

Syria: questions must be asked and answered

By [Global Research](#)

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The text below was written after a visit to Damascus over Easter by the author. It was published by ABC Australia as an opinion. The name of the author does not appear

To develop a concerned and responsible understanding of what is happening in Syria today, questions that generally aren't being posed must be.

1. The prominent Egyptian Islamic scholar, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a cleric with a huge following in the Middle East and North Africa and with links to the Muslim Brotherhood, has recently called on Sunni Muslims to rebel against the "Alawite regime" in Syria, "for Arabs to support protesters in Syria". Two chants of demonstrators in Daraa have been, "No Hezbollah. No Iran. Syria for Muslims (read "Sunnis")", and "Send Christians to Beirut and kill Alawis." Syrian friends (mostly Sunnis but some Alawis and Christians as well - if that is relevant) have told me soldiers are being killed in cold blood, government workers as well. One friend who lives on the outskirts of Damascus rang me Easter Sunday to tell me that soldiers had been killed - targeted and shot - in his area and in the nearby military hospital. The brother-in-law of a friend was shot and killed in his car along with his two children and nephew. He wasn't a "human rights activist"; he was an army officer. Are such killings related to Qaradawi's call?

2. Arms are in the hands of many Syrian civilians. (Apparently, armed non-Syrians have also been arrested.) I learnt when I was in Damascus last weekend that there is a lot of confusion as to who is killing demonstrators. One young man I met witnessed a small demonstration in an outlying Damascus suburb at which two people were killed and several injured, but he said no one he spoke to there could say who had shot them. It was a mystery. After the initial problem in Daraa, the President ordered soldiers not to shoot unless they were shot at first. Why do the mainstream western and Arab media keep insisting that the situation is straight-forward: i.e. that the regime is killing peaceful demonstrators? I understand there is a newspaper that is being distributed freely in Kuwait. It presents what it purports to be the side of the demonstrators and demonises the Syrian 'regime'. Who is behind that and why is such a black and white picture being presented?

3. A vast majority of Syrians support President al-Assad and the reforms he has introduced. University students are not involved in the demonstrations in Damascus; it is mainly people from the very poor, outlying suburbs that are involved in the small demonstrations. The reforms are significant and are having an obvious effect on what the Syrian media is presenting and on the talk in the street, for example. Why don't demonstrators give the reforms a chance? How can continued chaos in the country guarantee a better outcome?

4. Syria is the only country which has taken a consistently firm stand against the Israeli

occupation of Palestinian territories, the wars in Gaza and Lebanon. Since 1967, Israel has occupied Syrian land against international law and in defiance of UN resolutions. What are the implications of this? It has been well documented for at least 7 years that powerful people in the United States, people with strong links to Israel, want to “target” Syria – to destabilise the country. Most Syrians say Israel and America, with help from some friends such as Saad Hariri, are behind the current troubles. Could they have a point? (Or do “we” in the west always know best? Do “we” display wisdom and sophistication when we scoff at such “conspiracy theories” and when we infer we are much more sophisticated and knowing than the majority of people in Syria?)

5. For most Syrians, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya TV, and BBC Arabic news have been discredited. At least four Al-Jazeera reporters have resigned in protest at the way the station is presenting the situation in Syria. There is no effort being put into presenting more than one side of the story and there is credible evidence of the presentation of fake phone calls from “witnesses” claiming to be in Syria as well as dodgy video footage purportedly from Syria. A male nurse in Damascus was found by his colleagues to be making calls to Al-Jazeera from the hospital roof, claiming he was a witness in Daraa (news on Syrian TV – 2/5/2011). Wikileaks has recently presented proof that the US has been funding a Syrian opposition group abroad. If the US is targeting Syria how best would it use mainstream media and social networking sites to support its game-plan? What devious strategies might have been devised in operation rooms over the past 7 years?

6. If people are intent on overthrowing what they view as an Alawi regime (it is not!), and they are successful, what might the consequences be? Many people in Syria and Lebanon believe it would inevitably lead to a civil war as bloody and messy as Lebanon’s and Iraq’s. Who would benefit from that, or rather, who would imagine they could benefit from that?

7. Syria is the most secular society in the Middle East, yet in the western media there is virtually no regard given to this and to the threat from extremists. The Christian community in Damascus supports the President and the reforms. There was much written and spoken about the fear that the Muslim Brotherhood would take control of the demonstrations in Egypt. Why isn’t this given the attention it is due in the news about Syria?

8. Many years ago, I was a peaceful protester against Australia’s participation in the Vietnam war and I was arrested once when I handed out leaflets urging young men not to register for national service. I remember being in the minority and we protesters were not given very much respect by the mainstream society or media. People who marched in demonstrations then were a motley lot; there were people who wore Stalin or Mao badges; people who threw bricks through windows and got aggressive in confrontations with the police. Now, in regard to Syria, why is so much credence given to people who speak to the western media or Al-Jazeera etc and who claim they are human rights activists or peaceful demonstrators? Of course there are genuine human rights activists and many many genuine peaceful demonstrators, but it is not as straight forward as the presentation in the western and mainstream Arabic media. Have the warnings of Orwell and Graham Greene been forgotten (“ ref: The Quiet American”)? Have we been lulled into a confident belief that we can’t trust the propaganda from Syria, but we can trust our own on this issue? Can we be confident that we can damn Syrian TV as if there could be no intelligent, responsible people working on Syrian TV programs? I watched a lot of Syrian TV over Easter and was impressed by what I saw, and Syrian friends say they are impressed by the changes; the changes are considerable and meaningful. But of course everything has to be questioned – always. Why is the narrative presented in our news media so simplistic and so seldom

questioned?

9. I have Syrian Australian friends who migrated here and whose children are trapped to some extent in a socially conservative time-lock their parents have maintained because like people in most migrant communities their parents have hung onto the social tenets they brought with them and haven't 'moved on' as people back in Syria have. Is it possible that some people with Syrian backgrounds in Australia, the US and Europe are trapped in a political time-lock of sorts? (This may offend some readers. But it is a question worth considering, I believe. I don't have an answer to it.)

My local Lebanese Australian greengrocer considers these are key questions and has responses to all of them. Why aren't they questions being presented in the western media?

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