

US “Intelligence Assets” leading the Syrian “Opposition”, the Role of the Bilderberg and the CFR

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In a July 12 article for the Guardian’s “Comment is Free” section, Charlie Skelton poses the fundamental question the world’s media does not want asked.

“The Syrian opposition: who’s doing the talking?” is a devastating exposé of the intimate connections between the Syrian opposition and the US, British and French intelligence services, along with top US neo-cons. It traces the formation of the Syrian National Council and the appointment of its leading personnel to long-standing and well-funded plans for regime change in Syria and more generally in the Middle East. These plans date back to at least 2005, and have been funded by Washington in an effort to secure political control of the oil-rich region.

Skelton does not attempt to be comprehensive. He focuses on a few of the most prominent members of the SNC and identifies some of the most vociferous proponents of military intervention as being paid representatives of the Western powers.

Among those routinely cited as “official spokesmen” or “pro-democracy campaigner” is the Paris-based Syrian academic Bassma Kodmani, a member of the executive bureau and head of the SNC’s foreign affairs.

Kodmani is a repeated visitor to the Bilderberg group conference, an organisation of top political figures dedicated to strengthening the links between US and European imperialism and securing their collective global interests under the banner of promoting “Atlanticism.”

In 2005, she worked for the Ford Foundation in Cairo. That year saw a marked deterioration in US-Syria relations, with President George W. Bush contemplating military intervention against Damascus alongside Israel.

In September, Kodmani was made the executive director of the Arab Reform Initiative, funded by the US Council on Foreign Relations and its US/Middle East project—chaired by former national security adviser General Brent Scowcroft.

“Financial oversight” of the project was given to the Centre for European Reform (CER), a British think-tank headed by Lord Kerr, deputy chairman of Royal Dutch Shell.

Kodmani is also a member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, functioning as the executive director of its Arab Reform Initiative.

Radwan Ziadeh, the SNC's director of foreign relations, is a senior fellow at the US Institute of Peace and a signatory to a letter calling for US military intervention alongside former head of the CIA James Woolsey, Karl Rove and other prominent neo-cons. He has acted as an intermediary between the White House and the Syrian opposition since 2005.

Najib Ghadbian, a University of Arkansas political scientist, is a member of the general secretariat of the SNC and is on the advisory board of a Washington-based Syrian Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, along with Ziadeh.

Ausama Monajed of the SNC is the founder of Barada Television, a pro-opposition satellite broadcaster and the former "director of public relations for the London-based Movement for Justice and Development" (MJD). Both are heavily funded by the US State Department, according to WikiLeaks.

Skelton cites some of the many hundreds of millions of dollars channelled into the Syrian opposition from the US and the Gulf States.

Among Monajed's services to Washington was his publishing an official policy statement of the SNC, a document drafted by Michael Weiss of the Henry Jackson Society calling for intervention in Syria. The society is backed by top neo-cons such as William Kristol and Richard Perle.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, whose inflated figures on casualties are constantly cited by the media, turns out to be one man, Rami Abdul Rahman, based in Coventry and a clothes retailer.

Another Henry Jackson Society luminary is Hamza Fakher, described by Nick Cohen of the Observer as "one of the most reliable sources on the crimes the regime's news blackout hides."

The stories he has initiated have been routinely cited as eye-witness reports.

Fakher is the communication manager of Monajed's London-based Strategic Research and Communications Centre and an employee of Barada TV.

Skelton deserves credit for writing so honestly on the network of connections between the Syrian opposition and the US/European military security apparatus. But the fact is that what he exposes will be well known to the research departments of the Guardian, the New York Times, BBC, NBC, CBS, ABC, et al.

None of them are being hoodwinked by anyone. They are willing conduits for imperialist war propaganda who ask no questions of the sources they cite because they do not want to undercut the drumbeat for war.

It is this that accounts for the scathing denunciation of Skelton in the next day's edition of the Guardian by diplomatic editor Julian Borger

"US manipulation of news from Syria is a red herring," the headline declares, "The big picture is clear."

Accusing Skelton of "innuendo," a heavy use of quotation marks to denote skepticism,

“banal prose” and other literary crimes, Borger defends the various intelligence assets identified by Skelton as “people who have devoted a substantial share of their working life studying Syrian society and politics.”

This is a definition so value-free that could be applied to any number of imperialist strategists and spies.

The clear importance of Bassma Kodmani in the SNC hierarchy is simply dismissed, while Skelton is even derided for describing the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) as “a powerful US lobby group,” for being “needlessly sinister”. It is “America’s most prestigious foreign policy talking shop and research centre”, Borger insists.

Borger in fact argues against his own faux-naïf pose. No other foreign policy think tank is more influential than the CFR, and Kodmani is there as a trusted representative of US imperialist interests in the Middle East.

It must be added that Britain’s Socialist Workers Party and its global co-thinkers, the Pabloite United Secretariat, and other pseudo-left outfits demonstrate a similar politically motivated blindness to the true character of the Syrian opposition and its aims.

In June, Khalil Habash complained in the United Secretariat’s International Viewpoint, “The Syrian revolutionary process has since the beginning been met by circumspection by some on the left...accusing it of being a conspiracy of Western imperialist and reactionary regional countries such as Saudi Arabia. This trend has unfortunately continued....”

The SWP’s Simon Assaf was blunter still at the annual Marxism 2012 event. He said that he did not want to dwell on those alleging “conspiracy” due to the involvement of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia or the US because “it would take me too long to calm down”.

It is not simply that these groups refuse to take a critical stance towards the opposition movement and the diverse social forces it represents—as would be necessary for anyone seeking to lay the basis for the development of an independent working class oppositional movement in Syria. Like the Guardian and other mainstream media, they very deliberately conceal the bourgeois, Sunni-sectarian and pro-imperialist character of the movement’s current leadership to conceal great-power imperialist intrigues, the end result of which will be more disastrous than even NATO’s war against Libya.

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