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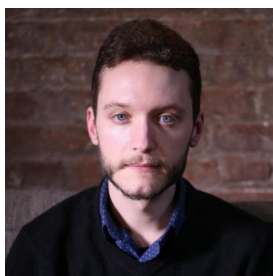
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زبانهای اروپایی

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29.10.2020



Ben Norton

## ***Leaked docs expose massive Syria propaganda operation by Western government contractors and media***

*By Severine Renard on October 26, 2020 2 Comments*



*Photo: The Liberation of Aleppo December 2016 Collage © Jan Oberg*

*October 26, 2020*

**Western government-funded intelligence cutouts trained Syrian opposition leaders, planted stories in media outlets from BBC to Al Jazeera, and ran a cadre of journalists. A trove of leaked documents exposes the propaganda network.**

[Originally published on The Grayzone, September 23rd, 2020](#)

*Update (September 29, 2020): A few days after this article was published, the authenticity of these leaked materials was indirectly confirmed by the British government, which reported that hundreds of Foreign Office documents detailing its Syria propaganda operations were [hacked in an alleged cyber attack](#).*

Leaked documents show how UK government contractors developed an advanced infrastructure of propaganda to stimulate support in the West for Syria's political and armed opposition.

Virtually every aspect of the Syrian opposition was cultivated and marketed by Western government-backed public relations firms, from their political narratives to their branding, from what they said to where they said it.

The leaked files reveal how Western intelligence cutouts played the media like a fiddle, carefully crafting English- and Arabic-language media coverage of the war on Syria to churn out a constant stream of pro-opposition coverage.

US and European contractors trained and advised Syrian opposition leaders at all levels, from young media activists to the heads of the parallel government-in-exile. These firms also organized interviews for Syrian opposition leaders on mainstream outlets such as BBC and the UK's Channel 4.

More than half of the stringers used by Al Jazeera in Syria were trained in a joint US-UK government program called Basma, which produced hundreds of Syrian opposition media activists.

Western government PR firms not only influenced the way the media covered Syria, but as the leaked documents reveal, they produced their own propagandistic pseudo-news for broadcast on major TV networks in the Middle East, including BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Orient TV.

These UK-funded firms functioned as full-time PR flacks for the extremist-dominated Syrian armed opposition. One contractor, called InCoStrat, said it was in constant contact with a network of more than 1,600 international journalists and "influencers," and used them to push pro-opposition talking points.

Another Western government contractor, ARK, crafted a strategy to "re-brand" Syria's Salafi-jihadist armed opposition by "softening its image." ARK boasted that it provided opposition propaganda that "aired almost every day on" major Arabic-language TV networks. Virtually every major Western corporate media outlet was influenced by the UK government-funded disinformation campaign exposed in the trove of leaked documents, from the New York Times to the Washington Post, CNN to The Guardian, the BBC to BuzzFeed.

The files confirm reporting by journalists including [The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal](#) on the role of ARK, the US-UK government contractor, in popularizing the [White Helmets](#) in Western media. ARK ran the social media accounts of the White Helmets, and helped turn the [Western-funded group into a key propaganda weapon of the Syrian opposition](#).

The [leaked documents](#) consist mainly of material produced under the auspices of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. All of the firms named in the files were contracted by the British government, but many also were running "multi-donor projects" that received funding from the governments of the United States and other Western European countries.

In addition to demonstrating the role these Western intelligence cutouts played in shaping media coverage, the documents shine light on the British government program to train and arm rebel groups in Syria.

Other materials show how London and Western governments worked together to build a new police force in opposition-controlled areas.

Many of these Western-backed opposition groups in Syria were extremist Salafi-jihadists. Some of the UK government contractors whose activities are exposed in these leaked documents were in effect [supporting Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra](#) and its fanatical offshoots.

The documents were obtained by a group calling itself Anonymous, and were published under a series of files entitled, “[Op. HMG \[Her Majesty’s Government\] Trojan Horse: From Integrity Initiative To Covert Ops Around The Globe. Part 1: Taming Syria.](#)” The unidentified leakers said they aim to “expose criminal activity of the UK’s FCO and secret services,” stating, “We declare war on the British neocolonialism!”

The Grayzone was not able to independently verify the authenticity of the documents. However, the contents tracked closely with reporting on Western destabilization and propaganda operations in Syria by this outlet and many [others](#). (*Update: After this article was published, the [UK government told Middle East Eye](#) that Foreign Office documents concerning the work of its contractors in Syria had been hacked and published online.*)

### **UK Foreign Office and military wage media war on Syria**

A leaked [UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office report](#) from 2014 reveals a joint operation with the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development to support “strategic communications, research, monitoring and evaluation and operational support to Syrian opposition entities.”

The UK FOC stated clearly that this campaign consisted of “creating network linkages between political movements and media outlets,” by the “building of local independent media platforms.”

The British government planned “Mentoring, training and coaching for enhanced delivery of media services, including digital and social media.”

Its goal was “to provide PR and media handling trainers, as well as technical staff, such as cameramen, webmasters and interpreters,” along with the “production of speeches, press releases and other media communications.”

An additional 2017 government document explains clearly how Britain funded the “selection, training, support and communications mentoring of Syrian activists who [share the UK’s vision for a future Syria](#)... and who will abide by a set of values that are consistent with UK policy.”

This initiative entailed British government funding “to support Syrian grassroots media activism within both the civilian and armed opposition spheres,” and was targeted at Syrians living in both “extremist and moderate” opposition-held territory.

In other words, the UK Foreign Office and military crafted plans to wage a comprehensive media war on Syria. To establish an infrastructure capable of managing the propaganda blitz, Britain paid a series of government contractors, including ARK, The Global Strategy Network (TGSN), Innovative Communication & Strategies (InCoStrat), and Albany.

The work of these firms overlapped, and some collaborated in their projects to cultivate the Syrian opposition.

### **Western government contractor ARK plays the media like the fiddle**

One of the main British government contractors behind the Syria regime-change scheme was called ARK (Analysis Research Knowledge).

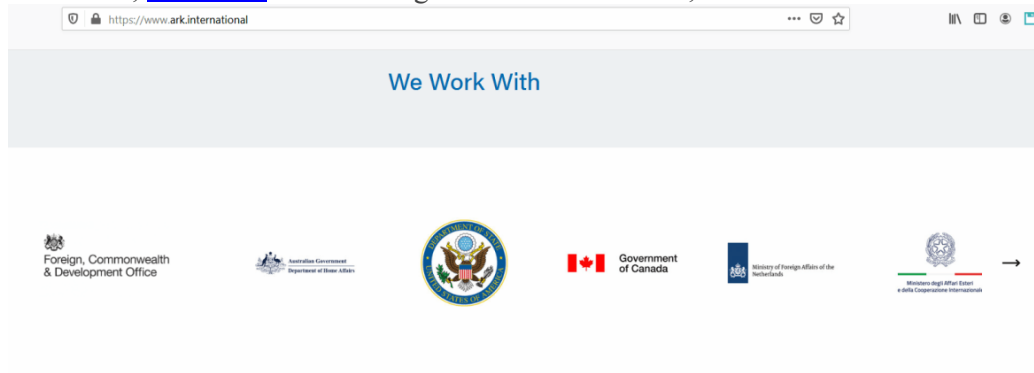
[ARK FZC](#) is based in [Dubai](#), in the United Arab Emirates. It brands itself as a humanitarian NGO, claiming it “was created in order to assist the most vulnerable,” by establishing a “social enterprise, empowering local communities through the provision of agile and sustainable interventions to create greater stability, opportunity and hope for the future.”

In reality ARK is an intelligence cutout that functions as an arm of Western interventionism.

In a leaked document it filed with the British government, ARK said its “focus since 2012 has been delivering highly effective, politically-and conflict-sensitive [Syria programming for the governments](#) of the United Kingdom, United States, Denmark, Canada, Japan and the European Union.”

ARK boasted of overseeing \$66 million worth of contracts to support pro-opposition efforts in Syria.

On its website, [ARK lists](#) all of these governments as clients, as well as the United Nations.



In its Syria operations, ARK worked together with another UK contractor called The Global Strategy Network (TGSN), which is directed by [Richard Barrett](#), a former director of global counter-terrorism at MI6.

ARK apparently had operatives on the ground inside Syria at the beginning of the regime-change attempt in 2011, reporting to the UK FCO that “ARK staff are in regular contact with activists and civil society actors whom they initially met during the [outbreak of protests in spring 2011](#).”

The UK contractor boasted an “extensive network of civil society and community actors that ARK has helped through a dedicated capacity building centre ARK established in Gaziantep,” a city in southern Turkey that has been a base of intelligence operations against the Syrian government.

ARK played a central role in developing the foundations of the Syrian political opposition’s narrative. In one leaked document, the firm took credit for the “[development of a core Syrian opposition narrative](#),” which was apparently crafted during a series of workshops with opposition leaders sponsored by the US and UK governments.

ARK trained all levels of the Syrian opposition in communications, from “citizen journalism workshops with Syrian media activists, to working with senior members of the National Coalition to develop a core communications narrative.”

The firm even oversaw the PR strategy for the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the leadership of the official armed wing of Syria’s opposition, the Free Syrian Army (FSA). ARK created a complex PR campaign to “provide a ‘re-branding’ of the SMC in order to distinguish itself from extremist armed opposition groups and to establish the image of a functioning, inclusive, disciplined and professional military body.”

ARK admitted that it sought to whitewash Syria’s armed opposition, which had been largely dominated by Salafi-jihadists, by “[Softening the FSA Image](#).”



Outputs in **Phase 4** will vary according to capabilities and requirements but, on previous experience, are expected to include:

- 4 x posters campaigns (public expectation, FSA recognition and accountability)
- 1 x leaflet (FSA Rules of Engagement and role of SMC)
- 4 x radio spots
- 8 x ENG (popular expectations from FSA, heroes of FSA, FSA Rules of Engagement)

Costings for these products have been provided but are not included in the budget.



Figure 2: Basma has already carried out limited rebranding for the FSA that was well received

ARK will use its existing communications networks inside Syria and leverage Basma's extensive experience of developing and disseminating content, as outlined below.

ARK took the lead in developing a massive network of opposition media activists in Syria, and openly took credit for inspiring protests inside the country.

In its training centers in Syria and southern Turkey, the Western government contractor reported, “More than [150 activists have been trained and equipped](#) by ARK on topics from the basics of camera handling, lighting, and sound to producing reports, journalistic safety, online security, and ethical reporting.”

The firm flooded Syria with opposition propaganda. In just six months, ARK reported that 668,600 of its print products were distributed inside Syria, including “posters, flyers, informative booklets, activity books and other campaign-related materials.”

In one document spelling out the UK contractors’ [communications operations in Syria](#), ARK and the British intelligence cutout TGSN boasted of overseeing the following media assets inside the country: 97 video stringers, 23 writers, 49 distributors, 23 photographers, 19 in-country trainers, eight training centers, three media offices, and 32 research officers.

ARK emphasized that it had “well-established contacts” with some of the top media outlets in the world, naming Reuters, the New York Times, CNN, the BBC, The Guardian, the Financial Times, The Times, Al Jazeera, Sky News Arabic, Orient TV, and Al Arabiya.

The UK contractor added, “ARK has provided regular branded and unbranded content to key pan-Arab and Syria-focused satellite TV channels such as [Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, BBC Arabic](#), Orient TV, Aleppo Today, Souria al-Ghadd, and Souria al-Sha’ab since 2012.”

“ARK products promoting HMG (Her Majesty’s Government) priorities by fostering attitudinal and behavioural change are [broadcast almost every day on pan-Arab channels](#),” the firm bragged. “In 2014, 20 branded and un-branded Syria reports were produced on average by ARK each month and broadcast on major pan-Arab television channels such as Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera, and Orient TV.”

“ARK has almost daily conversations with channels and weekly meetings to engage and understand editorial preferences,” the Western intelligence cutout said.

The firm also took credit for placing 10 articles per month in pan-Arab newspapers such as Al Hayat and Asharq Al-Awsat.

### **US-UK program Basma cultivates Syrian media activists**

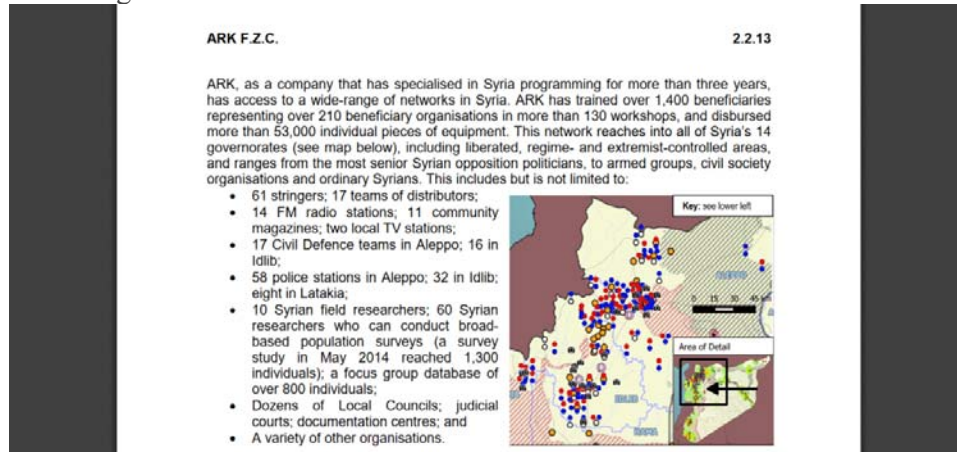
The Syrian opposition media war was organized within the framework of a project called Basma. ARK worked with other Western government contractors through Basma in order to train Syrian opposition activists.

With funding from both the US and UK governments, Basma developed into an enormously influential platform. Its Arabic Facebook page had over 500,000 followers, and on YouTube it built up a large following as well.

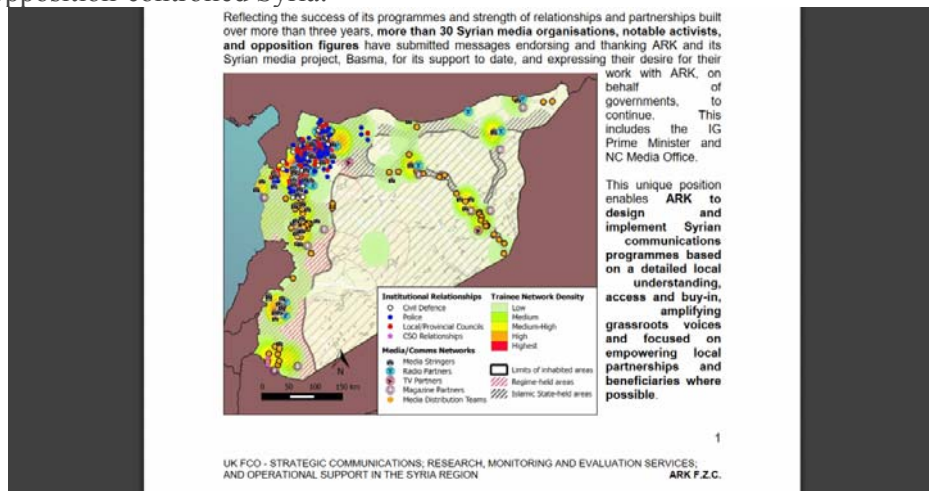
Mainstream corporate media outlets misleadingly portrayed Basma as a “[Syrian citizen journalism platform](#),” or a “[civil society group](#) working for a ‘liberatory, progressive transition to a new Syria.’” In reality it was a Western government astroturfing operation to cultivate opposition propagandists.

[Nine of the 16 stringers used by Al Jazeera in Syria](#) were trained through the US/UK government’s Basma initiative, ARK boasted in a leaked document.

In an earlier report for the UK FCO, filed just three years into its work, ARK claimed to have “trained over 1,400 beneficiaries representing over 210 beneficiary organisations in more than 130 workshops, and disbursed more than 53,000 individual pieces of equipment,” in a vast network that reached “into all of Syria’s 14 governorates,” which included both opposition- and government-held areas.



The Western contractor published a map highlighting its network of stringers and media activists and their relationships with the White Helmets as well as newly created police forces across opposition-controlled Syria.



In its trainings, ARK developed opposition spokespeople, taught them how to speak with the press, and then helped arrange interviews with mainstream Arabic- and English-language media outlets.

ARK described its strategy “to identify credible, moderate civilian governance spokespeople who will be promoted as go-to interlocutors for regional and international media. They will echo key messages linked to the coordinated local campaigns across all media, with consortium platforms able to cover this messaging as well and encourage other outlets to pick it up.”

In addition to working with the international press and cultivating opposition leaders, ARK helped develop a massive opposition media super-structure.

ARK said it was a “key implementer of a multi-donor effort to develop a network of [FM radio stations and community magazines inside Syria](#) since 2012.” The contractor worked with 14 FM stations and 11 magazines inside Syria, including both Arabic- and Kurdish-language radio.

To propagate opposition broadcasts across Syria, ARK designed what it called “Radio in a Box” (RIAB) kits in 2012. The firm took credit for providing equipment to 48 transmission sites.

ARK also circulated up to 30,000 magazines per month. It reported that “ARK-supported magazines were the three most popular in Aleppo City; the most popular magazine in Homs City; and the most popular magazine in Qamishli.”

A Syrian opposition propaganda outlet directly run by ARK, called [Moubader](#), developed a huge following on social media, including more than 200,000 likes on Facebook. ARK printed 15,000 copies per month of a “high-quality hard copy” Moubader magazine and distributed it “across opposition-held areas of Syria.”

The British contractor TGSN, which worked alongside ARK, developed its own outlet called the “[Revolutionary Forces of Syria Media Office](#) (RFS),” a leaked document shows. This confirms a 2016 report in The Grayzone by contributor [Rania Khalek](#), who obtained emails showing how the UK government-backed RFS media office offered to pay one journalist a staggering [\\$17,000 per month to produce propaganda for Syrian rebels](#).

Another leaked record shows that in just one year, in 2018 – which was apparently the final year of ARK’s Syria program – the firm billed the UK government for a staggering [2.3 million British pounds](#).

This enormous ARK propaganda operation was directed by [Firas Budeiri](#), who had previously served as the Syria director for the UK-based international NGO Save the Children.

40 percent of ARK’s Syria project team were Syrian citizens, and another 25 percent were Turkish. The firm said its Syria team staff had “extensive experience managing programmes and conducting research funded by many different governmental clients in [Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq](#) and other conflict-affected states.”

### **Western contractor ARK cultivates White Helmets “to keep Syria in the news”**

The Western contractor ARK was a central force in launching the [White Helmets](#) operation. The leaked documents show ARK ran the Twitter and Facebook pages of Syria Civil Defense, known more commonly as the White Helmets.

ARK took credit for developing “an internationally-focused communications campaign designed to [raise global awareness of the \(White Helmets\) teams](#) and their life saving work.”

ARK also facilitated communications between the White Helmets and [The Syria Campaign](#), a PR firm run out of London and New York that helped popularize the White Helmets in the United States.

It was apparently “following subsequent discussions with ARK and the teams” that The Syria Campaign “selected civil defence to front its campaign to keep Syria in the news,” the firm wrote in a report for the UK Foreign Office.

“With ARK’s guidance, TSC (The Syria Campaign) also attended ARK’s civil defence training sessions to create media content for its #WhiteHelmets campaign which launched in August 2014 and has since gone viral,” the Western contractor added.

In 2014, ARK produced a long-form documentary on the White Helmets, titled “Digging for Life,” which was repeatedly broadcast on Orient TV.

While it was running the White Helmets’ social media accounts, ARK bragged that it was boosting followers and views on the Facebook page for Idlib City Council.

The Syrian city of Idlib was taken over by al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which then went on to publicly execute women who were accused of adultery.

While effectively aiding these al-Qaeda-aligned extremist groups, ARK and the British intelligence cutout TGSN also signed a document with the FCO hilariously pledging to follow “[UK guidance on gender sensitivity](#)” and “ensure gender is considered in all capacity building and campaign development.”

#### **Setting the stage for lawfare on Syria**

Another leaked document shows the Western government-backed firm ARK revealing that, back in 2011, it worked with another government contractor called Tsamota to help develop the [Syrian Commission for Justice and Accountability](#) (SCJA). In 2014, [SCJA changed its name](#) to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA).

[The Grayzone exposed CIJA as a Western government-funded regime-change organization](#) whose investigators collaborated with al-Qaeda and its extremist allies in order to wage lawfare on the Syrian government.

ARK noted that the project initially worked “with seed funding from the UK Conflict Pool to support investigative and forensic training for Syrian war crimes investigators” and has since “grown to become a major component of Syria’s transitional justice architecture.”

Since the US, European Union, and their Middle East allies lost the military phase of their war on Syria, CIJA has taken the lead in trying to prolong the regime-change campaign through lawfare.

#### **InCoStrat creates media network, helps them interview al-Qaeda**

In the leaked documents, another UK government contractor called Innovative Communications Strategies (InCoStrat) boasted of building a massive “network of over [1600 journalists and key influencers](#) with an interest in Syria.”

InCoStrat stressed that it was “managing and delivering a multi donor project in [support of UK Foreign Policy objectives](#)” in Syria, “specifically providing strategic communication support to the moderate armed opposition.”

Other funders of InCoStrat’s work with the opposition in Syria, the firm disclosed, included the US government, the United Arab Emirates, and anti-Assad Syrian businessmen.

InCoStrat served as a liaison between its government clients and the Syrian National Coalition, the Western-backed parallel government that the opposition tried to create. InCoStrat advised senior leaders of this Syrian shadow regime, and even ran the National Coalition’s own media office from Istanbul, Turkey.

The Western contractor took credit for organizing a 2014 [BBC interview](#) with Ahmad Jarba, the then-president of the opposition National Coalition.

The firm added that “journalists have often reached out to us in search of the appropriate people for their programmes.” As an example, InCoStrat said it helped plant its own Syrian opposition activists in BBC Arabic reports. The firm then added, “Once making the initial connections we encouraged the Syrians to maintain the relationships with the journalists in the BBC instead of using ourselves as the conduit.”

Like ARK, InCoStrat worked closely with the press. The firm said it had “extensive experience in engaging Arab and international news media,” adding that it worked directly with “heads of regional news in [major satellite TV networks](#), press bureaus and print media.”

“Key members of InCoStrat have previously worked as Middle East correspondents for some of the world’s largest news agencies including Reuters,” the Western contractor added.

Also like ARK, InCoStrat established a vast media infrastructure. The firm set up Syrian opposition media offices in Dera’a, Syria; Istanbul and Reyhanli, Turkey; and Amman, Jordan.



InCoStrat worked with 130 stringers across Syria, and said it had more than 120 reporters working inside the country, along with “an additional five official spokesmen who appear several times a week on international and regional TV.”

InCoStrat also established eight FM radio stations and six community magazines across Syria.

The firm reported that it penetrated the armed opposition by developing “[strong relationships with 54 brigade commanders](#) in Syria’s southern front,” that involved “daily, direct engagement with the commanders and their officers inside Syria,” as well as defected officers Free Syrian Army (FSA) units in government-held Damascus.

In the leaked documents, InCoStrat boasted that its reporters organized interviews with many armed opposition militias, including the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.

### **Don’t just plants media stories; “initiate an event” to create your own scandals**

In its media war on Damascus, InCoStrat pursued a two-pronged campaign that consisted of the following: “a) [Guerrilla Campaign](#). Use the media to create the event. b) Guerrilla Tactics. Initiate an event to create the media effect.”

The intelligence cutout therefore sought to use the media as a weapon to advance tangible political demands of the Syrian opposition.

In one case, InCoStrat took credit for a successful international campaign to force the Syrian government to lift its siege of the extremist-held opposition stronghold of Homs. The Grayzone contributor [Rania Khalek reported on the crisis in Homs](#), which was besieged by Damascus after the far-right Sunni fundamentalists that controlled it began carrying out sectarian massacres against religious minorities and kidnapping Alawite civilians.

“We connected international journalists with Syrians living in besieged Homs,” InCoStrat explained. It organized an interview between Britain’s Channel 4 and a doctor in the city, which helped raise international attention, ultimately leading to an end to the siege.

In another instance, the UK contractor said it “produced postcards, posters and reports” comparing the secular government of Bashar al-Assad to the fundamentalist Salafi-jihadists in ISIS. Then it “provided a credible, Arabic-English speaking Syrian spokesperson to engage the media.”

The campaign was very successful, according to InCoStrat: Al-Jazeera America and The National published the firm’s propaganda posters. The British contractor also organized interviews on the topic with The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, The Guardian, The Times, BuzzFeed, Al-Jazeera, Suriya Al-Sham, and Orient.

#### **2. Supporting Evidence.**

a) **Guerrilla Campaign: Geneva II January 2014.** We exploited the concentrated presence of journalists to put pressure on the regime and to support a humanitarian effect in Homs.

1) **ISIS & Assad – two sides of the same coin.** The guerrilla campaign fuelled the emerging debate around the relationship between the regime and ISIS, drawing particular attention to crimes against humanity.

##### **a. Action.**

- I. We produced postcards, posters and reports to draw behavioural parallels between the regime and ISIS, playing to the commonly-held belief that a latent relationship exists between the two
- II. We provided a credible, Arabic-English speaking Syrian spokesperson to engage the media



##### **b. Effect.**

Major news outlets, such as *Al-Jazeera America* and *The National* published our posters. We conducted interviews with a wide range of prominent newspapers and major international and Syrian news channels, among them: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Suriya Al-Sham*, *Orient*.

### **After regime change comes Nation Building Inc.**

InCoStrat has apparently been involved in numerous Western-backed regime-change operations.

In one leaked document, the firm said it helped to train civil society organizations in marketing, media, and communications in [Afghanistan, Honduras, Iraq, Syria, and Libya](#). It

even trained a team of anti-Saddam Hussein journalists inside Basra, Iraq after the joint US-UK invasion.

In addition to contracting for the United Kingdom, InCoStrat disclosed that it has worked for the governments of the [United States, Singapore, Latvia, Sweden, Denmark, and Libya](#).

After [NATO destroyed the Libyan state in a regime-change war in 2011](#), InCoStrat was brought in in 2012 to conduct similar communications work for the Libyan National Transitional Council, the Western-backed opposition that sought to take power.

**Coordinating with extremist militias, cooking news to “reinforce the core narrative”**

The leaked documents shed further light on a UK government contractor called Albany.

Albany boasted that it “secured the participation of an extensive local [network of over 55 stringers, reporters and videographers](#)” to influence media narratives and advance UK foreign policy interests.

The firm helped create an influential Syrian opposition media outfit called Enab Baladi. Founded in 2011 in the anti-Assad hub of Daraya, at the beginning of the war, Enab Baladi was aggressively marketed in the Western press as a grassroots Syrian media operation.

In reality, Enab Baladi was the product of a British contractor that took responsibility for its evolution “from an amateur-run entity into one of the most prominent Syrian media organizations.”

Albany also coordinated communications between opposition media outlets and extremist Islamist opposition groups by hiring an “engagement leader (who) has deep credibility with key groups including (north) Failaq ash-Sham, Jabha Shammiyeh, Jaysh Idleb al Hur, Ahrar ash-Sham, (center) Jaysh al Islam, Failaq al Rahman, and (south) Jaysh Tahrir.” Many of these militias were linked to al-Qaeda and are now recognized by the US Department of State and European governments as official terrorist groups.

Unlike other Western government contractors active in Syria, which often tried to feign a semblance of balance, Albany made it clear that its media reporting was nothing more than propaganda.

The firm admitted that it trained Syrian media activists in a unique “newsroom process” that called to “curate” news by “collecting and organising stories and content that support and reinforce the core narrative.”

In 2014, Albany boasted of running the Syrian National Coalition’s communications team at the [Geneva Peace talks](#).

Albany also warned that revelations of Western government funding for these opposition media organizations that were being portrayed as grassroots initiatives would discredit them.

When internal emails were leaked showing that the massive opposition media platform [Basma Syria](#) was funded by the United States and Britain, Albany wrote, “the [Basma brand has been compromised](#) following leaks about funding project aims.”

The leaks on social media “have damaged the credibility and trustworthiness of the existing branded platform,” Albany wrote. “Credibility and trust are the key currencies of the activities envisaged and for this reason we consider it essential to refresh the approach if the content to be disseminated is to have effect.” The Basma website was taken down soon after.

These files provide clear insight into how the Syrian opposition was cultivated by Western governments with imperial designs on Damascus, and was kept afloat with staggering sums of cash that flowed from the pockets of British taxpayers – often to the benefit of fanatical militiamen allied with Al Qaeda.

While Dutch prosecutors [prepare war crimes charges](#) against the Syrian government for fighting off the onslaught, the leaked files are a reminder of the leading role that Western states and their war-profiteering companies played in the carefully organized destruction of the country.

Please help TFF remain truly independent by contributing if you benefited from this article

## **Ben Norton**

is a journalist, writer, and filmmaker. He is the assistant editor of The Grayzone, and the producer of the [Moderate Rebels](#) podcast, which he co-hosts with editor Max Blumenthal. His website is [BenNorton.com](#) and he tweets at [@BenjaminNorton](#).

### **Editor's note**

In autumn 2016, TFF published a background analysis on the White Helmets – [Just How Grey Are The White Helmets And Their Backers?](#) As expected, none of the thousands of media people who received it as TFF PressInfo reacted.

When I went to Damascus and Aleppo in December 2016, I found out upon my return that there was not one Western mainstream media that would print any of my texts and photos from there. I was the only one there from Scandinavia and very few Western media people present – but no interest whatsoever, except those whose only purpose was to frame me as pro-Assad, paid or 'embedded'.

[I've written about it here](#) – lots of links to facts, mails with these media people documenting the media response and (attempts at) manipulations also of myself. It was about as shocking to me as the destruction I saw in Syria.

And here are [my documentary photos](#) – up till now seen by 175 000.

Trust me, after the revelations above and elsewhere – no mainstream media will have the decency to regret their coverage, their conveying of *fake* news, stories and overall narrative – nor their *omission* of factual information and important perspectives and interpretations.

[al-Qaeda](#), [ARK](#), [Basma](#), [Ben Norton](#), [citizen journalism](#), [counterterrorism](#), [Fake news](#), [INCoStrat](#), [media analysis of Syria](#), [Media propaganda](#), [MI16](#), [omitted news](#), [Syria](#), [Syria and media](#), [Syrian media activists](#), [Syrian opposition narrative](#), [UK Foreign Office](#), [war on terror](#), [Western intelligence](#), [Western interventionism](#), [Western media bias](#), [White Helmets](#)

The Transnational