

Syria: Media Disinformation, War Propaganda and the Corporate Media's "Independent Bloggers"

By Phil Greaves 13 December 2013

A glaring example of one of the major pitfalls emerging in supposed "new media" has arisen during the conflict in Syria. Most notably in the form of YouTube blogger, and self-proclaimed weapons expert Eliot Higgins, aka "Brown Moses". The clique of highly ideological [analysts, think-tankers](#) and journalists Higgins' regularly works with and consults – alongside the dubiously funded western NGO's he [receives payment](#) from – provide a stark indication as to the factions within the corporate media circus this supposedly independent blogger is operating in unison with.

Higgins has provided the western corporate media apparatus the opportunity to present its war-propaganda as having a "new media" facade of impartial legitimacy. Yet it is the same capitalistic "old media" apparatus endlessly promoting his work – consisting of scouring Jihadist war-porn and agitprop on YouTube for tidbits that may bolster corporate media narratives – as an invaluable tool in tracking human rights abuses, arms trafficking, and risk-free coverage of fast evolving conflicts. Yet contrary to the innocuous portrayal of an unemployed YouTube addict in Leicester becoming a credible analyst of a conflict in the Middle East; Higgins' blog has been thrust into the foreground not through the benefit of impartiality or public appraisals, but through corporate "[benefactors](#)" with vested interest operating alongside the same "old media" organisations and stenographers.

Bloggers such as Higgins promoting themselves as working from an impartial standpoint are actually nothing of the sort and work in complete unison with mainstream journalists and western NGO's – both in a practical capacity, and an ideological one. As noted at the [Land Destroyer blog](#) and others; Higgins was initially pushed into the limelight by the Guardian's former Middle East editor Brian Whitaker, a "journalist" with the honour of being a lead proponent of almost every [smear campaign](#) and piece of western propaganda directed at the Syrian government, while wholeheartedly promoting the Bin Ladenite "rebels" as secular feminist freedom fighters and repeatedly spouting the liberal opportunist mantra of western military "[action](#)", which realistically means Imperialist military intervention. Whitaker and Higgins played a lead role in bolstering corporate media's fantasy narratives throughout the joint NATO-Al Qaeda insurgency in Libya during 2011, with many of the anti-Gaddafi claims they propagated subsequently proven to be [speculative](#) at best, [outright propaganda](#) at worst.

Furthermore, Whitaker's [promotion](#) of "The Gay Girl in Damascus" is but one embarrassing anecdote within the litany of completely fabricated narratives both he and the Guardian have made efforts to advance, while making equal effort to marginalize and discredit journalism and opinion that contradict western-desired narratives. It was during Whitaker's period of running the Guardian's "Middle East Live blog" – providing daily scripted coverage of the "Arab Spring" in a pseudo-liberal "new media" format – that he and other Guardian journalists first began to promote Higgins' YouTube findings as credible evidence. Regular readers commenting on the Guardian blog quickly recognised the duplicity and close

relationship between Higgins and the Guardian staff, resulting in his propagandistic comments being scrutinised, debunked, and ridiculed on an almost daily basis. Curiously, Whitaker has since left the Guardian and the “MELive” blog has been cancelled due to “staffing shortages” and the ridiculous excuse of a lull in worthwhile coverage. Yet the Guardian’s skewed standpoint on Syria, along with Whitaker and Higgins’ relationship, have remained steadfast.

The working relationship between Higgins and the corporate media became almost uniform during the course of the Syrian conflict; an unsubstantiated anti-Assad, or pro-rebel narrative would predictably form in the corporate media (cluster bombs, chemical weapons, unsolved massacres,) at which point Higgins would jump to the fore with his YouTube analysis in order to bolster mainstream discourse whilst offering the air of impartiality and the crucial “open source” faux-legitimacy. It has become blatantly evident that the “rebels” in both Syria and Libya have made a concerted effort in fabricating YouTube videos in order to incriminate and demonize their opponents while glorifying themselves in a sanitized image. Western media invariably lapped-up such fabrications without question and subsequently built narratives around them – regardless of contradictory evidence or opinion. Yet such media, and more importantly, the specific actors propagating it fraudulently to bolster the flimsiest of western narratives has continued unabated – primarily as a result of the aforementioned “old media” organs endlessly promoting it.

Following award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh’s groundbreaking [essay in the London Review of Books](#), which exposes the Obama administration’s intelligence surrounding the alleged chemical attacks in Ghouta as reminiscent of the Bush administration’s outright lies and fabrications leading to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, Higgins took it upon himself to rush through a rebuttal, published by the establishment media outlet [Foreign Policy magazine](#) – a predictable response as Higgins represents the principal source for the “Assad did it” media crowd. Accordingly, the “old media” stenographers that originally promoted Higgins became the vanguard force pushing his speculative Ghouta theories above Hersh’s – to hilarious [effect](#).

A particularly revealing example of Higgins’ unwillingness to depart from mainstream discourse came shortly after the alleged Ghouta attacks. The findings of a considerable open-source collaborative effort at the [WhoGhouta blog](#) were repeatedly dismissed as ridiculous or unverifiable by Higgins. The bloggers at WhoGhouta drew more or less the same logical, and somewhat scientific conclusions outlined in the Hersh piece, but in *much* greater detail. Yet Higgins chose to ignore WhoGhouta’s findings and instead rely on his own set of assumptions, dubious videos, and an unqualified ex-US soldier that seems determined to defy both logical and scientific reality. The estimated range of the rockets allegedly used in the attack, with the alleged azimuth that pointed to Syrian army launch points breathlessly promoted by Higgins and his patrons at Human Rights Watch (HRW), and of course corporate media, were [convincingly debunked](#) mere weeks after the attack at the WhoGhouta blog, yet Higgins chose to stick to his orchestrated narrative until the bitter end, only revising his wild speculation on rocket range once the obvious became too hard to conceal.

As Higgins is a self-declared advocate of “open source investigative journalism”, it is perplexing that he attempted to marginalize and dismiss the many findings from independent observers and instead concentrated on bolstering the dubious narratives of the US government and western corporate media. Unless of course, he is tied to a particular narrative and desperate to conceal anything that contradicts it.

Predictably, Higgins now claims the Syrian army are indeed capable of firing the alleged rockets from anywhere in the region of Ghouta, no longer is the alleged launch-zone exclusive to the Syrian army’s Republican Guards base; effectively nullifying the original fabrications he relied on to build his earlier accusation alongside HRW.

It is no longer necessary to address the ins and outs of the Ghouta debate, as a comprehensive review by others has already highlighted the strawman nature of Higgins’ feeble refutation of Hersh, (see [here](#).) not to mention the plethora of literature that has effectively demolished the US governments “intelligence” summary and the much-politicised UN report that Higgins originally built his fantasies from. Rather, the focus of this article is the pernicious nature of the “new media” model currently being promoted by Higgins et al, as a credible alternative to the corporate “old media” model. If the corrupt acolytes of “old media” are promoting their own versions of “new media” to the public, then the public aren’t really getting anything “new” apart from a YouTube generation of ill-informed and gullible recruits to the same old systems.

Prominent members of “new media” have invariably been pushed to the foreground of mainstream coverage by the very same corporate media institutions and establishment journalists that the public has rightly become exceedingly sceptical of. It is becoming an accepted normality for the lackeys of “old media” to determine what now represent the figureheads and platforms of “new media”, with large corporate organisations and their Jurassic minions making concerted efforts to raise the profile of, and offer incentives to bloggers who invariably say or write exactly what’s required to bolster the “old media’s” still-dominant narratives.

The complete lack of historical materialism, geopolitical insight, [critical distance](#), logical reasoning and dialectics, and crucially, an open political position, afforded by simplistically narrow-framed blogs such as Higgins’ gives the corporate media class a malleable tool it can easily manipulate to bolster its propaganda.

The Ghouta debate again provides an example of the way in which narrow frames of reference are manipulated by corporate media to subvert logical reasoning and the lack of solid evidence. Higgins’ simplistic narrative conveniently dismisses the fundamental argument that the Syrian government – winning its fight against an [internationally orchestrated](#) and [funded](#) terrorist insurgency – had nothing to gain from using chemical weapons, and everything to lose, while the rebels in Ghouta found themselves in the exact opposite conundrum. Motive generally tends to be a sticking point in a court of law, but not even an afterthought in the puerile “courts” of the corporate media and its underlings. Higgins’ argument also dismisses the fact that prior to the August 21st attack, it was the Syrian government that invited the UN inspection team to investigate the use of chemical weapons, and then supposedly launched a massive chemical weapons attack a mere 15 miles from the UN teams

base. Such logical reasoning is afforded no space in the conspiracy theories of Higgins and the corporate media, instead the discourse is filled with obfuscation, misleading tangents and speculation.

The dynamic of young, supposedly independent minded bloggers and writers being co-opted by corporate media is by no means a new dynamic, as the self-proclaimed “leftist” [Owen Jones can happily attest to](#). Since Jones’ rise to fame and employment with the corporate-owned establishment newspaper the Independent, he has become the archetypal Fabian opportunist, preaching a reform-based bourgeois social democracy, while duplicitously portraying himself as some sort of socialist Marxist. Jones now deems it reasonable, no doubt civilised, that he should “no-platform” speakers at western anti-War events in order to marginalize anyone accused of having an unacceptable opinion to that of the dominant media class of corporate vultures. Jones has become a caricature of himself, more eager to spend his time promoting the UK Labour party on war-mongering podiums of the BBC (for a fee of course) and appease the corporate stenographers and celebrities he is surrounded by, than to hear – or, heaven forbid, sit beside – a nun from a war-zone in the Middle East that disagrees with western prescriptions and corporate propaganda.

To avoid the pitfalls outlined above, a totally new model of journalism is required, a model that is not designed, *or even accepted*, by the current dominant corporate media class. A model in which writers and journalists have the space and freedom to express their opinions in an open and forthright manner – discarding the charade of objectivity. A model in which publicly oriented media is free from the chains of corporate power, advertising, celebrity subversions, and, more importantly, monetary incentive.

Thus, the question remains: in a capitalist incentive-driven world, is journalistic freedom and honesty even attainable? Or is the omnipotent corporate-media-system and its inherent corruption an inevitable side-effect of the sickness that is Capitalism?

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<http://notthemsmdotcom.wordpress.com/>

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