

Syria Analysts, Impartial? Not likely. Think Tank Commentators Posing as Objective Scholars

By [Phil Greaves](#)

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As is evident with the vast majority of coverage on the Middle East, the analysis used to bolster media narratives on Syria is predominantly derived from paid “think-tank” commentators posing as objective scholars. To the discerning reader, this dynamic of the mass media relying on dubiously attached “analysts” is in itself nothing new.

In an op-ed titled [“The Sham Terrorist Expert Industry”](#) journalist Glenn Greenwald offers a compelling in-depth critique of the dominant clique of highly ideological “analysts” pervasive within the realm of US national security and foreign policy media. This “clique” – whose primary objectives are to propagate policies of the states or corporations that created the institutions they work for – has extended into the majority of western “analysis” on the Middle East, not least in regard to the Syrian conflict. Indeed, in many cases the analysts and supposed experts covering Syria are employed by the very same dominant institutions (WINEP, et al), and sit in the very same offices, as the frauds in Greenwald’s aforementioned article. The common talking points provided by this band of charlatans generally fall in line with the current of demonizing Muslim nations in general, in order to “other” the primary targets of western aggression; overblowing the threat of “Islamic terror” in the west to bolster the governing class’ “need” for oppressive National Security laws, solely designed to encroach upon the public’s civil liberties and curtail the possibility of domestic dissent to the ruling systems; while advancing whatever bolsters US/Israeli geopolitical interests at any given time.

Yet, during the course of the Syrian conflict, this corporate analysis industry has exhibited an about-turn of discourse, and in stark contrast to the usually anti-Islamic propaganda utilised to bolster fabricated domestic “threats”; the “tailored analysis” of militia in Syria has been in the majority of a favourable approach. More often than not, such favourable analyses regarding opposition militants has been proven to be entirely false. Furthermore, in some instances, it has become blatantly obvious that said think-tanks have gone to great lengths to mitigate the fundamentalist ideologies rife within the ranks and leadership of Syrian “rebel” forces.

The much publicised fraud Liz O’Bagy, offers perhaps the prime example of the war-lobby’s propaganda apparatus and its pervasive attempts to build support for the Syrian insurgency under patently absurd “secular freedom fighter” narratives. O’Bagy was formerly employed by the Neo-Conservative lobbying group posing as an objective conflict-analysis center called The Institute for the Study of War. A think-tank whose [board of directors](#) reads like a whos-who of past and present US military establishment. Moreover, the ISW’s main donors and “clients”, ie: those that ultimately determine the organisations output, are the biggest

military contractors on Earth. It is these same “interests” that represent the direct financial beneficiaries of a possible US-led (overt) war on Syria. Regardless of the ISW’s ties to the military industry; O’Bagy was regularly paraded in western media as an impartial expert on Syria; it was only once her fraudulent doctorate claims were exposed that any scrutiny was placed upon O’Bagy or the outfit she worked for. Since then, the ISW continues to be portrayed as an objective source of analysis whilst O’Bagy has become the scapegoat for the whole sordid affair. Any serious investigation of the mendacious agenda at the ISW, and the State Department funded rebel-lobbying group the “Syrian Emergency Task Force” ([SETF](#)) has conveniently been forgotten.

In relation, and as evidenced in a detailed report by the [Public Accountability Initiative](#), the military and corporate ties held by prominent commentators pushing for war on Syria became particularly blatant during the immediate aftermath of the alleged chemical weapons attacks. One such commentator, Stephen Hadley, a former national security adviser to George W. Bush, made a series of high-profile media appearances advocating US military strikes on Syria. On almost every occasion, the fact Hadley served as a director of Raytheon Corp. – the producer of the tomahawk missiles being prepared for use in a “strike” on Syria – and would therefore financially benefit from the imminent use of such weaponry, was totally omitted; giving the viewer the false impression of Hadley as an objective and experienced “National Security” expert.

Regularly quoted analysts providing sound-bites and “insight” regarding the Syrian insurgency in western media have invariably been employees of “think-tanks” with dubious ties to the military and corporate establishments of the west and Israel. This vested interest within analysis ostensibly portrayed as objective is not only prevalent in the higher echelons of the commentariat, nor is it explicit to coverage of critical junctures during the conflict. Rather, it is endemic throughout such analysis and feeds down to lesser-known beneficiaries: manipulable low-level employees and young interns keen to “get ahead” in the realm of “National Security” agitprop. In turn, think-tanks providing analyses that lend credibility to a desired corporate media narrative are promoted and given exposure, regardless of how many times such analysis is proven wrong – or worse still, intentionally misleading.

The Washington institute for Near East Policy (WINEP, founded by AIPAC members including Martin Indyk, now of the monolithic US think-tank the [Brookings institution](#)) is arguably the most prominent example of the organised propaganda ubiquitous in western media coverage of the Middle East. Its board of directors exhibits a long history of US establishment Neo-Conservatives and Zionists alike. Described by Columbia University’s Professor of Arab studies Rashid Khalidi as the “most important Zionist propaganda tool in the United States”; WINEP employs a plethora of devout Zionists, US establishment figures, and promoters of the apartheid state with the specific intention of flooding US foreign policy discourse with a pro-Israeli bias. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimers’ groundbreaking book: “The Israel Lobby and US foreign policy” gives a detailed account of WINEP’s methodology: “Although WINEP plays down its links to Israel and claims that it provides a ‘balanced and realistic’ perspective on Middle East issues, this is not the case. In fact, WINEP is funded and run by individuals who are deeply committed to advancing Israel’s agenda ... Many of its personnel are genuine scholars or experienced former officials, but they are hardly neutral observers on most Middle East issues and there is little diversity of views within WINEP’s ranks.”

Accordingly, WINEP has been at the forefront of providing biased and skewed analysis that forms much of western media's talking points on Syria. The self-described "Hezbollah expert" Matt Levitt (who has incidentally never spoken to a member of Hezbollah), lacking any credible evidence, has consistently exaggerated Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian conflict. In similar vein, WINEP analyst Andrew J. Tabler has been published in western media relentlessly and has [consistently](#) advocated further US military intervention. It becomes once again evident that, in the context of Syria, WINEP's general "analysis" has been built in order to bolster governing narratives required to undertake US/Israeli objectives, whether that analysis is sound, or not, is entirely irrelevant.

The oft-referenced Syria analyst Charles Lister, of IHS Janes' "Terrorism and Insurgency Center" provides one such example of the corporate end of the spectrum. Lister is prominently touted in western media as an objective, informed source of analysis on rebel groups in Syria. Indeed, his twitter feed and sporadic articles give the impression he spends much of his time studying "rebel" groups in Syria for a benevolent and impartial "terrorism center". However, contrary to this perception, Lister's employer, IHS, describes itself as a "global information company... shaping today's business landscape" and promotes itself as "one of the leading global providers of critical technical information, decision support tools and related services to customers in the energy, defense, aerospace, construction and automotive industries,". Again, and in accordance with the ISW's military roll-call of directors; [IHS Janes board of directors and investors](#) reads like a who's-who of western corporate special interest of past and present - from Goldman Sachs to Citigroup. To give this elite public relations company, its employees, and its offspring of "tailored information" the credence of objectivity is tantamount to blind stupidity. In line with the uniform analysis, Lister was a leading proponent of the "secular, democratic revolutionary" narrative, which he still upholds to this day. Although his analysis has become less anachronistic and he acknowledges the extremist ideologies and dominance within the rebels; Lister [still refuses](#) to abandon the fantasy of a "nationalist" uprising. This disingenuous western-promoted line of a nationalist and democratic militant insurgency morphing into an extremist-led war simply doesn't stand up to serious [scrutiny](#).

An example of the manipulable intern is provided by the analyst Aymenn AJ Tamimi, who has become a prominent source for media on the extreme factions in Syria. Concentrating on [coverage of Da'wah and civilian "outreach"](#) that Al Qaeda operatives Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) so kindly provide for the people of Syria, Tamimi primarily writes lengthy reports detailing ISIS' efforts to learn from their mistakes in Iraq, and how ISIS are now determined to win "hearts and minds" through social programs and so forth. His analysis has consistently highlighted the small instances of ISIS success at avoiding alienating the Syrian communities which they invade and dominate. Furthermore, while providing a knowledgeable, and what seems well-sourced overview of ISIS et al, from a supposed objective point of view, there is a distinct aversion to the many well publicised and brutal crimes the ISIS commit. For example; it seems odd that Tamimi, an oft-quoted expert on ISIS no-less, made no effort to analyse the Latakia massacres and mass-kidnappings that occurred in early August 2013. Indeed, any negative reflection of this whole event - led by ISIS no less - is almost entirely omitted from Tamimi's analysis and impressive body of work. In comparison to his coverage of ISIS Da'wah, or "outreach" as he labels it, his coverage of ISIS crimes and atrocities is minimal. Moreover, Tamimi has relied on anonymous "ISIS sources" to form the backbone of much of his work; often resulting in a favourable or bias interpretation of events.

Tamimi is listed as “Shillman Ginsburg fellow” at the [Middle East Forum](#) (MEF), which for all intents and purposes is an outright Zionist/Neo-Conservative think-tank with a stated mission of “promot[ing] American interests in the Middle East and protect[ing] Western values from Middle Eastern threats.” Further, the MEF outlines those “American interests” as being: “fighting radical Islam; working for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; robustly asserting U.S. interests vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia; developing strategies to deal with Iraq and contain Iran; and monitoring the advance of Islamism in Turkey. Domestically, *the Forum combats lawful Islamism; protects the freedom of public speech of anti-Islamist authors, activists, and publishers; and works to improve Middle East studies in North America.*” (emphasis added)

Upon reading the MEF’s mission statement, it again seems counterproductive for an overtly Islamophobic propaganda outlet allowing its fellowship interns enough freedom to portray ISIS and their affiliates in a favourable fashion. The MEF is affiliated to none other than raging Zionist/NeoCon Daniel Pipes, who has consistently called for heavier US military involvement in Syria. In April 2013 upon (falsely) assuming the “rebels” were winning the fight, Pipes demanded that an about turn was necessary and the US should actively support Bashar al-Assad in order to “guide enemies to stalemate by helping whichever side is losing, so as to prolong their conflict.” Pipes’ proposal, coincidentally of course, precisely reflects the [“optimal scenario”](#) of the Israeli military establishment. Again, it strikes as odd then, that an analyst who spends the majority of his time studying radical Islamic groups in Syria in such a favourable light gains fellowship at an institution led by Zionist/Neoconservative Islamophobes.

These are but a few examples of a vast and sophisticated propaganda apparatus; built and paid for by global military and corporate institutions to consume the media discourse with preferential analysis and commentary. The “tailored analysis” required to sanitize the image of the “rebels” in Syria has required the western/Israeli think-tank industry to engage in a lengthy period of cognitive dissonance.

There is a simple explanation for Zionists and NeoCons promoting and sanitizing Islamic extremists in Syria: the paymasters of Western/Israeli dominated think-tanks promoted in mass media hold a similar objective to that of the paymasters of the brainwashed extremists and criminals engaged in an insurgency being portrayed as a struggle for democracy; that common objective being the overthrow of the Syrian government and the subsequent destruction of the Syrian state. It has become an almost mainstream fact that Israel and Saudi Arabia – the latter being by far the largest supporter of the Salafi/Jihadi militia in Syria, nay, on earth – share many common objectives in the region; their mutual conflict and hostility toward the Resistance bloc, led by Iran, providing the fundamental platform for the increasingly close relationship between Riyadh and Tel Aviv.

The [“Redirectional”](#) policies of the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia – designed to mitigate opposition to their regional dominance and bolster radical Sunni fundamentalist ideologues in order to attack their mutual enemy: the Resistance bloc of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah – erroneously labelled “the Shi’ite crescent” – has made unlikely analytical bedfellows. Quite [literally](#), apologists and propagandists of Zionists, Neo-Conservatives, liberal interventionists, and Al Qaeda no less, have all found common ground on Syria. Accordingly, this alliance has manifested itself in the uniform commentary provided by corporate public relations firms that dominate analysis within mass media.

Phil Greaves is a UK based writer/analyst, focusing on UK/US Foreign Policy and conflict analysis in the Middle East post WWII. <http://notthemsmdotcom.wordpress.com/>

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