

# **“Democracy Now” and the “Progressive” Alternative Media: Valued Cheerleaders For Imperialism and War**

By [Finian Cunningham](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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The major Western mainstream media outlets have been running a “shock and awe” propaganda offensive against the Syrian government of President Bashar Al Assad for nearly 16 months. The misinformation has been unrelenting, monolithic, unverified, one-sided and, frankly, increasingly preposterous.

With the suppression of mounting facts that Western governments are waging a covert war of aggression in Syria, the Western public is right to treat the conventional media sources with skepticism and outright contempt. Such media are seen as “politicized” and “unreliable”, serving a naked imperialist agenda for Western regime change. In a word, they are damaged goods.

This is where a segment of the so-called alternative media can play a valuable propaganda function for Western powers. Because such media are supposed to be independent, critical, non-corporate, the public tends to consider their reports as objective and unbiased. One such “alternative” news service is “Democracy Now” hosted by Amy Goodman. Goodman is seen as something of a campaigning critical journalist shedding the light of truth on the depredations of the US government, corporations and the Pentagon. But a closer look at what Goodman’s “Democracy Now” is reporting on Syria shows that the purported critical broadcaster has become a purveyor of Western government propaganda. While the mainstream media’s propaganda function is obvious to the informed public, Goodman’s “Democracy Now” plays a more subtle role. Camouflaged with the trappings of critical, independent journalism, “Democracy Now” serves to sow powerful seeds of misinformation in a way that the “compromised” mainstream media cannot.

This misinformation from “Democracy Now” is valuable to the ruling elite because to many of its readers it is not seen as misinformation.

Rather, the “news” on “Democracy Now” is viewed as reliable and representing the views of the anti-war, anti-imperialist constituency. In this way, Goodman is a valuable asset to Washington and Wall Street because her broadcasts can serve to disorient and undermine a constituency that is normally opposed to Western warmongering and imperialism. Many of the subscribers to “Democracy Now” may see through the misinformation. Many, though, may not, and therefore will become embedded with the imperialist agenda. The fact that Democracy Now ratings appear to be holding up would indicate that a lot of its followers are oblivious to the insidious effect of such misinformation. As such, Democracy Now is more valuable to the powers-that-be than, say, the *New York Times* or the *Financial Times*.

“Democracy Now” ensures that the agenda of the powerful becomes infiltrated in a constituency that would otherwise be opposed to that agenda.

First, let’s recap on the mainstream propaganda offensive against Syria.

Since mid-March 2011, when violence was initially reported in that country, the Western mainstream television, radio and press studiously ignored the evidence of covert foreign-backed subversion and terrorism. Instead these outlets have sought to portray the protests as part of the pro-democracy Arab Spring popular movements that were seen in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Bahrain. The mainstream media have run saturation coverage to demonise the government in Damascus as a “brutal, authoritarian regime” that is cracking down mercilessly on its civilian population demanding democratic reforms. The narrative is monolithic in the major media outlets on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, or the Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Le Monde, BBC, ITN, the Irish national broadcaster RTE or the Middle East’s much-vaunted Al Jazeera – the “story” on Syria is uncannily uniform. A noble, civilian mass-based movement is being savagely crushed by a tin-eared dictator, so the story goes.

Every possible smear campaign against the Assad government has been indulged in and indeed fabricated. From the alleged killing of innocent civilians by the national armed forces, to the perpetration of massacres by pro-government militias, to self-inflicted car bombs in urban centres by Assad secret services, to the feckless shopping habits of the president’s wife. Russia Today, Press TV, *Der Spiegel*, *the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the Vatican News Service (Agenzia Fides), to name a few, have been honorable exceptions in mainstream media journalism for conveying a more accurate picture of what is really happening inside Syria – showing that “protesters” are far from peaceful civilians, and much of the violence is actually stemming from Western, Turkish and Arab-backed mercenaries that have infiltrated the country. As the facts of US and NATO-backed violence in Syria become more transparent and harder to conceal owing to the sheer volume of covert involvement, the Western public has rightly become more skeptical about what the mainstream media outlets are telling them. Indeed, the blatant misinformation and lies that are being sold as journalism is increasingly seen as contemptible.

The Houla massacre on 24 May is a case in point. The BBC and other mainstream media outlets have been shown to be outrageously wrong in their initial rush to blame the atrocity on Syrian government forces when the evidence has slowly emerged that it was most likely the grisly work of Western-backed mercenaries.

It is all the more disquieting when a supposedly informed, alternative news service, Democracy Now, peddles such blatant misinformation – more than six weeks after the massacre occurred and after evidence has been reported that points convincingly to Western-backed perpetrators. [On 9 July, Goodman broadcast an interview with Rafif Jouejati](#), a spokesperson for a Syrian opposition group called the Syrian Local Coordination Committees, based in Washington DC. Despite the mounting evidence of Western, Turkish and Saudi/Qatari covert operations, Goodman gave her guest a free rein to regurgitate the litany of mainstream media calumnies on Syria. Without a hint of scepticism from Goodman, her guest said:

*“The bottom line is that the majority of the country is engaged in a popular revolution for freedom, for democracy, for dignity... We have mountains of evidence indicating that [Assad’s] armed forces have been engaged in systematic torture, rampant detentions,*

*massacres across the country."*

Really? The majority of the country engaged in a popular revolution for freedom, democracy and dignity? That sounds more like the fanciful imagination of someone safely based in Washington DC. By contrast, sources in Syria have confirmed that people are terrified by Western-armed gangs running amok in their communities, kidnapping, murdering, evicting families from their homes and burning down business premises. According to the leaked Arab League Observer Mission Report, which had initially been commissioned by the Arab League at Washington's request:

*"In Homs, Idlib and Hama, the Observer Mission witnessed acts of violence being committed against Government forces and civilians that resulted in several deaths and injuries. Examples of those acts include the bombing of a civilian bus, killing eight persons and injuring others, including women and children, and the bombing of a train carrying diesel oil. In another incident in Homs, a police bus was blown up, killing two police officers. A fuel pipeline and some small bridges were also bombed. "*

*"Such incidents include the bombing of buildings, trains carrying fuel, vehicles carrying diesel oil and explosions targeting the police, members of the media and fuel pipelines. Some of those attacks have been carried out by the Free Syrian Army and some by other armed opposition groups."* ([League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria, Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from 24 December 2011 to 18 January 2012](#), Ironically, these fact-finding observations of the AL Observer Mission , went against the interests of its Western sponsors. It was barely reported by the mainstream media)

According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ):

*"Those killed were almost exclusively from families belonging to Houla's Alawi and Shia minorities. Over 90% of Houla's population are Sunnis. Several dozen members of a family were slaughtered, which had converted from Sunni to Shia Islam. Members of the Shomaliya, an Alawi family, were also killed, as was the family of a Sunni member of the Syrian parliament who is regarded as a collaborator. Immediately following the massacre, the perpetrators are supposed to have filmed their victims and then presented them as Sunni victims in videos posted on the internet."* ([Neue Erkenntnisse zu Getöteten von Hula.Abermals Massaker in Syrien](#), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 7, 2012 translated from the German, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/neue-erkenntnisse-zu-getoeteten-von-hula-abermals-massaker-in-syrien-11776496.html>)

The FAZ report quoted above echoes eyewitness accounts collected from refugees from the Houla region by members of the Monastery of St. James in Qara, Syria. According to monastery sources [cited by the Dutch Middle East expert Martin Janssen](#), armed rebels murdered "entire Alawi families" in the village of Taldo in the Houla region.

Also of significance is the report of [Der Spiegel](#) (March 29, 2012) entitled ["An Executioner for Syria's Rebels Tells His Story"](#). A system of "burial brigades" for those executed confirms an organized process of mass-murder and extra-judicial killings. This single "burial brigade", according to the executioner's testimony, was responsible for the arbitrary execution of 350-400 people including "prisoners" and "traitors". The "traitors" are Sunni civilians within

the occupied urban and rural areas, who express their opposition to the rule of terror of the Free Syrian Army (FSA):

***“Since last summer, we have executed slightly fewer than 150 men, which represents about 20 percent of our prisoners,”*** says Abu Rami. ... *But the executioners of Homs have been busier with traitors within their own ranks than with prisoners of war. “If we catch a Sunni spying, or if a citizen betrays the revolution, we make it quick,”* says the fighter. According to Abu Rami, Hussein’s burial brigade has put between 200 and 250 traitors to death since the beginning of the uprising.” ([Der Spiegel, March 29, 2012](#))

The Vatican News Service Agenzia Fides largely confirms that the Western backed “opposition forces” rather than the Al Assad government were responsible for countless atrocities:

*“In Homs, called the “martyred city”, “opposition forces have occupied two areas, Diwan Al Bustan and Hamidieh, where there are all the churches and bishoprics,” the Archimandrite told Fides. “The picture for us – he continues – is utter desolation: the church of Mar Elian is half destroyed and that of Our Lady of Peace is still occupied by the rebels. Christian homes are severely damaged due to the fighting and completely emptied of their inhabitants, who fled without taking anything. The area of Hamidieh is still shelter to armed groups independent of each other, heavily armed and bankrolled by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. All Christians (138,000) have fled to Damascus and Lebanon, while others took refuge in the surrounding countryside.*

*The Syrian soldiers in fact, continue to face foreign fighters, mercenaries Libyans, Lebanese militants from the Gulf, Afghans, Turks. “The Sunni Salafist militants – says the Bishop – continue to commit crimes against civilians, or to recruit fighters with force. The fanatical Sunni extremists are fighting a holy war proudly, especially against the Alawites. When terrorists seek to control the religious identity of a suspect, they ask him to cite the genealogies dating back to Moses. And they ask to recite a prayer that the Alawites removed. The Alawites have no chance to get out alive.”* ([Agenzia Fides, Vatican News Service, 4 June 2012](#))

These reports were known to the alternative media. “Democracy Now” chose to ignore them.

### Overblown Casualty Figures, Blamed on the Government

Goodman also indulged in the overblown casualty figures from dubious Syrian opposition sources as if they were verifiable accurate data. She even sounded like Hillary Clinton in talking up the “defection” of the hapless former Syrian Brigadier General Manaf Tlass as “significant” when informed sources discount that news as a minor irrelevance.

In the interview between Goodman and her guest (whom sources describe as belonging to a family formerly aligned with the Syrian government), Bashar Al Assad was portrayed as an unhinged leader who is in denial over massacres – massacres, as we have noted, that have most likely been carried out by Western-backed death squads as confirmed by numerous reports.

Preposterously, Assad was described as guilty of much worse crimes than former Egyptian and Libyan rulers Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi. Then the “alternative” [Democracy](#)

[Now broadcast this statement from the supposed opposition spokesperson](#) as if it were normal discourse:

*"I would like to think that we will proceed with full prosecution in the International Criminal Court. I think the longer this issue goes on and the more violence he [Assad] commits, the more likely he will wish to have a fate such as Gaddafi's."*

Recall that the Libyan leader was lynched on a roadside by a NATO-directed mob, and sodomised with a knife before being shot dead. It may also be recalled that ["Democracy Now" gave prominent broadcasts supporting NATO's intervention in Libya and justifying the criminal subversion of that country](#). Going by the latest coverage on Syria, Democracy Now is acting once again under a "progressive" cloak as a propaganda tool for US-led imperialist intervention. Given the misplaced respect among many of the public seeking independent, alternative, accurate news and analysis, this insidious role of Democracy Now is reprehensible. May it be suggested, in the name of media transparency, that the programme be aptly renamed "Imperialism Now".

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#### Evidence of Atrocities Committed by Opposition Forces



[SYRIA: Killing Innocent Civilians as part of a US Covert Op. Mobilizing Public Support for a R2P War against Syria](#)

- by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky - 2012-05-30

US military doctrine envisages the central role of "massive casualty producing events" in which innocent civilians are killed. The killings are carried out as part of a covert operation. The enemy is blamed for the resulting atrocities.

#### [Report: Rebels Responsible for Houla Massacre](#)

Armed rebels murdered "entire Alawi families" in village of Taldo in Houla

- by John Rosenthal - 2012-06-10



[Propaganda War: Houla Massacre Committed by US-NATO Sponsored "Free Syrian Army". But They Accuse Syrian Government](#)

- by Thierry Meyssan - 2012-06-09



["Humanitarian War Criminals" in High Office: Was the Houla Massacre Ordered by the Western Military Alliance?](#)

- by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky - 2012-06-11

Who is behind these rebel groups? What is the precise nature of the relationship between the FSA and the Western military alliance? What is the command structure? What is the nature of this diabolical covert operation? Who ordered these atrocities against the Syrian people?

## [VATICAN NEWS: Foreign Fighters, Mercenaries, Terrorists, behind Syria Massacre](#)

“The desolation of Homs and the war of information “: the Words of a Greek-Catholic Bishop  
– by Vatican News (Agenzia Fides) – 2012-06-04

Background analysis on Syria



## [SYRIA: NATO's Next “Humanitarian” War?](#)

– by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky – 2012-07-15

ONLINE INTERACTIVE I-BOOK. The insurgency in Syria is based on the “Libya Model”: it is integrated by mercenaries and Al Qaeda affiliated paramilitary brigades supported by British, French and Turkish Special Forces...

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website [Globalresearch.ca](#). He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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