrageous that a person of Beeley's credibility as an investigative journalist and the author of a wide range of superbly documented articles and books should be barred from presenting a talk on a critically important subject at a Canadian university or a public library. What has happened to our supposed "freedom of speech"?

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*This article was originally published on [Canadian Dimension](#).*

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