

“Professional” News Gathering: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is a Tool of Western Propaganda

By [Steven MacMillan](#)

Global Research, December 12, 2015

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Since Russia began military operations in Syria against the terrorist proxy forces of NATO and the Gulf states, ubiquitous reports in the Western media have emerged which claim that Russia has killed and targeted civilians. Yet a large proportion of these news organisations that apparently are at the pinnacle of journalism in the West, are publishing reports that are often based on one or two very dubious (to say the least) sources.

No photographs, videos or any actual evidence is provided in a lot of these articles. The press is so lazy these days they can't even be bothered manufacturing fake evidence most of the time, they just cite a blog post from what may as well be some random guy on Twitter, and then quote a few Western politicians who want to oust Assad from power in Damascus; and they try and pass that off as professional news gathering. It's truly a new low for Western mainstream journalism.

One of the most widely cited 'organizations' in the Western media pertaining to the Syrian conflict is the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). As Tony Cartalucci astutely noted back in 2012, in his article: [West's Syrian Narrative Based on "Guy in British Apartment"](#), the Western media portrays the SOHR as a group of impartial and highly skilled professionals who are based in Syria:

One would believe this to be a giant sprawling organization with hundreds of members working hard on the ground, documenting evidence in Syria with photographs and video, while coordinating with foreign press to transparently and objectively "observe" the "human rights" conditions in Syria, as well as demonstrate their methodologies. Surely that is the impression the Western media attempts to relay to its readers.

As usual, the reality of this so-called organization is the complete inversion of the way the mainstream media portrays it. The [SOHR](#) was founded in 2006 by the enigmatic Rami Abdulrahman (also spelled Abdurrahman, but his real name is Ossama Suleiman), who is also the director of the one-man group. He is the only individual publicly listed as working for the SOHR, with even the [New York Times](#) admitting in a 2013 article that the SOHR is "virtually a one-man band".

He apparently relies on four unnamed men inside Syria who assist him, along with over 200 unnamed informants. Obviously, the major problem with these unnamed activists is that they are anonymous, meaning the media has absolutely no idea who these people are, or if they even exist. Are some of these activists members of ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra? Do they

work for MI6 or the CIA? Is the tooth fairy one of his informants? There is no way to verify that Abdulrahman's informants are authentic, reliable or objective.

Secondly, Abdulrahman is not an impartial individual himself, and is starkly opposed to the Syrian government. He told [Reuters](#) in 2012 that he would only return to Syria "when Bashar al-Assad goes". (It should also be noted that when he was still living in Syria, Abdulrahman supposedly served three brief spells in a Syrian jail for what Reuters called "pro-democracy activism" – you can make of that what you wish).

In 2011, [CNN](#) reported that Abdulrahman met the former Foreign Secretary of Britain, William Hague, in London, as a representative of the Syrian opposition (he was even [photographed](#) outside the Foreign & Commonwealth Office). The SOHR clearly has an agenda, and should not be relied on to give impartial reports on the situation in Syria.

Thirdly, Abdulrahman left Syria in 2000 and now [lives in Coventry](#), England! You would think the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is based in Syria, considering the 'organization' supposedly monitors the situation solely in Syria.

Furthermore, the SOHR [casualty count](#) for certain periods in the Syrian conflict often differs from the figures calculated by specialists from around the world.

Blatant Propaganda!

Many of the allegations in the Western press that accuse the Russian government of killing civilians are solely based on this one unprofessional and biased source. The International Business Times (IBT) published an article on the 21st of October, titled: [Russia in Syria: 370, including civilians killed in Russian airstrikes, says SOHR](#). The IBT article provides no second source, and merely says "according" to the SOHR.

On the 20th of November 2015, the SOHR released a report which claimed that the Russian air force had [killed 403 civilians](#) in Syria, including 166 women and children. In the report, there is absolutely zero evidence to support these claims – literally not a shred of evidence. But that doesn't stop Western media quoting the SOHR report as proof of civilian casualties however.

The Independent published an article on the 23rd of November with the sensationalist headline: [Russian air strikes in Syria 'have killed 97 children', monitoring group says](#). The Independent only cites the SOHR report which has zero evidence in it, and provides no additional evidence to support this accusation, but somehow that passes for journalism in the West – what a joke. The Independent isn't even a tabloid paper, it's meant to be a little more respectable than say The Sun.

Other mainstream news outlets such as [Reuters](#), [Yahoo News](#) and the [New York Times](#), publish stories which quote this figure of 403 civilians from the SOHR report.

The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, denounced the SOHR in October of this year, when she was responding to allegations widely circulated in the Western media that Russia had bombed a hospital in Northern Syria, killing 13 people. [Zakharova stated](#):

This information appears with reference to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights based in London. As we all understand, it is very 'convenient' to cover and observe what is happening in Syria without leaving London and without the ability to collect information in the field.

It is obvious to anyone who values real journalism and intellectual honesty, that the SOHR is a joke, and is the antithesis of a reliable and impartial source. For the Western mainstream media however, its legitimate sounding name is an important and useful tool when promulgating war propaganda and disinformation to their ignorant readers.

Steven MacMillan is an independent writer, researcher, geopolitical analyst and editor of [The Analyst Report](#), especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook"](#).

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Steven MacMillan](#), Global Research, 2015

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Steven MacMillan](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca