# The Amateur Computerist

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**Table of Contents**

Netizen Journalism and International Relations. . . . . Page 1
Netizens Expose Media Fabrications and Distortions. . . . . Page 3
The United Nations, China and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen . . . . . Page 14
Korea and the Era of the Netizen. . . . . Page 26
Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the United Nations. . . . . Page 37
UN Role in Korea 1947-1953: Is it Being Repeated? . . . . . Page 69

## Netizen Journalism and International Relations

This issue of the *Amateur Computerist* brings together some of the papers and presentations about the emergence and development of the netizen and netizen journalism that were presented by Ronda Hauben and Jay Hauben on a trip to China and South Korea in the summer of 2012.

The impetus for the trip was a request by their colleague Yunlong that they present a panel about the UN and international relations at the 2012 Annual Conference on International Relations and Political Science held every year in Beijing in July.

The panel they proposed, which was accepted for the conference, was titled, “The UN is a Dilemma.” One of the papers for this panel “The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the United Nations” is included in this issue as is the talk “The UN Role in Korea 1947-1953: Is it Being Repeated Today?”

Once they were in Beijing for the conference, Ronda and Jay received invitations from several other organizations to give presentations about Netizens and the Internet and its impact on China. These invitations included one from a research institute at the Chinese Academy of Science, another from a research institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, and an invitation to give a presentation about netizen journalism at a cultural event sponsored by media group April Media.

The articles in this issue, "China and Syria: Netizens Expose Media Fabrications and Distortions" and "The United Nations, China and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen" are versions of the talks given at the cultural event sponsored by April Media on the last day of the visit to Beijing. These talks were followed by a lively question and answer and discussion period.

From China, Ronda and Jay went to South Korea. There they were invited to give a presentation on "Korea and the Era of the Netizen" at the Hope Institute, an NGO in Seoul. At the end of the presentation, the hosts surprised them with a birthday cake with 15 candles to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the print edition of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet.*

The many invitations to speak about netizens and netizen journalism and the enthusiastic responses to the talks in Beijing and Seoul demonstrated the interest in the development of a consciousness about the important impact that netizens are having in Northeast Asia. The concept of netizen as it was originally conceived of in 1993 by Michael Hauben has continued to spread both online and offline around the world. This is indeed a tribute to the recognition by Michael that the Internet is not just a technology but, as importantly, it gives raise to the emergence and empowerment of the netizen and to the better world the Net and Netizen will make possible.

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[Editor's Note: The year 2012 marks the 15th Anniversary of the publication of the English and Japanese print editions of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* by

Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben. To help celebrate this anniversary Ronda and Jay Hauben participated in a salon on July 22 in Beijing which launched the April Salon. What follows is the presentation by Jay and an edited excerpt from the presentation made by Ronda.]

# China and Syria: Netizens Expose Media Fabrications and Distortions*

by Jay Hauben
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My story is about netizen activity in China. But to be sure there is netizen activity in virtually every society. I will add an epilogue about the Syrian crisis. Netizen activity takes many forms. Anti-CNN and my epilogue about Syria are examples of netizens as watchdogs over the mainstream and online media. Anti-CNN is also an example of the value of discussion forums.

Netizen as a vision of something new emerging and as a concept of scholarly interest was first analyzed in the research of Michael Hauben at Columbia University starting in 1992. Michael Hauben wrote that he became aware of "a new social institution, an electronic commons developing."[1] He found social and political issues being discussed with seriousness in this online community which the conventional media and his school courses rarely if ever covered or covered only from a narrow angle.

Hauben found that there were people online who actively use and take up to defend public communication. They support open communication and oppose disruptive online behavior. He recognized this as a form of network citizenship. At the time, a net user who defended the net was often referred to as a 'net.citizen'. Hauben contracted net.citizen into 'netizen' to express something new. It is an online, non-geographically based, social identity and net citizenship. He wrote, "My research demonstrated that there were people active as members of the network, which the words net citizen did not precisely represent. The word citizen suggests a geographic or national definition of social membership. The word Netizen reflects the new non-geographically based social

membership.…"[2]

The online self-identity and practice of netizenship spread around the world. Two uses of the word netizen emerged. To be clear, not all net users are netizens. In 1995 Michael Hauben wrote: "Netizens are not just anyone who comes online. Netizens are especially not people who come online for individual gain or profit. They are not people who come to the Net thinking it is a service. Rather they are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place."[3]

It is necessary to distinguish between all net users and those users who participate constructively concerning social and political issues in forums and chat rooms or on their blogs and microblogs. This second category of net users comes online for public rather than simply for personal and entertainment purposes. They act as citizens of the net and are the users I feel deserve the name netizen.

My usage is that of Michael and similar to that of Haiqing Yu who writes, "I use 'netizen' in a narrow sense to mean 'Net plus citizen' or 'citizen on the Net.' Netizens are those who use the Internet as a venue for exercising citizenship through rational public debates on social and political issues of common concern."[4] I add, also, that netizens are not only 'citizens on the net' but also 'citizens of the net' signifying those who actively contribute to the development and defense of the net as a global communications platform.

With this concept of netizen, I want to argue that anti-CNN was a netizen activity and prototype of the watchdog function that netizens are beginning to play in China and around the world.

On March 14, 2008, Tibetan demonstrators in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region in China, turned violent. A Canadian tourist and the one or two foreign journalists who witnessed the situation put online photos, videos and descriptions documenting the ethnically targeted violence of the rioters against citizens and property.[5] That was even before the Chinese media started to report it. The Chinese media framed the story as violence against Han Chinese and Muslim Chinese fomented by the Tibetan government in exile. Much of the mainstream

international media like BBC, VOA, and CNN framed the violence as the result of discriminatory Chinese rule and Chinese police brutality.

Wide anger was expressed by many Chinese aboard when they discovered that some of the media in the U.S., Germany, France, and the U.K., were using photos and videos from clashes between police and pro-Tibetan independence protestors not in China but in Nepal and India to support that media's claim of violence by Chinese police. One poster wrote, "Xizang terrorists raided Lhasa (Lhasa), they killed more than 10 innocent people and destroyed others' properties. But Western media called such a terror a 'peaceful' protest. Ridiculous, isn't it? Many Western media simply say: People died in the protest. This implicitly tells their audience or readers that Chinese government killed protests. Do they dare mention who died? who attacked whom? and who killed whom? Amazing, isn't it? Other than that, they distorted the facts by using pictures from violence in other countries and commented as what happened in China." The poster followed his post with links to 15 examples of distortions.[6]

A digital slide show was put online which contained a narrated presentation (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas&feature=related)[7] of 11 mislabeled photos inappropriate for the articles with which they appeared. It spread widely in cyberspace in and outside China. The slide show contains some of the photos that were put online to show the distortions and false narrative of many international mainstream media. Very crudely, the major media used photos from elsewhere to support their false story of Chinese police brutality in Lhasa in March 2008.

Within a few days of the appearance of the inaccurate reports, Rau


**Figure 1** Annotated screenshot of the German Channel N24.

Jin a recent Tsinghua University graduate launched the anti-CNN website (http://www.anti-cnn.com). He explained that after being part of netizen anger and discussion, he wanted to "speak out our thoughts and let the westerners learn about the truth."[8]

The top page of anti-CNN featured articles, videos and photos documenting some of the alleged distortions in the coverage of the Lhasa events. The website also had forum sections first in Chinese then also in English.

The organizers set as the goal of anti-CNN to overcome media bias in the Western media by fostering communication between Chinese netizens and netizens outside of China so that the people of the world and of China could have accurate knowledge about each other. They wrote on their website, "We are not against the Western media, but against the lies and fabricated stories in the media."[9] Anti-CNN was chosen as the site name, Qi Hanting, one of the organizers said, "because CNN is the media superpower. It can do great damage so it must be watched and challenged when it is wrong."[10] But the site was not limited to countering errors in the reporting of CNN. It invited submissions that documented bias or misrepresentations of China in the global media.

Rau Jin quickly received from net users hundreds of offers of help to find examples of media distortions. He gathered a team of 40 volunteers to monitor the submissions for factualness and to limit emotional threads. Rau Jin and his group decided on some rules. Name-calling or attacks on individuals or groups were to be deleted. Emotional posts were not allowed to have follow-up comments.

Forum discussions were started on the topics: "Western Media Bias," "The Facts of Tibet" and "Modern China." In the first five days the site attracted 200,000 visits many from outside of China. At its maximum, the site received millions of daily hits. Over time, serious threads contained debates between Han Chinese and both Westerners and Tibetan Chinese and Uyghur Chinese trying to show each other who they were and where they differ or where they agree.

Many visitors from outside China posted on the anti-CNN English forum. Some expressed their criticism of Chinese government media censorship. In the responses to such criticism, some Chinese posters acknowledged such censorship but argued (1) it was easy to circumnavi-

gate, (2) that all societies have their systems of bias or censorship and (3) that netizens everywhere must dare to think for themselves and get information from many sources. One netizen with the alias *kylin* wrote, "I can say free media works the same way as less-free media. So what's most important? The people I'd say — …. If people dare to doubt, dare to think on their own, do not take whatever comes to them, then we'll have a clear mind, not easily be fooled. I can say, if such people exist, then should be Chinese… the least likely to be brainwashed, when have suffered from all those incidents, cultural revolution, plus a whole long history with all kinds of tricks."[11]

Often there are expressions of nationalist emotions in Chinese cyberspace, for example calls for boycotting Japanese or French products. After the riot in Lhasa, there was an upsurge of nationalist defense of China including on anti-CNN. At least some moderators on anti-CNN however were opponents of nationalism, arguing that it is a form of emotionalism and needs to be countered by rational discourse and the presentation of facts and an airing of all opinions. Moderators often answered Chinese nationalists with admonitions to "calm down and present facts." While nationalist sentiment and love of country and anger appeared often on the anti-CNN forums, the opportunity for a dialogue across national and ethnic barriers is an expression of the internationalism characteristic of netizens.

Chinese citizens in general know that the mainstream Chinese media have a long history as a controlled and propaganda press. On the other hand, there was a wide spread assumption among people in China that the mainstream international media like CNN and BBC are a more reliable source of information and alternative viewpoints. The wide-spread online exposure of distortions and bias in major examples of the international mainstream media called into question for many Chinese people their positive expectation about Western media. The exposures also attracted the attention of others who questioned whether the so called Western mainstream media is any less a propaganda or political media than the Chinese mainstream media.

Over its first year, the anti-CNN website had become a significant news portal. After a year, there was a debate to determine its future. Some of the founders left. The site continued with separate forum

sections in Chinese and English but became less focused than it was before on exposing media bias.

Today, the April Media Group founded by Rau Jin is a continuation of anti-CNN. It has Chinese and English language websites both known as M4 (http://www.m4.cn/, http://www.4thmedia.org/). Recently M4 had its comment section closed while the Chinese government decided how it would deal with a major political scandal.

For me the special significance of anti-CNN was that it took up the important task of a media watchdog, but especially a watchdog over the most powerful media like CNN and BBC. In an article "The Computer as a Democratizer"[12] Michael Hauben argued for the crucial role in a society of a watchdog press. In every society, major sectors of the media serve the current holders of power. Now, with the Internet, there is an emerging media and journalism which tries to serve society by watching and criticizing the abuses of those with power. Anti-CNN provided for the whole world an alternative to the established media which was distorting the truth about the Lhasa riot. The net users who launched anti-CNN took for themselves a public and international mission, using the net to watch critically the main international media. In the process there was discussion and debate on difficult social and political questions. They and those from China and around the world who take up the exposures and discussion and debate are examples for me of netizens.

I want to add a short epilogue to the story of anti-CNN. This is about Syria.

Some time in early March 2011, protest demonstrations in Dara'a in Southern Syria were given a violent component. On March 17 or 18, 2011 armed people attacked policemen in Dara'a, killing seven. Media reports said at least four other people were killed at that time[13]. The Syrian state media framed the story as "armed gangs attacking security forces and public property." Western and Gulf satellite media quickly framed the story that "the Syrian government is killing its own people."

This time there was very early a massive use of videos and photos purporting to document the "crimes of the Syrian government," not only in or on the Western and Gulf satellite media, but also on websites and facebook and Youtube and with tweeted links. As in the case of Tibet,

many net users realized that much of this so called documentation was suspicious. Using online search engines, original sources were found and posted to prove that many supposed “crimes of the Syrian government” were distortions and fabrication. Often crimes were traced to the armed opposition itself.


**Figure 2** Wounds from an explosion in New York City posted online labeled as the result of a S government attack on Syrian protestors.

I did a brief online search using a search engine and in microblogs and facebook on the phrase 'Syria Distortions.' I found net users and groups in the U.S., Tunisia, Palestine, Syria and elsewhere who were able to show that many of the videos and photos were from many places other than Syria. At blogs like Tunisian Quest for Truth and Uprooted Palestinians[14] and on their related facebook pages I found exposures of online media distortions that were very similar to those done at the beginning of anti-CNN. These sites also turned up as links sent out as tweets and the photo exposures on these sites then also appeared on many websites. The photos were found to be from the Civil War in Lebanon, from gang murders in Mexico, from Israeli atrocities in Palestine, rebel crimes in Libya, but they were all labeled as Syrian government atrocities. Some were found to be photos of mass demon-


**Figure 3** Photo of pro-government demonstration presented as an anti-government demonstra adding an extra star to the flag.

strations in support of the Syrian government doctored to claim these were in support of the armed uprising.

I found an ongoing online war between the fabricators and the exposers. The exposures often attract a set of comments supporting the effort to have an accurate narrative. But I have not yet found where the exposures have been turned into discussion forums as happened on anti-CNN.

In my short search I also found the website Moon of Alabama.[15] On that site a detailed exposure appeared when the U.S. Government distributed satellite photos claiming to show military shelling of the city of Homs. Moon of Alabama looked at Google Maps and Google Earth satellite photos to demonstrate for example that some of the satellite photos were of a Syrian military training base not of shelling of the city of Homs. Similarly the blogger argued that each of the claims by the U.S. government about these photos was false. The same blogger also viewed a video purported to be a one hour live video cast from the shelling of the city of Homs. The blogger wrote a script to guide viewers so that the level of fabrication was apparent.

In addition to the research bloggers who find and expose fabrications and distortions, there is a growing number of journalists, websites and news sources which provided an alternative account of the crisis in Syria and a critique of the Western and Gulf state media narrative about Syria. Among these are the Center for Research on Globalization, Voltairenet, Syria360, Russia Today (RT), Prensa Latina from Cuba, to name a few.

A serious analytic, research journalism with a public purpose is emerging which attempts to give a solid base so net users can arrive at an accurate understanding of crises and situations like that in Syria. Ronda Hauben calls such journalism ‘netizen journalism’.

My conclusion is that the vision of netizens becoming more and more a force in society continues to be relevant and powerful. The net continues to empower people toward a greater participation in more and more aspects of their societies. As with the anti-CNN website and with the opening of an alternative channel of information, news and analysis in the Syria crisis, netizens are becoming a force not only in domestic politics but also in international politics.

Notes:

1. “Preface: What is a netizen” in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, IEEE Computer Society Press, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997, p. ix. Also, an earlier version is online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.xpr.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. “From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of post-Mao China” in *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 16 (2), June 2006, page 304. Online at: http://unsw.academia.edu/HaiqingYu/Papers/849981/From_active_audience_to_media_citizenship_The_case_of_post-Mao_China
5. See for example the blog entry by Kadfly, March 15, 2008 http://kadfly.blogspot.com/2008/03/lhasa-burning.html, (access restrictive), the report on March 15 by Al Jezeera http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfnBVKrzX6Y, and the video posted on YouTube by cali2882 on March 15, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZLzKBvvGMg. There was also a reporter for *The Economist*, James Miles, who was in Lhasa and described on March 20 the riots in a CNN interview as ‘ethnically-targeted violence’ and the Chinese police response as gradual and cautious. See, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-03-20/world/tibet.miles.interview_1_tibetans-ethnic-groups-lhasa?_s=PM:WORLD
6. See for example post by FIA_cn, March 23, 2008, “Who Lie about Xizang (Tibet) Violence and How!” at: http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/archive/index.php/t-130727-p-6.html
7. “Riot in Tibet: True face of western media” posted by dionysos615 on YouTube on March 19, 2008 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas&feature=related.
8. Quoted in *China Daily*, April 2, 2008, http://www.chindaily.com.cn/china/2008-04/02/content_6587120_2.htm
9. Quoted in: http://jmsc.edublogs.org/2008/04/03/chinese-netizens-war-against-western-media/.
10. Interview with anti-cnn webmaster Qi Hanting, April 19, 2008, translated from Chinese. See Ronda Hauben, “Netizens Defy Western Media Fictions of China” http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=382523&rel_no=1
11. http://www.anti-cnn/forum/en/thread-2316-1-1.html
12. Online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x18.
13. See, May 1, 2011, The Center for Research on Globalization in video at: http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24576 and May 3 article at: http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24591.
14. Tunisians Quest for Truth

http://tunisianquestfortruth.wordpress.com/ and
Uprooted Palestinians http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.com/.
15. http://www.moonofalabama.org/

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*This presentation was accompanied by slides which can be seen at:
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/j-china2012-april-cafe.ppt

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# The United Nations, China and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen

by Ronda Hauben
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[This is an updated and edited excerpt from a talk given in Beijing in July 2012 at the April Salon. Please contact Ronda if you are interested in a copy of the longer talk.*]

## Introduction

I am happy to be here today and to accept Rao Jin's invitation to make one of the first presentations at April Café and Salon.

The title of my talk is "The United Nations, China and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen."

As Jay mentioned in his talk today, this year, 2012 is the 15th anniversary of the publication of the English and the Japanese print editions of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet.*

To mark this occasion I wanted to try to understand the significance of this anniversary with respect to ongoing development of the Internet and the Netizen. Coming to China this year was an impetus to review my previous visits to China and the interesting events I was able to take part in related to netizens during these visits.

In 2005 when I first came to Beijing, it was because Beijing was the

host of the International Congress on the History of Science. At the conference I presented a paper on "The International and Scientific Origins of the Internet and the Emergence of the Netizens." At the time there was a lot of new construction going on in Beijing and the city appeared to be new and developing. It appeared to be an appropriate place to present a talk on the importance of Internet development. With the continuing development of the Internet the phenomenon of the netizens was becoming more important to understand.

My second trip to Beijing was in April 2008 when I was invited to give a talk at the Internet Society of China. In my talk I asked the question "Is this is a new Age, the Age of the Netizen?" Also during this trip I was invited to give a talk on "the Global Media and the Role of Netizens In Determining the News." This talk was for a journalism class at Tsinghua University. On the day the talk was scheduled, there was a meeting between students at Tsinghua University and several journalists from the International Federation of Journalists. The students at Tsinghua University were angry about the Western media coverage of China. They told the journalists their complaints. The journalists seemed surprised and found it difficult to respond. In the process I met students who were part of the Anti-CNN web site that was created to challenge the falsifications about China that were then appearing in the Western press.

One of the reasons for my next trip, in September 2009 was to participate in a Netizens' Day event sponsored by the Internet Society of China. This Netizens Festival Day was observed on September 14, 2009.

For this Netizen day event, a stage was set up in front of the CCTV Tower. I was invited to present background on the development of the Netizen. I gave a short introduction about the discovery of the emergence of the Netizens. This was presented in English with a Chinese translation and the event is captured on Youku.

I described how in 1992-1993, Michael Hauben who was then a Columbia University student, sent out a set of questions across the networks asking users about their experiences online. He was surprised to find that not only were many of those who responded to his questions interested in what the Net made possible for them, but also they were

interested in spreading the Net and in exploring how it could make a better world possible. Based on his research Michael wrote his article "The Net and Netizens."

The netizen, Michael recognized, was the emergence of a new form of citizen. This was a citizen who was using the power made possible by the Net for a public purpose, and who was not limited by geographical boundaries. The Net for Michael was a new social institution and the discovery of the emergence of the netizen was the special contribution that he made to the field of network study.

The first Netizen day event held in China was the first official recognition of the netizen anywhere in the world. It was a celebration to honor the fact that the phenomenon of the netizen continues to develop and spread and to be recognized as a new and important achievement of our times. It was fitting that it was in China with its many millions of netizens pioneering the use of the Internet that there is a day to celebrate Netizens.

When I returned to New York in 2009 after my visit to China, I went to an event at the Chinese Mission to the UN. On the way into the Mission, there was a rack with magazines about China. A magazine in the rack caught my attention. It was the July 5, 2009 edition of the magazine *NewsChina* The title of the issue was "The Netizens' Republic of China."

The magazine was filled with articles documenting the impact of the Net and Netizens on what is happening in China. It presented several examples of netizens speaking out in discussions in online discussion groups and forums. In an article titled "Netizens, the New Watchdogs," the writer, Yu Xiaodong wrote, "It is the newly emerging Internet media, in particular, citizen journalism that has filled the need to kindle political discussion in China leading many to conclude that Internet media has become the mainstream itself rather than a peripheral form of communication."

Based on these experiences I wrote an article with the title "China in the Era of the Netizen." In the article I explained my sense that something significant is happening in China. Beijing, I wrote, was being developed as a world class city with the benefit of contributions made possible by the Internet and by netizens. "So perhaps a special character-

istic of Beijing has to do with the emergence of the Netizen." The *NewsChina* issue of the magazine helped to clarify that there were those in China who also recognized that netizens were crucial actors in the development of China.

I have had subsequent visits to China, in which I have been encouraged to give talks about Netizens and about the development and spread of the Internet and its potential impact on China.

What seems significant about these experiences is that there is interest and support for netizen development in China that I have not found elsewhere in the world.

This introduction brings me to the subject of the talk I want to give today. This talk is about a problem with the mainstream western media and how the Internet and netizens are creating a needed alternative to solve this problem.

## Part I The UN and General Mood's Missing Report on Conflicting Accounts of the Houla Massacre

The Houla massacre occurred in Syria on May 25, 2012. This was but a few days before Kofi Annan, who was at the time the joint Arab League-UN envoy, was scheduled to visit Syria.

Immediately after the massacre, there was a media campaign in much of the Western media to blame the Syrian government for the deaths. There were 108 deaths reported which included men, women and children. A short time after the massacre, an alternative account was made available by a Russian online media group, Anna News.[1] The day following the massacre, a news team for this online site visited the area where the massacre had occurred. Their report appeared on a number of alternative news sites soon after the massacre.

The reports from the Anna News team, and other netizen news reports, challenged the mainstream Western media claims that the Syrian government was responsible for the killings.

Similarly, the Syrian government conducted a preliminary investigation. They provided witnesses that the massacre was carried out by armed insurgents and criminal elements.

The mainstream Western media accounts of the massacre (and some

Arab satellite tv channels) have mainly presented what they claim is happening from the point of view of the armed opposition in Syria. The armed oppositions account of events demonizes the Syrian government and campaigns for foreign intervention. There have been a number of instances when the accounts from the armed opposition have been shown to be false.

Differing from the reports in the mainstream Western media is information presented by the Syrian government. Also there is the information in the alternative media that I refer to as netizen journalism. Netizen journalism exposes distortions and misrepresentations in the news coverage provided by the mainstream Western media, and does the investigation required to present an accurate narrative. For example, in the aftermath of the Houla massacre, a number of articles documenting the role of the armed insurgents in carrying out the Houla massacre appeared on alternative media sites. Similarly there were articles comparing what had happened in Houla with media campaigns advocating foreign intervention in the Yugoslavian conflict in the 1990s. Also there were articles considering what the motive was behind the massacre and the clues this provided toward determining who was responsible.

I want to propose that this form of alternative media is setting up a communication channel different from that of the mainstream Western media.

What has been interesting has been to consider not only the two different channels that these different forms of news represent, but also to look at how different actors at the UN relate to these different communication channels.

In April, the UN Security Council authorized a mission of 300 unarmed observers to monitor what was happening in Syria and to try to encourage a cease fire between the conflicting parties. This mission was called the UN Supervisory Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). When the Houla massacre first occurred, UNSMIS observers went to investigate the massacre. The initial response of UNSMIS was that there were presented to them two views of what had occurred and who was responsible. UNSMIS said it was not yet possible to make a determination which was accurate and which was a falsification.

The UN Security Council issued a press statement after the Houla massacre requesting that UNSMIS do an investigation.[2] In June, Major General Robert Mood, the commander of UNSMIS told journalists that a report had been prepared and submitted to UN headquarters.

In the article "General Mood: 'Two Versions' of the Houla Massacre," John Rosenthal writes, "At the June 15 press conference General Mood went on to say that the mission had assembled a report about the massacre, including the details of witness interviews and that this report had been submitted to UN headquarters in New York. This raises an obvious question," writes Rosenthal, "Why has this report not been rendered public?"[3] Rosenthal does a service pointing to General Mood's June 15 press conference in Damascus. The press conference is online only in a video format. I have transcribed the part of the press conference where General Mood talks about the report on the Houla massacre that he says was given to UN headquarters.[4]

Describing the investigation by UNSMIS into the Houla massacre and the report UNSMIS submitted to UN headquarters, General Mood tells journalists:

> "The statement we issued after el Houla is still valid. Which means we have been there with an investigating team. We have interviews, interviewed locals with one story, and we have interviewed locals that has another story.
>
> The circumstances leading up to el Houla and the detailed circumstances, the facts related to the incident itself, still remains unclear to us.
>
> We have put this together, the facts that we (can) could establish by what we saw on the ground. We have put together the statements, the witness interviews and we have sent that as a report to UN headquarters, New York.
>
> And then the assessment on what is the way forward. Will there be a different investigation? [This] is a matter for headquarters in this context. But if we are asked, obviously we are on the ground, and could help facilitate that."

According to General Mood's statement during this press conference, UNSMIS provided UN headquarters with a report on the Houla massacre. This report included the facts on the ground that UNSMIS

was able to establish, and also witness statements and interviews from "locals with one story" and from "locals that have another story." This report, according to General Mood, was not able to establish "the circumstances leading up to el Houla, and the detailed circumstances, the facts related to the incident itself," as these still remained unclear to UNSMIS.

But General Mood explained that if there was to be "a different investigation," UNSMIS was "on the ground and could facilitate that."

UN Security Council members have said that the Security Council did not receive the report nor does it appear that there was general knowledge at the Security Council that this report presented two conflicting accounts of what happened and that UNSMIS, which was on the ground in Syria at the time, was able to help conduct a more expansive investigation to determine who was responsible for the massacre.

The question is raised as to why the UN Secretariat did not make the UNSMIS report available to the Security Council? Why didn't the UN pursue the course of a further investigation into the circumstances leading up to the Houla massacre and the facts related to the incident itself by taking up the offer that General Mood made to facilitate such an investigation?

When journalists asked the Secretary-Generals spokesperson what happened to Mood's report and why it wasn't given to the Security Council, the spokesman told the press the report had been given to various members of the UN Secretariat. But as several people at the UN and online have asked, "Why not to the Security Council?"

One of the original purposes for the UNSMIS mission, according to Kofi Annan, was "to see what is going on" so as to be able to "change the dynamics."[5]

This past April, outlining the need for UNSMIS, Annan said, "We continue to be hampered by the lack of verified information in assessing the situation. We need eyes and ears on the ground. This will provide the incontrovertible basis the international community needs to act in an effective and unified manner, increasing the momentum for a cessation of violence to be implemented by all sides." This "eyes and ears on the ground" function was to be filled by UNSMIS. UNSMIS was deployed

to Syria and was on the ground at the time of the Houla Massacre and was able to do an investigation.

Yet when UNSMIS submitted a report to UN headquarters documenting its investigation, it was withheld from the Security Council. Though Ban Ki-Moon's spokesperson acknowledged that the report was received, the report was not given to the Security Council. It was not made available to the media and the public. Thus it could not be part of the eyes and ears on the ground that Annan said was needed. One can only wonder about the fact that shortly after this report was received by the Secretariat, General Mood left UNSMIS, and not long after that, UNSMIS was ended. The UNSMIS report on Houla did not blame the Syrian government for the massacre, but instead presented two conflicting views of the massacre and offered to facilitate a further investigation.

At least some Security Council members indicated that they wanted the kind of information General Mood explained was in his report. For example, on June 4, at a press conference to mark the beginning of the Chinese Presidency of the Security Council for the month of June 2012, China's Ambassador Li Baodong, referring to the Houla massacre, said[6]: "Now we have different stories from different angles. Now we have the story from the Syrian government, and from the opposition parties, and from different sources. Since the Security Council has a team…on the ground," he said referring to UNSMIS, "We want to see first-hand information from our own people." He hoped this would make it possible to put the different pieces of information together and to "come to our own conclusion with our own judgment."

The acknowledgment by China's UN Ambassador that there were different views of what had happened in the Houla massacre and that there was a need to get accurate information from an on the ground investigation was an important step for a member of the Security Council to make. This challenged mainstream media claims that their account was the only account of what was happening in Syria. The UNSMIS report was the kind of additional information the Chinese Ambassador indicated he was seeking.

The fact remains, however, that the report from UNSMIS that General Mood presented to Ban Ki-Moon's UN headquarters was

withheld from the Security Council, the press and the public. Instead of the UNSMIS report, and any in-depth independent investigation conducted by the UN, which General Mood said UNSMIS could facilitate, something different happened. On August 3, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the government of Syria for the violence in Syria. In his speech in support of the resolution, Abdallah Y Al-Mouallini, the Ambassador representing Saudi Arabia at the UN, blamed the Syrian government for the Houla massacre.

Similarly, in August, the Geneva based UN Human Rights Council issued a report blaming the Syrian government for the violence in Syria. The Human Rights Council made no effort to reconcile the conflicting facts or interviews submitted by UNSMIS to the UN, nor any effort to take up the offer made by General Mood that UNSMIS would provide on the ground assistance to do the needed investigation. The report of the Human Rights Council inaccurately claimed that[7]: "The lack of access significantly hampered the commissions ability to fulfill its mandate. Its access to Government officials and to members of the armed and security forces was negligible. Importantly, victims and witnesses inside the country could not be interviewed in person."

Such a statement by the Human Rights Council misrepresented the fact that indeed the UN had had observers on the ground in Syria, and that those observers not only gave a report to the UN, but also said that they could facilitate a more thorough investigation if the UN desired to do so. Hence the claims of the Human Rights Council that the UN was unable to conduct an investigation "inside the country" are contrary to General Mood's statement to the press.

Then in August the Security Council, without being able to review the UNSMIS report or to consider the need for the additional investigation that General Mood said was possible in order to determine who was responsible for the Houla massacre, allowed the mandate authorizing UNSMIS to expire. Though there was an effort by some nations on the Council to introduce a resolution to extend UNSMIS, others on the Council refused to do so unless Syria was penalized, even though the issue of who was responsible for the violence against civilians, as had happened at Houla, had not been determined by the Security Council nor by any other UN body through an UNSMIS facilitated and impartial

investigation.

Commenting on the Security Council action withdrawing UNSMIS from Syria, Archbishop Mario Zenari, the Vatican Nuncio to Syria, said that the withdrawal of UN forces from Syria was a "sad blow. Three or four months ago, there was a good bit of hope for their mission, and now their departure plunges us back into this reality…."[8]

His disappointment is understandable. The Annan plan was based on having eyes and ears on the ground as a way to discourage violence against civilians. The failure of the UN to make the UNSMIS report on Houla available to the Security Council and to the public, and to recognize the need for a more extensive pursuit of the facts of what happened in Houla, was a failure dooming the Annan mission in Syria.

Commenting on what she referred to as "fake" news reports about what is happening in Syria, Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross, a Superior of the community at the monastery of St James the Mutilated in Qara, Syria, explained that the news reports were "forged with only one side emphasized."[9] In her comments to the Irish Times, she included a criticism of UN reports that she said, were "one sided and not worthy of that organization." Though she didn't specify any particular reports, one would not be surprised if it were particularly the Human Rights Council Report she had in mind.

In a paper titled, "The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the United Nations" presented in July at the International Relations and Political Science Conference in Beijing, I documented more of the particularities of netizen journalism in the media war at the UN over Syria.[10] There have been many articles and videos posted on a number of web sites challenging the Western mainstream media version of the events in Houla and providing facts that make a convincing case that the massacre was carried out by armed insurgents and local criminals.

With these articles acting as a catalyst, the mainstream German newspaper, the Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung published two articles documenting how the armed insurgency was responsible for the Houla massacre. The titles of the articles translated into English were "Syrian Rebels Committed Houla Massacre" and "On the Houla Massacre: The Extermination."

In my paper on "The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War

at the UN," I also consider the netizen journalism coverage of two other examples of conflicts that were under consideration by the Security Council and consider the impact on the Security Council of the netizen journalism on these issues.

## II Conclusion

The problem raised by this preliminary presentation concerns the importance of facilitating an accurate channel of communication about the conflicts under consideration by the Security Council.

In the example of the Syrian conflict, the fact that General Mood's report on the Houla massacre could be withheld from the Security Council, and UNSMIS ended by the UN Security Council without any consideration of the issues raised by the report, represents a serious dilemma. This indicates that there is a problem with the communication channels at the UN. There is a problem with the integrity of these communication channels. This is an example of what happens when a communication channel can be blocked.

In a press conference held in March of 2011 when China assumed the month long rotating Security Council presidency, Ambassador Li Baodong referred to the international media as the "16th member of the Security Council."[11]

While Ambassador Li Baodong was then referring to the mainstream media, it is important to recognize that there is a new form of journalism emerging. This new form of journalism is being created by netizens dedicated to doing the research and analysis to expose the interests and actions that are too often hidden from view in the reporting of the news. As a result of the failure at the UN to provide the Security Council with the conflicting facts of the UNSMIS investigation and to take up the UNSMIS offer to help carry out a more substantial investigation on the ground, an impartial investigation, the ability of the Security Council, and ultimately the UN, to determine what is an accurate narrative about the Houla massacre has been blocked.

This situation demonstrates in a graphic manner, the need for a netizen journalism that can help to create a channel for communication to provide a more accurate understanding of the conflicts the Security Council is considering. Such a journalism can help to make more likely

the peaceful resolution of these conflicts.

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* The longer talk can be accessed at
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-april-cafe.doc

Notes:

1. Anna News- Houla Report
Early reports were on Syrianews.cc but later many alternative web sites carried Anna Reports. Following is one url for an early report:
http://www.syrianews.cc/syria-what-really-happened-in-al-hula-homs/
2. *Security Council Press Statement on Attacks in Syria*, May 27, 2012. "Those responsible for acts of violence must be held accountable. The members of the Security Council requested the Secretary-General, with the involvement of UNSMIS [United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria], to continue to investigate these attacks and report the findings to the Security Council."
http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10658.doc.htm
3. John Rosenthal, "General Mood: Two Versions of the Houla Massacre." The Western media was quick to blame Assad. But does an unpublished UN report tell a different story?, June 26, 2012. Rosenthal writes: "What is perhaps most remarkable about General Mood's comments is that they have been almost universally ignored and this despite the fact that the video of the press conference has been made publicly available by UNSMIS on the mission's own website."on "Korea and the Era of the Netizen."
http://pjmedia.com/blog/general-mood-two-versions-of-the-houla-massacre/
4. June 15, 2012, General Mood Press Conference, Video part 2. The section where General Mood describes the UNSMIS report on Houla starts at min: 3:10 and ends at 4:17.
5. See "Kofi Annan tells UN We Need Eyes and Ears on the Ground," April 26, 2012.
http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/04/26/kofi-annan-briefing/
6.Video of Li Baodong press conference marking the Chinese Presidency of Security Council for the month of June 2012. June 4, 2012.
http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/06/li-baodong-china-president-of-the-security-council-on-the-programme-of-work-for-the-month-of-june-2012-press-conference.html
7. Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. Human Rights Council, August 15, 2012.
http://un-report.blogspot.com/2012/08/report-of-independent-international.html#more
8. Cindy Wooden and Sarah MacDonald, "Nuncio in Syria: People stunned worried for the future," *The Tidings*, 24 August 2012.
http://www.the-tidings.com/index.php/news/newsworld/2548-nuncio-in-syria-peopl

e-stunned-worried-for-the-future
9. Patsy McGarry, "Media Coverage of Syria violence partial and untrue, says nun," *The Irish Times*, Monday Aug 13, 2012,
http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2012/0813/1224322099930.html
10. "The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the UN." See this issue page 17.
Draft Paper:
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-paper.doc
Talk:
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-talk.doc
11. Press Conference: Li Baodong (China) President of the Security Council for the month of March, 2 March 2011.
http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/03/press-conference-li-baodong-china-president-of-the-security-council-for-the-month-of-march.html

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[Editor's Note: Also in celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the print edition of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, Ronda Hauben made the following presentation at the Hope Institute in Seoul South Korea on Aug 10, 2012.]

# Korea and the Era of the Netizen

by Ronda Hauben
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## Part I – Introduction

In my talk today I want to provide some background to how the concept of the netizen came to be recognized and how the understanding and practice of netizenship has spread around the world.

Then I want to focus on developments by netizens in South Korea and try to begin a discussion of the significance of this development and its implications for the future of democracy.

Fifteen years ago, on May 1, 1997, the print edition of the book *Netizens* was published in English. Later that year, in October, a Japanese translation of the book was published. *Netizens* was the first book to recognize that along with the development of the Internet, a new

form of citizenship had emerged. This is a form of citizenship that has developed based on the broader forms of political participation made possible by the Net.

The book *Netizens* documents the emergence of this new political identity. It also explores the potential for how netizens will change the social structures and institutions of our society.

A recent article in the Reader's Opinion section of the *Times of India* newspaper referred to a paper I wrote about South Korean netizens in 2006. Quoting my paper, the *Times of India* article said, "Not only is the Internet a laboratory for democracy, but the scale of participation and contribution is unprecedented. Online discussion makes it possible for netizens to become active individuals and group actors in social and political affairs. The Internet makes it possible for netizens to speak out independently of institutions or officials."

The writer in the *Times of India* article pointed to the growing number of netizens in China and India and the large proportion of the population in South Korea who are connected to the Internet.

"Will it evolve into a 5th estate?" the article asks, contrasting netizens' discussion online with the power of the 4th estate, which is the mainstream media.

"Will social and political discussion in social media grow into deliberation?" asks Vinay Kamat, the author of this article, "Will opinions expressed be merely 'rabble rousing' or will they be 'reflective' instead of 'impulsive'?"

Both South Korea and China are places where the role of netizens is important in building more democratic structures for society. South Korea appears to be more advanced in grassroots efforts to create examples of netizen forms for a more participatory decision making process. But China is also a place where there are significant developments because of the Internet and netizens.

Later in my talk I will refer to Chinese netizen developments, but first I want to look at the work that the co-author of the netizens book Michael Hauben did to develop and spread an understanding of netizens. Then I want to look at some of the netizen achievements I have observed in South Korea.

## Part II – About Netizens

First, some background.

In 1992-1993, Michael Hauben, then a college student who had gotten access to the Net, wondered what the impact of the Net would be.

He decided to do his research using the Net itself. He sent out several sets of questions and received many responses. Studying the responses, he realized something new was developing, something not expected. What was developing was a sense among many of the people who wrote him that the Internet was making a difference in their lives and that the communication it made possible with others around the world was important.

Michael discovered that there were users online who not only cared for how the Internet could help them with their purposes, but who wanted the Internet to continue to spread and to thrive so that more and more people around the world would have access to it.

He had seen the word 'net.citizen' referred to online. Thinking about the social concern he had found among those who wrote him, and about the non-geographical character of a net based form of citizenship, he contracted 'net.citizen' into the word 'netizen'. Netizen has come to reflect the online social identity he discovered doing his research.

Here is an excerpt from one of the questions he posted on line during this period in the early 1990s when the Internet was just spreading and becoming more widely available:

"Looking for Exciting Uses of the Net"

"…I would like to know about people's uses of the network(s) that have been especially interesting, valuable and/or exciting. I want to hear about people's delights and also disappointments."

Gathering all the replies he had received, he wrote a paper describing his research. The paper was titled, "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives." This research was done in 1992-1993. At that time, the Internet was spreading to countries and networks around the world.

He posted his paper on July 6, 1993 on several of the discussion forums known as Usenet and on several Internet mailing lists. It was posted in four parts under the title "Common Sense: The Net and

Netizens: the Impact the Net is having on people's lives." People around the world found his article and helped to spread it to others. The term netizen quickly spread, not only in the online world, but soon it was appearing in newspapers and other publications offline.

This paper initiated the conscious awareness of netizenship as a new form of citizenship.

The concept and consciousness of oneself as a netizen has continued to spread around the world.

In a talk he gave in Japan in 1995, Michael explained that there were two uses of the word netizen that had developed:

> Netizens are not just anyone who comes online. Netizens are especially not people who come online for individual gain or profit. They are not people who come to the Net thinking it is a service. Rather they are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place. (Hypernetwork '95 Beppu Bay Conference)

This usage of netizens is the usage I am referring to in my talk today as well.

"The Net and Netizens" was but one of a number of articles Michael wrote about the research he was doing about the Net.

During this period I collaborated with Michael, also doing research and writing. Our different articles were often based on what we had learned from people online and which we subsequently posted online.

In January 1994 we collected our papers into an online book we titled *Netizens and the Wonderful World of the Net*, or in its shortened title "The Netizens Netbook."

In 1997 a second version of the book was published in a print edition titled *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* in English in May, and then in a Japanese edition in October.

Among the responses Michael had received to his work was one from a professor in Japan, Shumpei Kumon. The professor wrote: "I am a social scientist in Japan writing on the information revolution and information oriented civilization. Since I came across the term 'netizen' about a year ago, I have been fascinated with this idea."

Professor Kumon wrote, “It seems that the age of not only the technological understanding but, also political-socio-revolution is coming, comparable to the citizen’s revolution in the past. I would very much like to do a book on that theme.”

When Professor Kumon’s book on netizens was published in Japanese, its title in English was *The Age of Netizens*. The book begins with a chapter by Michael on the birth of the netizen.

In the 1992-1994 period, a significant critique of the professional news media was developing among netizens. In the chapter of the *Netizens* book, “The Effect of the Net on the Professional News Media,” there are a number of observations made by people online who recognize that this new media makes possible the participation of a broader set of people in reporting the news and that the range of news is also considerably expanded.

## Part III – Some Examples of New Forms of Netizens Reporting the News

In order to consider in more concrete terms the new form of citizenship and the new form of media that the Internet makes possible, I want to describe some examples drawn mainly from South Korea (though there are other examples from China, and other countries that it would be valuable to discuss during the question period if we have time.)

### A. South Korea and the Netizens Movement

My first experience with netizens in South Korea was in 2003 when I saw an article in the *Financial Times* that the new president of South Korea at the time, Roh Moo-hyun, had been elected by the Netizens.

This was, as you can imagine a very striking news article for me to find, not previously knowing anything about the struggles of the netizens in South Korea. But subsequently I learned that the Netizens book was known by several in the academic community. For example, Professor Han Sang-jin of Seoul National University (SNU) told me he used the book in a class at SNU. Professor Kang Myung-koo also of SNU learned of the book from the Japanese edition and it had an influence on his

thinking, and Professor Yun Yeon-min of Hanyang University learned of the book from its online edition, and it inspired him to write his early book about South Korean networking titled “A Theory of Electronic Space: A Sociological Exploration of Computer Networks” (Seoul: Jeonyewon).

When during a trip to Seoul in 2005, I asked a number of different people that I met if they are netizens. They all responded “yes” or “I hope so.”

There have been a number of important netizen developments in Korea. These include:

1) Helping to build what became large candlelight demonstrations against the agreement governing the relations between the U.S. government and South Korea. This agreement is known as the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA for short) in Nov., 2002.
2) Helping to build the campaign for the presidency of South Korea for a political outsider Roh Moo-hyun in Nov-Dec 2002.
3) Helping to create a climate favorable to the development of online publications.

In 2002 the *Sisa Journal*, a Korean weekly, named ‘Netizens’ as the person of the year. This represented a rare recognition at the time of a new and significant phenomenon that is represented by the emergence and development of the netizen.

A subsequent example demonstrating how netizens have been able to have an impact on science policy is the case involving the stem cell scientist Hwang woo-suk in South Korea. Hwang had been considered a top Korean scientist and his scientific achievements were celebrated by the Korean government. Netizens in South Korea were able to demonstrate that Hwang had doctored photographs of his research to present fraudulent results.

Lee Myung-bak won the South Korean presidency in 2007. In April 2008, he went to the U.S. and agreed to a beef agreement ending the former restrictions on the import of U.S. beef into South Korea.

Starting on May 2 there were 106 days of candlelight demonstrations in South Korea protesting the administration of Lee Myung-bak

and calling for his impeachment. (I was in South Korea when the first candlelight demonstration occurred on May 2 but wasn't able to go to it.)

One of the most remarkable events of the 2008 Candlelight demonstrations occurred on June 10-11. A big demonstration was planned for June 10 to celebrate the victory over the military government in South Korea in June 1987 that led to direct popular election of the ROK president.

To try to keep the demonstrators from marching on the Blue House, the presidential residence, the Lee Myung-bak administration set up shipping containers as barriers and filled them with sand. Then they were covered with grease so that people would not be able to climb over them.

Netizens named these structures the Lee Myung-bak castle. They made a Wikipedia entry for it as a landmark of Seoul. They decorated this new landmark of Seoul with graffiti.

On the other side of the shipping containers there were buses filled with police inside and outside the buses, guarding the president's house.

Blocks of styrofoam were used at the demonstration to build a structure to be able to go over the police barricade.

There was a 5-1/2 hour discussion with people supporting the different positions in the debate. Through the discussion people decided not to go over the barricade for a number of reasons. Many people felt it was too dangerous to go over it. Instead several people with their banners went up on the barricade.

The people who went up on it did so to show that they could have gone over it if they wanted to, but that it had been decided not to.

The situation presented the contrast between what is supposed to be democracy, which is the side of the barricade protecting the President from communicating with the people. And what is democracy, which is the people communicating with each other on the other side of the barricade. People online wrote how important this all was to them, to see that there could be a discussion where people who had real differences came to a decision taking those differences into account.

This was significant, I feel, in two ways. First they figured out how to resolve their differences to come to a decision. Second they coopera-

tively determined how to construct a structure that would enable them to carry out their decision. They took what they could do online and they did it offline.

The discussion and decisions carried out on June 11 were by a combination of people acting as netizens and as citizens. What they did, I want to propose, represents an important achievement.

There is one other netizen development that I want to mention in this talk.

This is the situation that happened with respect to the South Korean war ship Cheonan in 2010. The ship broke in two and sank on March 26, 2010. At the time, it had been involved in naval exercises with the U.S. military in an area of the West Sea/Yellow Sea between North Korea and China. This is a situation that soon became the subject of much discussion among netizens.

Initially the South Korean government and the U.S. government said there was no indication that North Korea was involved. Then at a press conference held on May 20, 2010 in Seoul, the South Korean government claimed that a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine had exploded in the water near the Cheonan, causing a pressure wave that was responsible for the sinking. Many criticisms were raised about this scenario.

First, there is no direct evidence of any North Korean submarine in the vicinity of the Cheonan. Nor is there any evidence that any torpedo was actually fired causing the pressure wave phenomenon. Hence there was no actual evidence that could be presented in court of law to support the South Korean government's claims.

In fact, if this claim of a pressure wave phenomenon were true even those involved in the investigation would have to acknowledge that this would be the first time such an action was used in actual fighting.

What I am interested in, however, is how netizens responded to this situation.

What is unusual and something I find especially interesting is that netizens who live in different countries and speak different languages took up to critique the claims of the South Korean government about the cause of the sinking of the Cheonan. It appears, also, that such netizen activity had an important effect on the international community. And it

appears to have acted as a catalyst affecting the actions of the UN Security Council in its treatment of the Cheonan dispute.

Such activity is the basis for what I refer to as a new form of news.

There were substantial analyses by NGO's like Spark, PSPD, Peaceboat and others posted online in English as well as Korean. These were distributed widely online.

There were also discussions and critiques at American, Japanese and Chinese websites that I saw when searching online during the period that the Security Council was discussing the Cheonan incident.

One example of such a critique was by an American blogger, Scott Creighton, who uses the pen name Willy Loman. He wrote a post titled, "The Sinking of the Cheonan: We are being lied to."

In a post he titled "A Perfect Match?," he showed that there was a discrepancy between the diagram displayed at the press conference held by the South Korean government and the torpedo part that the South Korean government claimed it had found near where the ship sank.

The South Korean government claimed that the diagram was from a North Korean catalogue offering this as proof that the torpedo part was of North Korean origin.

On his blog, Loman showed how the diagram was of a torpedo different from the part of the torpedo the South Korean government had put on display. The diagram was of the PT97W torpedo, while the part of the torpedo on display was of the CHT-02D torpedo.

Much discussion followed this post on Loman's blog, both from Americans and also from Koreans. At first the South Korean government denied these claims. But three weeks later in response to a question from a journalist, the government acknowledged that Loman was right.

In a post titled "Thanks to Valuable Input" Loman wrote: "Over 100,000 viewers read the article and it was republished on dozens of sites all across the world (and even translated). A South Korean MSM outlet even posted our diagram depicting glaring discrepancies between the evidence and the drawing of the CHT-02D torpedo…. But what we had, was literally thousands of people across the world committed to the truth…." It was signed Willy Loman.

Such online discussion and posts appeared to have acted as a catalyst to encourage the UNSC to act in a neutral way toward the two

Koreas, with the Security Council giving time to hear from both sides of the dispute and encouraging the two Koreas to settle the dispute peacefully. A Presidential statement issued by the Council on July 9, 2010 took a balanced view, stating the different views of both sides, but without assigning blame to anyone.

## Part IV – Implications

Describing the ability of citizens to discuss issues online on the Chinese Internet, an Australian researcher, Haiqing Yu, a researcher at the University of Melbourne, realized that there was an important phenomenon developing among some of the people online in China who identified as netizens. They were exploring how the Internet could help them to contribute to their society.

She explains in her book *From Active Audience to Media Citizenship* that there is a new manifestation of what it means to be a citizen and to express one's citizenship developing on the Internet, that it is a more mobile and flexible manifestation than previously. (p. 307)

She maintains that the virtual space of the net has become a public forum that makes it possible for ordinary people to take part in the traditional media's agenda setting and government decision making and law-making functions. Haiqing Yu writes, "Citizenship is not an abstract concept discussed in ivory towers among elite intellectuals. It is a mediated social reality where ordinary people can act as citizens of a nation when they use the Net to talk, discuss, petition and protest."

In a similar observation, Michael Hauben noted that, "The collective body of people assisted by Net software, has grown larger than any individual newspaper."

The implication from these two different observations is that a new form of global media and a new form of citizenship are developing. Instead of the traditional news reporting which is actually the news of a certain set of elite economic and political interests, there is the ability developing among netizens to have real debate on issues on the Net. This new media includes the participation of a broader set of people who hold a wider more encompassing set of diverse perspectives.

Actually the ability to have this broader set of perspectives that the Net makes possible is helping to create a new media and a new role for

the citizen. These are gradually supplanting the traditional forms of journalism and of citizenship.

## Part V – Conclusion

I want to point to an analysis of the netizen by media historian Mark Poster in his book *Information Please*. The book considers the effect of globalization on the citizen and argues that with globalization the citizen loses the power to be able to have any influence on government officials. The concept of the netizen, however, intrigues Poster, as he sees in this concept the potential to forge a new identity that is capable of opposing and challenging the harmful effects of globalization.

Poster explains, "This new phenomena will likely change the relation of forces around the globe. In such an eventuality, the figure of the netizen might serve as the critical concept in the politics of globalization."

I want to support Poster's argument but I propose our time can best be described as the Era of the Netizen. The ability of the netizen to focus on communication and participation to affect the institutions of the society, is a critical characteristic of this new Era.

In his article comparing the impact of the Net on our society, with the impact of the printing press to bring revolutionary changes to the society after it was introduced, Michael wrote, "The Net has opened a channel for talking to the whole world to an even wider set of people than did printed books."

In conclusion, considering the examples of the response of netizens to the problems raised by the investigation of the Cheonan incident, I want to propose that the importance of the collaborative response of netizens supporting each other from diverse countries and cultures is but a prelude to the potential of netizens around the world in different countries to work together across national borders to solve the problems of our times.

Thank you for your attention and we welcome your questions and comments.

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[Editor's Note: On July 14-15, the annual meeting of the Chinese Community of Political Science and International Relations (CCPSIS) was held in Beijing. The following paper was prepared for this conference.]

# The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the United Nations

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## Preface

The history of journalism includes many different forms of publication and many different methods of organization of those publications. Journalism scholars like Chris Atton and Tony Harcup of the U.K. point to a wide continuum of how the news is produced and who are the journalists who produce it. These scholars argue that it is too narrow to restrict the definition and consideration of journalism to commercially or government produced media. Instead these scholars propose that the many forms of alternative journalism should be considered as part of the spectrum of journalism and those who produce for these publications are to be considered in any study of journalists.

Traditionally, alternative journalism provides for a broader set of issues to be raised than is common in commercially produced mainstream media. Often, too, alternative publications allow for a broader set of sources to be utilized. Such a media often reflects not only a criticism of the limitations of the mainstream commercial media, but also a demonstration that another form and practice of journalism is viable.

With the creation and the spread of the Internet, the emergence of a new form of citizenship, know as netizenship, has developed. Also a critical and vibrant form of online journalism has begun to develop. I call this journalism, netizen journalism. A more detailed exploration of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper as the paper is for a panel on questions related to the United Nations. As such, the paper will

focus on the impact of netizen journalism on the United Nations and on issues related to the United Nations. But an awareness of the emerging phenomenon of netizen journalism can help to provide a context for issues investigated in this paper.

## Introduction

In this paper I take three conflicts which are or have been on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council. The paper will explore the role of netizen journalism in relation to the efforts to resolve these conflicts in a peaceful manner. The three examples the paper will consider in relation to the UN are 1) the Cheonan conflict in South Korea (2010), 2) the war against Libya (2011), and 3) the crisis in Syria (2011-2012).

## I Medvedev and the Challenge of Media Manipulation to International Relations

In a recent speech, Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, spoke about what he called "the new security dimensions" in international relations.[1]

"Today," he said, "we are witness to persistent attempts to make mass manipulation of public opinion a tool in international relations."

He offered as an example what he calls the media campaign against Syria.

"Syria's case is illustrative in this respect," Medvedev said. "A very active media campaign unfolded with respect to Syria." He explained, "What is clear is that this media campaign had little to do with ending the violence as rapidly as possible and facilitating the national dialogue that we all want to see there."

He attributed this media campaign to the nature of what is considered the politics of certain countries. Describing this politics, he explained, "This sees a country or group of countries instill their own aims and objectives in the consciousness of others…with other points of view rejected."[2]

What I propose is important about his talk for our panel on "The UN is a Dilemma" is that Medvedev argues that media manipulation by

certain political actors presents a serious problem for the field of international relations. He argues that such a media campaign against Syria interferes with the goal of international relations "to concentrate on professional and serious discussion rather than propaganda efforts," so as to be able to work out "a common approach to settling this conflict."

While he does not see journalism as able to help solve this problem, I want to propose that there is development of an alternative form of journalism that is taking on the problem. This is the journalism I call netizen journalism. Netizen journalism seeks to challenge the misrepresentations and distortions of mainstream Western journalism that Medvedev presents as a serious challenge to international relations. Netizen journalism encourages not only the exposure of the distortions in the mainstream media, but research and writing to provide the background and information needed to determine how to settle a conflict. By challenging the media campaign fomenting a conflict, netizen journalism becomes a participant in the media war at the UN.

## II The Cheonan Incident, the UN, and Netizen Journalism

I first turn to the details of what happened with the Cheonan incident which was brought to the UN in 2010, to examine how netizen journalism affected the media war in that situation and helped to make a significant contribution to the peaceful resolution of the conflict that was embraced at the Security Council.

The Cheonan incident concerns a South Korean war ship which broke up and sank on March 26, 2010. At the time it was involved in naval exercises with the U.S. military in an area in the West Sea/Yellow Sea between North Korea and China. This is a situation that had been the subject of much discussion on the Internet.

Initially the South Korean government and the U.S. government said there was no indication that North Korea was involved. Then at a press conference on May 20, 2010, the South Korean government claimed that a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine had exploded in the water near the Cheonan, causing a pressure wave that was

responsible for the sinking. Many criticisms of this scenario have been raised.

There was no direct evidence of any North Korean submarine in the vicinity of the Cheonan. Nor was there any evidence that a torpedo was actually fired causing the pressure wave phenomenon. Hence the South Korean government had no actual case that could be presented in a court of law to support its claims.

In fact, if this claim of a pressure wave were true even those involved in the investigation of the incident acknowledge that "North Korea would be the first to have succeeded at using this kind of a bubble jet torpedo action in actual fighting."[3]

The dispute over the sinking of the Cheonan was brought to the United Nations Security Council in June 2010 and a Presidential Statement was agreed to a month later, in July.[4]

An account of some of what happened in the Security Council during this process is described in an article that has appeared in several different Spanish language publications.[5] The article describes the experience of the Mexican Ambassador to the UN, Claude Heller in his position as president of the Security Council for the month of June 2010. (The presidency rotates each month to a different Security Council member.)

In a letter to the Security Council dated June 4, the Republic of Korea (ROK) more commonly known as South Korea, asked the Council to take up the Cheonan dispute. Park Im-kook, then the South Korean Ambassador to the UN, requested that the Security Council consider the matter of the Cheonan and respond in an appropriate manner.[6] The letter described an investigation into the sinking of the Cheonan carried out by South Korean government and military officials. The conclusion of the South Korean investigation was to accuse North Korea of sinking the South Korean ship.

Sin Son Ho is the UN Ambassador from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which is more commonly known as North Korea. He sent a letter dated June 8 to the Security Council, which denied the allegation that his country was to blame.[7] His letter urged the Security Council not to be the victim of deceptive claims, as had happened with Iraq in 2003. The letter asked the Security Council to

support his government's call to be able to examine the evidence and to be involved in a new and more independent investigation on the sinking of the Cheonan.

How would the Mexican Ambassador as President of the Security Council during the month of June handle this dispute? This was a serious issue facing Heller as he began his presidency in June 2010.

Heller adopted what he referred to as a "balanced" approach to treat both governments on the Korean peninsula in a fair and objective manner. He held bilateral meetings with each member of the Security Council which led to support for a process of informal presentations by both of the Koreas to the members of the Security Council.

What Heller called "interactive informal meetings" were held on June 14 with the South Koreans and the North Koreans in separate sessions attended by the Security Council members, who had time to ask questions and then to discuss the presentations.

At a media stakeout on June 14, after the day's presentations ended, Heller said that it was important to have received the detailed presentation by South Korea and also to know and learn the arguments of North Korea. He commented that "it was very important that North Korea approached the Security Council." In response to a question about his view on the issues presented, he replied, "I am not a judge. I think we will go on with the consultations to deal in a proper manner on the issue."[8]

Heller also explained that, "the Security Council issued a call to the parties to refrain from any act that could escalate tensions in the region, and makes an appeal to preserve peace and stability in the region."

Though the North Korean Ambassador at the UN rarely speaks to the media, the North Korean UN delegation scheduled a press conference for the following day, Tuesday, June 15. During the press conference, the North Korean Ambassador presented North Korea's refutation of the allegations made by South Korea. Also he explained North Korea's request to be able to send an investigation team to the site where the sinking of the Cheonan occurred. South Korea had denied the request. During its press conference, the North Korean Ambassador noted that there was widespread condemnation of the investigation in South Korea and around the world.[9]

The press conference held on June 15 was a lively event. Many of the journalists who attended were impressed and requested that there be future press conferences with the North Korean Ambassador.

During June, Heller held meetings with the UN ambassadors from each of the two Koreas and then with Security Council members about the Cheonan issue. On the last day of his presidency, on June 30, he was asked by the media what was happening about the Cheonan dispute. He responded that the issue of contention was over the evaluation of the South Korean government's investigation.

Heller described how he introduced what he refers to as "an innovation" into the Security Council process. As the month of June ended, the issue was not yet resolved, but the "innovation" set a basis to build on the progress that was achieved during the month of his presidency.

The "innovation" Heller referred to, was a summary he made of the positions of each of the two Koreas on the issue, taking care to present each objectively. Heller explained that this summary was not an official document, so it did not have to be approved by the other members of the Council. This summary provided the basis for further negotiations. He believed that it had a positive impact on the process of consideration in the Council, making possible the agreement that was later to be expressed in the Presidential statement on the Cheonan that was issued by the Security Council on July 9.

Heller's goal, he explained, was to "at all times be as objective as possible" so as to avoid increasing the conflict on the Korean peninsula. Such a goal is the Security Council's obligation under the UN Charter.

In the Security Council's Presidential Statement (PRST) on the Cheonan, what stands out is that the statement follows the pattern of presenting the views of each of the two Koreas and urging that the dispute be settled in a peaceful manner.

In the PRST, the members of the Security Council did not blame North Korea. Instead they refer to the South Korean investigation and its conclusion, expressing their "deep concern" about the "findings" of the investigation.

The PRST explains that "The Security Council takes note of the responses from other relevant parties, including the DPRK, which has

stated that it had nothing to do with the incident."[10]

With the exception of North Korea, it is not indicated who "the other relevant parties" are. It does suggest, however, that it is likely there are some Security Council members, not just Russia and China, who did not agree with the conclusions of the South Korean investigation.

Analyzing the Presidential Statement, the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* noted that the statement "allows for a double interpretation and does not blame or place consequences on North Korea."[11] Such a possibility of a "double interpretation" allows different interpretations

The Security Council action on the Cheonan took place in a situation where there had been a wide ranging international critique, especially in the online media, about the problems of the South Korean investigation, and of the South Korean government's failure to make public any substantial documentation of its investigation, along with its practice of harassing critics of the South Korean government claims.[12]

One such critique included a three part report by the South Korean NGO People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD).[13] This report raised a number of questions and problems with the South Korean government's case. The PSPD document was posted widely on the Internet and also sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council for distribution to those Security Council members interested and to the South Korean Mission to the UN.

There were many blog comments about the Cheonan issue in Korean.[14] There were also some bloggers writing in English who became active in critiquing the South Korean investigation and the role of the U.S. in the conflict.

One such blogger, Scott Creighton who uses the pen name Willy Loman, wrote a post titled "The Sinking of the Cheonan: We are being lied to."[15] On his blog "American Everyman," he explained how there was a discrepancy between the diagram displayed by the South Korean government in a press conference it held, and the part of the torpedo on display in the glass case below the diagram.

He showed that the diagram did not match the part of the torpedo on display. The South Korean government had claimed that the diagram displayed above the glass case was from a North Korean brochure offering the torpedo identified as the CHT-02D.

There were many comments on his post, including some from netizens in South Korea. Also the mainstream conservative media in South Korea carried accounts of his critique.

Three weeks later, at a news conference, a South Korean government official acknowledged that the diagram presented by the South Korean government was not of the same torpedo as the part displayed in the glass case. Instead the diagram was of the PT97W torpedo, not the CHT-02D torpedo as claimed.

Describing the significance of having documented one of the fallacies in the South Korean government's case, Creighton writes[16]: "(I)n the end, thanks to valuable input from dozens of concerned people all across the world…. Over 100,000 viewers read that article and it was republished on dozens of sites all across the world (even translated). A South Korean MSM outlet even posted our diagram depicting the glaring discrepancies between the evidence and the drawing of the CHT-O2D torpedo, which a high-ranking military official could only refute by stating he had 40 years military experience and to his knowledge, I had none. But what I had, what we had, was literally thousands of people all across the world, scientists, military members, and just concerned investigative bloggers who were committed to the truth and who took the time to contribute to what we were doing here."

"'40 years military experience' took a beating from 'we the people WorldWide' and that is the way it is supposed to be."

This is just one of a number of serious questions and challenges that were raised about the South Korean government's scenario of the sinking of the Cheonan.

Other influential events which helped to challenge the South Korean government's claims were a press conference in Japan held on July 9 by two academic scientists. The two scientists presented results of experiments they did which challenged the results of experiments the South Korean government used to support its case.[17] These scientists also wrote to the Security Council with their findings.

Also a significant challenge to the South Korean government report was the finding of a Russian team of four sent to South Korea to look at the data from the investigation and to do an independent evaluation of it. The Russian team did not accept the South Korean government's

claim that a pressure wave from a torpedo caused the Cheonan to sink.[18]

Such efforts along with online posts and discussions by many netizens provided a catalyst for the actions of the UN Security Council concerning the Cheonan incident.

The mainstream U.S. media for the most part chose to ignore the many critiques which have appeared. These critiques of the South Korean government's investigation of the Cheonan sinking have appeared mainly on the Internet, not only in Korean, but also in English, in Japanese, and in other languages. They present a wide ranging challenge of the veracity and integrity of the South Korean investigation and its conclusions.

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 28 noted the fact, however, that the media in the U.S. had ignored the critique of the South Korean government investigation that is being discussed online and spread around the world.[19] On August 31, an Op. Ed. by Donald Gregg, a former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, appeared in the *New York Times*, titled "Testing North Korean Waters." The article noted that "not everyone agrees that the Cheonan was sunk by North Korea. Pyongyang has consistently denied responsibility, and both China and Russia opposed a U.N. Security Council resolution laying blame on North Korea."[20]

Netizens who live in different countries and speak different languages took up to critique the claims of the South Korean government about the cause of the sinking of the Cheonan. Such netizen activity had an important effect on the international community. It also appears to have acted as a catalyst affecting the actions of the UN Security Council in its treatment of the Cheonan dispute.

In his Op Ed in the *New York Times*, Gregg argued that, "The disputed interpretations of the sinking of the Cheonan remain central to any effort to reverse course and to get on track toward dealing effectively with North Korea on critical issues such as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

North Korea referred to the widespread international sentiment in its June 8 letter to the Security Council. The UN Ambassador from North Korea wrote: "It would be very useful to remind ourselves of the ever-increasing international doubts and criticisms, going beyond the

internal boundary of south Korea, over the 'investigation result' from the very moment of its release…."

The situation that the North Korean Ambassador referred to is the result of actions on the part of South Korean netizens and civil society who challenged the process and results of the South Korean government's investigation. Also, there was support for the South Korean netizens by bloggers, scientists and journalists around the world, writing mainly online but in a multitude of languages and from many perspectives. Several of the non-governmental organizations and scientists in South Korea sent the results of their investigations and research to members of the Security Council to provide them with the background and facts needed to make an informed decision.[21]

The result of such efforts is something that is unusual in the process of recent Security Council activity. The Security Council process in the Cheonan issue provided for an impartial analysis of the problem and an effort to hear from those with an interest in the issue.

The effort in the Security Council was described by the Mexican Ambassador, as upholding the principles of impartiality and respectful treatment of all members toward resolving a conflict between nations in a peaceful manner. It represents an important example of the Security Council acting in conformity with its obligations as set out in the UN charter.

In the July 9 Presidential Statement, the Security Council urged that the parties to the dispute over the sinking of the Cheonan find a means to peacefully settle the dispute. The statement says:

"The Security Council calls for full adherence to the Korean Armistice Agreement and encourages the settlement of outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula by peaceful means to resume direct dialogue and negotiation through appropriate channels as early as possible, with a view to avoiding conflicts and averting escalation."

Ambassador Gregg is only one of many around the world who have expressed their concern with the course of action of the U.S. and South Korea as contrary to the direction of the UN Security Council Presidential Statement. Gregg explained his fear that the truth of the Cheonan sinking "may elude us, as it did after the infamous Tonkin Bay incident of 1964, that was used to drag us (the U.S.) into the abyss of the

Vietnam War."[22]

Despite this dilemma, the Security Council action on the Cheonan dispute, if it is recognized and supported, has set the basis instead for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.[23]

While the netizen community in South Korea and internationally were able to provide an effective challenge to the misrepresentations by the South Korean government on the Cheonan incident, the struggle over the misrepresentations of the conflict in Libya was less successful.

## III False Claims that Led to the War Against Libya

A short article at the *Current Events Inquiry* website lists several provocative claims which helped to provide a false pretext for the NATO bombing of Libya.[24] Among them were reports by Al Jazeera and the BBC that the Libyan government had carried out air strikes against Benghazi and Tripoli on February 22, 2011. Russia Today reports that the Russian military who had monitored the unrest in Libya from the beginning, "says nothing of the sort was going on on the ground."[25]

According to the report by the Russian military, the attacks had never occurred.

Another such claim widely circulated by major Western media very early in the Libya conflict was that the Libyan government "is massacring unarmed demonstrators." The NGO, the International Crisis Group (ICG) in its June 6, 2011 report says that such claims were inaccurate. The report explains that this version of the events in Libya "would appear to ignore evidence that the protest movement exhibited a violent aspect from early on." This includes evidence that early in the protests, "demonstrations were infiltrated by violent elements."

Similarly the ICG report found no evidence for claims that the Libyan government "engaged in anything remotely warranting use of the term 'genocide'."

A similar criticism was made of the claim that "foreign mercenaries" were employed by the Libyan government. A report by Amnesty International which is described in an article in the *Independent* newspaper in the U.K. on June 24, 2011 says that, "The Amnesty Report found no evidence for this."

## Netizen Journalism on the Conflict in Libya Presents a Different View

From the early days of the false media claims targeting Libya for an outside intervention to remove its government, a growing set of articles and comments were written and published online exposing the lack of evidence for these claims and demonstrating that they were distortions with a political purpose. These articles exposing the distortions were read and distributed by a growing set of online reporters. These examples demonstrate that a different form of journalism is emerging. While such a form of journalism may not yet appear to present an adequate challenge to the gross misrepresentations and inaccuracies spread by much of the mainstream Western and Arab satellite media about the Libyan conflict, the nature of this newly developing form of journalism is important to explore and to understand.

This new journalism has at least two important aspects. One is serious research into the background, context and political significance of conflicts like that in Libya or Syria. Another is the application of this research to the writing of articles or to comments in response to both mainstream and alternative media articles.

As an example of this netizen journalism related to the conflict in Libya, I want to refer to a small collection of articles titled "Libya, the UN, and Netizen Journalism."[26] This collection contains articles focusing on a critique of actions at the UN that provided the authority for the NATO war against Libya.

One article in that collection, "UN Security Council March 17 Meeting to Authorize Bombing of Libya All Smoke and Mirrors" is about the Security Council meeting which passed Resolution 1973 by a vote of 10 in favor and 5 abstentions. The article includes some sample comments from online discussions about what was happening in Libya at the time. While the UNSC members at the March 17 meeting speak about their support for the resolution to "protect Libyan civilians," there is no acknowledgment that the resolution instead will in effect support the ongoing armed insurrection against the government of Libya.

While Security Council delegates and the mainstream media described what was happening in Libya as "peaceful protestors" attacked by a "brutal government," online discussion of the situation during this

same period describes the opposition in Libya as engaged in an armed insurrection. The following sample from comments from a discussion of an article on the *Guardian* (U.K.) website in March 2011 provides an example of netizens questioning and critiquing the actions of the Security Council and asking why the UN is protecting and supporting an armed insurgency[27]:

"Armed civilians or ununiformed fighters have no place being supported or protected by our air power. They carry a gun and get targeted that is their look out, not our job to hit the other side."

JamesStGeorge, 22 March 2011

"The thing is the rebels are 'civilians' when ever it suits us."

lundiel, 23 March 2011

"Of course once you start bombing, there will clearly be plenty of collateral damage. This then makes a complete mockery of the stated purpose of the intervention, to save innocent civilians."

contractor000, 23 March 2011

"Yes tanks are not planes! Or in the air flying. The civilian protection has no place extending to armed rebels, they are not civilians."

CockfingersMcGee, 23 March 2011

"So we are supposed to accept this scenario that the Military aggression against Libya is to do with protecting the protesters, the revolution, innocent civilians, the rebels etc. This sounds very reminiscent of attacking Iraq because of WMD."

comunismlives, 22 March 2011

Similar discussions were going on at other websites. Here, for example, are some comments from a discussion at the Hidden Harmonies website.[28]

"Resolution 1973 is also directed at rebel force, but we are not bombing the rebels, but usurping the resolution to provide air cover in aid of the rebels. Prolonging Libya's civil war only brings more harm to the civilians, and facilitating division of Libya's sovereignty, are contravening/violating the resolution." Charles Liu, March 22nd, 2011

"We can argue technicalities, but everyone knows the current

U.S.-led bombings are toward weakening Qadhafi and to bolster the rebel opposition. Obama and the Coalition publicly say so."

"Its like seeing a thief caught on video sneaking around in a store and after seeing no one around, pockets the candy. He also says he is stealing."

"Now we are suppose to 'prove' it? That's quite retarded."

DeWang, March 22nd, 2011

"'under threat of attack' clause includes threat of attack by the rebels, yet we are not bombing them for their incursion outside Benghazi. This violates the preamble's stated limit of military authorization to not divide Libya's sovereignty. Not withstanding any sort of red herring and semantics wiggling, the selective air strike in aid of the rebels violates UN resolution 1973, while 1970 gave no legitimacy to the armed rebellion in Libya, which the legitimate government of Libya has the sovereign right to sanction against."

Charles Liu, March 22nd, 2011

"I just don't understand why the bombing is taking place at all."
"1) It is a civil war. Why should the west take sides?"
"2) Wasn't Qaddafi the U.S.'s pet since Bush II? Why is the U.S. seeking to remove one of their puppets? Is the U.S./west looking for another Iraq?"

"I wouldn't be one bit surprised if this war was instigated by wall street looking to make a killing on oil and commodities." colin, March 22nd, 2011

"It's a historical pattern of these UN Resolutions, including way back when the Korean War started, that 'all necessary force' is the general catch phrase for 'unrestrained warfare' limited only by what weapons are available."

"Now, even the high cost of the cruise missiles, $1 million a pop, is not enough to deter the launching of 100's of these."

"Well, I guess we are going to see the cost, sooner or later."

r v March 23rd, 2011

These two examples of selected comments from online discussions at the time demonstrate that netizens raised serious concerns and critiques of the Security Council action passing UN Resolution 1973,

while the mainstream media mainly reported what Western governments were saying.

Similar questions and critiques were raised throughout the conflict in articles by independent journalists who were in Libya during much of the period of the defense of Libya from the NATO bombing and the NATO support for the armed insurrection in Libya. Such journalists included Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya of Global Research, Thierry Meyssan, from Voltairenet, Lizzie Phalen who reported for various outlets including Presstv, and Franklin Lamb whose articles were carried on various web sites.

Also a group that called itself Concerned Africans published an open letter which they also submitted to the UN Secretary General, the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly. The letter which was signed by over 300 concerned Africans, described what it called the contribution to "the subversion of international law." The letter maintained that in passing UNSCR 1973, "the Security Council used the still unresolved issue in international law of 'the right to protect' the so called R2P, to justify the Chapter VII military intervention in Libya."[29] Other articles focused on the violations in Security Council procedures represented by allowing Libyan officials who had defected to appear at the Security Council representing Libya.[30]

Similarly, Professor Mahmood Mamdani, at Columbia University who has studied the region and its history, points to the "political and legal infrastructure for intervention in otherwise independent countries," namely the Security Council and the International Criminal Court working 'selectively', that has been created by Western powers.[31]

Among the many websites at the time publishing articles critiquing the UN's actions in Libya were The Center for Research on Globalization, Voltaire Network, Libya 360, Mathaba, April Media, and American Everyman.[32]

During this period, several of the independent journalists or the journalists writing articles challenging the Security Council actions providing for the bombing of Libya appeared on satellite news programs like that of RT News and Press TV. Also there were interviews and videos posted online.

While these articles, discussions, critiques and analyses did not

succeed in stopping the NATO attack on Libya, they created an example of more accurate reporting and analysis about the attack on Libya. A few months later when an Aljazeera journalist explained why he resigned from Aljazeera, he pointed to the pressure from Aljazeera to misrepresent what was happening in his reporting. He explained that the support of Qatar for the militarization of the Libyan conflict was a turning point in the distortion of the news at his station.[33]

Also as the following comment by a netizen indicates, someone who supported the attack on Libya and who has learned lessons from what happened, is more likely to question the media claims about Syria:

"(I)t is also important to me that I feel I was deceived about the Libyan situation. Being like Libya would itself be reason to oppose intervention in Syria."

And others suggest that the experience of NATO's actions in Libya has been having an impact on what some at the UN and some of the nations of the UN will do with respect to Syria. As one Netizen wrote after hearing of the Houla massacre[34]:

"What has changed in the last week following the murder of more than 100 people in Houla, including dozens of children, is that a new urgency and disgust has been injected into an escalating crisis that has brought the country to the verge of civil war. The role of the Syrian opposition should also be clearly investigated as well. Rather than just blaming Assad in a media witch-hunt. As many of those killed were supposed to be people who refused to collaborate with the opposition."

"It is obvious that the Russians and Chinese have learnt from Libya too. Where the number of people killed by unbridled NATO bombing has been carefully suppressed, and the use of the UN to cover 'regime change', has only bought chaos in its wake. So the Oil there has changed hands, but most of the north of Africa is now transformed into a violent marasme. Both of those major powers now know from experience that – NATO with UN agreement means the destruction of peace, the loss of their assets in the region, and the continuation of war into other areas (Iran, Yemen, Pakistan etc. or closer to their own spheres of influence.

China sea – the 'Stans', the southern (Muslim) aligned ex-Russian states etc. or into South America). They do not see any end. So they must draw a line somewhere."

"Is the object of the west once again to cause a major mid-eastern war ?"

shaun, 2 June 2012 10:00PM

## IV The Syrian Crisis and the UN: Critique of the Reporting on Syria

Similar to the mainstream media war against Libya, there is a set of false narratives in the mainstream Western and Arab satellite media related to what has been happening in Syria. While such media essentially frames its news about Syria to demonize the Syrian government and its President Bashar Assad, its news stories support the armed opposition, and its journalists rely on opposition sources for the news that is to be reported.

In this situation, netizen journalism presents a critique of the mainstream media support for what is an armed insurrection against Syria. The forms this netizen journalism takes include articles, interviews, commentary, historical background, analysis and discussion. Critical articles about the mainstream media reports and misrepresentations are also common.

### The Houla Massacre

The original mainstream media account of what has come to be known as the Houla massacre was that an opposition demonstration was suppressed by Syrian government shelling.

Criticism of this claim soon emerged pointing to the fact that the majority of those murdered were killed at close range, not by shelling. In response, the mainstream Western media produced a new element, a so called pro government militia that they claimed had gone into the homes of those killed and carried out the massacre. Why an alleged pro government militia, the so called 'Shabiha' would go into the homes of people was not explained. Whether the people massacred were pro or

anti government is an issue still in contention.

When Alex Thomson, a British Channel 4 reporter, went to the village that the opposition in Houla had said had produced the so called Shabiha accused of the attack in Houla, he found no evidence of any such militia. He writes, "Beyond a few languid soldiers and the odd policeman no sign of militias. No trace of heavy weapons. No tank tracks on the roads…. Well these Alawites insist there are not, nor have ever been, Shabiha in these villages."[35]

Neither do the mainstream Western media wonder why the Syrian government would carry out a massacre of civilians at the very time that the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council are planning to discuss Syria.

In his book *Liar's Poker* which analyzes the disinformation used to justify the NATO bombing of Serbia, the Belgian journalist Michel Collon observes that "Information is already a battlefield which is part of war."[36]

## Seeking Facts About the Houla Massacre

Shortly after the news spread about the Houla massacre, netizen media sites included articles which revealed that the area where the massacre was carried out was under the control of the Free Syrian Army, not of the Syrian government. A Russian news team had gained access to the site the day following the massacre and did interviews to determine what had happened. Their report was originally published in Russia but soon was translated into English.

Their account noted that Houla is an administrative area, made up of three villages. Houla is not the name of a town. Some of this area had been under control of armed insurgents for a number of weeks. The Syrian army maintained certain checkpoints. The Russian journalists' account explains that on the evening of May 24, the Free Syrian Army launched an operation to take control of the checkpoints, bringing 600-800 armed insurgents from different areas.

At the same time that there was the fight over the checkpoints, several armed insurgents went into certain homes and massacred the members of several families. Among the families targeted was a family related to a recently elected People's Assembly representative. This

family and another family that were killed were said by some local people to be families that supported the Syrian government. "Other victims included the family of two journalists for Top News and New Orient Express, press agencies associated with Voltaire Network," reports the news and analysis site Voltairenet.[37]

Soon after the news of the massacre appeared, there were articles challenging the claims that it was the work of the Syrian government. In his article "Death Squads Ravage Syrian Town – West Calls for 'Action'," Tony Cartalucci of the Land Destroyer Report blog, writes "'Cui Bono?' To whose benefit does it serve to massacre very publicly entire families in close quarters and broadcast the images of their handiwork worldwide?"[38] He argues that this is in no way in the Syrian government's interest.

In another article he points to a U.K. government official blaming the deaths on "artillery fire" by the government. Claiming to be responding to such reports, several governments including the U.K. government expelled Syrian diplomats. Even though these claims were soon demonstrated to be false, Carlucci points out that there was no retraction from the U.K. government or reversal of the expulsion of Syrian diplomats. Cartalucci writes:[39] "U.K. Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt peddling what is now a confirmed fabrication, told for days to the public as the West maneuvered to leverage it against the Syrian government. The UN has now confirmed that artillery fired by government troops were not responsible for the massacre, and instead carried out by unidentified militants. Despite this, the U.K. has failed to retract earlier accusations and has instead expelled Syrian diplomats in an increasingly dangerous, irrational, aggressive posture."

Others online recognized that a photo BBC posted which was allegedly of the corpses from the Houla Massacre, was actually a photo that had been taken in 2003 of deaths in Iraq. Describing how the misrepresentation was detected, Sy Walker explains on his blog[40]: "The information on which it's based comes from a pro-Syrian tweeter called Hey Joud, whom I've found to be well informed and savvy."

"A friend of this tweeter discovered the misrepresentation and tweeted about it:
'@BBCWorld propaganda:

http://imageshack.us/photo/my-image… showing a pic of bodies from Iraq claiming it's the ?#HoulaMassacre? ?#Syria?'" http://shineyourlight-shineyourlight.blogspot.ca/2012/01/9-nike-years-of-war-in-iraq.htmleyourlight-shineyourlight.blogspot.ca/2012/01/9-nike

BBC changed the photo, Walker explains, adding: "This is not the first time I've reported on image fakery with regard to Syria. The Western media's sustained attack on that beleaguered nation has now been underway for more than a year. A comprehensive account of all its deceptions and misreporting over that period would fill many volumes."

In a blog post titled "Hula Hoax," Mathias Broeckers also comments on the BBC presenting the 2003 Iraq photo as a photo of Houla. Broeckers writes:[41] "It is the forbidden geopolitical agenda, the big Picture that isn't talked about, as opposed to the horrors by which the wars are legitimized."

Other online journalists comment on the bias of the United Nations Human Rights Council and its inability to do an objective investigation of the facts of the Houla Massacre. Reporting about an interaction between an anti-war activist from the "No War Network", Marinella Corregia, and Rupert Colville, spokesman for the Human Rights Council, an article on the Uprooted Palestinians blog is titled "UN report on Houla massacre? But they only talk to Syrian opposition – by phone." Colville explains to Corregia that the Human Rights Council will do its investigation by speaking with the local network of opposition members they have contact with in Syria by phone, with opposition members they have met in Turkey and with opposition members they have met in Geneva.[42]

Martin Janssen, a Dutch Middle East expert and journalist who reports from Damascus and whose articles appear online is also concerned that there are other important sources of information that have information about what happened, but that the Human Relations Council investigators will not speak with them because the investigators are only interested in hearing from opposition sources.[43]

Janssen said that he was in contact with a Catholic organization in the area of Houla, a monastery in Qara in the Homs-Hana region, and the two Russian journalists, Marat Musin and Olga Kulygina, who were

able to visit Houla the day after the massacre, on May 25 with a TV crew. Janssen reported that Musin and Kulygina tried to offer their findings to the UN Special Commission on Human Rights doing the investigation, but that the Commission was not interested in hearing from them. Coville indicated that the sources the investigators had were adequate because all their other sources had already informed them that the 'shabibha' were responsible for the massacre. The Commission was not interested in hearing from anyone with different views or with information different from that given to them by the opposition.

The online discussion in response to Janssen's article was a serious discussion critiquing the mainstream media and putting forward the criteria of what a media should do. The discussion is an important one as it sets out both the failings of the current mainstream media and the needed objectives for a more competent media.

## Netizen Journalism Coverage of Houla Massacre

Along with the account of what happened in the al Houla region, were articles proposing a broader perspective. This included historical background describing where the U.S. and NATO utilized death squads in prior conflicts. One article "Syria Under Attack by Globalist Death Squads," by Bramdon Turbeville presents background on how certain U.S. officials including Robert S. Ford, the former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, and John Negroponte who was U.S. Ambassador to Honduras in 1981-1985 and later in Iraq, supported death squads first in Nicaragua (known as the "Salvador Option") and later in Iraq.[44] Turbeville's article and articles by others like the article titled, "The Salvadorian Option for Syria: U.S.-NATO Sponsored Death Squads Integrate 'Opposition Forces'" by Michel Chossudovsky, put the death squads functioning in Syria in this historical context.

Along with the articles I am describing that are available in English, there are also a wide range of similar articles online in French, German, and other languages. There are also online discussions and comments about the Syria conflict. A collection of articles, *The Houla Massacre: The Disinformation Campaign*, available at Global Research website, lists a number of the articles recently published on the media war over the Syrian conflict.[45]

There are various forms of online discussions. One such discussion on an online forum was initiated with the post, "Houla Massacre, Syria: What If?" The discussion considered whether the Syrian government claims that it was not responsible for the massacre was or wasn't a lie. Online sources referred to in discussions like this could be either mainstream media or alternative media sources. Through discussion, referring to various articles and details, netizens in this online forum concluded that armed insurgents were to blame, not the Syrian government.[46]

## The Media and Syrian Sovereignty

Since it is rare at the current time that the mainstream Western media deviates from a hostility toward the Syrian government and a sympathy with the armed insurgents, it seems significant that in Germany one of the mainstream national newspapers, the *Frankfurter Allgmeine Zeitung* has printed a significant story documenting the role of the Free Syrian Army in the Houla massacre. The journalist, Rainer Hermann, speaks Arabic. He has been reporting from the Middle East for over 22 years and he did his thesis on modern Syrian social history. His article "Abermals Massaker in Syrien" appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgmeine Zeitung* on June 7.[47]

His article has been welcomed by many netizens and has been reprinted at various online news sites. Several online sites featured the article and offered an English translation of it. The story corroborated the report of the Russian journalists that the Free Syrian Army insurgents were behind the Houla massacre.

Similarly there was an anonymous criticism of Rainer's article on the Houla massacre from opposition forces, and Rainer wrote a second article "The Extermination" responding to the criticism.[48] His article appears to be his response to sources troubled over the attacks and discrimination that the armed insurgents have been introducing into the Syrian struggle. But perhaps it is also an indication that netizen journalism is having some effect in the current media war over Syria.

Similarly, there is a report by the British media criticism site, Media Lens on the low key recognition by a BBC journalist that it is not adequate to blame the Houla massacre on Syria's President Assad, as

several of the media are doing, without more knowledge of what actually happened, and with an approach which includes more shades of gray rather than just treating it as a stark black or white issue.

## Netizen Journalism and the UN

Since the Houla massacre, the Syrian conflict, some say, appears to be at a turning point. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has a recent article arguing that there are lessons that have been learnt from what happened with Libya and that the UN has to take into account these lessons. In his op-ed, "On the Right Side of History," Lavrov writes:[49]

> When deciding to support UN Security Council Resolution 1970 and making no objection to Resolution 1973 on Libya, we believed that these decisions would help limit the excessive use of force and pave the way for a political settlement. Unfortunately, the actions undertaken by NATO countries under these resolutions led to their grave violation and support for one of the parties to the civil war, with the goal of ousting the existing regime-damaging in the process the authority of the Security Council....
>
> It is clear that after what had happened in Libya it was impossible to go along with the UN Security Council taking decisions that would not be adequately explicit and would allow those responsible for their implementation to act at their own discretion. Any mandate given on behalf of the entire international community should be as clear and precise as possible in order to avoid ambiguity. It is therefore important to understand what is really happening in Syria and how to help that country to pass though this painful stage of its history.

Along with such comments from diplomats, netizens are covering and discussing what the UN is doing about the Syrian conflict. A summary on the Moon of Alabama blog of the General Assembly meeting discussing the Houla Massacre described how the UN Secretary General, the Secretary General of the League of Arab States and other officials, along with many of the representatives of the nations at the UN, blamed the massacre on the Syrian government, even though there were few facts available as to what had happened and who was behind the events.[50] Though rarely mentioned in the mainstream media, there

were comments by the ambassadors of several member states including the Syrian Ambassador and the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, those of Venezuela, of Nicaragua, and a few others calling for an investigation, into the details of the massacre, before making any rush to judgment.[51]

## V Conclusion: Channels of Communication for International Relations

In the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, the misrepresentations by the mainstream Western media and Arab satellite media have seemed difficult to counter effectively. In the Cheonan situation, the misrepresentations were effectively countered both internally and on an international level. In his presentation to journalists at the press conference marking the start of China's presidency of the UN Security Council in March 2011, China's Ambassador to the UN, Li Baodong, recognized the impact of the international media on the work of the Security Council. He went so far as to refer to the international media as the "16th member of the Security Council."[52] The Cheonan conflict is one where the international critique of the South Korean Cheonan report was an encouragement to at least some members of the Security Council, to act diplomatically to calm the conflict. Similarly, the North Korean Ambassador held a rare press conference and indicated that he found encouragement in the international support for the critique. Along with the many online articles by netizens critiquing the role of the South Korean government in the Cheonan conflict, progressive media in South Korea covered the activities of those challenging the Cheonan report and also reported on the Russian investigation of the problem. There were also articles in the Chinese media and the Russian media that critiqued the South Korean efforts to blame the breakup of the ship on North Korea.

The actions of the Security Council in the Libya and the more recent Syria conflict show the serious nature of the problem Medvedev referred to in his talk in March.

Looking at the problem it is important to analyze the nature of the media manipulation and the means of responding to such distorted

information.

In his book *The Nerves of Government* Karl W. Deutsch writes that: "Men have long and often concerned themselves with the power of governments, much as some observers try to assess the muscle power of a horse or an athlete. Others have described the laws and institutions of states, much as anatomists describe the skeleton or organs of a body. This book concerns itself less with the bones or muscles of the body politic than with its nerves – its channels of communication and decision."[53]

Deutsch goes on to explain that "it might be profitable to look upon government somewhat less as a problem of power and somewhat more as a problem of steering and communication." He maintains that, "It is communication, that is, the ability to transmit messages and to react to them, that makes organizations…." He proposes that this is true for the cells in the human body as it is for the "organizations of thinking human beings in social groups."[54]

The significance of this perspective is that distorted messages are the basis for distorted social organization. A social organization that can make an accurate assessment of the conditions on the ground in a conflict, is in a position to analyze what is needed for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

There are a number of scholarly articles studying the impact of the Internet on media and on communication among netizens. Some of the articles focus on the communication channels created, and the nature of not only the transmission of information, but also its reception.

Deutsch makes a distinction between power and information. He writes that "Power, we might say, produces changes, information triggers them in a suitable receiver."[55] It is not the amount of what is transmitted that is necessarily significant, but rather the nature of what it is, what the receiver is, and the effect of the information on the receiver. Deutsch gives the example of the relative weakness of the Nazi quisling government in Norway at the end of WWII, and the relative strength of the resistance because it had better channels of communication.[56]

Joseph S. Nye in an article, "The Future of American Power," argues that information is indeed important in the battle for the U.S. to

try to maintain its power.[57] He writes that, "Conventional wisdom holds that the state with the largest army prevails, but in the information age, the state (or the nonstate actor) with the best story may sometime win."[58] He advises, "It is time for a new narrative about the future of U.S. power."[59] But for him, whether or not the story helps to obtain the desired goal is important, not the truth or accuracy of the narrative.

At a program at the Japan Society in New York where Nye spoke about his book *The Future of Power*, he was asked a question about his view of U.S. actions in the NATO war against Libya. Nye responded that what President Barack Obama had done with respect to the NATO war against Libya was exactly right.[60] Obama had waited until he had the needed narrative to justify the military action against Libya. It was important, Nye explained, that the U.S. not be seen as once again attacking a Muslim country as had happened with Iraq. Instead the Arab League and the UN Security Council resolutions provided a narrative "of a legitimate enforcement of humanitarian responsibility to protect civilians." This provided Obama with the ability to claim that the U.S. was taking "collective responsibility," not that the U.S. was undertaking a military intervention.

The problem with Nye's argument is that he is focusing on how the world perceives the action he is taking, not on the actual nature of the action itself.

But what happened in Libya was a military action to support an armed insurgency. The NATO bombing of Libya was not for the protection of civilians, but for the protection of an armed insurrection against the government and people of Libya.

Similarly, when the UN Security Council passed UN Resolution 1973, many of the ambassadors who spoke said the resolution was to protect peaceful protesters in Libya. A few days later the Russian Federation's President Vladimir Putin, who was then the Prime Minister of Russia, said that the "protection of civilians" was but a pretext by which to intervene in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.[61]

Nye's contention that a convincing narrative can gain support for actions, fails to recognize the harm in lives lost and the devastation wrought that results from the use of "convincing narratives" to justify actions that are contrary to the obligations of the UN Charter and the

pursuit of the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Also such duplicity sullies the image of the United Nations amongst peace loving people around the world.

I have briefly surveyed research in English about netizens and have found important scholarship developing in this field. Similarly, there is scholarship in journalism which explores the relationship of alternative journalism and citizenship. I want to propose that there is a need for research in the field of international relations and communication which explores the new forms of online media and discussion that are developing, often across geographic borders. Those who have taken up the struggle against the misinformation in the Cheonan case or against the media attacks on Libya and Syria are pioneering this relatively new form of alternative journalism, netizen journalism. Speaking about the potential for such a journalism Michael Hauben, whose pioneering research on the social impact of the Internet recognized the emergence of the netizens, writes:[62] "As people continue to connect to Usenet and other discussion forums, the collective population will contribute back to the human community this new form of news."

Hauben recognized that a new form of news was evolving which would include both the contributions of netizens and the capabilities of the Internet. Describing the frustration of many netizens with the traditional media that they had to rely on before the Internet, Hauben wrote, "Today, similarly, the need for a broader and more cooperative gathering and reporting of the News has helped create the new online media that is gradually supplementing traditional forms of journalism."

What Hauben realized is there was a symbiosis developing between the news, netizens and the Internet. These were evolving into an interdependent partnership which had become substantial. He wrote, "the collective body of people assisted by (Usenet) software, has grown larger than any individual newspaper…."

There are many examples that have developed of netizens making their contributions to the News and the Net.

One important example of this new media was the anti-cnn web site created in China in 2008.[63] The website was created in response to Western media distortions of the Tibet demonstrations and riots and the website critiqued these distortions.

Netizens in South Korea and in various online sites around the world took on to challenge the inaccuracies and serious problems in the South Korean government investigation into the sinking of the Cheonan. Their work had an effect at the UN. In 2011, there was an online critique by netizens of the UN Security Council misrepresentation of the armed insurgency in Libya as peaceful demonstrators needing foreign military intervention for protection. The UN can only benefit from such input. It is still too soon to know whether netizens will be able to have a significant impact on the UN in its handling of the crisis in Syria, but those defending Syrian sovereignty have received support and encouragement from the increasing spread of netizen journalism.

The significance of this new form of journalism is that there are netizens who are dedicated to doing the research and analysis to determine the interests and actions that are too often hidden from public view. By revealing the actual forces at work, netizens are making it possible to have a more accurate grasp of whose interests are being served and what is at stake in the events that make up the news.

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There are over 450 such lists indicated in the UN records. As each list can contain several or a large number of documents the Security Council has received, the number of such documents is likely to be in the thousands.

Under Rule 39 of the Council procedures, the Security Council may invite any person it deems competent for the purpose to supply it with information on a given subject. Thus the two procedures in the Security Council's provisional rules give it the basis to find assistance on issues it is considering from others outside the Council and to consider the contribution as part of its deliberation
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# The UN Role in Korea 1947-1953: Is it Being Repeated Today?*

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This presentation is based on a paper I wrote with the title, "Is the UN Role in Korea 1947-1953 the Model Being Repeated Today?" I will

first speak about the UN role in the election in 1948 that created a separate South Korea and in the Korean War. Then I will look briefly to see if the UN is still playing the same role in the recent Libyan and Syrian situations. One question I am asking is what prevents the UN from living up to its Charter?

After WWII, the question of the future of Korea was addressed internationally at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in Dec 1945. It was agreed that a U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission would meet to assist in forming a provisional Korean government. There were no Koreans at the Moscow Conference or at any previous discussion by the allies about Korea. Apparently ignored in Moscow was the fact that the Korean nationalists and socialists had already formed in September 1945 a Korean People's Republic based on Peoples Committees throughout the Peninsula.

## The UN and the Creation of a Separate South Korea

By the summer of 1947, it was clear that the bilateral Joint Commission set up by the Moscow Conference was failing. According to a plan it had been working on for a year, the U.S. brought the "problem of Korean independence" to the UN. Not to the Security Council where a Soviet veto was possible but to the General Assembly, which has, according to the Charter, only the powers to "discuss" and "recommend."

The Soviet Union offered a counter proposal: Both sides remove their troops to allow "the Korean people itself the establishment of a national government."[1] But the U.S. had made the strategic decision to involve the UN before it would remove its troops. The Soviet Union made known that it rejected the legitimacy of the General Assembly debating this question. The majority of the General Assembly members passed a resolution[2] recognizing the "rightful claims of the people of Korea to independence" but also establishing a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (called UNTCOK) to travel, observe and hold consultations throughout Korea. The language of the resolution seemed to treat the Korean people as one nation and set as its purpose the independence of that nation. But the action of sending the commission could also be seen as an intervention in the internal affairs of the

Korean people.

When the UNTCOK commission arrived in Seoul it adopted a resolution "that the sphere of this Commission is the whole of Korea and not merely a section."[3] It immediately found two obstacles. First, the Soviet Union stood firm. UNTCOK could not consult or observe in the Soviet zone. Second, the social and political situation in the U.S. zone meant UNTCOK could not consult with most leftist parties due to the suppression of left wing activity by the U.S. military government. Despite the suppression, some leftists and others did convey to the Commission their opposition to creating a separate South Korean state which they saw as the likely result of UNTCOK's activity.

After less than one month, UNTCOK decided it could not observe the national election it was sent to conduct and should report this back to the General Assembly. For the U.S., the UN was crucial to its plans to be able to have a presence on the Asian mainland while also able to withdraw it troops from Korea. Many nations friendly to the U.S. feared that what the U.S. wanted "would actually result in permanent division and two hostile governments."[4] Even after high level consultations, the U.S. failed to convince Australia and Canada to drop their opposition. Despite negative votes by Australia and Canada, UNTCOK was sent back by the General Assembly to implement the program that had been meant for the whole peninsula but now only in the southern zone.

Back in Korea, one half of the commissioners argued that elections in South Korea alone would contribute nothing to the unifying of Korea, so the United Nations has no right to participate in them.[5] That included the Indian commissioner who stated that supporting an election only in the U.S. zone was not legally sound. However, he was under instructions from his government to proceed with supporting the election. The General Assembly decision he was instructed was a political not a legal decision.[6] With instructions from their governments which were under U.S. economic and ideological pressure, all the commissioners aligned themselves with giving the U.S. support for an election in its zone alone and thus the creation of a separate South Korean state. Legal questions or UN principles had been put aside.

The 35 members of UNTCOK had the impossible task to observe an election among 20 million people living in the U.S. zone. The U.S.

military government and right wing paramilitary groups controlled the entire election process. Most major political parties and politicians in southern Korea opposed the elections. There were strikes, demonstrations and protests against creating a separate South Korea. The repression of this opposition resulted in over 10,000 arrests and hundreds of deaths.

The election was held on May 10, 1948. On the basis of its minimal observations, without giving significance to the overwhelming evidence of coercion and military control of the election process, the commission sent its report to the General Assembly calling the election "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate of those parts of Korea which were accessible to the Commission."[7] From that time on, that election has been described in UN and U.S. documents as "sanctioned" or "supervised" by the UN despite the extremely limited and compromised role of UNTCOK in the election process.

A rush of events followed the election, including the convening of an assembly in the south but calling itself a 'National Assembly' and the writing of a constitution for a 'Republic of Korea.' The creation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the U.S. zone was followed shortly by the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the Soviet zone. UNTCOK had thus helped solidify a division of Korea which haunts the world until today.

The UN role in the creation of the ROK in 1948 also set the basis to label the DPRK an aggressor across an international border two and one half years later.

## The UN and the Korean War

When hostilities broke out at the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950, the U.S. had a general plan ready: Request that the UN Security Council call for a cease fire. If the fighting does not stop immediately, request that the UN authorize military and other sanctions.

Twelve hours after the start of hostilities in Korea, the U.S. State Department called UN Secretary General Trygve Lie and read to him an edited version of the cable it received from the U.S. Ambassador in Seoul. It hid from the Secretary General that the Ambassador was not yet clear how the hostilities started. Did the North attack the South or

did the South attack the North which repelled the attack on then went on the offense?[8]

Later in the morning the U.S. requested that the Security Council call an emergency meeting for that day. At the meeting, the Council president recognized the Secretary General as the first speaker. Trygve Lie said he believed the North Koreans had violated the UN Charter, was the aggressor and had breached the peace. That statement contradicted the report he had received from the UN commission in Korea which provided no evidence yet about how the hostilities began.[9] The U.S. then introduced its resolution condemning North Korea for a breach of the peace. To protest the non seating of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union was boycotting Security Council meetings. The representative of Yugoslavia unsuccessfully offered an alternative resolution calling for a cease-fire and the invitation of North Korea to voice its complaint to the UN. He explained that "there seemed to be a lack of precise information that could enable the Council to pin responsibility." This agreed with the recommendation from the UN commission in Korea that the Security Council urge mediation between the two sides to negotiate peace.[10]

The U.S. ordered its military to give air and sea support and all possible military aid to South Korea. Then the U.S. offered a draft resolution calling for sanctions against North Korea. No mediation as advocated by the UN Commission was going to be tried. The resolution passed requiring that "members of the U.S. resolution furnish such assistance to the ROK as may be necessary to repel the armed attack." In a later resolution, the command of all operations was given to the United States under a Unified Command not subject in anyway to UN control or oversight.

For this talk, the next relevant event was the decision the U.S. made to send its military north across the 38th Parallel with a push toward the Yalu River and the eventual carpet fire bombing of all of North Korea. It can be argued that crossing the 38th Parallel and such bombing was an aggression in violation of the UN Charter and of the Security Council resolution "to restore international peace and security." Even the Secretary Trygve Lie began more urgently to call for negotiations.

Finally on July 27, 1953 an armistice was signed without the ROK.

Until today there is yet to be a peace treaty. Korean is still divided at the 38th Parallel. U.S. troops have been stationed in South Korea as a sign that the war-like situation continues. And as we saw in 2010 in the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents a resumption of hostilities is always a possibility.

Fifty-eight years later the UN was involved in authorizing another war. This time in Libya.

## The UN and the Libyan War

The conflict in Libya broke out in mid February 2011. Two UN resolutions and NATO bombing internationalized the conflict. All 15 Security Council member states explained their votes as protection for Libyan civilians. None mentioned non-interference or other UN Charter principles.

Soon after the U.S. started bombing Libya, U.S. Congressman Dennis Kucinich gave a speech to the U.S. Congress.[11] I will use that speech to show parallels between the Korean and Libyan Wars. "Let us make no mistake about it," Kucinich told the Congress "dropping 2000 lb. bombs and unleashing the massive firepower of our air force on the capital of a sovereign state is in fact an act of war." Up until the Korean War, every U.S. president seeking to order the U.S. military into major action followed the Constitution and asked Congress for a declaration of war. In the Korean case in 1950 and the Libyan in 2011, instead of Congress, the U.S. president went to the UN Security Council for authorization of war.

In February 2011, the Security Council met to consider the crisis in Libya. Outside of all precedent, two defectors from the government of Libya were allowed into the consultation sessions with Council members. Their emotional appeals rather than any first hand report from UN personnel in Libya were taken as the basis for a resolution condemning Libya.[12] Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon spoke after the votes. He too offered no evidence or Charter principles to justify military action against a sovereign state not threatening any other nation.

The no-fly zone authorized by the Security Council[13] was immediately transgressed by U.S. and the NATO missile and air strikes at all manner of targets and structures. Like in the Korean War so also in the

NATO bombing of Libya, the UN exercised no political or other control over the military measures it authorized.

In the Libya crisis, the Russia Federation played the same role that the Soviet Union played in the Korean crisis. It did not veto the rush to intervene. What about China? Had the People's Republic of China been on the Security Council as it deserved in 1950, could the UN sanction of a U.S.-lead war against North Korea have been avoided? But even then, the U.S. was prepared to use the General Assembly to authorize the war it wanted. And if we look at the invasion of Iraq, we see the U.S. made its war even without UN sanction. Still the question needs to be raised, why did not China or Russia veto Resolution 1973 authorizing an air war against Libya? Is the world stuck with the division of Korea and instability in Libya because the UN cannot be a force to challenge the U.S./Western European powers?

This brings me to the case of the crisis in Syria which started in March 2011 and continues today.

## The UN and Syria

During 2012, of the 15th Security Council members there were five members of NATO (U.K., U.S., France, Germany and Portugal). Like in the Libyan case, the NATO Security Council members sought to bring resolutions for UN sanctioned intervention to change the government in Syria. But this time, China and Russia vetoed the resolutions. The U.S. Ambassador expressed outrage that the tough sanctions and arms embargo needed she said to "protect the population" were not enacted.[14] She was introducing a different principle, the Responsibility to Protect (often call, R2P) which is not in the Charter and she was faulting Russia and China for not abiding by it. But R2P is in conflict with the Charter principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.[15] The representative of China emphasized this principle, saying any action the UN took should contribute to peace and stability and comply with the United Nations Charter principle of non-interference in internal affairs.[16]

Not able to get UN backing from the Security Council, the forces seeking a change of the Syrian government turned to the General Assembly. Two meetings of the General Assembly were called. Both

were outside normal procedure. Some General Assembly members protested, suggesting that the president of the General Assembly was using his office to further the political goals of his country. To balance the picture of the source of violence, several delegates referred to an Arab League Observer Mission Report which went a long way to confirm Syrian government claims about armed groups and terrorists operating in Syria.[17] The Nicaraguan Ambassador stressed that there is "armed violence by irregular groups supported by foreign powers against the Syrian people." She feared a Libya style UN solution. She urged that the General Assembly not allow Responsibility to Protect (R2P) "to become a devious argument to justify intervention in the domestic affairs of states."[18]

On February 16th, the General Assembly passed a resolution for full support for regime change in Syria. But the General Assembly did not and could not call for member state action. The UN Charter reserves requiring action of member states for the Security Council. Based on the General Assembly resolution a Special Envoy was appointed and the Security Council passed two resolutions establishing a United Nations Supervisory Mission in Syria called UNSMIS to monitor and report violations of a cease-fire.

In the Korean situation, the Soviet Union rejected the legitimacy of UNTCOK and UNTCOK ended up serving the interests of the U.S. In the Syrian situation, Russia welcomed UNSMIS as offering a chance to help stop the violence while avoiding external intervention. The U.S. Ambassador greeted the UNSMIS with the warning, "Let there be no doubt, we, our allies and others in this body are planning and preparing for those actions that will be required of all of us…."[19]

When this presentation was prepared it was too soon to know what role UNSMIS and the UN will continue to play in the Syrian crisis. Russia and China have so far supported the UN Charter principles of respect for state sovereignty. Several member states of the UN oppose R2P and its justification of interference by external forces into internal strife and crises. But having helped the world to have a divided Korea and a ruined Libya is there any chance the UN's role will lead Syria to a better fate?

To me the UN is a dilemma. It provides a forum for more than one

side or just the major powers to be heard. It provides for the gathering of all nations and the possibility with its deliberations for compromises or new networks of nations to emerge. But still one of the world's major powers, dominated the UN in the Korean situation and with its allies in the Libyan situation. In the Syrian crisis, Russia and China have so far challenged and resisted that dominance. The challenge is not just from those two states and several others. That challenge is also taken up by some very few journalists at the UN and by the much greater body of netizen journalists who have begun to analyze and circulate the voice of the challengers and add their own research and voice. The Syrian crisis leaves me with the question is it possible that the UN can shake off the Korean model of manipulated elections, wars and divisions? And if not this time, might it be possible in the future?

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*See the paper prepared for the conference at:
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/j-china2012-paper.doc.
See this presentation at:
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/j-china2012-talk.doc.

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