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Netizen Journalism and the Crisis in Syria

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Introduction

“Each generation has to solve its own problems. The sit-down generation solved the problem of organization. The postwar generation solved the problem of pensions and inflation. Not entirely, but a good start was begun. The present generation is faced with the greatest problems of all. They are Automation, Peace and Politics.”

(from *The Searchlight* (newspaper of UAW Local 659, Flint, MI), April 21, 1960, p. 2).*

This is what one of the pioneers of the American labor movement Jack Palmer wrote when he retired.

Significantly, this issue of the *Amateur Computerist* is the 50th issue of the publication which was started 25 years ago in 1988. The current issue is dedicated to exploring the nature of netizen journalism and its potential to provide for a more accurate consideration of situations in the news.

This issue includes a number of articles covering how the UN Security Council has responded to the conflict in Syria in the time period beginning on October 4, 2011 through September 28, 2012. The significance of the set of articles covering this time period is to provide some perspective on the actions of the Security Council in connection with Syria.

The mainstream western media narrative claims that two permanent members of the Security Council have impeded cooperative activity to stop the killings and violence in Syria.

The set of articles in this issue presents a very different picture of the actions of the Security Council with respect to Syria. A more accurate narrative emerges from considering the actual activities of the Security Council during this period. By October 4, 2011, two draft resolutions had been introduced into the Security Council. One resolution encouraged the Syrian government to implement reforms and it condemned extremist violence against the Syrian government and people.

The second resolution condemned the actions of the Syrian government without also seeking to stop the foreign intervention by other nations sending weapons and mercenaries into Syria and thereby encouraging attacks against the government, civilians and infrastructure of Syria. This second resolution portrayed the government of Syria as the whole problem and gave support to extremist violence.

Only the second resolution was brought to a vote by members of the Security Council, leading to a veto of this resolution by two permanent members of the Security Council. Had this second resolution been

passed it would have served to fan the violent attacks on the Syrian government, people and infrastructure. Such actions are contrary to the role of the Security Council as provided for in the UN Charter.

A problem of the Security Council is demonstrated by the way that the second resolution supporting violent attacks against the sovereignty and people of a member nation of the UN was put to a vote. It was clear there was disagreement with the resolution and that it would be vetoed but was put to a vote for political purposes rather than the Charter purpose of peace and security.

Support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria which is in accord with the UN charter requires condemnation of foreign intervention into the internal affairs of a member state. The problem, however, is not merely those nations fueling the armed insurgency and who are trying to overthrow the government of Syria. The problem is also that there is a mainstream media that broadcasts the false narrative of an alleged evil Syrian government. This false narrative is presented by the NATO members of the UN Security Council and aids their quest to carry out regime change in Syria despite what the majority of the Syrian people desire, or what the principles of the UN Charter require.

The mainstream media which broadcasts this false framing is essentially a media supporting a NATO dominated restructuring of the Middle East. A nation like Syria which provided a challenge to the Israeli and NATO domination of the region is henceforth a target, both as a warning to other nations not to object to the geopolitical designs of the NATO powers, and as an encouragement to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations for their goal of replacing a secular Syria.

The western media claims of nonexistent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in the period leading up to the March 2003 U.S. and British invasion of Iraq paved the way for the invasion. The false claims of alleged weapons also demonstrated that along with a military invasion of a country, there will be the false media claims demonizing the government of the nation to be invaded. To have a more peaceful world, there is a need to be able to effectively and conscientiously counter not only the military acts of aggression but also the false media misrepresentations of the aggression.

The articles in this issue of the *Amateur Computerist* are an effort

to propose examples of netizen journalism to help to not only expose the false narratives being presented, but also to establish what is the accurate narrative that is being hidden by the military maneuvers and its manipulative media coverage.

In the article in this issue, “The United Nations and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen” there is a reference to a talk by the current Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, describing the media campaign against the government of Syria. Medvedev sees that the “mass media manipulation of public opinion” has become a “tool in international relations.” This is a problem that he explains poses a serious security dimension and it must be recognized and provisions made to counter this danger.

While Medvedev discusses the problem, we recognize the importance of creating a netizen media that will provide a means to help solve this problem. The goal of the *Amateur Computerist* is not only to expose the problem of the false narratives and media manipulation, but to help demonstrate the kind of netizen media needed as a counter narrative.

* http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/text/article_from_vol_1.txt

[Editor’s Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Oct 27, 2011 at:

http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2011/10/27/security_council_veto_on_syria/]

UN Security Council Vote Challenges Hidden Agenda on Syria

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I – Introduction

On Tuesday, October 4, the UN Security Council announced it

would take up a draft resolution on Syria. This meeting was to be an instance, when the lessons some Security Council members had drawn from the experience with the resolutions on Libya could be reflected in their action on a draft resolution against Syria.

Several weeks earlier, journalists had been told that there were two different draft resolutions about Syria tabled at the Security Council.

One draft resolution on Syria had been proposed by Russia and China. Russia and China said their resolution had been designed to encourage a peaceful process to help the Syrian government deal both with its stated desire for reforms and with the extremist violence against the Syrian government that was making such reform difficult.

The other draft resolution was tabled by four of the European members of the Security Council – France, U.K., Germany and Portugal.¹ This draft condemned the actions of the Syrian government. It did not oppose foreign intervention into Syria's domestic affairs. The European draft called on all states to deny the Syrian government arms, but made no such call to deny weapons to the armed opposition.

The European draft framed the problem as the Syrian government, similar to how Resolution 1973 framed the problem in Libya as being due to the government guided by Muammar Gaddafi.

Coming to the stakeout area where the journalists were congregated, the four European Security Council members informed journalists that they had called for a vote on their resolution that evening at a meeting scheduled to start at 6:00 p.m.

II – The Security Council Vote on the European Draft Resolution

At 6:20 p.m., the Nigerian Ambassador U. Joy Ogwu, as the President of the Security Council for the month of October, opened the meeting.² Under Rule 37 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council, she invited the Syrian UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari to participate in the meeting.³

The Security Council President called for a vote on the European draft resolution. No members spoke before the vote.

There were nine votes in favor of the resolution, two votes opposed

and four abstentions. Voting in favor of the draft resolution were Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, France, Gabon, Germany, Nigeria, Portugal, the U.K., and the U.S. Voting against were China and Russia. Abstaining were Brazil, India, Lebanon and South Africa. The ‘no’ votes by China and Russia, as permanent members of the Security Council, represented a double veto of the European draft resolution. The European draft resolution failed to pass.

III – Comments by Nations Voting ‘No’ on the Resolution

What was different in this situation from the vote on Security Council Resolution 1973 about Libya, is that instead of the two permanent members Russia and China abstaining, as they had done on the Libyan resolution in March, this time they both voted ‘no’.

Russian Federation UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin explained his vote. He said that working with China, Russia had prepared a draft resolution which was supported by Brazil, India and South Africa. The fundamental philosophy of the draft resolution he had worked on, he explained, was to support a respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and the principle of non-intervention in its internal affairs. These are key principles of the UN Charter. Such an effort, he argued, necessitated the need to refrain from confrontation. There should be no threats, ultimatums, or sanctions against the Syrian government.

“The situation in Syria cannot be considered in the Council separately from the Libyan experience,” Ambassador Churkin said. (Transcript, p. 4) He referred to the alarm expressed in the international community at NATO statements that Security Council resolutions on Libya provided a model for future actions by NATO.

Churkin specifically pointed to how the language of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya was turned into its opposite by some members of the Council. The language calling for a quick cease-fire, he said was turned into a full-fledged civil war. The provision of a no-fly zone, he explained, “has morphed into the bombing of (Libyan) oil refineries, television stations and other civilian sites.” (Transcript, p. 4) The arms embargo was used as a pretext for a naval blockade affecting humanitarian goods. The call to prevent a tragedy in Benghazi led to a tragedy in

Sirte and Bani Walid, observed the Ambassador.

Though Churkin did not present a specific description of this tragedy, NATO bombing campaigns were being waged against civilians in Bani Walid and Sirte, even as the Council met. “These types of models should be excluded from global practices once and for all,” said Churkin.

One of the reasons Churkin gave for voting against the European draft, was that those writing the resolution had refused to build in a prohibition against foreign intervention into the Syrian conflict. “Our proposals for wording on the non-acceptability of foreign intervention were not taken into account and, based on the well-known events in North Africa that can only put us on our guard,” Churkin told the Council.

While the Russian Ambassador condemned Syrian government repression of non-violent demonstrations, he also pointed to the need to condemn the extremists’ violent actions against the Syrian government taken outside the law and aimed at gaining foreign sponsors for their actions. Churkin offered to continue to work on the Russian-Chinese draft resolution to support a process toward a peaceful resolution of the internal Syrian conflict.

China’s UN Ambassador Li Baodong, explaining his own vote against the European draft resolution, called on all parties in Syria to avoid violence. Whether the Security Council takes further action on the question of Syria, he said, should depend on whether such action would facilitate the easing of tension in Syria, help to defuse differences through political dialogue, and contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Important for China was whether the Security Council’s efforts comply with the UN Charter and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, “which has a bearing upon the security and survival of developing countries, in particular small and medium sized countries,” Ambassador Li told the Security Council.

China’s Ambassador reminded the Council that there were two draft resolutions, one of which China supported because “it advocates respect for the sovereignty of Syria and resolving the crisis through political dialogue.” The other draft, the one that was voted down, focused “solely

on exerting pressure on Syria, even threatening to impose sanctions,” he explained.

IV – Nations Abstaining Explain their Vote

The four nations that had abstained also spoke to the Council about the reasons for their votes.

The Indian Ambassador, Hardeep Singh Puri, explained that states have an obligation “to respect the fundamental aspirations and respond to the grievances” of their people. (Transcript, p. 6) “At the same time,” he said, “states also have the obligation to protect their citizens from armed groups and militants.” Clarifying his concern, he said, “While the right of people to protest peacefully is to be respected, states cannot but take appropriate action when militant groups – heavily armed – resort to violence against State authority and infrastructure.”

He saw the need for “the international community” to give “time and space for the Syrian government to implement far-reaching reform measures they have announced.” For this to happen, he proposed, it is necessary “that the opposition forces in Syria give up the path of armed insurrection and engage constructively with the authorities.”

The Indian Ambassador cautioned that the international community should “not complicate the situation by threats of sanctions, regime change, et cetera.”

Ambassador Basu Saggu of South Africa explained his nation’s abstention. He observed, “We have seen recently that Security Council resolutions have been abused, and that their implementation has gone far beyond the mandate of what was intended.” (Transcript, p. 11)

He questioned whether the plans of the European sponsors of the draft resolution were not part of “a hidden agenda aimed at once again instituting regime change which has been an objective clearly stated by some.” He referred to the rejection by the European Security Council members of “language that clearly excluded the possibility of military intervention in the resolution...” He proposed that, “the Security Council should proceed with caution on Syria lest we exacerbate an already volatile situation.”

Lebanon’s Ambassador Nawwaf Salam said his country had abstained to defend Syria’s right to sovereignty and “the integrity of its

people and land” and in protection of Syria’s unity and stability. (Transcript, p. 9)

Explaining why her nation abstained from voting for the draft resolution, Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti of Brazil said that the European draft resolution had been rushed to a vote rather than allowing the needed time to accommodate the serious concerns raised by members about it. (Transcript, p. 11-12)

V – Votes of Nations Sponsoring the Draft Resolution

Explaining their votes in favor of the resolution, France, the U.K., Germany and Portugal portrayed what is happening in Syria mainly as a movement for “freedom and democracy” essentially denying that there have been violent attacks against the Syrian government or foreign intervention which encourages these attacks. Their response to the concerns raised by Russia and China and other Council members was to dismiss the issues that they raised. The four European members brought their draft resolution to a vote without resolving the disagreements. While it is likely they had anticipated a veto, they claimed to be surprised at the results of the vote. U.K. Ambassador Sir Mark Lyall Grant maintained that their text “contained nothing that any member of this Council should have felt the need to oppose.” (Transcript, p. 7)

VI – Other Council Members Voting in Favor Draft Resolution

The U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice said that the U.S. was “outraged” by the action of the Council. (Transcript, p. 8) The U.S. offered no specific responses to concerns raised by other council members about the resolution, such as Ambassador Churkin’s concern about how the words of the Libyan resolution were turned into their opposites, or the South African concern that the draft European resolution on Syria would be used for actions far beyond any mandates intended by all members of the Council. Ambassador Rice merely said that the resolution against Syria was “not about military intervention” or about Libya.

Nowhere in her comments was there any response to the problem other Council members raised about alleged foreign intervention, like

that of Turkey and other states which are repeating with Syria the pattern of what NATO nations had done in the case of Libya. Colombia and Bosnia expressed their support for the resolution condemning the Syrian government. Gabon and Nigeria did not speak to explain why they voted in favor of the European resolution.

VII – Syrian Comments to the Council

After all of the Council members who had asked to speak, had been given the floor, Syrian Ambassador Ja'afari was called on to present his comments to the Council. It is the usual Security Council practice to allow a UN member with a material interest in an issue being considered, to present its position, but only after a vote is taken.

The Syrian Ambassador proposed that the reason the NATO countries are targeting his country for hostile action is not because of any humanitarian concerns. The basis for their hostile actions, he said, is “due to our independent political position which does not conform to the agendas of those capitals.” (Transcript, p. 12) Pointing to massacres and human rights violations by the U.S. and other western nations in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Algeria, many African countries, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, Ja'afari said he did not see how anyone could ignore these. The implication was that the nations bringing the draft resolution to the Council had a double standard about whose human rights violations they asked the Council to condemn. While he acknowledged the need and desire of the Syrian people and government for economic, political and social reforms, he denounced the misuse of such demands to try “to facilitate external opposition,” and to “pave the way for external intervention.”

He proposed that, “encouraging the radical demands of the opposition in Syria to topple the government by force of arms, violence and terrorism amounts to a coup supported by outside powers....” (Transcript, p. 14)

He argued that “the intervention of the Security Council in Syrian internal affairs further aggravates the situation and sends a message to extremists and terrorists – that their acts of deliberate sabotage and violence...are encouraged and supported by the Security Council.” (Transcript, p. 14)

Concluding his comments, he expressed his appreciation to the States that had rejected what he characterized as abuse of the Council. “If we are optimistic about the Council,” he said, “it is because we continue to hear the voice of the wise echoing in the Chamber.”

The Security Council meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

VIII – Some Examples of Netizen Comments on the Resolution

While much of the mainstream Western media portrayed the October 4 Security Council meeting in the terms offered by the U.S. and European members of the Council, several responses posted on the Internet demonstrated that there are many people who oppose the actions of the western members of the Security Council.⁴

For example, in one response to media reports that Ambassador Rice said the U.S. was “outraged” by the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the European draft resolution, one netizen asked, “Where is all the outrage over U.S. and Europe’s cracking down on their protesters? Where is the UN resolution on all that?”

A number of netizens applauded Russia and China for vetoing the European resolution against Syria.

Some netizens wrote that Russia and China “should also have vetoed the Libyan resolution.” One netizen explained the view that “they (Russia and China) just allowed NATO to kill Libyans, and destroy the country so they can make big money in reconstruction contracts.”

A U.S. netizen who expressed a similar view said, referring to the U.S. President Obama, “So I guess our Nobel Peace Prize winner wants to spread more peace around the globe. He will have to do it Bush style without UN approval.”

Another netizen said that such a veto a few months ago in the Libyan situation would have prevented the “now ongoing genocide and catastrophe that the U.S., France and so-called U.K. have brought the Libyan nation via NATO bombings and flagrant – shameless support of armed revolt. Perhaps there’s still a chance for the ‘United Nations’ to vindicate itself historically and salvage its long lost credibility and honorable standing.”

Expressing a similar viewpoint, a netizen ended his comment, “If a ‘no-fly zone’ is interpreted by Obama and Sarkozy as six months of unlimited bombing (of Libya), how could China and Russia risk allowing any kind of resolution on another country.”

IX – Conclusion

Comparing the October 4 Security Council meeting which rejected the hostile European draft resolution against Syria with the March 17 meeting approving Resolution 1973 against Libya, what stands out is that on October 4, some members of the Security Council acknowledged the violent actions of some of the internal opposition against the Syrian government. In March the Council had failed to acknowledge the armed insurrection against the Libyan government.

One lesson that several members of the Council appear to have drawn from the Security Council action on Libya, was the need to avoid passing a vague or hostile resolution which could be abused by powerful nations as a pretext to carry out a hidden agenda of regime change.

The opposition on the Security Council to the European draft demonstrated a determination to prevent a NATO type intervention against Syria, similar to that which had been carried out by the U.S., France, and the U.K. against Libya using NATO. The Libyan experience had shown that these powerful western governments would do as they wished using a Security Council resolution as a pretext and the Security Council had no means to stop such abuse of its resolutions.

The UN Charter obligation of the Security Council is to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts affecting peace and security in the international arena. The situation in Syria, as it was in Libya, is a domestic affair complicated by foreign intervention. The fact that many Libyan civilians have been and continued to be killed by NATO bombing missions in Libya as the Council considered a similar resolution against Syria, offered a grotesque backdrop to the fact that some NATO members who are members of the Security Council have continued to try to use the Security Council to claim legal authority for their clearly illegal attack on the sovereignty of UN member nations.⁵

Netizen comments in response to western media reports in support of such illegal actions demonstrate a rejection by these netizens of the

kind of action NATO has undertaken against Libya. The effort of NATO members of the Security Council to use the Libya resolution as a model to support their attack on Syria, was met by a double veto and four abstentions in the Security Council. It was also met by netizens posting articles and comments on the Internet to oppose NATO's actions and to welcome the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the European draft resolution.

Notes

1. S/2011/612, Security Council Draft Resolution (Not approved)
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/612
2. Rule 37 of the "Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council"
<http://www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/rules.pdf>
"Any Member of the United Nations which is not a member of the Security Council may be invited, as the result of a decision of the Security Council, to participate, without vote, in the discussion of any question brought before the Security Council when the Security Council considers that the interests of that Member are specially affected, or when a Member brings a matter to the attention of the Security Council in accordance with Article 35 (1) of the Charter."
3. S/PV.6627, The Security Council Meeting of Oct 4, 2011. I refer to this UN document as "Transcript" in the text of the article. A URL for the document at the UN website is:
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6627
4. Comments in response to an article in the *Washington Post*.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russia-china-block-syria-resolution-at-un/2011/10/04/gIQArcFBML_allComments.html#comments
5. See, for example, an excerpt from a talk given by John Pilger at the October 8, 2011 protest in Trafalgar Square, U.K.
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/pilger101011.html>
"(T)he United States, Britain, and France are bombing a city in Libya called Sirte. There are 100,000 people. Day and night, residential buildings, clinics, schools have been hit with fragmentation bombs and Hellfire missiles.... The media refer to Sirte as a true Gaddafi stronghold. The Channel 4 reporter in Libya describes the attacks as "cutting off the head of the snake." For such heroic journalists, there are two types of humanity in war: there are worthy victims and unworthy victims. The people of Sirte are unworthy victims, and therefore they are expendable both as people and as news. In Iraq the people of Fallujah were also unworthy victims. American Marines, helped by the British, killed some 5,000 people there.... As Harold Pinter would say...none of it happened. It didn't happen even as it was happening. It didn't matter.... We've

had ten years of such crimes that didn't happen, that didn't matter.... The war on Afghanistan was a fraud right from the beginning, just as the attack on Iraq was a fraud and the invasion of Libya is a fraud.”

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Dec14, 2011 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2011/12/14/lessons-from-unscr-1973-on-libya/>]

Lessons from UN Security Council Implementation of Resolution 1973 on Libya

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I – Introduction

As is customary, a press conference was held by Ambassador Vitaly Churkin to mark the beginning of the Russian Federation's Presidency of the Security Council for the month of December, 2011. Ambassador Churkin's comments in this press conference provide insight into an important problem in the structure of the Security Council that became evident in the course of the implementation of the Security Council resolutions against Libya.

The press conference was held on December 2. There is video of the press conference for those who are interested in viewing the conference itself.¹

Though other issues were brought up, many of the questions asked by journalists related to the Russian Federation's views concerning Security Council action on Libya and Syria.

II – Critique of Implementation of SCR 1973 on Libya

During the press conference Ambassador Churkin revealed that

NATO had been asked for a “final report...summing up their view of their complying or not complying, of performing or not performing under the resolutions of the Security Council.” But no summary had been received from NATO. Ambassador Churkin said it was his understanding that NATO was not planning to send the Security Council any summary.

The importance of this revelation is that during its military action against Libya, NATO claimed it was acting under the authorization of UN SC Resolution 1973 (SCR 1973). Yet when asked to provide the Security Council with an evaluation of how its Libyan campaign complied with the actual resolution, apparently NATO did not see itself as being held accountable to the Security Council.

This situation reinforces the observation made by some inside and others outside the Council.² The Council passed SCR 1973, but it had no means of monitoring or controlling how this resolution was implemented. Thus the implementation of this Security Council resolution on Libya reveals a serious flaw in the structure of the Council itself.

Some members maintained that the resolution called for a cease fire and political settlement of the conflict in Libya.

Other Security Council members began bombing Libyan targets, and brought NATO in to carry out a bombing campaign against military, civilian and infrastructure targets in Libya. Ironically, NATO claimed such bombing was about the protection of civilians.³ Similarly a self appointed “Contact Group” on Libya set as its goal, regime change in Libya. Members of the Security Council who expressed opposition to these activities, arguing they were contrary to SCR 1973, had no means to stop such usurpation of Security Council control over the implementation of the resolution.

The December 2 press conference with Ambassador Churkin helped to illustrate and examine this problem.

In an earlier Security Council meeting, Brazil had indicated it was planning to do a concept paper on the “responsibility while protecting” under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept.⁴ Brazil’s two year term on the Security Council will be over at the end of December, but no such concept paper has yet been presented. When Churkin was asked what he could tell journalists about the progress on this paper, he said,

“My understanding is that it is going to be a serious process, a fundamental process of revisiting those things.”

On the issue of the Security Council’s summary of what had happened in the course of implementing Resolution 1973 against Libya, Ambassador Churkin explained the dilemma this posed for the Council. “As to lessons learned, this is a much broader issue which unfortunately I think we cannot put together as council members. It is something for round tables, academics, politicians to discuss in various fora. We discussed that. We have had a number of discussions of the various lessons we have learned, and the things we need to do or not to do.”

He recommended looking back at the Security Council meetings held in open chambers, particularly at the statements he had made in his capacity as the Russian Federation Permanent Representative. “I minced no words about some of the conclusions that need to be drawn from our Libyan experience,” he said. “But I am sure the Libyan experience is something that will have an impact of such importance that this will be a subject of attention for years to come.”

Asked whether the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept had been misused by the Security Council, Ambassador Churkin responded, “This is a very dangerous thing.” This was not only the view of his delegation, but also of others both on the council and outside of the council, he explained.

“That is something that makes the life and work on the Security Council very difficult because words are no longer what they used to be. They have different meanings,” he said, offering as an example the implementation of the No-Fly Zone on Libya contained in SCR 1973.

He described how, “No-Fly Zone in the good old world, used to mean that nobody’s flying. That you prevent aircraft from being used against civilians.”

“In the brave new world,” though, said Churkin, “No-Fly Zone means freewheeling bombing of the targets you choose to bomb in whatever modality and mode you want to bomb. Close air support, OK. Bombing a television station, OK. And that is a matter of grave concern.”

The significance of there being such a big difference in how words are being used, Churkin explained, was that, “Now we have to think not

only about the words and concepts, but about the enormous ability of some of our colleagues to interpret the world out of them. And this is a very serious issue.”

“We need to return to the Council, to our interaction and cooperation with our colleagues, a clear understanding of what we mean,” maintained Churkin.

Demonstrating the significance of this discrepancy between how different members of the Council interpreted the words of resolutions, Churkin pointed out that in the case of Libya, there had been reports that the Gaddafi regime was using airplanes to bomb civilians. (But no evidence was ever presented to support these claims, at the time, or since. -ed)⁵

There were, however, no such reports about Syria. How then could there be “such uncritical enthusiasm” for setting up a No-Fly Zone for Syria, Churkin wondered. Where was this enthusiasm coming from?

“Is it,” he asked, “an indication that in fact when they are saying that they don’t plan any military action (against Syria -ed), they don’t really mean it? When they talk about a no-fly zone, they are already planning targets to bomb in Syria?”

Referring to the implication of this problem, Churkin noted, “On various issues which can have dramatic repercussions for regions and countries, and unfortunately this is clearly the case about Syria and about Iran and about some other issues, so it is not a perfect day for diplomacy, a perfect day to work in the Security Council.”

III – Security Council Action Against Syria

In response to several questions from journalists asking about the Russian Federation’s view of what action was appropriate with respect to Syria, Churkin explained the principles that should guide such action.

“We think it’s the role of the international community to try to help resolve internal crises by promoting dialogue,” Churkin told journalists, “This is what we have been doing with our contacts with the Syrian authorities, opposition, and the Arab League.”

Referring to the proposal of the Arab League to conduct a monitoring mission in Syria, he explained, “We think that the Arab League has a unique opportunity to play a constructive role in Syria.”

This required, however, that the Arab League be willing to consider Syria's proposed amendments to the Arab League proposal, rather than just offering Syria an ultimatum that it had to accept the Arab League proposal with no negotiations over it, said Churkin.

"We think the Syrian government's proposed amendments to that plan could have been considered," he explained. "Personally I looked at the two texts. I haven't seen in the texts anything which couldn't have been bridged there with some negotiations on the modalities of the deployment of that mission."

Concerned that, "this opportunity to really mediate between the government and the opposition is not lost," Churkin proposed that the Arab League economic sanctions imposed on Syria were "counterproductive."

Comparing Security Council action on Syria with its action on Yemen, Churkin said that Russia was able to "exercise our position of principle" in Security Council Resolution 2014 (2011) about Yemen, "by encouraging dialogue and political accommodation on the basis of the Gulf States initiative."⁶ In the case of Yemen, Churkin noted, the Security Council and the international community had rallied in support of the action that Russia proposed.

But when it came to Syria, he described how Russia and China had proposed a resolution that "had many of the same elements which were contained in the resolution which was adopted on... Yemen." In the case of Syria, however, the Russian-Chinese sponsored Resolution, was not supported by several other members of the Council.⁷

"So I think in Yemen the international community can be proud that even in a situation with bloodshed and very serious conflict in a country we were giving a strong signal in favor of dialogue and of political accommodation and this is what we achieved," said Churkin.

"What we don't understand," he noted, "is why if that can be done in Yemen, why that can't apply to Syria."

Furthermore, in the case of Syria, he said, the Security Council met with opposition from some of the capitals, to any form of dialogue to resolve the Syrian conflict. The governments opposed to dialogue, he reported, took the position that there was, "no way dialogue can help. That those who go into dialogue they should stop it immediately," and

that “there is no future in the Arab League initiative.”

Such action is, he proposed “something very counterproductive. And this is something that has acerbated the situation in Syria.”

While maintaining that there is “no [one] prescription for different countries” since they are all structured differently with regard to their traditions and political set up, Churkin proposed that there is a general attitude and principles that can be applied in a general way. This is that “the international community is not there to smell blood and to fan confrontation. But the international community is there to prevent further bloodshed and to encourage dialogue.”

Reflecting on the importance of such an international effort in favor of domestic dialogue, Churkin said, “This is what the United Nations is all about. This is what the Security Council is about.”

IV – Concerns about Libya

With respect to Gaddafi, Churkin said “members of the council, including Russia, thought that what happened to Gaddafi is something that shouldn’t have happened.”

Ambassador Churkin was asked whether the Security Council was concerned about the conditions in Libya for those who had supported the Gaddafi government and particularly, about the situation of Saif al Islam Gaddafi and whether it was conceivable he could get a fair trial in Libya when there was no functioning legal system in the country.

Churkin responded that these concerns about the situation in Libya had been discussed very often and the delegation of the Russian Federation and of a number of other countries had raised these concerns. Also he spoke to concern over the plight of migrant workers in Libya. “We directed the UN mission in Libya to pay proper attention to these issues,” he said.

He indicated that they would continue to follow these issues closely.

V – Conclusion

Ambassador Churkin’s press conference was an important and all too rare example of a press conference held by a member of the Security Council which helps to shed light on the workings of the Council. All

too often the problems that develop in the course of Security Council activity are shrouded in shadows and kept from public view. This is contrary to the obligations of the Council, which is obliged to report on its actions to the General Assembly in annual and special reports under the UN Charter, Article 15(1). Members of the General Assembly responding to the annual report from the Security Council ask for more analytical reports, rather than just summaries of the activities that have gone on over the year.

In his December 2 press conference, Ambassador Churkin shared some of the problems that developed in the Security Council over the course of the implementation of the resolutions on Libya. In the process he has helped clarify what future difficulties in the Security Council will be, given a failure to understand and resolve the problems he has outlined. By helping to reveal the difficulties in the functioning of the Security Council, Ambassador Churkin has provided important details that need further attention and consideration.

Notes

1. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation and President of the Security Council for the month of December, 2011 on the Programme of Work of the Security Council for the month.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/12/press-conference-ambassador-vitaly-churkin-president-of-the-security-council.html>

2. See for example the critique of Resolution 1973 by the Concerned Africans, "An Open Letter to the Peoples of Africa and the World from Concerned Africans," July, 2011.

<http://www.concernedafricans.co.za/>

See also Mahmood Mamdani, "A Ugandan's Perspective: What Does Gaddafi's Fall Mean for Africa."

<http://www.unaetimes.com/2011/10/>

3. For some of the examples of NATO's bombing of civilians that went on during its military campaign against Libya see: Global Civilians for Peace in Libya

<http://globalciviliansforpeace.com/tag/bombing/>

"Libya: War Without End" by Stephen Lendmain, ThePeoplesVoice.org, October 30, 2011.

<http://www.thepeoplesvoice.org/TPV3/Voices.php/2011/10/30/libya-war-without-end>

4. See Nov. 9, 2011 meeting of the Security Council on Protecting Civilians in the

Situation of Armed Struggle, S/PV.6650, p. 16 Ambassador Viotti said: “The Brazilian delegation will shortly circulate a concept paper. It elaborates on the idea that the international community, as it exercises its responsibility to protect, must demonstrate a high level of responsibility while protecting.”

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/PRO/N11/585/43/PDF/N1158543.pdf?OpenElement>

5. Actually no evidence was ever presented that airplanes were ever used to bomb civilians under the Gaddafi government. It was only under NATO that there is evidence that airplanes were used resulting in the bombing of civilians. See for example:

<http://globalciviliansforpeace.com/reports>

“Despite detailed investigation we could not find any evidence that the three regions of Tripoli cited in UN resolution 1973 had been subjected to government forces bombardment nor that their had been fighting between government troops and the people, we received many testimonies to the contrary.”

6. See SCR 2014 (passed October 21, 2011)

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2014\(2011\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2014(2011))

7. See for example Ronda Hauben, “UN Security Council Challenges Hidden Agenda on Syria,” taz.de

http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2011/10/27/security_council_veto_on_syria/

[Editor’s Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Jan 31, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/01/31/observer-mission-report-syria/>]

AL Observer Report Corrects Media Narratives About Syria

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The Arab League Observer Mission succeeded in providing a different perspective from that of the mainstream western media about what has been happening on the ground in Syria. After a resolution by the Arab League which was worked out in an agreement with the Syrian government, Observers from the League went to Syria and provided a means of investigating what was happening.

The report of the Observers mission that was concluded on January 19, noted several important observations.¹

1. The mission noted that there were false reports being made of explosions or violence and when the observers went to the location, they found that the reports were unfounded.
2. The mission found that media accounts were exaggerated about the nature of incidents or numbers of people killed in incidents and protests.
3. There were discrepancies in the lists the Mission received of people in detention. Names were repeated, or information was missing or inaccurate about detainees.
4. The Mission observed armed groups committing acts of violence against Government forces, resulting in the death and injury of the forces being attacked. Some of the armed groups were using flares and armor-piercing projectiles.
5. A French journalist who was killed and a Belgium journalist who was injured were the victims of opposition mortar shells.
6. The mission was the target of a hostile media campaign with media publishing untrue statements, distorting the truth, and attributing statements to the head of the mission which were never made.
7. Such accounts by the media undermined the work of the observer mission and seemed to be aimed toward making the mission fail.
8. The Observer mission was able to fulfill its mandate.

The most important observation was as the Report stated, that it had “determined that there is an armed entity” that had not been mentioned in the protocol setting up the mission. This armed opposition entity was a force that needed to be taken into account in structuring the mission. The report listed a number of violent incidents, some of which were

carried out by the Free Syrian Army and some of the other armed opposition groups, stating that such incidents would widen the gap and increase the bitterness in the situation.

The observers requested the continuation of the mission, but with proper equipment and numbers, for another month. The committee in charge approved the request. The mission was to be extended. But suddenly, a different agenda was put into action, an agenda calling for regime change in Syria. Similarly, armed attacks against the government were stepped up and government forces sought to stem these attacks.

What had been a promising beginning for a contribution to a peaceful settlement of the conflict, was hijacked by forces intent on imposing a military solution of regime change on Syria.

Subsequently, pressure was put on the UN Security Council, pressure from both inside and outside the Council to authorize a proposal for regime change in Syria and for foreign intervention against Syria. The scenario is to play out with a high level meeting at the Security Council on Tuesday, January 31, of Foreign Ministers of some of the nations on the Council.

Also there was a report at Voltaire Network that on Sunday night, January 29, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Abdul Al-Zayani, went to Brussels to meet with the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen.²

Recent information is that the Arab League Secretary-General decided to freeze the Observer Mission which had been renewed for another month by the League's Ad Hoc Ministerial Council. The Committee, according to an article at Voltaire Network is "an Arab Plan follow-up organism consisting of five States out of 22 (Algeria, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Sudan).³ This Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee adopted the observer's report by a vote of four votes in favor (Algeria, Egypt, Oman and Sudan), one against (Qatar). Little media coverage was given to this vote.

Voltaire Network also reported that the Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil Al-Arabi took the view that the observers were jeopardized after "the spiritual leader of the Syrian Salafists, Sheikh Adnan Al-Arouri announced over Al-Arabiya airwaves that it was lawful to kill the Arab observers."⁴

The decision to support the regime change plan by the Arab League was also made by a vote of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Council. According to the Voltaire Network, this vote was three in favor (Egypt, Oman and Qatar), one against (Sudan) and one abstention (Algeria). On the basis of this vote of three members of the Arab League, the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary General of the Arab League were going to the UN to ask the Security Council to back their plan for regime change in Syria.⁵

On Friday, January 27, a new resolution drawn up by some of the members of the council and presented by Morocco, was introduced to the Security Council diverting the discussion from focusing on the positive results of the Arab League Observer Mission and how to support its continuation.

The hijacking of the Security Council Agenda from a discussion on continuing the process begun by the Observer Mission to a regime change resolution against Syria was a process that received little media attention, but much media hype reminiscent of the media pressure on the Security Council which resulted in its resolutions against Libya.

While there has been the claim of great media concern over unverified reports of 5000 casualties in Syria over an eight month period, there was comparatively no media attention to the estimated 60,000 or more casualties of the NATO bombing and armed rebels attacks in Libya over a comparable period.

The buildup of pressure on the United Nations to undertake support for using the Security Council to provide legitimacy for military and political action against Syria is a challenge to the obligation of the UN Charter to support peaceful solutions to conflict situations and to respect the sovereignty of nations.

Notes:

1. "League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria: Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012?"

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Report_of_Arab_League_Observer_Mission.pdf

2. "The GCC and Turkey Turn to NATO," Voltaire Network, January 29, 2012, <http://>

www.voltairenet.org/a172551

3. “Media confusion around the Arab League meeting,” Voltaire Network, January 23, 2012, <http://www.voltairenet.org/a172476>

4. “The GCC and Turkey Turn to NATO,” Voltaire Network, January 29, 2012, <http://www.voltairenet.org/a172551>

5. “Media confusion around the Arab League meeting,” Voltaire Network, January 23, 2012, <http://www.voltairenet.org/a172476>

[Editor’s Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Feb 11, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/02/11/defending-the-un-charter/>]

Defending the UN Charter by Use of the Veto: The SC Resolution on Syria

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Up until the Arab League Observer Mission had been sent to Syria on December 24, 2011, there had been two main narratives describing what was happening in Syria. One was that the violence in Syria was by the government against its people. The other was that the violence was also perpetrated by armed groups attempting to destabilize Syria. There had been no independent way to judge between these two narratives. The Observer Mission Report of January 22 provided such an independent judgment.¹

The Observer Mission determined that there were armed opposition elements in Syria. (Paragraph 71) The original protocol setting up the Observer Mission did not take into account this aspect of the situation. By detailed observations in the Report, the Observer Mission documented that there were armed opposition elements attacking civilians and government officials, blowing up trains and pipelines, civilian buses and killing not only Syrian civilians but also a French journalist.² (Paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 44, 75)

The Observer Mission Report noted that as a result of the Mission’s

insistence on a complete end to violence, the problem of violence by the Government forces and exchange of gunfire with armed elements in Homs and Hama had receded. “The most recent reports of the Mission,” the Report stated, “point to a considerable calming of the situation and restraint on the part of those forces.”

The Report documented that the Observer Mission witnessed peaceful demonstrations by both the opposition and the supporters of the government while the Mission was on the ground. (Paragraph 30)

Also, the Report said that, “The most important point in this regard is the commitment by ‘all sides’ to cease all aspects of violence thereby allowing the Mission to complete its tasks and ultimately lay the groundwork for the political process.” (Paragraph 79) The Report warned that discontinuing the Mission “could lead to chaos on the ground.” (Paragraph 81)

To seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria, the continuation of something like the Observer Mission would be needed. The Report concluded that there needed to be an “expansion of and a change in the Mission’s mandate.” (paragraph 79) Also the Mission needed political, media and technical support to fulfill its mandate. (Paragraphs 80, and 82)

The dominant states in the Arab League, however did not support changing the protocol to include the problem represented by the armed groups in Syria, as recommended by the Report. Instead, the Arab League introduced a plan to require President Assad of Syria to step down and to turn over power to the Vice President to fulfill a plan drafted without the Syrian government’s agreement.³ This ignored the recommendations of the Report of the Observer Mission, and substituted the imposition of an Arab League political plan for Syria in place of the recommended modification and continuation of the Observer Mission. The Arab League political plan had as its aim the removal of the Syrian president, as opposed to creating a peaceful solution so that the Syrian people could make the political changes they desired in a Syrian determined process.

The Arab League brought their regime change political plan to the UN Secretary General asking him to submit it to the Security Council. The Arab League was seeking the UN’s endorsement for its plan.

The Arab League submitted a letter to the UN Secretary General requesting a meeting of the Security Council. The letter listed several enclosures.

Though the Report of the Observer's Mission (Report) to the UN was listed as one of the enclosures, this document was not included in the material originally sent to the UN.

The Russian Ambassador, however, insisted that the Report be submitted to the UN Security Council. No Security Council discussion of the Arab League plan was to be held until the Report was submitted to the Security Council. Also it was to be treated as an official document of the UN and translated into the six official languages as is customary of official documents.

Russia had requested that the Security Council hold a session to discuss the Report. Russia also requested that the head of the Observer Mission, General Mohammed Al-Dabi, be invited to the Security Council to discuss the Report. Russia's request to the Security Council to discuss the Report was not accepted, even though there were other Security Council members who agreed about the importance of the report. Instead some members of the Council wanted to schedule the Security Council to discuss the Arab League plan on Monday, January 30. Other members wanted the meeting on Tuesday, January 31 to give Security Council members time to read the Report.⁴

On January 31, as part of the Security Council meeting, the Report was officially circulated in English and Arabic along with the letter from the Arab League to the Secretary General. The Arab League, represented by its Secretary General Nabil Elaraby and the current rotating chairman of the League, Prime Minister Al-Thani of Qatar, presented its plan to the Security Council. They discouraged the Security Council from asking to meet with Al Dabi. Though some members of the Security Council recognized the importance of the Report, the discussion in the Council was diverted to the Arab League plan for Syria.

Subsequently, a draft Security Council resolution was submitted by Morocco. Though Russia also had submitted a revised version of the Resolution it had submitted weeks before, the discussion turned to the Moroccan draft.⁵ The issue in contention over this draft was whether the Council would agree to "fully support" the Arab League plan for regime

change in Syria.

The recommendations of the Observer Report presented the need to expand the protocol agreed to by the Syrian government and the Arab League to include a provision related to the presence of armed groups and the violence perpetuated by them. The Arab League proposal for regime change in Syria ignored this issue. The Security Council members differed on the need to make an independent judgment about whether the Arab League plan fit the criteria of Chapter VIII in the UN Charter. This provision of the Charter requires that regional actions supported by the Security Council be consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations. (Article 52(1))

On Saturday, February 4, the Russian Federation submitted several amendments to the draft resolution, amendments it said would enable Russia to support a resolution on Syria.⁶ It asked that these amendments be discussed before taking a vote on the draft resolution.

To deal with the problem of armed groups and violence perpetuated by them, Russia proposed that a line be added to the Security Council Resolution that would not only demand the withdrawal of the government's military forces from conflict areas, but in conjunction would require that armed groups be prevented from taking advantage of the vacuum to occupy those areas.⁷

Also the Russian Federation identified another important loophole in the draft Security Council resolution. The Arab League plan required that President Assad step down and turn over negotiations for a political transition to his vice president. This is essentially a call for Assad to agree to a forced regime change for Syria. If Assad were to resist, which one would expect of the head of State of a nation being attacked by armed insurgents who are killing civilians and destroying infrastructure. Then what? The arbitrary and mandatory time deadlines would provide a pretext for the advocates of foreign intervention to claim that the UN supports intervention into the internal affairs of Syria. This is what had been done with Libya. The Russian amendments proposed the need to change the mandatory time deadlines in the Arab League timetable to make the deadlines advisory, instead of mandatory. Mandatory time deadlines could be used as a pretext to violate the UN Charter which prohibits foreign interference in the internal affair of a member state.

(UN Charter, Article 2(7))

The request for time to discuss the amendments was denied, leading to a vote on the draft resolution at a public meeting of the Council on February 4. Russia and China as expected by all, vetoed the resolution. Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong supported Russia's request for continued consultations as "reasonable."⁸ He said that it was "regrettable" that Russia's request for a few days of discussion on its proposed amendments had not been honored.

Referring to the Charter to explain why China vetoed the resolution, Li Baodong said: "(T)he sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria should be fully respected. The actions of the Security Council on the Syrian issue should comply with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter...."

"Under these principles," he said, "China has taken an active part in the consultations on the draft resolution, and supported the efforts made by the Arab League to facilitate a political settlement of the Syria issue and maintain stability in the region. Like many Council members, China maintains that, under the current circumstances, to put undue emphasis on pressuring the Syrian government, prejudge the result of the dialogue or impose any solution will not help resolve the Syrian issue, but instead may further complicate the situation."

Talking to journalists at a media stakeout at the UN, Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin described some of what led to his nation's veto of the proposed Security Council resolution.⁹ "As Syrian forces were pulling out, armed groups were moving in. We were trying to address that situation," he explained. To support a peaceful political solution to the crisis in Syria as required by the UN Charter, both sides capable of substantial violence had to be observed and called on to be restrained and to cease all acts of violence, thereby allowing the Mission to complete its tasks and, ultimately lay the groundwork for a political solution.

Commenting on the impact on Russia of the Security Council action on Libya, a columnist for *Russia Today* (RT), Fyodor Lukyanov, explains that, "Russia has drawn lessons in Libya last year after Moscow refrained from using its veto in the UN SC, paving the way for 'humanitarian intervention' by NATO. The 'no-fly' mandate was almost

immediately shifted into a regime change operation led by France and Britain. Russia felt its cooperation had been abused.”

The result of this experience, Lukyanov argues, is that, “Russia opposes any call for Bashar al-Assad to resign because ultimatums of this kind will mean entering onto a path whose final destination is invasion. This is because the UNSC will not allow its demand to be ignored, while it is unlikely that Assad will be in any hurry to fulfill it.”¹⁰

At a media stakeout after he spoke with the Security Council on Wednesday, February 8, Ban Ki-moon said that he had told the Security Council that the Arab League Secretary General had spoken with him on the phone and asked the UN Secretary General about setting up some sort of Observer Mission in Syria in conjunction with the UN. The question this raises is whether such a possible joint Observer Mission would take into account the recommendations of the January 22 Observer Mission Report. The obligations of the UN Charter require that the UN Security Council act in line with the UN Charter, rather than just endorsing the actions of regional organizations even if such actions are in violation of the UN Charter.¹¹

The struggle continues at the UN Security Council to find a way to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria without violating the Purposes and Principles of the UN Charter. The February 4 veto was in the words of the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, “the (United Nations) Charter at work.”

Notes

1. “League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria: Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012?”

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Report_of_Arab_League_Observer_Mission.pdf

The official UN document distributed January 31, 2012 at the UN contained the Observer Report as Enclosure 4 of S/2012/71

2. See for example, Ronda Hauben, Al Observer Report Corrects Media Narratives about Syria, taz.de January 31, 2012

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/01/31/observer-mission-report-syria/>

3. Security Council S/2012/71, Enclosure 1 “Elements of Arab Plan to Resolve the

Syrian Crisis,” January 30, 2012 Enclosure 1 listed the following steps to be taken in Syria:

A. Govt. of national unity formed within two months. The President should grant his Vice-President full powers to fulfill transition phase

B. Within three months of its formation free and fair elections should be held for a constituent assembly

C. This should prepare a new draft constitution for approval by popular referendum and an electoral based on that draft constitution

4. I was told that Security Council members received a copy of the Observer Mission Report sometime on Friday, January 27.

5. Draft resolution S/2012/77

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/223/75/PDF/N1222375.pdf?OpenElement> vetoed on February 4, 2012

6. Mathew Lee, “Russian Amendments Condemn Armed Groups, Only ‘Take Into Account’ AL,” Inner City Press, February 4, 2012

<http://www.innercitypress.com/syria1rusam020412.html>

7. Change proposed by Russia from the text of the Resolution on Syria. Resolution said: 5d) withdraw all Syrian military and armed forces from cities and towns, and return them to their original home barrack; Russia’s requested change: Requested change said: 5d) withdraw all Syrian military and armed forces from cities and towns, and return them to their original home barrack; in conjunction with the end of attacks by armed groups against State institutions and quarters and towns.

8. UN Transcript, Security Council Meeting on Middle East Situation (February 4, 2012) – Syria, S/PV.6711, p. 9-10

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/PRO/N12/223/56/PDF/N1222356.pdf?OpenElement>

9. Stakeout, Vitaly L. Churkin (Russian Federation) on Syria, Security Council Media Stakeout, February 4, 2012

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/h-e-mr-vitaly-i-churkin-russian-federation-on-the-situation-in-syria-security-council-media-stakeout-2.html>

10. Fyodor Lukyanov, “Why is Russia so Resolute on Syria?,” RT, February 3, 2012

<http://rt.com/politics/columns/unpredictable-world-foreign-lukyanov/russia-syria-assad-un/>

11. Ban Ki Moon at stakeout at Security Council on February 8, 2012.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/un-secretary-general-ban-ki-moon-on-the-middle-east-security-council-media-stakeout.html>

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Feb 19, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/02/19/un-ga-meeting-syria/>]

Using the UN GA to Endorse the AL Regime Change Agenda for Syria

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Part I – The Monday meeting

Why did the current president of the UN General Assembly (GA), Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser of Qatar, call a special meeting of the General Assembly on February 13, a meeting, as several nations noted, outside the regular procedures of the General Assembly?

The notice for the GA meeting was unusually short, as UN members were only notified on the Thursday night before for a meeting the following Monday morning. So it was not surprising that there were a number of complaints that in addition to procedural violations, normal consultation channels for calling a GA meeting had not been followed.

As the meeting unfolded on Monday, several delegations provided explanations of the customary procedures that had been violated, suggesting that the President of the GA was using his office to manipulate a procedure at the UN to further the political goals of his nation. Also, several of those speaking at the GA on Monday referred to the precedent this was setting for GA meetings in the future. Such a precedent would make it more likely that future Presidents of the GA will call meetings contrary to GA procedures when the person in the presidency has a political purpose.

The meeting went on all day on Monday with several speaking for and against the GA President's purpose for the meeting to condemn Syria for its clampdown on allegedly "peaceful protest." Several of those speaking made clear their view that the violent acts of armed opposition and foreign forces who are acting in Syria cannot be considered acts of "peaceful protest."

Several who spoke referred to the Arab League Observer Mission

Report which had verified the presence of armed groups and the Syrian Free Army, and that these armed insurgents were responsible for violent actions against the Syrian government and civilians.

The proposal of the Observer Mission to continue for another month and to work toward a political solution had been quickly dismissed by the Qatar Presidency of the Arab League, just as now the Qatar President of the GA failed to mention the important contribution of the Observer Mission to the understanding of what is happening in Syria.¹

In his statement to the GA on Monday, the Russian Ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, explained that his nation “regretted the ending of the Observer Mission” and took note of this fact.

Similarly others speaking referred to the importance of this mission.

One of the most comprehensive statements of what is happening both in Syria and at the United Nations was presented by Ambassador Maria Rubiales de Chamorro of Nicaragua on Monday.² Her statement deserves serious attention. Following is a summary of her presentation.

The Nicaraguan Ambassador explained that at a Summit meeting of ALBA in early February, an analysis of the situation in Syria was discussed and a condemnation was issued of the policy of the interference in the domestic affairs of Syria, as well as the effort to destabilize Syria.

Also ALBA condemned what it called “armed violence by irregular groups supported by foreign powers against the Syrian people.”

Calling for a return to calm in Syria and support for peaceful reform and national dialogue, she referred to the steps being taken by the government of Syria to arrive at a political solution to the conflict.

But what is interfering with such efforts, she explained, is the fact that the “same script that the forces of NATO and their allies implemented in Libya” is now being applied to Syria.

Ambassador Rubiales de Chamorro pointed to the actions of NATO and its allies against Libya where “these same actors carried out the same practices and policies.”

The “play” in process against Syria that she described, included several acts. She listed these acts as:

1. Provocation.
2. Arming of Terrorists.

3. Military Intervention.
4. Destruction of the Country.
5. Juicy Contracts for the Reconstruction of that country that they themselves have destroyed.

The Ambassador called on other members of the UN to make clear that “we do not share the hypocritical view of life that is now being labeled R2P.” (Responsibility to Protect)

R2P, she said, “cannot be allowed to become a devious argument to justify foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of states.”

She explained that the Arab League Observer Mission Report had documented that Syria had complied with the protocol setting up the mission and the Arab Plan of Action.³

The Syrian government withdrew members of the military from the streets. It released thousands of detainees who had not been involved in acts of violence. It facilitated the work of the foreign media. But yet the very report documenting these conclusions is “now being swept under the carpet,” she noted.

Similarly, the Nicaraguan Ambassador expressed her nation’s appreciation for the initiative of the Russian Federation to offer to mediate a diplomatic, political and peaceful solution to the crisis. She conveyed the full support from her President, Daniel Ortega, to Russia and China for the work they had done in the Security Council in favor of negotiations and a peaceful resolution of the conflict and against instigating a war against Syria.

Despite the fact that several other nations had spoken at Monday’s meeting against the imposition of a regime change program by the Arab League for Syria, when the GA President ended Monday’s meeting, he only summed up the sentiments of those supporting the Arab League program.

The impact of these abuses of UN GA precedents and procedures is that not only the people and government of Syria, but also the very integrity of the UN system itself, are being undermined and jeopardized. The actions of the subsequent meeting that followed on Thursday demonstrated this abuse ever more clearly.

Part II – The Thursday Meeting

At the Monday GA meeting, Bashar al-Jafari, the Syrian Ambassador effectively challenged not only the substance of the meeting, but also the abuse of the precedent under which it was called. The meeting had allegedly been called for the GA to discuss a Human Rights Report issued by the Human Rights Council in December of 2011. The Syrian Ambassador pointed out that this was an inappropriate activity as the GA Resolution governing how Human Rights reports from the Human Rights Council were brought to the GA was violated.

The procedure established in Resolution A/Res/65/281 (July 20, 2011) was that the Human Rights Council Report to the GA was to be presented in the 3rd Committee of the GA and subsequently in the GA. The Report would cover the period of the prior year from October 1 to September 30 of the current year.⁴ The presentation of a December, 2011 Human Rights Council Report to a GA Plenary meeting in February, 2012 was violating the mandate set in the GA Resolution. Hence holding the GA meeting on Monday, February 13 in violation of the procedures contained in A/Res/65/281 was an illegal activity by the GA President. The Syrian Ambassador had asked that the Monday meeting be suspended to await an impartial decision by the UN Secretariat Legal Council on the actions being taken by the GA President.

The GA President refused to accommodate this request and just continued with his plan for the Monday meeting.

When the Thursday meeting was held, however, in recognition of the correctness of the Syrian Ambassador's legal objection, the GA Agenda designation for the meeting was changed. The new Agenda designation was under the GA agenda item 34, "Prevention of Armed Conflict."

Such maneuvers help to demonstrate that the very holding of the GA meeting itself was not in line with the procedures or provisions for General Assembly activity.

If the GA is acting outside of its processes and procedures, then the stage is set for it to go on to endorse a resolution contrary to the Charter of the UN.

The Charter of the UN clearly states that if the Security Council is exercising the functions it is assigned with regard to any dispute, the

General Assembly cannot “make any recommendation with regard to that dispute or situation unless the Security Council so requests.” (Chapter II, Article 12(1))

Yet practically the same resolution that was vetoed at the Security Council on February 4, was brought to the GA for a vote on February 16. The Russian Federation asked to amend the resolution with the amendments it had proposed in the Security Council so that the resolution would conform to the requirements of the UN Charter.

These amendments included a provision to not only require that Syrian government military and armed forces withdraw from cities and towns, but that this happen “in conjunction with the end of attacks by armed groups against state institutions and quarters of cities and towns.”

Another provision of the Russian amendments was to replace the requirement of meeting a time table set by the Arab League with the provision that the process would “take into account” the time table set by the Arab League, adding that this would be done “without prejudging the outcome.”

Such amendments could help to prevent the Arab League process from becoming a process in support of the armed insurgents against the Syrian government, and hence a mechanism for regime change, in violation of the obligations of the Charter to respect the sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of Syria. The sponsors of the GA Resolution refused to consider the Russian Federation’s requested amendments.

At the GA meeting on Thursday to consider the resolution against Syria under the Agenda item “Prevention of Armed Conflict,” the representatives of several nations spoke against the resolution, objecting to the fact that it did not take into account that there is an armed insurgency operating against the Syrian government and people.

Instead of the resolution recognizing this problem, as the Arab League Observer’s Mission had recommended, the GA Resolution supported the armed insurgency by requiring the Syrian government to cease military action against that insurgency, but not providing any other means to prevent the actions of the insurgents against the government or people of Syria.

Speaking against the GA Resolution, the Venezuelan Ambassador, Jorge Valero explained⁵: “The Draft resolution denies the Syrian State

its right to protect its population and to ensure internal peace and security. The draft asks it to give up the privileges granted to it by the Constitution for ensuring the country's stability. The draft does not call for – as proposed in the amendment submitted by the Russian Federation, and I quote, it does not call for – ‘all sections of the Syrian opposition to dissociate themselves from armed groups engaged in acts of violence’ nor does it, and I continue to quote from the Russian amendment, nor does it ‘urge Member States and all those in a position to do so to use their influence to prevent continued violence by such groups.’”

Ambassador Valero pointed out the mechanisms of the Arab League plan for Syria that are a violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and pointed to how the Resolution supported the armed insurgency against the Syrian government and people. This, he explained, was but a repeat of the acts taken by the UN against Libya. Also he expressed his support for the initiatives of the Russian Federation and China, “which have prevented the Security Council from being used to violate the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic.”

Several others who spoke against the draft resolution, either before or after the vote, expressed similar objections, as well as the disappointment that the Russian Federation amendments had not been accepted by the sponsors of the GA resolution.

The vote was taken. More than one quarter of the UN members either did not vote at all, or voted against or abstained. Even some of those who voted in favor of the resolution expressed their support for the Russian amendments.⁶

Speaking after the vote, the Syrian Ambassador expressed his concern not only for his nation, but also for the UN as a whole. He expressed the concern that if the UN continues to send the “erroneous message” that it is acceptable to violate the sovereignty of member states, then this will impact the UN itself morally and politically. “And we will have destroyed the large body of normative efforts for the past 60 years,” he warned.

Watching the process first at the UN Security Council with the draft resolution against Syria, and then at the GA with the draft resolution against Syria, what is surprising is that in this situation, the veto

protected the Principles of the Charter at the Security Council, while at the GA, the members could not prevent the abuse of their procedures and subsequently of the Charter.

Under an agenda item for “Prevention of Armed Conflict” many members voted to support an armed insurgency against a member nation in clear violation of the Charter. One member expressed her hope that the warning given by those who opposed the resolution would not prove true. Grenada’s Ambassador said that she was voting for the resolution to provide diplomatic support to help the government and people of Syria end all the bloodshed. She said she was not voting on or for a resolution that directly or indirectly or through interpretation or reinterpretation would be used as the basis for the removal of government, military intervention or other acts against the Charter of the UN in letter or in spirit. She said that she was expressing these understandings with a prayer and a hope. She didn’t acknowledge, however, the abuse of Libya that had occurred under Security Council resolutions, or the difficulty of reversing the support for the armed insurgency in Syria that some nations would claim they had license to provide based on this GA resolution.

What was important about her statement, however, was that she demonstrated that at least she had heard the objections to the resolution. Though she voted in support of the resolution, she acknowledged that if the objections proved true, such a use of the resolution would not be in accord with why she voted in favor of it. Though she said that her vote was not intended to provide a pretext for regime change or foreign intervention in Syria, unfortunately such a vote does little to protect a fraternal member nation of the UN from abuse.

Notes

1. For background see Ronda Hauben, “Defending the UN Charter by Use of the Veto: the SC Resolution on Syria, February 11, 2012, taz.de

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/02/11/defending-the-un-charter/>

2. General Assembly Meeting on February 13, 2012

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/96th-plenary-meeting-general-assembly-meeting.html>

The statement by Nicaragua starts at 42:50

3. “League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria: Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012?”

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Report_of_Arab_League_Observer_Mission.pdf

The official UN document distributed January 31, 2012 at the UN contained the Observer Report as Enclosure 4 of S/2012/71

4. General Assembly Resolution A/Res/65/281

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/285

July 20, 2011 “6. Decides also to continue its practice of allocating the agenda item entitled ‘Report of the Human Rights Council’ to the plenary of the General Assembly and to the Third Committee, in accordance with its decision 65/503 A, with the additional understanding that the President of the Council will present the report in her or his capacity as President to the plenary of the General Assembly and the Third Committee and that the Third Committee will hold an interactive dialogue with the President of the Council at the time of her or his presentation of the report of the Council to the Third Committee; 7. Decides further that the annual report of the Human Rights Council shall cover the period from October 1 to September 30, including the regular September session of the Council.”

5. General Assembly Meeting on February 16, 2012

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/97th-plenary-meeting-general-assembly.html>

The statement by Venezuela starts at 34:23

6. The Draft Resolution on Syria A66/L.36 “The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic”

http://www.new-york-un.diplo.de/Vertretung/newyorkvn/en/_pr/press-releases/2012/20120216-syria-resolution-ga.html?archive=2990092

Vote totals announced on Thursday, February 16, 2012:

For 137

Against 12

Abstaining 17

Vote problems 3

Not voting 24

(Total not voting, abstaining, or voting against 53)

Total members 193

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on March 3, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/03/04/kofi-annans-role-in-syrian-conflict/>]

The UN Charter and Kofi Annan's Role in the Syrian Conflict

by Ronda Hauben

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In line with the non-binding UN General Assembly resolution A/Res/66/253 approved at the UN on February 16, 2012, Ban Ki-moon has appointed Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General as the joint UN-Arab League envoy to Syria.¹

Mr. Annan came to the UN on Wednesday, February 29, to begin the assumption of his role in the Syrian situation. Speaking to journalists at a press stakeout on Wednesday evening, Ban Ki-moon presented Mr. Annan to the media. As this was the first chance for UN journalists and the public to hear from Mr. Annan about the role he envisions playing in the Syrian conflict, it was disappointing that the Spokesman for the Secretary General only allowed three questions from journalists at this press encounter.

Clearly Mr. Annan is no stranger to the UN Charter as he served for 10 years as UN Secretary General. Yet his new appointment represents a significant dilemma with which he will need to come to grips if he is to be able to act in a manner consistent with the principles of the UN Charter.

The position he has accepted is under the umbrella of two institutions, namely that of the United Nations which is supposed to adhere to the principles of the UN Charter, and the Arab League which has its own mandates and political realities. Will the former UN Secretary General recognize the need to place adhering to the principles of the UN Charter as the higher authority for his joint appointment? Or will he take the road of accommodating the political pressures from Arab League and UN member nations who have ignored the UN charter in their actions

connected with the Syrian conflict.

Two questions I had for Mr. Annan which I was not able to ask were, [1] Were there any conditions that you put on taking this position? [2] Were you familiar with the content and conclusions of the Arab League Observer Mission Report on Syria?

With no opportunity to ask these questions, it is only possible to consider Mr. Annan's remarks to the press on Wednesday, February 29, and subsequent comments from Ban Ki-moon on Friday, March 2 to see if there is any indication of how Mr Annan might have responded to these questions.

The first question is one that Mr. Annan appeared to address in his opening statement on Wednesday evening. He said "(L)et me say one thing. If we are going to succeed, it is extremely important that we all accept there should be one process of moderation.... (O)ne single unitary process, and it is when the international community speaks with one voice, that voice is powerful."²

Since the spokesperson did not allow sufficient time for questions, no journalist was able to ask Mr. Annan what other possible "process of moderation" he was referring to.

One journalist tried to ask Martin Nesirky, the Spokesperson for the Secretary General, the question the next day at the noon briefing. Later in the day, the same journalist tried to pose this question to the U.K. Ambassador who had just assumed the position of acting President of the Security Council for the month of March. There was no answer to the question from either of these parties, and no means indicated to get an answer.

The UN member nation that had publicly offered to provide a means to support dialogue among the different parties in the Syrian conflict is the Russian Federation. While the Russian Federation did not offer to mediate the conflict, it has offered to provide a venue for the different sides to the conflict to come to speak with each other as a means of encouraging dialogue to resolve the conflict. If Mr. Annan has indeed set out to limit the efforts of the Russian Federation to help support a peaceful settlement of the conflict, this would appear to be in contradiction to the need to welcome all to help resolve the problem. Recently, Deputy Foreign Minister Gatilov of the Russian Federation indicated

that he invited Mr. Annan to Russia for consultations on the situation. Since Mr. Annan has promised “to consult broadly with all actors,” Mr. Annan response to the invitation will help indicate if he will fulfill his promise.

Also striking is the fact that Mr. Annan spoke about the international community “speaking with one voice” over the conflict in Syria. He is clearly aware that there is a significant conflict among the permanent members of the Security Council over what is needed to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, or even if a peaceful resolution is possible. Two members of the Security Council are opposed to foreign intervention into the domestic affairs of Syria, in line with the obligations of the UN Charter. They also oppose the UN Security Council dictating a solution involving regime change in Syria. To do so, is also contrary to the Charter. Other permanent members of the Security Council, however, are supporters of both foreign intervention in Syria and regime change, despite the prohibitions against such actions in the UN Charter.

At a press conference with Ban Ki-moon on Friday, March 2, one journalist asked Mr Ban if Mr Annan’s mandate stemmed from the Arab League’s prescription for a political transition in Syria which required the removal of the Syrian President from the process. The Secretary General’s response was that there is a distinction between the “broader guidelines on the mandate for the Special Envoy” contained in the General Assembly resolution of February 16, and the Arab League’s position in their resolution of January 22.

Explaining this distinction, Ban told journalists³: “SG: The General Assembly has adopted a resolution giving a broader guideline of the mandate of the Special Envoy, and of course, as you said, the League of Arab States has adopted a resolution on January 22, having their own position there. But I believe at this time, to have a political dialogue with Syrian authorities, he should be given broader flexibility, a broader framework. This is what we have agreed [to]. Rather than sticking to any specific points, as you mentioned in the resolution of the League of Arab States. So, it’s up to Mr. Annan’s very able diplomatic skill to draw out, first of all, and to [end] all violence and to bring about the political solution of these issues and also help create some humanitarian space.

This is a broader, broader framework and mandate, so he will have much more flexibility.”

Ban indicated that this was the mandate agreed to during a half hour three way teleconference on Thursday conversation between himself, Kofi Annan and [Nabil] El-Araby of the Arab League.

While there have been some clues to what Mr. Annan’s response would have been to the first question I would have asked, what his response might have been to the second question is more difficult to determine. The issues raised by the conclusions of the Arab League Observer Mission Report referred to the need to overtly address the problem of the armed insurgency against the Syrian government and civilians.⁴

Despite false media or opposition claims, what is going on in Syria is not that the government is attacking peaceful civilian protesters.⁵ To the contrary, there is an armed insurgency, fueled by foreign intervention and support, that the Syrian government is endeavoring to defeat. To call the Syrian government to stop the action against the armed insurgency, while not providing a mechanism to protect civilians and the government from the violent actions of these armed insurgents, presents a support for the violent actions of the insurgents. Such a situation would require the Syrian government to fail to fulfill its obligation to civilians and state institutions to protect them from foreign and internal violent attacks. The Observer Mission Report recognized this problem, as have the Ambassadors of the Russia Federation, China, and several other UN members. Mr. Annan did not give any clear indication of whether or not he recognized this problem.

In his opening statement to the press, Mr. Annan did refer to the need for a peaceful resolution to the Syrian conflict, as opposed to those who openly call for regime change or foreign intervention. While Mr. Annan appears to have overtly discouraged any other efforts toward a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict, he has only gently and obliquely referred to the fact that there are those who advocate foreign intervention and violence to determine the outcome of the Syrian conflict. While Mr. Annan has advocated “dialogue between all actors in Syria” he only obliquely noted, “I know there are people who have other ideas that dialogue may not be the way to go and one should use other means.”

The rationale he offers to counter the armed insurgency is a weak one. He explains, “But I think, for the sake of the people, for the Syrian people who are caught in the middle, a peaceful solution through dialogue and a speedy one is the way to go.”

While it is early in the process, one can only wonder how Mr. Annan expects to accomplish “a peaceful solution through dialogue and a speedy one,” when one of the parties to the conflict is an armed insurgency backed by at least some NATO members and the Gulf Cooperation Council. These are UN member nations whose intervention in the domestic affairs of Syria is clearly contrary to the principles of the UN Charter. Other parties to the conflict are the Syrian government and its supporters, and the nonviolent internal opposition that is opposed to foreign intervention in the conflict. Any process that leaves out the Syrian government or dictates who that government is, is a process only aimed at dictating regime change in a sovereign UN member state, a process which would be in clear violation of the UN Charter.

In addition to the actions of Russia and China, the fact that the mandate for Mr Annan’s mission has been broadened and focused on ending all violence and initiating a political dialogue is one of the few optimistic signs yet to emerge from the UN in its efforts to help to find a solution to the Syrian conflict. Ban Ki-moon’s statement that Kofi Annan is to have a broader framework and much more flexibility than any particularities in the Arab League resolution is a commitment to be watched as the process undertaken by Mr Annan unfolds. Can the principles of the UN Charter begin to function as a guide for a negotiation process in Syria? Is there a means to stop the foreign intervention and encouragement and support for armed insurrection against the Syrian government and civilians? If such conditions are met, will the Syrian government be able to carry out a reform process to meet legitimate demands of opposition forces while protecting the safety and political rights of other segments of the Syrian population. These are some of the questions that the conflict in Syria and the role played by the UN raises. The good offices mission of Mr. Annan will be watched by people around the world as a test of the UN and its ability to contribute to a peaceful resolution of a conflict that has been intensified by the intervention of foreign powers.

Notes

1. UN GA Resolution G/Res/66/253 “The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic” Adopted February 16, 2012, See also, Ronda Hauben, “Using the UN GA to Endorse the AL Regime Change Agenda for Syria”, February 19, 2012.

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/02/19/un-ga-meeting-syria/>

2. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UAW-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syria, Kofi Annan on Syria-Joint Media Stakeout, February 29, 2012. Video and transcript:

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/secretary-general-ban-ki-moon-and-kofi-annan-on-syria-media-stakeout.html>

3. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon Press Conference, March 2, 2012 Video and transcript:

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/03/un-secretary-general-ban-ki-moon-press-conference-2.html>

Ban Ki-moon told journalists: “The mandate will be based on the General Assembly resolution. Yesterday, I had a trilateral teleconference involving myself, Kofi Annan and [Nabil] El-Araby of the League of Arab States for about half an hour – what the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Special Envoy would be. We have an agreement on that. Basically, his mission and his activities will be guided by this General Assembly resolution to have a good offices role and try to have a cease-fire, an end to violence and to help [find a] political solution [to] this issue in an inclusive way.”

4. “League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria: Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012?”

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Report_of_Arab_League_Observer_Mission.pdf

5. See for example, Sharmine Narwani, “Questioning the Syrian ‘Casualty List’,” *Akhabar English*, February 28, 2012

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/questioning-syrian-%E2%80%99Casualty-list%E2%80%9D>

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on April 7, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/04/07/against-parallel-track-to-un-syria-plan/>]

Struggle at the UN against Parallel Track to Annan Syria Plan

by Ronda Hauben

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The Presidency of the General Assembly (PGA) at the United Nations this year is held by the former Ambassador from Qatar, Nassir Abdulaziz al Nasser. On Thursday, April 5, the President (PGA) held an informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly. Often an informal meeting is called when the meeting will be closed to the press and the public. But in this situation, the spokesperson for the PGA sent journalists e-mail inviting them to the meeting and informing them "Please be advised this will be an OPEN meeting on UNTV and webcast." (E-mail to journalists from Nihal Saad, April 4)

The meeting was to hear a report via a live satellite link from Mr Kofi Annan, the UN Envoy for Syria, about the progress of his six point peace plan for Syria. The meeting was called to order and was webcast for journalists and the public.

After Mr. Annan's live video presentation, the GA President announced that members could speak but should limit their comments to three minutes. He then called on the Syrian Ambassador. As the Syrian Ambassador began to speak, the UNTV coverage of the webcast and press access were suddenly ended. This was in violation of the previous announcements to the press that the meeting would be open and available via a webcast.¹

In response, Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari, the Syrian Ambassador to the UN called a press conference later that afternoon. At the press conference, he said that such action is a serious violation of UN General Assembly procedures and norms and in his estimation an example of "diplomatic and media terrorism." He pointed to the e-mail that the

Spokesperson for the PGA had sent out announcing that the meeting was an OPEN meeting. The Ambassador explained that after the webcast had been turned off and the meeting closed to journalists, only selected speakers were allowed to speak, specifically the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia and the European Union Representative.

The Syrian Ambassador said that multiple requests he made to speak were denied. He also reported that a point of order that the Russian Ambassador asked to be considered was not responded to. Ambassador Ja'afari described how the European Union Representative had been granted time to speak before the Russia's representative, in violation of procedures of the GA requiring that member nations be called on before the EU Representative.

Why would the President of the GA announce that member delegations could speak for three minutes and then close the meeting, and deny all but a few chosen members the right to speak?

This is a serious question as the United Nations is the one multilateral organization which includes 193 member states. If the processes of the UN General Assembly are being administered with no regard for customary procedures and traditions, then the integrity of the organization itself is in jeopardy.

During the press conference with the Syrian Ambassador, he was asked for his understanding of why the PGA would be involved with such activity? Ambassador Ja'afari explained that he believed that the PGA was using his position as President of the UN General Assembly to carry out the foreign policy of his government, Qatar, rather than acting to carry out the duties of the presidency as a neutral officer of the UN to facilitate the decisions of the member states.

After Kofi Annan had made his presentation, Syria's Ambassador explained that he had asked to speak because he had wanted to present the Syrian government's official position of support for the Kofi Annan mission. His government, he explained had agreed by a letter sent to Mr. Annan, to pull back troop concentrations and to stop the use and presence of heavy weapons in population centers by April 10.

The action of the President of the General Assembly, however, had objectively functioned to prevent such a public explanation of the position of the Syrian government during the General Assembly

meeting.

Syria's Ambassador explained that Mr. Annan had not indicated the receipt of any such official notification from the armed opposition that it would comply with its obligations to honor a cease fire.

“What would happen if the army withdrew from the hotspots and the armed opposition did not give up their fighting?” asked Ambassador Ja'afari.

This is exactly what happened this past January when Arab League observers were withdrawn by the Gulf states after having documented the on-the-ground-presence in Syria of armed insurgents attacking government troops, civilians and the public infrastructure. But in the situation in January, there were Arab League Observers on the ground while the Syrian government was withdrawing its armed forces from population centers, so it could be clear who was breaking the cease fire efforts.

In the case of Mr. Annan's peace proposal, however, there is no such observer force on the ground to monitor the movements toward a cease fire. In addition, the armed insurgents are not being asked to honor a cease fire until 48 hours after the Syrian government has completed the withdrawal of its forces. Ambassador Ja'afari explained that Syria was asking Mr. Annan to provide guarantees that Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other nations arming the insurgents would stop their economic, military and logistical support for the armed insurgents fighting against the government of Syria.

The Syrian Ambassador pointed out that on March 25 the Syrian government had officially agreed to Kofi Annan's six point proposal. One week later, on April 1, countries engaged in the illegal intervention in Syria's domestic affairs, had organized a meeting in Istanbul, where they agreed to fund the armed insurgency by providing it with economic, military and logistic support. Instead of providing support for the Annan mission, these countries acted to create a parallel track to undermine the peace process being carried out by Mr. Annan. Providing arms to the insurgents who are fighting to overthrow the Syrian government is against international law. Ambassador Ja'afari said, “Somebody should stop them.”

The UN is being put in a contradictory position. Can the UN help

to settle the conflict in Syria, when some of its member nations are financing and arming insurgents to commit violent acts against the government, civilians and the public infrastructure of Syria in violation of the UN charter? If the actions of some members of the UN at its meetings make it impossible to maintain the integrity of the procedures and principles of the UN, the actions of the UN are more likely to intensify the conflict in Syria, rather than helping to resolve it. Such actions will also undermine the very integrity of the UN itself. It was helpful that Ambassador Ja'afari raised these issues in the press conference he held on Thursday, April 5. To challenge the distortions and procedural violations at the UN is an important step toward maintaining the integrity of the UN so it can contribute to resolving conflicts rather than deepening them.

Notes

1. A description of this violation was given later that day by the Syrian Ambassador at a press conference he called. Video of the Press conference by Bashar Ja'afari, April 5, 2012

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/04/press-conference-bashar-jaafari-syria-on-the-situation-in-syria.html>

A helpful written summary for the April 5, 2012 Press Conference by the Permanent Representative of Syria is available at the UN website.

http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs//2012/120405_Syria.doc.htm

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on April 23, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/04/23/unsc-approves-90-day-observer-mission-to-syria/>]

Second Track Challenged as UN SC Approves 90 day Observer Mission to Syria

by Ronda Hauben

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I – Security Council Authorizes UN Observer Mission

At a stakeout for journalists on Saturday after the vote on Security Council Resolution 2043, Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin explained that the text was carefully worded to signal all, including the opposition, to refrain from violence and to support the implementation of Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan. This resolution (S/RES/2043(2012)) provides the authorization for up to 300 UN observers to be sent to Syria for a period of up to 90 days.¹ The resolution states that the "mandate of the Mission shall be to monitor a cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties and support the full implementation of the Envoy's six-point proposal."

Differences about some of the provisions of the resolution had been resolved by changes made to the draft resolution in a 3-1/2 hour consultation held by Security Council members on Friday evening. Ambassador Churkin expressed satisfaction that the Security Council resolution he had initiated provided the basis for the resolution approved by the Security Council on Saturday in a unanimous vote of all 15 members.

II – Statements After the Vote

Statements made by several of the members of the Security Council after the vote help to shed light on the situation the UN observer mission can expect to encounter in Syria. In his statement, South African

Ambassador Baso Sangqu referred to a letter to the Security Council members received earlier in the week. In that letter, the UN Secretary General reported that the Syrian government had welcomed the Advance Team of the observer mission, and that “despite some challenges, the Advance Team has enjoyed freedom of movement and has not observed major military concentrations or conflict.”

“We welcome the news,” Ambassador Sangqu said, “that the advance team has been able to visit hotspots of the conflict, including Homs and that they have observed calm and an end to major hostilities.” He noted that, “The deployment of the advance team has already proven to be a calming influence as violence has decreased during its presence. This marked decrease in violence should now be sustained.”

In his statement after the vote, Indian Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri thanked the Russian delegation for introducing the resolution. “This is a significant step in the Council’s collective support for the efforts of the joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan,” said Ambassador Puri.

The Indian Ambassador observed, “it is a matter of satisfaction that Mr. Annan’s efforts over the last seven weeks have resulted in an improvement in the situation in Syria. Even though there have been reports of violations, the cease-fire that came into force on 12 April has been observed by all parties in a large part of Syria.” Ambassador Puri called for an expeditious deployment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) which the Security Council had just authorized.

China’s Ambassador Li Baodong expressed the hope that, “the Supervision Mission will fully respect Syria’s sovereignty and dignity, act in strict accordance with the authorization of the Security Council, adhere to the principles of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality, and play an active and constructive role in pushing for a sustained cessation of violence in Syria.”

In his comments after the vote, Ambassador Churkin, expressed his view that, “The resolution establishes a clear framework of responsibilities for all parties to end the Syrian violence and for the need for cooperation with the UN observer mission and the Special Envoy.” He called upon the “external players involved in the Syrian question” to behave “responsibly” and to act in accordance with the provisions of

resolutions adopted by the Security Council. In that regard, he pointed to the fact that the UN Security Council is the body which holds primary responsibility for matters of international peace and security. Other formats like the “groups of friends” that met in Tunis, Istanbul or Paris, should follow the resolutions of the Security Council and not undermine its work, he said. Similarly, he expressed the sentiment that “the Libyan model of action should remain forever in the past.”

While other delegations on the Security Council like those of Portugal, Pakistan, and Morocco pointed to the obligations of all in the Syrian conflict to honor the cease fire and cease violent acts, the U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice focused her criticism solely on what she referred to as the “Assad regime.” And she threatened that if the Syrian government did not provide for “full freedom of movement for UN personnel” and other demands that she enumerated, the U.S. would “pursue measures against the Syrian government.”

The text of the resolution, however, contains no provision for “full freedom of movement for UN personnel” to be provided, as Ambassador Rice demanded. To the contrary, the resolution calls on the Syrian government to ensure the effective operation of UNSMIS by ensuring that unimpeded and immediate freedom of movement and access as necessary “to fulfill its mandate.” The mandate is not open ended but is specifically written. The mandate is “to monitor a cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties and support the full implementation of the Envoy’s six-point proposal.”

After all Council members who had asked to speak had been called on, the Syrian Ambassador Bashar al-Jaafari made a statement to the Council. He noted that there were statements made in the Security Council session in support of the resolution and statements contrary to it. He pointed to the fact that there was no reference in the resolution to the “Assad regime” as the U.S. Ambassador had mischaracterized the Syrian government. Similarly, he noted the mischaracterizations of the violence in Syria. He pointed out that such mischaracterization had been critiqued in the Arab League Observer Report. (para 30 Arab League Observer Report)²

Examples presented in the Report provided convincing evidence that there were armed militants carrying out violent acts in Syria. Also

the Arab League Observers noted in their Report that while they were in Syria, peaceful opposition protests that they observed had not been disrupted by the Syrian government. (para 71 Arab League Observer Report)

Ambassador Jaafari characterized as topsy turvey blaming crimes by armed insurgents on the Syrian government. He hoped that the UN Observer Mission would help to dispel the media misinformation about the situation on the ground in Syria, as the Arab League Observer Mission Report had done.

III – Safety Issues and Lessons from Arab League Observer Mission

During the stakeout held by the Russian Ambassador after the Security Council meeting, one journalist asked a question referring to the danger of sabotage of the UN Observer Mission as had happened with the Arab League Observer Mission. This earlier mission was discontinued just as it documented the actual existence of an armed insurgency that was responsible for substantial violence in the Syrian conflict.

The Russian Ambassador acknowledged that the UN observers going to Syria would be facing a “daunting task.” He was concerned for their safety and noted that Russian observers would be part of the UN Mission. It would be their duty to report objectively, he explained, and he hoped that the international community would support their objective reporting.

In the Security Council process of planning for this Second Observer Mission to be sent to Syria, there appears to have been little attention paid to building on the lessons described in the Arab League Observers Report. The Report of the Arab League Observers was included as Enclosure Number 4 in the document S/2012/71 (p. 11-46) distributed at the January 31, 2012 meeting of the Security Council. In the Report, problems of the insufficiency of transportation and communication equipment were particularly noted, as was the need to make available adequate “administrative and logistic support” and “media and political support to create an appropriate environment that will enable

it to fulfill its mandate in the required manner.” (Para 83) (See Also Para 64, 65,68 and 69, VIII)

The Report describes the experience of the Arab League Observers, both their successes and the problems they faced. In so doing it provides a basis to predict what problems will need to be solved and what difficulties can be expected for the UN Observer Mission to Syria. Ambassador Churkin and several other members of the Security Council recognized the challenges that the UN Observer Mission will face, but the frequent distractions presented by those governments that are hopeful they can bring about regime change in Syria appear to hinder the needed consideration in the Security Council of how to build on the lessons of the Arab League Observer Mission.

IV – Netizen Comments

In an online discussion of a report on RT (Russia Today TV and streaming video) about the most recent Security Council Resolution authorizing the UN to provide for the observer mission in Syria, one netizen pointed to the problem of foreign support for the armed insurgency in Syria.³ As part of a longer comment, this netizen criticized the UN saying: “The UN has failed in its duties to protect Syria from outside interference by remaining silent on the continued arming/funding of the ‘opposition’ by the U.S./U.K./Israel/Turkey and their Arab allies.” (Anon, April 22. 00:08)

Another netizen commenting on the need for accurate reporting about the role of the armed insurgents wrote: “Let’s hope the monitors have the guts to tell the UN the role that the terrorist opposition plays in the mayhem. Unlike Ban-Ki-Moon, who blames it all on the govt. forces.” (CON, April 21, 2012. 19:49)

A netizen comment on the irony represented by media reports which are in sharp contrast to the reality on the ground: “Despite the UN’s ‘peace plan’ being fully rejected by both the Syrian rebels and their Western and Arab League backers who have openly pledged cash, weapons, and support for them to continue fighting in full violation of the proposed cease fire, the Western media has instead accused the Syrian government of failing to meet its obligations....” (Tony Cartalucci, April 21, 2012. 23:12)

Yet another netizen pointed to the lack of logic of much of Western reporting about the armed insurgents in Syria: “It is absurd to try to enforce a cease fire, when only (the) Government has signed the accord. The militants did not bother. And in the meantime, all Western governments are concerned about is the “right of Syrians to protest.” Fantastic. Let them just get in the streets, so that the bombers can blow them up and blame the Government. Militants are giving interviews in (the) Western press – *Der Spiegel* – about their executions of civilians suspected of supporting (the) regime!... If anywhere on (the) planet such armed extremists try to take over neighborhoods, the entire force of that country will be brought to bear on them, and nobody would shed a tear if they all get blasted into oblivion. But in Syria, we glorify them? And why? I am not sure, but it seems to me that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf do not like the fact that in Syria EVERYBODY can practice openly any religion – and is safe...” (Bianca, April 22, 2012. 06:54)⁴

Responding to such comments, another netizen wrote, “...I salute the discerning readers of this thread.” (Igor, April 22, 2012. 13:38)

Such extracts from comments of netizens discussing the UN Security Council activities demonstrate that the situation in Syria is of concern to people around the world.

Security Council Resolution 2043, some of the statements made in the Security Council after the vote, and the Arab League Observer Mission Report paint a more accurate than usual picture of the crisis in Syria. Considered in light of sample netizen comments and other articles⁵ on the Internet critiquing mainstream media coverage of this crisis, a more accurate view of the crisis emerges which will be needed if the means is to be found to resolve the conflict.

Notes

1. S/RES/2043 (2012) “The situation in the Middle East”
[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2043\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2043(2012))
The draft resolution was S/2012/245
<http://un-report.blogspot.com/2012/04/final-draft-resolution-on-syria.html>
2. The Arab League Observer Report
<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=s/2012/71>

“Letter dated January 24, 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, Enclosure 4 League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria “Report of Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012, p. 11-22.”

3. <http://rt.com/news/un-security-council-monitors-syria-635/comments/>

4. “Ulrike Putz, An Executioner for Syria’s Rebels Tells his Story,” *Der Spiegel*, March 29, 2012

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,824603,00.html>

5. A couple of other recent articles documenting media misrepresentations of what is happening in Syria include:

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/blogs/sandbox/surprise-video-changes-syria-timeline>

<http://www.syrianews.cc/syria-security-council-unscc-increases-observers-607.html>

<http://tunisianquestfortruth.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/samples-of-media-distortion-of-facts-about-syria-1-fake-pictures/> (contains some disturbing images)

[Editor’s Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on April 26, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/04/26/kofi-annan-briefing/>]

Kofi Annan tells UN “We Need Eyes and Ears on the Ground”

by Ronda Hauben

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In his briefing to the UN Security Council on Tuesday April 24, Kofi Annan noted the important impact that the UN Observer Mission was having on the ground even though there had only been a few UN observers deployed thus far.¹ He reported that there had been a marked decrease in the level of violence since the April 12 cease fire in Syria. “Without comprehensive monitoring of the situation,” he said, “it is difficult to assess the level of violence, but the available reports suggest that, taken as a whole the level of violence has decreased across the period since April 12....” (Kofi Annan Briefing, Para 7)

He noted that the importance of having observers was not only to “see what is going on.” More significantly, he pointed out that “their

presence has the potential to change the political dynamics.” (Kofi Annan Briefing, Para 21)

His goal is not to “freeze the situation” he explained, but to move toward what he calls an “enabling environment” that will facilitate “a genuine political process.”

Annan spoke to the crucial role that accurate information must play in helping to ease the crisis in Syria. “We continue to be hampered by the lack of verified information in assessing the situation,” he said. “We need eyes and ears on the ground,” he emphasized. “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,” he explains. (Kofi Annan Briefing, Para 20)

Such a statement fails to acknowledge that there are those in what he calls the “international community” who are hostile to his peace mission. Instead they are working for regime change in Syria, a goal contrary to the UN charter. Accurate information is, in fact, as he emphasized, critical to the success of his mission in Syria.

A significant weakness of what he is doing appears to be the fact that he does not acknowledge the harmful effect that the unverified reporting of claims of the opposition has played in the Syrian crisis.

The January 2012 Report of the Arab League Observers Mission contained several references to the harmful role played by inaccurate media reports of what is happening in Syria.² In Section E of that Report “The Media,” there is a summary of this role. Quoting this section: “Since it began its work, the Mission has been the target of a vicious media campaign. Some media outlets have published unfounded statements, which they attributed to the Head of the Mission. They have also grossly exaggerated events, thereby distorting the truth.” (Report of Arab League Observer Mission, Para 68)

“Such contrived reports have helped to increase tensions among the Syrian people and undermined the observers’ work. Some media organizations were exploited in order to defame the Mission and its Head and cause the Mission to fail.” (Report of Arab League Observer Mission, Para 69)

In considering such past experience of an Observer Mission in

Syria, it is to be expected that again there will be exaggerated media reports that will distort the truth. In his briefing to the Security Council, however, Annan refers to some unverified reports as having led him to be “particularly alarmed.” Though he admits that such reports have not been “confirmed,” he doesn’t warn that such reports must be suspect until after a verification process has occurred. (Kofi Annan Briefing, Para 9) Not surprisingly many western media reports about Annan’s briefing to the Security Council focused on Annan’s statement of alarm, rather than cautioning that such alarm is premature in the absence of verification.

While the Arab League Observer Mission was able to quickly put 166 monitors from 13 Arab countries and six relevant Arab organizations on the ground, the Security Council is being told that it will take up to a month to send 100 of the 300 UNSMIS observers to Syria. Such a slow pace for fulfilling the mandate provided by the Security Council in its approval of UNSMIS (S/RES/2043(2012)) is being criticized by some Security Council members. In his presentation to the Council, Annan asked that the “momentum generated” by the Council quickly approving the mandate for the Observer Mission not be lost.

Reports from on the ground are that there are eleven UN observers already in Syria, and that by the end of April the thirty observers for the initial contingent should be deployed. Despite such small numbers of observers, the early phase this represents in the mission, and the positive nature of Annan’s briefing to the Security Council, there are media reports quoting various sources that proclaim that the mission has failed.³

Such misleading media reports are to be expected as there is a media war against the sovereignty of Syria and in support of the armed insurgency. One mechanism of this media warfare is constant reference to unverified reports from the opposition from such questionable sources as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights which is in the U.K. Several exposures of this organization have been written showing that not only do two rival groups claim they are the legitimate representatives of this entity, but neither of the groups has a basis to verify the reports that are issued in its name. Yet many media organizations around the world, especially in the West, continually refer to claims by this London

based organization as the basis for the casualty figures they blame on the Syrian government. Similarly, more reliable information including names of victims among both government or civilian sectors caused by the armed insurgency are not reported in these mainstream media sources. Recently, a number of journalists have resigned from Aljazeera claiming that the political thrust of the news organization would not allow these journalists to report on the evidence of violence by the armed insurgents.

In every war, media is a major weapon. Annan's six point plan is part of a peace mission. How the UN Observer Mission will respond to the media warfare against the Annan plan is a critical question that will determine how effectively UNSMIS can perform as a force in Syria.

Notes

1. Kofi Annan Briefing to the Security Council, April 24, 2012.
<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0ByLPNZ-eSjJdbVRRTE4xb3F0RDQ/edit?pli=1>
2. Report of the Arab League Observer Mission to Syria, January, 2012, S/2012/71
<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=s/2012/71>
(The title of the UN document is "Letter dated January 24, 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, Enclosure 4. League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria 'Report of Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from December 24, 2011 to January 18, 2012, p. 11-22'.")
3. See for example: Ariel Zirulnick, "Observers in Syria Having an Impact but only 11 on the Ground So Far," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 25, 2012
<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2012/0425/Observers-in-Syria-having-an-impact-but-only-11-on-the-ground-so-far>
Ian Black, "Kofi Annan offers bleak progress report on Syria," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2012
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/25/kofi-annan-bleak-report-syria?newsfeed=true>
4. RT, "Russia questions credibility of Syrian Observatory for Human Rights," February 25, 2012
<http://rt.com/news/syrian-observatory-human-rights-reliability-223/>
RT, "Deaths in Syria: Counting them (politically) correctly," February 9, 2012
<http://rt.com/news/syria-death-count-political-875/>
"Al Jazeera reporter resigns over 'biased' Syria coverage"
<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/al-jazeera-reporter-resigns-over-biased-syria-co>

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on June 12, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/06/12/un-and-houla-massacre/>]

UN and Houla Massacre: The Information Battlefield

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At a press conference held on June 4 marking the beginning of China's presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of June, Li Baodong, China's Ambassador to the UN, observed that there are different versions of the facts of the Houla Massacre. "Now we have different stories from different angles," he noted. "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, "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."¹

The expectation was that Joint UN-Arab League Envoy Kofi Annan would be able to provide further information from the UNSMIS Observer mission when he came to speak with the Security Council on Thursday, June 7. It was anticipated that Annan's presentation would help to clarify the facts of the massacre.²

On June 7, however, instead of providing new information from such an investigation, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and several of the other speakers at the Informal General Assembly (GA) meeting put the responsibility for the Houla Massacre on the Assad government. This was also the dominant response of the nations that spoke at the informal GA meeting even though there had not yet been any adequate

investigation into facts of the situation.³ Also, there were claims of a new massacre.

Some of the member nations that spoke at the informal GA meeting, however, objected to coming to such a conclusion, especially, in the absence of an adequate investigation.

In his comments referring to the massacres in Houla and on the outskirts of Hama, the Russian Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, said, “Clearly these are the most serious crimes that require a reliable detailed investigation.”

Other nations including Venezuela, India, Cuba and Nicaragua expressed similar views. The Venezuelan Representative told the Informal GA meeting, “We suspect the fact that these criminal acts happen to coincide with these debates at the UN. We have to wonder who does this benefit at this time?” He urged that, “an independent and transparent investigation into these massacres must take place and we must find convincing clarity.”

India’s Ambassador to the UN, Hardeep Singh Puri, noted that the attacks against civilians and security forces in Syria “have intensified over the last few weeks and have taken a significant toll.” Also he drew attention to the sharp increase in the number of terrorist attacks in different parts of the country.” He “condemned all violence, irrespective of who the perpetrators are,” and called for the “cessation of all outside support for armed groups and serious action against the terrorist groups in Syria.” And he asked that the crimes, “including the recent incident in El Houleh, are fully investigated and their perpetrators brought to justice.”

After comparing what has happened in Syria with what had happened in Libya, the Nicaraguan Representative called for “an exhaustive investigation of these crimes and to bring the guilty to justice.”

The Cuban Ambassador noted that the “information is fragmented, imprecise and the object of frequent manipulation.” He denounced what he saw as the “complicity of the major broadcast media which are used to confusing reality and not accepting the responsibility for their acts.”

During his comments, which were twice cut off by the UN video transmission system, Ambassador Bashir Ja’afari, the Syrian Ambassa-

dor, asked how the Secretary General of the League of Arab States could render a judgment about who is responsible for the Houla massacre when such a judgment contradicts the report of the United Nations observers on the ground, and investigations of that atrocious massacre have not yet been completed. The massacre, he emphasized, had been condemned by the Syrian government.

Ambassador Ja'afari announced that, "Syria is ready to receive a commission of inquiry of states known for their independence and for their respect for the UN charter and for their refusal to interfere in Syrian internal affairs."

Later in the afternoon, after the Security Council's informal briefing with Kofi Annan, there was a media stakeout at the Security Council. One journalist asked Ban Ki moon, "Mr. Secretary General, what steps have you taken to comply with the request of the Security Council on 27th of May through the press statement to investigate fully, independently and transparently the killing in El Houleh?" The UN Secretary General did not answer the question.⁴

It is notable that as Ambassador Li Baodong had recognized during his press conference on June 4, several different narratives have been used to describe the Houla massacre. These offer different explanations of the circumstances under which it happened and therefore what the implications are for the future of the Kofi Annan six-point peace plan.

Those nations encouraging an investigation into the details of the Houla massacre want to determine the lessons from it toward solving the crisis in Syria. Those who were quick to jump to conclusions based on superficial information are helping to fan the flames of the conflict.

What are these major competing narratives?

Western and Arab Media Narrative

The narrative that is being spread by much of the mainstream western and Arab satellite media is a narrative that blames the Assad government for the Houla massacre. At first that media claimed that the people killed, including the women and children, had been killed by shelling from Syrian troops attacking the town.

In examining the videos and photos put online or provided by the opposition making these claims, however, it became evident that many

of the victims, particularly the women and children, had been killed at close range by bullets and knives and not by the shelling of heavy weapons by the Syrian military.

It soon became obvious that only 20 of the 108 who were killed may have been killed in combat fighting over the checkpoint and that the circumstances of these deaths were not yet determined.

The opposition and the western and Arab media supporting the opposition, like BBC and Aljazeera, etc. had to quickly change their narrative. They invented a new force allegedly used by the Syrian government, the shabbiya, which they claimed is a pro government militia.⁵ The shabbiya allegedly came into the homes of people and killed them at close range.

Russian News Team Narrative

A Russian news team interviewed people after the massacre. The explanation compiled from these interviews represents a very different narrative.

Their account noted that Houla is an administrative area, made up of three villages. It 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. This 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 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.⁶

Template for Media Warfare

At a press conference held in Damascus shortly after the Houla massacre by Joint UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, a question was asked which provides an important context to keep in mind when trying to determine what happened in Houla.

The journalist asked: I am a Russian living in Syria and reporting for various Russian online sites. What is happening in Syria reminds me of what happened in Yugoslavia that led to its division. We have sources that tell us that the Pentagon is preparing for war. If that happens, what do we do? What do Syrians do and what does the Government do?⁷

Annan's response was that he had no information of the Pentagon "preparing for war." Nor did he have any indication that what was happening in Syria would be a repeat of "what happened in Yugoslavia." Despite the fact that Annan dismissed the journalist's question, the question provides an important perspective toward understanding what is happening in Syria.

Looking back at the form of media warfare used to prepare public opinion for the NATO aggression against the former Yugoslavia, a template emerges that reflects a pattern in these events.

In this media warfare, the mainstream western media was used to spread stories about the alleged "responsibility for" massacres in order to demonize certain forces. This demonization served to justify the NATO bombing of their country. Hence the Russian journalist's question to Kofi Annan raised an important and serious concern.

In his book "Liar's Poker," which analyzes the role of the media in the Yugoslav war, Michel Collon writes "Information is already a battlefield, which is part of war." He writes that in 1991 the Slovenian government created a "media center which unleashed a flood of disinformation to international correspondents."⁸ This disinformation created a false narrative about what was happening and about who was responsible for the violent acts that killed many innocent people. The false narrative was then used to provide the justification for foreign intervention on one side of the conflict.

Also Collon documents the use of U.S. public relations agencies to help mold public opinion in favor of the Croatian and Muslim nationalists and as media warfare against the Serbs. In a striking way, Collon

shows how “a massacre happens unexpectedly each time certain Western powers plan to escalate measures against the Serbs.”⁹ He proposes what could be considered as the template used to create the climate of public opinion justifying the escalation of the attack on Yugoslavia.

Here are the components of the template he presents¹⁰:

Step 1: Preparation of a more or less hidden agenda

Step 2: Images that shock Public Opinion

Step 3: Groundless and Wild Media Accusations Without Investigation

Step 4: Western Objectives are Achieved

Step 5: Corrections to Erroneous News Reporting: Too Late and No Impact

Collon argues that shocking events were “staged” for the international media so as to make possible a planned escalation of the attack on Serbia. The Houla massacre bears a striking resemblance to the incidents that Collon refers to in the 1990s that set a basis for the escalation of the aggression against the Serbian government.

Is this current rush to judgment, both at the UN, and in the mainstream western and Arab media but another example of support and encouragement for armed aggression against a sovereign nation, as in the Yugoslavian situation? Is it but a signal to the armed insurgents willing to carry out horrific deeds to achieve their goal of foreign intervention, that they should go ahead with their cruel agenda? These are questions that need to be asked as they may help to explain the underlying motives of one of the narratives.

The failure of mainstream western and Arab satellite media and of a number of nations at the UN to acknowledge that there are different views of the underlying cause and implementation of the Houla massacre impedes the urgency with which the needed investigation and analysis are to be organized.¹¹ Such an investigation is critical to identify the actual problems and to understand what is needed to solve them.

It is important to acknowledge that there are two major narratives about the events of the Houla massacre. Such an acknowledgment recognizes, as Ambassador Li Baodong did, the need for evidence to determine what is an accurate narrative of the Houla Massacre. There are a number of blogs and news sites on the Internet where netizens

contribute articles and comments that are helpful toward analyzing what is happening in Syria and at the UN and whether the actions at the UN are helpful or harmful for resolving the crisis in a way that is in line with the principles of the UN charter. There are examples of a substantial new netizen journalism developing on the Internet which is taking up the needed work to investigate the facts of the Syrian conflict so as to understand what is needed to contribute to a peaceful resolution.¹²

Notes

1. Video of Press Conference marking the beginning of the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for the month of June.

<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/security-council/watch/li-baodong-china-president-of-the-security-council-on-the-programme-of-work-for-the-month-of-june-2012-press-conference/1672822951001>

2. The press statement issued by the UN Security Council on May 27 called for the Secretary General and UNSMIS “to continue to investigate these attacks and report the findings to the Security Council.”

3. See for example the summary by Moon of Alabama,

<http://www.moonofalabama.org/2012/06/the-syria-discussion-at-the-un-general-assembly.html>

4. “Joint press encounter with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Kofi A. Annan, Joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy on Syria and Nabil El-Araby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.”

5. See for example the account by AP: “The assault came nearly a week after 108 people, many of them women and children, were killed in the area. Activists said government forces first shelled the area on Friday, then pro-regime fighters known as shabiha stormed the villages. The Syrian government denied its troops were behind the killings and blamed ‘armed terrorists’.”

<http://calgary.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20120531/UN-chief-warns-syria-houla-120531/20120531/?hub=CalgaryHome>

6. See for example: Thierry Meyssan, “The Houla Affair Highlights Western Intelligence Gap in Syria,”

<http://www.voltairenet.org/The-Houla-affair-highlights>

See also: Wassim Raad, “The Set Up Massacre and the American Fingerprint”

<http://www.voltairenet.org/The-set-up-massacre-and-the>

In German see for example Mathias Broeckers, “Der Hula-Hoax”

<http://www.broeckers.com/2012/06/05/der-hula-hoax/>

and Rainer Hermann, “Again massacre in Syria,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 7, 2012.

<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/neue-erkenntnisse-zu-getoeteten-von-houla-aberma-ls-massaker-in-syrien-11776496.html>

(An English translation FAZ is available at Moon of Alabama blog:

<http://www.moonofalabama.org/2012/06/prime-german-paper-syrian-rebels-committed-houla-massacre.html>)

7. Transcript of JSE Press Conference in Damascus, May 29, 2012, p. 4. For video see: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unsmis/>

8. Michel Collon, *Liar's Poker*, International Action Center, New York, 2002 p. 45. (This is an English translation of the book which was originally published in French.)

9. *Ibid.*, p. 28

10. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

11. The Human Rights Council has passed a resolution calling for an investigation into the Houla Massacre. Several sources, however, document that the Human Rights Council only considers information supplied by activists in support of the armed opposition. See for example “UN Commissions report on Houla? But they only talk to Syrian opposition – by phone,” May 31, 2012 “Anti-war campaigner Marinella Corregia worries the HR commissioner talks only to its sources: the opposition.”

<http://www.rt.com/news/houla-massacre-un-syria-635/>

12. A few of the English language web sites providing news and analysis of the Syrian conflict toward a directed peaceful resolution include:

Moon of Alabama: <http://www.moonofalabama.org/>

Centre for Research on Globalization:

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/>

VoltaireNet: <http://www.voltairenet.org/en>

Syria News: <http://www.syrianews.cc/>

Syria360: <http://syria360.wordpress.com/>

The 4th Media: <http://www.4thmedia.org/>

[Editor's Note: This article is taken from a talk given in Beijing in July 22, 2012 at a program sponsored by April Media. The whole talk is available at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-april-cafe.doc.>]

The United Nations and Journalism in the Era of the Netizen

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I – The Global Political Situation

The current international situation raises important questions for discussion and analysis. In a complex world, how can one have a means to understand what is happening. While the mainstream western media often project one view of the world, online discussion and analysis have begun to play an ever more important role in offering alternative viewpoints and analysis.

Around the world there has been a recognition that the mainstream western media can play a harmful role for those trying to develop an accurate understanding of the events of our times. This problem is often obvious in online comments and articles by netizens.

One such situation occurred in 2003 when the U.S. media promoted the false claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. used this false claim as the pretext to invade Iraq. But there were no such weapons in Iraq.

The question was raised among scholars in the U.S. about the poor quality of U.S. journalism.

How would it be possible to prevent the U.S. media from making similar false claims in the future? One answer was to recognize that there is a serious problem with much of the mainstream U.S. media. Instead of the U.S. media presenting the debate of different viewpoints on an issue, or acting as a watchdog over the U.S. government, this media presents only the dominant viewpoint of those in power. In

so doing the mainstream U.S. media helps to strengthen those in power even more.¹

Exploring a similar problem, Michael Hauben wrote an article titled, “The Effect of the Net on the Professional News Media.”² He considered what the effect of both the netizen and the Internet would be on the future of the news and news media. He recognized that a new form of news was in its infancy.

Michael saw that this new form of news was evolving into a new paradigm 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, Michael 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 supplanting traditional forms of journalism.” What is this new form of news and what are its characteristics?

With the creation and the spread of the Internet, the emergence of a new form of citizenship, known as netizenship, has developed. Along with this new form of citizenship, a critical and vibrant form of online journalism is emerging. I call this journalism netizen journalism. I propose that this new journalism has at least two important aspects.

One is that it encourages serious research into the background, context and political significance of the conflicts of our times, conflicts like those in Libya or Syria. Another important aspect of this new form of journalism is the application of this research to the writing of articles or to comments in online discussions on issues of public concern, and in response to both mainstream and alternative media articles. Often the comments by netizens on these issues include criticism of false claims like the claim that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Video news and oral interviews can also be examples of netizen journalism if they meet the above criteria.

At a conference held in Russia last March, Dmitry Medvedev, who is now the Prime Minister of the Russia Federation, presented a speech describing the need to recognize the problem of media manipulation of public opinion in the international arena.³

Medvedev particularly referred to the Syrian situation. “A very active media campaign unfolded with respect to Syria,” he explained. “I will not now discuss the nature of these events,” he said, “but what is clear is that this media campaign has little to do with the task of ending violence as rapidly as possible and facilitating the national dialogue that we all want to see.”⁴

Medvedev proposed that such a media campaign against a country presents “the new security dimension.” Such a security danger needs to be recognized and exposed.

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

A somewhat different approach to the problem Medvedev has pointed out is offered by the political scientist Karl Deutsch.

In his book *Nerves of Government*, Deutsch explores problems of communication that develop in politics. He proposes that it is helpful to look at the problems that develop in government or in the governance of other political organizations as if such organizations are a nervous system consisting of channels of communication and feedback. Deutsch writes, “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,...as the skeleton or organs of a body. This book,” Deutsch explains, “concerns itself less with the bones or muscles of the body politic than with its nerves – its channels of communication and decision.”⁵

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 “organization of thinking human beings in social groups.”

Deutsch raises the question “To what extent are failures in the steering (i.e. of the problems that develop) of an organization due to

the absence of some crucial communication link not to the presence of some evil elements?”

While Deutsch is allowing for the situation where a problem in communication is responsible for a failure in the functioning of an organization, Medvedev is presenting the problem of media manipulation in international relations as a problem where the “security” danger must be recognized.

Considering Medvedev’s warning about the security danger presented by media manipulation, and Deutsch’s warning that a communication problem can lead to a breakdown in an organization, I want to look at some examples of United Nations Security Council experience and consider the significance of the problems in communication reflected in these examples.

The example I will focus most on, is that of the role of the UN in what is happening in Syria.

In my treatment of Syria, I want to focus on the Houla massacre as the situation to analyze in order to understand the media war at the UN over Syria.

The Houla massacre occurred in Syria on May 24, 2012.

This was but a few days before Kofi Annan, the joint Arab League-UN envoy, was planning a visit to Syria.

Immediately after the massacre there was a media campaign to blame the Syrian government for the deaths (there were over 100 deaths). A short time later, an alternative account was made available by a Russian online media group Anna News.⁶ This news team for an online site visited the area where the massacre occurred the following day. 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.

If one were to read or hear mainstream western media accounts of the massacre, however, they mainly present what they claim is hap-

pening from the point of view of the armed opposition in Syria. The armed opposition presents an account of events which demonizes the Syrian government. There have been a number of instances when the accounts from the armed opposition have been shown to be false.

Along with the different set of information presented by the Syrian government, there is the information in the alternative media that I refer to as netizen journalism. Netizen journalism will challenge distortions and other problems in the news coverage provided by the mainstream western media. 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.

I want to propose that this form of alternative media which I call netizen journalism, is setting up a communication channel different from that of the mainstream western media.

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

Three months ago the UN Security Council authorized a mission of 300 unarmed observers to monitor what is happening in Syria and to try to encourage a cease fire of the conflicting parties. This mission is called the UN Supervisory Mission in Syria or for short (UNSMIS). When the Houla massacre first occurred, UNSMIS went to investigate the massacre. The initial response of UNSMIS was that there were two views of what had occurred and who was responsible presented to them.

Then in response to a request from the UN Security Council that UNSMIS do an investigation, Major General Mood, the commander of UNSMIS said that a report had been prepared in June.⁷

He submitted the report to Ban Ki Moon.

In his article “General Mood: ‘Two Versions’ of the Houla Massacre” posted by John Rosenthal, June 26, 2012, Rosenthal writes that “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 John Rosenthal, “Why has this report not been rendered public?”⁸

Similarly, UN Security Council members report that they have not received the report.

When journalists asked the Secretary-General’s spokesperson what happened to Mood’s report and why it wasn’t given to the Security Council, they were told that it had been given to various members of the UN Secretariat. But as journalists at the UN 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.”⁹

This past April, 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.”

Yet when UNSMIS did create a report, it was withheld from the Security Council by the Secretary General of the UN.

At a press conference to mark the beginning of the Chinese Presidency of the Security Council for the month of June, China’s Ambassador Li Baodong, referring to the Houla massacre, said¹⁰: “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.”

This acknowledgment that there are different views of what had happened in the Houla massacre and that there is a need to get accurate information from an on the ground investigation is an important step for a member of the Security Council to make. This challenges the armed opposition claims that their account is the only account of what is happening in Syria.

In a recent paper I am working on titled, “The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the United Nations”¹¹ I document some of the various forms netizen journalism has taken in the media war on Syria.

There are many articles and videos posted on a number of web sites challenging the mainstream media version of the events in Houla and explaining the facts that demonstrated that the massacre had been carried out by the armed insurgents and local criminals.

With these articles acting as a catalyst, the mainstream German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* carried two articles condemning the armed insurgency 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 the longer paper I am working on on the Media Warfare at the UN, I consider the strength or weaknesses of the netizen journalism coverage of two other examples and consider its impact on the Security Council action in these examples.

II – Conclusion

The issue raised by this preliminary presentation concerns the need for serious attention to the importance of facilitating an accurate channel of communication with respect to the issues being considered by the Security Council. This will make it more difficult for the media manipulation that Medvedev identified as a serious security concern to succeed.

In the situation of the Syria conflict, the fact that General Mood’s report on the Houla massacre could be withheld from the Security Council for more than a month and that there is not yet any indication of when it will be given to the Security Council, represents a serious problem. This indicates that there is a problem with the communication channels at the UN 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, Amba-

sador Li Baodong referred to the international media as the “16th member of the Security Council.”¹²

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 journalism is being created by netizens, many of whom are dedicated to doing the research and analysis to expose the interests and actions that are too often hidden from 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. If such a journalism can help to provide the UN with a more accurate understanding of the conflicts it is considering, it can help to make more likely the peaceful resolution of these conflicts.

Notes

1. W. Lance Bennett, Steven Livingston, Regina G. Lawrence, *When the Press Fails*, Chicago, 2008.
2. Michael Hauben, The Effect of the Net on the Professional News Media: “The Usenet News Collective – The Man-Computer News Symbiosis,” Chapter 13 in Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, Los Alamitos, 1997.
<http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x13>
3. “Conference organized by the Russian Council for International Affairs,” March 23, 2012, Moscow.
<http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/3582>
4. He refers to how Libya and more recently Syria have been the victim of this politics. “How are we to see the mantras repeated by particular countries that consider themselves the main exporters of democracy if, say in the Libyan and now the Syrian cases, countries whose internal political lives are governed by completely different norms are chosen as models to follow for democratic development?”
5. Karl Deutsch, *Nerves of Government*, The Free Press, New York, 1966, p. xxvii.
6. 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/>
7. 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>

8. 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.”

<http://pjmedia.com/blog/general-mood-two-versions-of-the-houla-massacre/>

9. 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/>

10. Video of Li Baodong press conference marking the Chinese presidency of Security Council for the month of June, June 4, 2012, p. 11.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/06/li-baodongchina-president-of-the-security-council-on-the-programme-of-work-for-the-month-of-june-2012-press-conference.html>

11. “The Role of Netizen Journalism in the Media War at the UN.” Draft Paper:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-paper.doc>

Talk: <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/r-china2012-talk.doc>

12. Press Conference: Li Baodong (China) President of the Security Council for the month of March, March 2, 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>

[Editor's Note: The following article first appeared on the netizenblog on Nov 28, 2012 at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/11/28/why-is-unsmis-report-missing/>]

Why is the UNSMIS Houla Report Missing?

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I – Conflicting Views on the Human Rights Council September 28 Resolution

On September 28, the UN's Human Rights Council asked for a consensus vote on a resolution holding the Syrian government responsible for the violence in Syria. The resolution particularly referred to the Houla Massacre that took place in Syria on May 25-26, 2012. The resolution said it¹: "Condemns in the strongest terms the massacre of the village of AL-Houla near Homs, where the forces of the government of the Syrian Arab Republic and members of the Shabbiha were found by the commission of inquiry to be the perpetrators of outrageous and heinous crimes and stresses the need to hold those responsible to account."

Opposing the call that the resolution be passed by acclamation, Maria Khodynskaya-Golenischv, the Representative of the Russian Federation, explained why her country would vote against the resolution. Among the several reasons she gave was the objection that the resolution was inaccurate and biased in blaming the Syrian government for the massacre. She explained, "In particular we cannot agree with the one sided conclusion put out in the resolution concerning the Commission on the Houla tragedy." She noted, "We believe that the question for the attribution of guilt is still open. An investigation should be carried out thoroughly. One should not accuse the government if one does not have sufficient evidence therefore."²

The Russian Federation Representative also pointed out the harmful consequences such a resolution would have in deepening the conflict. “Unfortunately,” she said, “some states are in de facto encouraging terrorism in Syria. Therefore we have no doubt that the episode in Houla is definitely being whipped up in the media and being used to carry out force against this country.”

China’s Representative said that his nation would also vote against the resolution. He explained that putting pressure on only one party to the conflict would not help to resolve the conflict.

The Cuban delegate also announced that his country would vote against the resolution. Among the reasons he gave was the objection that the goal of some co-sponsors of the resolution was to impose regime change on the Syrian people through a decision arrived at by those outside the country. Such a goal, the Cuban Representative maintained, threatened to send Syria back to the Stone Age.

When the vote was taken, there were 41 votes in favor of the resolution, three votes against (China, Cuba and the Russian Federation), and three abstentions (Philippines, India and Uganda). The India Representative, explaining why his country had abstained, said that the obligation of the Human Rights Council was to act with impartiality and for its resolutions to be balanced and impartial. The implication of India’s remarks was that the resolution against Syria was not balanced or impartial.

Though Syria is not a member of the Human Rights Council, the Representative of Syria, Faysal Khabbaz Hamoui, was given permission to speak. Among the objections to the resolution that he raised was that the resolution did not take into account the report of the Syrian government’s Commission of Inquiry into the Houla tragedy. He also pointed to the closed process used by those drawing up the resolution. It was a process, he said, that did not accept any proposals to amend the resolution.

This interaction in the Human Rights Council takes on added significance when it is viewed in the context of the earlier Security Council request that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, with the involvement of UNSMIS (United Nations Supervisory Mission In Syria), do an investigation of the Houla massacre and report its find-

ings to the Security Council.³ This request was made in a press statement issued by the Security Council on May 27, 2012. By a rather mysterious process, the Security Council's request that an investigation of the Houla massacre, which was to be carried out with the involvement of UNSMIS, was shifted to a significantly different process that was carried out by the Human Rights Council and the Commission of Inquiry it created, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter CoI). How this shift happened and the significance of this change, merit serious consideration by those who are concerned about the role the UN is playing in the conflict in Syria.

II – What Happened to the UNSMIS Report on Houla Investigation?

It will be helpful to review the Security Council's request that there be an investigation of the Houla massacre with the involvement of UNSMIS. On May 27, shortly after the Houla Massacre took place, the UN Security Council issued a press statement. In the statement it said:⁴ “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.”

Note that the Secretary General was to present the results of the UNSMIS investigation to the Security Council.

Similarly relevant is an article by Reuters on May 29, two days after the Security Council issued its press statement. In the article, Karen AbuZug, a Commissioner on the CoI created by the Human Rights Council, is quoted saying,⁵ “We are discussing with UNSMIS over the next few days to see whether we can also have a look and maybe corroborate with information we get from outside the country.” Such a statement can be considered as an acknowledgment that UNSMIS was to conduct an on the ground investigation and the CoI would add what it could from its sources outside the country. The role assigned to UNSMIS by the Security Council to be involved in conducting the investigation was at the time recognized by AbuZug.

At a press conference with journalists in Damascus on June 15, Major-General Robert Mood, head of UNSMIS, explained the progress of UNSMIS in carrying out its investigation of the Houla tragedy.⁶ He said that UNSMIS had been to Houla with an investigating team. They did interviews. They interviewed locals who told one story. They interviewed locals who told another story. But the circumstances leading up to Houla, the detailed circumstances, the facts related to the incident still remained unclear to the UNSMIS investigators. This led General Mood to say that if there was a decision to support a more extensive on the ground investigation, UNSMIS could help to facilitate it.

As a result of its work, he said, UNSMIS put together the facts it could establish by what the team saw on the ground, together with the conflicting statements and witness interviews. UNSMIS sent that as a report to UN Headquarters in New York.⁷

Given this set of events one could logically expect that the Secretary General would present the conflicting results of the UNSMIS investigation to the Security Council, and the Security Council would consider whether to ask the Secretary General to establish a more extensive on the ground investigation of the circumstances leading to and occurring during the Houla massacre. This more extensive on the ground investigation would be one with access facilitated by UNSMIS as General Mood indicated was possible. As part of this more extensive investigation, the Human Right's Council's CoI might corroborate, as AbuZug had proposed in her comments in the Reuters article on May 29, by providing information from those outside of Syria if that was relevant.

But this is not what happened.

Instead there was silence at UN Headquarters about what the Secretary General's intentions were with respect to transmitting the findings of the UNSMIS investigation to the Security Council.

Only when journalists raised the question, did the Spokesperson for the Secretary General give any indication that the Report had been received.

On June 21, responding to a question from a journalist, the UN Spokesperson acknowledged the Secretary General had received the

UNSMIS Houla Report. The Spokesperson for the Secretary General explained⁸: “Spokesperson: Well, the Mission has sent its observations on the al-Houla killings to the Secretary-General for his consideration. The Secretary-General is in turn sending these observations to the relevant UN bodies monitoring human rights in Syria. And once these bodies complete their work, the findings on what I think everybody agrees was a terrible incident will be presented by the Secretary General to the Security Council.”

This statement raises the question of why the findings of UNSMIS were to be diverted to what he referred to as “UN bodies monitoring human rights” rather than presented directly to the Security Council as the Security Council had requested in their May 27 press statement.

The Spokesperson’s statement, however, acknowledges the UNSMIS Report on Houla was received by the Secretary General and that the Secretary General had the obligation to present it to the Security Council. Nevertheless, even several months later, members of the Security Council said that the conflicting information gathered from the on the ground investigatory process by UNSMIS still had not been presented to Security Council members.

When a question about the missing UNSMIS Report on Houla was raised again at the Secretary General’s Spokesperson’s briefing on September 14, the Deputy Spokesperson promised she would get a response to the journalist’s question.⁹ In an e-mail a few days later, on September 17, the Deputy Spokesperson wrote:¹⁰ “(J)ust to follow up on your question from Friday, the report by UNSMIS (i.e. Mood’s report) went to the Human Rights Council and the Security Council. Any further follow-up is in their hands.”

Yet when the President of the Security Council for the month of October, Guatemala’s Ambassador Gert Rosenthal, held a press conference on October 2, he was asked whether the Security Council had received General Mood’s Report. His response was¹¹: “To the best of my knowledge, the answer is No.” “I personally (as) a member of the council have not seen that report,” he said.

Apparently, according to the Guatemalan Ambassador, the Security Council members had not seen the UNSMIS Report on Houla,

despite the Deputy Spokesperson's e-mail stating that the UNSMIS Report had gone to the Security Council.

And an e-mail to the Spokesperson for the Human Rights Council about whether the Human Rights Council had seen the UNSMIS Report on the Houla massacre received no response.

Then on October 16, two members of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (CoI) appointed by the Human Rights Council held a press conference at UN Headquarters.¹² At the press conference, Karen AbuZug, a Commissioner and Paulo Pinheiro, Chairman of the Commission, were asked if they had seen the UNSMIS Report on Houla submitted by General Mood to UN Headquarters. AbuZug responded that she had been given a briefing on the Report but had not seen the Report itself. There was no means to ask another question about this issue during the press conference. After the press conference ended, AbuZug was asked if she could say what was presented in the briefing on General Mood's report. She responded that the briefing was confidential.

III – CoI Report as a One Sided Document

The CoI produced both a preliminary report on Houla of 20 pages on June 26, titled "Oral Update of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic" (A/HRC/20/CRP.1) (hereafter Oral Update Report) and a final Report in August titled "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic." (A/HRC/21/50) (hereafter August Report). The August Report is 107 pages but the part about the Houla massacre is approximately 7 pages (pages 10-12 and 64-67).

These reports by the CoI appear to serve not as a corroboration of the on the ground investigation by the UNSMIS team, as AbuZug originally proposed, but rather as the substitute for the UNSMIS Report. The UNSMIS Report of conflicting statements and interviews from locals in Houla, which General Mood described to journalists on June 15, appears to have vanished. Instead of the UNSMIS Report of the two conflicting versions of the stories by locals in Houla indicating the need for a more substantial on the ground investigation, the

CoI, with no actual evidence presented, declared that the Syrian government was to blame for the Houla massacre.

In contrast to General Mood's statement to journalists that UNSMIS had been on the site of the Houla massacre with an investigating team, the CoI made no visits to the site of the Houla massacre. When asked why the CoI did not include information from the UNSMIS Report in their CoI Report, Pinheiro answered that the report only includes the information the Commission gets from its own investigators. Such a statement is contradicted in its own August Report, which does include references to information from UNSMIS, just not with regard to the Houla massacre.

In his June 15 press briefing, General Mood said the UNSMIS Report on Houla included statements and interviews with locals with one story and statements and interviews with locals with another story. The August Report of the CoI tells only one story and claims that they either do not have other information or that any other information they know of is inconsistent, so that they have accepted that there is only one story. The Reports that the CoI produced had no onsite interviews or statements, but only telephone or Skype interviews with insurgents or those supporting the account of Houla presented by the armed insurgents.

General Mood said the scope of the information needed was, "the circumstances leading up to el Houla and the detailed circumstances, the facts related to the incident itself." He explained that these still remained unclear to UNSMIS. This information is needed to set a basis for a report on the Houla tragedy that is impartial and balanced, based on an understanding of the facts of not only what happened at Houla, but also what led up to this tragedy.

While the scope of the question raised by General Mood and UNSMIS for the Houla investigation was a question which puts what happened in Houla into a broader context, the CoI Reports, instead, narrow down the question raised so that the broader context is obscured.

The August Report from the CoI poses as its critical question, whether the Syrian government had the ability to have access to the area where the massacre occurred. The August Report speculates that

the Syrian government maintained control over one of the checkpoints in the area of a site of a massacre. Based on this speculation, the August Report claims that the Syrian government must be responsible for the massacre.

In general, however, accounts of the events of the tragedy differ about whether or not the Syrian military lost control of the checkpoints around the area where the massacre occurred. Also, there seems general agreement that the area in question was under the control of the armed insurgents and had been for a period of time.

The widely held agreement or claim that the armed insurgents had control of the area where the massacre took place was even referred to in a letter to the Security Council by Ban Ki moon shortly after the massacre occurred. In his letter to the UN Security Council, Ban Ki-moon wrote¹³ “The villages in question have been outside of the Government control, but surrounded by heavy military presence.” (The Secretary General, May 27, 2012) The CoI Reports dismiss the fact that the area was under the control of the armed insurgents.

Similarly, in the CoI Reports, there is no motive given for why the Syrian government would want to massacre these civilians.

This information is needed to set a basis for a report on the Houla tragedy that is impartial and balanced, based on an understanding of the facts of not only what happened at Houla, but also what led up to this tragedy.

General Mood also explained that there was a need to understand the facts related to the incident itself that were unclear even after the UNSMIS investigation.

The August Report, instead, treats its speculative conclusions as facts, rather than acknowledging that there are significant facts related to the incident itself which remain unclear, but which need to be resolved in order to determine who is responsible.

It is also important to remember that the UNSMIS investigation came up with conflicting stories, and conflicting interviews. There remain conflicting stories and conflicting interviews about what happened at Houla. Yet the August Report shows little recognition that this is true or that there is a need to not only recognize these conflict-

ing accounts, but also to propose the need to have a more extensive investigation that can resolve the unsettled issues.

The CoI Reports complain that their investigators did not have access to people on the ground in Syria, and so had to rely on interviews by phone or Skype. But the failure of the CoI investigators to do a balanced and impartial investigation explains why the Syrian government would not be willing to give them permission to carry out an investigation in Syria.

The question needs to be raised as to why the CoI investigators did not identify or contact people who could present a range of conflicting statements or interviews as UNSMIS had gathered and presented to UN headquarters. In addition, there are a number of potential witnesses that have been identified by alternative media or NGO sources whose accounts of the events differ from the conclusion of the August Report. Some of these alternative media or NGO sources report that when they tried to offer information to the CoI, their offers were refused.¹⁴ It is hard to understand how the CoI could claim it could accomplish an impartial and balanced investigation without accepting such offers and seeking such contacts.

Instead, the CoI Reports, particularly the August Report, are based mainly on the views of the armed insurgents. The August Report even misrepresents what the CoI said in the earlier Oral Update Report. The Oral Update Report allowed for three alternative possibilities as to who was responsible for the massacre of civilians.

The Oral Update Report of the CoI says (See for example, A/HRC/20/CRP.1, para 48-49, 54-55 p. 10-11): “First, that the perpetrators were ‘Shabbiha’ or other local militia from neighbouring villages, possibly operating together with, or with the acquiescence of, the Government security forces; second that the perpetrators were anti-Government forces seeking to escalate the conflict while punishing those that failed to support – or who actively opposed – the rebellion; or third, foreign groups with unknown affiliation.” “With the available evidence,” the Oral Update Report said, “the CoI could not rule out any of these possibilities.”

A few paragraphs later it added: “The CoI could not rule out the possibility of the involvement of foreign groups with unknown affilia-

tion. The CoI received information that the anti-Government armed groups in Taldou on that day received ‘support from other groups from neighboring areas.’ Testimony was also collected that described the perpetrators as having shaved heads and long beards – descriptions which have been applied both to foreign groups and the Shabbiha in other contexts. This information could not be corroborated by the Commission.”

Based on this statement, the Oral Update Report stated: “The CoI is unable to determine the identity of the perpetrators at this time....”

Without providing any substantial new evidence, the August Report, instead, states that there is “no doubt the Syrian government was responsible for the Houla massacre.” (A/HRC/21/50, para 49, p. 10)

The August Report even misrepresents that the earlier Oral Update Report offers three alternative views of who was responsible for the deaths of civilians in Houla. (See A/HRC/21/50, para 41, p. 10)

Somehow between the time of the Oral Update Report of June 26, and the August Report, the CoI found a means to trivialize what criteria would determine who to blame for the massacre. Also the CoI dismissed the broader issues, the questions and the obligation to provide a more substantial consideration of the background to the events that had occurred in Houla.

And with no explanation offered, the UNSMIS Report that Mood said was submitted to UN Headquarters, has effectively disappeared. Subsequently, the UNSMIS mission itself was ended. And the Security Council request to Ban Ki-moon to report to it on the findings of the UNSMIS investigation in Houla has never been fulfilled.

If the Security Council had heard the details of the conflicting nature of the statements and interviews in the UNSMIS Report and had this Report been available to the media and the public, this could have provided public pressure for the continuation of the UNSMIS mission and for the establishment of an impartial, competent team to conduct an on the ground investigation facilitated by UNSMIS. But this did not happen. With the disappearance of the UNSMIS Report on Houla, the Security Council allowed UNSMIS to be terminated.

Subsequently, the CoI appointed by the Human Rights Council was allowed to substitute a biased report lacking any direct knowl-

edge of the details of what happened in Houla or any face to face interviews with witnesses with direct knowledge of the events to be investigated.

One may ask why such a switch was made from the UNSMIS Report on Houla with information from an on the ground investigation gathering conflicting statements and interviews as requested by the Security Council, to the substitution of the Human Rights Council's CoI Report presenting no actual evidence, but putting the blame for the Houla massacre on the Syrian government.

This is a question which needs further investigation and analysis. An important clue to an answer, however, is suggested by the June 21 UN Spokesman's response to the question from the journalist who asked what happened to the UNSMIS Report.

Instead of sending the report directly to the Security Council as could be expected, the Spokesman said that the Secretary General was "sending these observations to the relevant UN bodies monitoring human rights in Syria."

But the Security Council's May 27 press statement asked the Secretary General with the involvement of UNSMIS to do an investigation of the Houla massacre, and report the findings to the Security Council. There was no Security Council request that the UNSMIS Report on Houla first be sent to UN bodies monitoring human rights.

Considering the subsequent developments the reason for this diversion becomes more apparent. UNSMIS took as its obligation to maintain a neutrality (See for example General Mood's July 5 press conference in Damascus, where he describes how he worked to maintain an impartiality in the actions of UNSMIS).¹⁵ The CoI, on the contrary, did not act to maintain an impartiality in its investigation, but instead took a side in gathering the information it considered for its investigation and the people it contacted.

The consequence of such a bias in the CoI investigation resulted in the August Report that has been justly criticized as presenting one sided conclusions and attributing blame for the Houla massacre without sufficient evidence.

Furthermore, if one asks UN related officials about the UNSMIS report on Houla, one is likely instead to be pointed to the August Report of the CoI.¹⁶

Thus it appears that by the time the UNSMIS Report on Houla was submitted to UN Headquarters, some decision had been made that it would not be presented to the Security Council, but instead the CoI would create a substitute report, despite the fact that this body had no direct access to the facts or to witnesses to the massacre.

And it appears that this substitution of the Human Rights appointed CoI Reports for the UNSMIS Houla Report has received only rare media attention, though the CoI Reports have been critiqued by some of the alternative media.¹⁷

For example, Marinella Correggia is an activist with the Italian No War network-ROMA which critiqued the CoI Reports. She concludes that given the Commission's international mandate, the partiality and one-sidedness of the August Report is both flabbergasting and disconcerting. She asks, "Has the UN no internal assessment mechanism to prevent such abuses in the 'documentation' of events upon which the UN is then required to act?"¹⁸

At the present time, the answer to her question appears to be that the UN does not have any internal mechanism to prevent such abuse, except for the few statements by member nations that are willing to speak out and make their criticisms, as did the nations that voted against or abstained in the vote at the Human Rights Council on September 28 Resolution condemning Syria.

Unfortunately, though, the result of the decision to substitute a biased CoI Report based on one sided reasoning and speculative conclusions, for the UNSMIS Report based on an impartial on the ground investigation, has significant consequences for the UN. The obligation of the UN is to be impartial, so as to be able to help resolve conflicts that threaten international peace and security. If instead the UN acts as the political proponent of certain powerful member states intervening in domestic conflicts of other states to bring about regime change, then the very essence of the UN is impaired and put in jeopardy.

Notes

1. A/HCR/21/L.32A. This resolution was passed by the Human Rights Council Resolution on September 28, 2012 condemning Syria for the Houla Massacre based on the biased and one sided Reports of the COI.

<http://www.voltairenet.org/article176162.html>

2. The proceedings of the September 28, 2012 meeting of the Human Rights Council are online at the UN website. The URL for the video is:

<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/human-rights-council/watch/132-vote-item:4-38th-meeting-21st-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/1865712813001>

The Russian Federation's Representation spoke from min. 4:42 -8:10

The Chinese Delegate spoke from min. 13:09-15:50

The Cuban Representative spoke from min. 16:10-18:50

The Syrian Representative can be heard in the video from min. 24:34-35:30

3. Ronda Hauben, "The UN and General Mood's Missing Report on Conflicting Accounts of the Houla Massacre," September 10, 2012,

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2012/09/10/unsmis-report-houla-massacre/>

4. See the wording in the UN Security Council Press Statement on Houla 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."

The URL is:

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10658.doc.htm>

5. Stephanie Nebehay, "Most Houla victims killed in summary executions: UN," Tuesday, May 29, 2012.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/29/us-syria-un-idUSBRE84S10020120529>

6. Press Conference with Major General Robert Mood in Damascus, June 15, 2012, Video Part 2. The section where General Mood describes the Report on Houla starts at min: 3:10 to 4:17 . The URL is:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOTJdHTloLg>

7. Describing the investigation by UNSMIS into the Houla massacre and the report UNSMIS submitted to UN headquarters, General Mood tells journalists, as transcribed from the video:

"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's the way forward. Will there be a different investigation? (This -ed) is a matter for headquarters in this context. But if we are asked, obviously we are on the ground, and could help facilitate that.”

8. Press Briefing with UN Spokesperson on June 21, 2012.

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2012/db120621.doc.htm>

9. Press Briefing with UN Spokesperson on Sept 14, 2012.

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2012/db120914.doc.htm>

10. E-mail received from the Deputy Spokesperson on September 17, 2012.

11. Video at the UN website of Oct 2, 2012 – H. E. Mr. Gert Rosenthal, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for the month of October, 2012 on the programme of work of the Security Council in October. The URL for the video is:

<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/security-council/watch/gert-rosenthal-guatemala-a-president-of-the-security-council-on-the-programme-of-work-for-the-month-of-october-2012-press-conference/1873411152001>

12. Press Conference on Oct 16, 2012 – Paulo Pinheiro, Chair and member of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria and Karen AbuZayd. The URL of the video on the UN website is:

<http://webtv.un.org/watch/the-latest-findings-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-syria-press-conference/1904479973001>

13. S/2012/368. Letter dated May 27, 2012 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council. The URL is:

<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20S2012%20368.pdf>

14. See for example: “Anti-war campaigner Marinella Correggia worries the HR commissioner talks only to its sources: the opposition.”

<http://www.rt.com/news/houla-massacre-un-syria-635/>

Thursday, May 31, 2012, “UN report on Houla massacre? But they only talk to Syrian opposition – by phone, “Uprooted Palestinians.”

<http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.com/2012/05/river-to-sea-uprooted-palestinian-views.html>

15. General Mood Meets the Press, Damascus, July 5, 2012.

See for example from min. 17:25-19:00

General Mood describes how UNSMIS has established an impartial system with “exactly the mechanism that addresses both sides in the same way.”

16. I have had two experiences when I asked either present or former UN officials connected for the UNSMIS Report. In both cases I was referred to the CoI Reports with no indication about what happened to the UNSMIS Report on Houla.

17. See for example: Marinella Correggia, “The Recent Report on Syria by the ‘Independent International Commission of Inquiry’ (CoI) mandated by the Human Rights Council is one-sided and lacks evidences” The URL is

<http://www.sibialiria.org/wordpress/?p=777>

See also, in Italian, Marinella Correggia. DOCUMENTO. Le fonti parziali e le prove mancanti nel rapporto della “Commissione internazionale indipendente di inchiesta” (CoI) nominata dall’Onu. The URL is

<http://www.sibialiria.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CONTRODOCUMENTO.LEFONTIELEACCUSEDELLACOMMISSIONEINTERNAZIONALEDIINCHIESTAONUpdf.pdf>

Another site that has taken on to examine the issues involved in the conflict in Syria “A Closer Look On Syria.”

http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Main_Page

See also, in Spanish, “La ONU ‘pierde’ el informe sobre la masacre de Houla” (The UN ‘loses’ the report on the Houla Massacre), a video at:

http://ciaramc.org/ciar/boletines/cr_bol477.htm

18. Marinella Correggia, “The Recent Report on Syria by the “Independent International Commission of Inquiry” (CoI) mandated by the Human Rights Council is one-sided and lacks evidences.” The URL is

<http://www.sibialiria.org/wordpress/?p=777>

See also Christof Lehmann, “Italian Peace Movement Criticizes Report of International Commission on Syria,” Sept 9, 2012, NSNBC.

<http://nsnbc.wordpress.com/tag/marinella-correggia/>

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