Western Media Whitewashes Rebel Destruction of Damascus Water Supply

Syria’s capital city Damascus continues to suffer without water. The water which fed four million people, was cut off by insurgents who have occupied the aquifer in Wadi Barada since late December. The insurgents, which include an alliance of US backed groups and Al Qaeda’s Syria branch Jabhat Fateh Al Sham (formally Jabhat al Nusra), uploaded a video of themselves rigging the ancient Ein Al Fijeh spring with explosives. Two days before this upload, the rebels were also accused of tainting the water supply with diesel. As a result of the success of the Syrian military campaign to recapture parts of Wadi Barada, the insurgents were forced to agree to allowing engineers in to fix the aquifer as part of a ceasefire agreement. However after the agreement was reached the insurgents shot and killed the negotiating team overseeing repairs. Previously they had shot at technicians as they attempted to enter Wadi Barada.

Several groups which included the so called “White helmets” NGO released a written statement, that they will not allow engineers to fix the spring until the Syrian government agrees to give them certain concessions. The White Helmets have received tens of millions of dollars from various Western governments. Their signed statement shows that they are complicit with AL Qaeda in what the UN has stated is tantamount to a war crime.

Yet NATO backed media outlets have failed to explicitly state this, tip toeing around the subject of responsibility. Some outlets were even initially suggesting its was the Syrian government that was responsible. The most offending headlines included this one from the Daily Beast, “Assad’s Newest War Tactic: Dehydration”. The Qatar linked Middle East Eye, a newspaper run by a former Guardian and Al Jazeera journalists, headlined with “Water war: Wadi Barada and Assad’s latest weapon”. Australia’s ABC news suggested that, “this was not the first time the Syrian government targeted it’s own facilities”.

Perhaps the worst offender was the discredited Bellingcat website, run by Eliot Higgins, which claims to be independent open source analysis while consistently backing up US State Department propaganda. They released an article claiming that the Syrian government was responsible for the damage to the aquifer. Bellingcat did not touch on the fact that it is the insurgents who refuse to allow the aquifer to be fixed.

Evidence

There is also ample evidence that the insurgents were indeed behind the initial destruction of the spring. The insurgents uploaded a video of themselves on Facebook, rigging the ancient Ein el Fijeh spring with explosives. In the video a rebel is seen walking through the pipes saying, “this is one of the water pipes of Ein el Fijeh spring, the revolutionaries are rigging it with explosives right now”. The video was accompanied by the following written statement.

“Let everyone know that the lives of the traitors in Damascus are not more precious than the life of a child from Wadi Barada. This is one of the tunnels that supply the occupied city of Damascus with water, it’s currently being booby-trapped by the rebels, in the event that the mercenary commander Qaus Farwa continues his offensive on Wadi Barada, all the main tunnels will be detonated and will never be restored.” #Bombing_is_better_than_evacuation

Rebels also made Facebook posts celebrating the destruction of the spring and taunting the people of Damascus.
One rebel posted photographs of himself flashing victory signs over the rubble of the aquifer tunnels. One post reads,

“Hahaha just as like you wanted, your water has turned into diesel, and the bombing will happen tomorrow or the day after. The bombing is ready no matter what and after that let the flood come. We will burn the soul of each christian, shi’ites and those traitor sunnis who sold their religion and decided to side with you, you jew idiots. You want a ceasefire now just so you can pull your dead bodies out of our sacred soil? You can drink water from my d**k you pigs.”

Seemingly in coordination with the US backed rebels, ISIS cut off the water supply to Aleppo a few days later, suggesting that the water crisis was a planned reprisal for the liberation of Aleppo. This would not be the first time that insurgents cut off water to Aleppo, Syria’s second capital. In 2014, the insurgents filmed themselves celebrating the destruction of Aleppo’s water supply. The population of Aleppo was without water for over a year.

**Motive**

Furthermore, the insurgents have motive to cut off the water supply while the Syrian government doesn’t. The recent liberation of Aleppo city, involved the evacuation of insurgents to the city of Idlib in green buses, part of the terms of their surrender. The Syrian military was approaching Wadi Barada with the same terms of evacuation on the table. The rebels from the area have cut water supplies to Damascus several times in the past as a bargaining chip to prevent the Syrian army from entering the area and pushing them out. This was likely what caused the insurgents to use the water again as leverage, and escalate by not only stopping the water flow as they have done previously, but destroying it entirely. This is reflected in the Facebook posts made by rebels, that “bombing [the aquifer] is better than evacuation”. The people in Wadi Barada do not get their water from Ein el fijah spring, but from sources further upstream, hence the rebels would not be damaging their own water supply by poisoning and bombing the spring.

On the other hand there is no motive for the Syrian government to cut off water to Damascus, a city which they hold and reside within. It was the government who demanded to get engineers in to fix the aquifer, and in the meantime initiated a program of rationing and distributing water. Bellingcat’s author Nick Waters was wise to this and did not attempt to invent a motive. Instead he claimed that the Syrian government had destroyed the aquifer by accident, coincidentally at the same time that the insurgents were rigging it with explosives. The claim that the attack could have been an ‘accident’ is contradicted by the United Nations, which said the “infrastructure was deliberately targeted.”

**Bellingcat’s Whitewash Attempt**

The Bellingcat article was written by Nick Waters a former British military officer. This brings up the question of whether he is still bias towards serving Britain's interests versus objective fact. Britain has been calling for regime change in Syria since 2011. Waters' article is riddled with logical fallacies and non-sequitur conclusions.

Waters asks us to accept that a Syrian airstrike on the militants holding Ein El Fijah spring, resulted in diesel leaking into the water supply, claiming that it “probably” must have “damaged a fuel tank, generator or otherwise”. However he provides no evidence that this occurred, or an explanation as to what a fuel tank would be doing near the aquifer. He states that the same rebels who showed the tunnel being prepared for demolition were the ones who blamed the water crisis on the Syrian government. He asks us to accept their word on the latter but not the former. To Waters, the credibility of Al Qaeda-linked militants is not damaged by the fact they intended to destroy Damascus’s water supply. Water’s says “using media freely available on Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, it is clear that the structure that covers the spring was significantly damaged on or after the 23rd December”. However the source he used showing the damage to the spring was from the 26th and 27th of December. Embarrassingly, Waters referred to Wadi Barada as “Barada Wadi” multiple times showing a complete lack of understanding about the very place he is attempting to write about. In another example of Waters’ profound ignorance, he also referred to one of the rebels posting on Facebook as “Abu”, however Abu is not a name, but a designation meaning ‘father of.’

**Conclusion**

Bellingcat and its founder Elliot Higgins are committed to building narratives in support the US State Department’s agenda. In the past, Bellingcat attempted to pin the blame on the crash of Malaysia MH17 on Russia. Bellingcat also produced shaky analysis claiming to have smoking gun evidence that the Syrian government was responsible for the
chemical weapons attack in Ghouta. The article that was jointly written by Dan Kaszeta and Eliot Higgins, was contradicted by well known Physics Professor and rocket engineer Theodore Postol who also stated that Dan Kaszeta was a fraud. Dan Kazseta claimed to be a chemical weapons expert but in fact had no education in chemistry. Bellingcat’s article on the water crisis in Damascus will stand as further testament to the unreliability, even intentionally deceptive nature of its reporting.

The United Nations has stated that the cutting off of Damascus’s water could constitute a war crime. One awaits similar UN statements to be made about Aleppo where there is no shadow of doubt that the US backed rebels cut off the water supply in 2014. The UN’s statement could mean that the Al Qaeda linked White Helmets NGO could be implicated in war crimes. This raises the stakes for NATO governments who have provided them with tens of millions of dollars in donations. It is no wonder that a campaign of disinformation is being run to deflect blame and whitewash the incident.

Maram Susli also known as “Syrian Girl,” is an activist-journalist and social commentator covering Syria and the wider topic of geopolitics. especially for the online magazine“New Eastern Outlook.”