



Activist CNN Reporter Rescues Syrian Prisoner: Is It Propaganda?

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): A very moving, emotional, and deeply melodramatic segment was aired this week on CNN when the foreign correspondent Clarissa Ward, who has gone to Syria in the wake of the ouster of long-time Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, purported to have entered one of the notorious Syrian prisons and discovered to her great shock that there was a single prisoner who was there, even though the prisons had been emptied, laying under a blanket who had not been discovered in the emptying of all the other prisons. And it gave her the opportunity to comfort him and to hug him and to show how oppressed these Syrians are. Now, one of the interesting things about the emptying of these prisons and the liberation of prisoners is that no one seems to be questioning whether any of these people deserve to be

in prison. It is certainly true there are a lot of political prisoners, the Assad regime torture people. When we wanted to torture people in interrogations, the United States, as part of the war on terror, sent people that we kidnapped from Europe to Egypt and Syria, both of which were Mubarak and Assad, who were our allies at the time. There is a lot of torture. There's a lot of political persecution under Assad. But there's other people who were in prison because they committed violent crimes or egregious crimes. There seems to be an assumption, though, that every person in a Syrian prison is an unjustly persecuted person – there simply because of their dissent, and so that we embrace them all, we free them all, and they're all evidence of Assad's tyranny.

So here is CNN. And you can see on the screen there, there's Clarissa Ward. And the graphic is: *CNN is on the scene the moment a Syrian prisoner is freed*. And here's what CNN claims is what happened in real time as they discover it along with you.

CNN Reporter 1: I can't tell, though. It might just be a blanket. But it's the only cell that's locked.

CNN Reporter 2: Is he going to shoot it?

Clarissa Ward (CW): The guard makes us turn the camera off while he shoots the lock off the cell door. We go in to get a closer look. It's still not clear if there is something under the blanket.

[00:02:31] Oh, it moved. Is there someone there? Is someone there? Or is it just a blanket? I don't know.

CNN Reporter 1: Hello?

GG: So there's one guy alone in a cell. He was, very dramatically, to give us suspense, to build the suspense, he wasn't just sitting there, he was under a blanket, perfectly in a way that you couldn't even tell if there was a human being there. So we're all waiting with bated breath to see what would happen when the blanket was removed. And it turns out there's a very seemingly clean and well cared for person under a blanket. And he puts his hands up and they've discovered a prisoner, one of the only ones or one of the very few who have not been released. CNN did. CNN is about to rescue him with their Syrian handlers. And here's what happened.

CW: "I'm a civilian", he says. "I'm a civilian".

CNN Reporter 1: It's okay. It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.

CW: He tells the fighter he's from the...

GG: I just need to show you this because I just want to show you some of the acting that was done here, some of the emoting that I didn't catch the first time I watched it. But as you saw, Clarissa Ward of CNN was in the room. She was speaking English to him. "I'm a civilian" – and I'm not sure why she was speaking English to him, but that's what she was doing. And then when he gets up, she goes back behind the door. She leaves the cell for just a moment. And this is what she does. There you see her. She's behind the door. And she just is very – she needs a moment to compose herself. She puts her hands on her heart. There you see her. Her hand is on her chest. Oh my God. She's so emotional about what they just discovered. A guy in a prison under a blanket. And then here's the rest.

CW: He tells the fighter he's from the city of Homs and has been in the cell for three months. Okay. You're okay. You're okay. You're okay. You're okay. He clutches my arm tightly with both hands. Okay. Does anyone have any water? Okay. It's water. It's water. Okay. Okay. Okay. You're okay.

GG: Now, there were a lot of people who had a lot of questions about this, where CNN said: we found and rescued a prisoner. No idea at all why he was there. Obviously, their Syrian handlers are people who are rebels who want to show the world how vicious and brutal the Assad regime is or was. And so I'm certainly not suggesting that CNN staged this. I don't know if the Syrian handlers did, but a lot of people did close ups of the hands of this prisoner. He had very well manicured and very clean hands. There was no one else in the prison with him. The other prison cells we've seen were overcrowded, huge numbers of people came out when the doors were opened. And there doesn't seem to be any human waste in the prison. So a lot of people were thinking this might have been staged as propaganda so that CNN could not just interview a prisoner, but actually participate in the rescue of a prisoner, a Syrian prisoner, someone in an Assad dungeon.

Now, the reason I found it so notable that it was Clarissa Ward in particular who was participating in this story, is because she had previously admitted that she was basically somebody who gave up on any pretense of journalistic neutrality or journalistic distance when it comes to Syria. She admitted that she was in fact a hardened advocate of the US policy to remove Bashar al-Assad from power. And in fact, she was sending deranged voicemails and emails to Obama White House officials, because they didn't do more to remove Bashar al-Assad. In 2021, she did a podcast titled *Intelligence Matters*, which is hosted by the former acting director of the CIA under President Obama, Michael Morell, one of the people who accused Trump of being a Russian asset in 2016 when he endorsed Hillary Clinton. And needless to say, he was one of the people who signed the notorious letter of 51 intelligence officials claiming that the Hunter Biden laptop had all the markings of Russian disinformation. She was on his podcast. She's a journalist on the podcast, chatting very friendly with the former head of the CIA, because that's, of course, the loyalties that she has. And she was asked about Syria. And this is what she said, quote, "I will cop to the fact that I think I crossed the line in Syria. I became so emotionally involved, and I was crushed by the US response and the US policy. I felt that there wasn't really a strong US policy, and that we had said, quote, 'Assad must go' and then we had done nothing to make him go. We had said

chemical weapons were a red line, and then that red line was crossed, and there wasn't really anything done in terms of repercussions. And I wrote to Ben Rhodes", who was an Obama National Security Assistant, she said: "I wrote him an email, while he was in the White House, to his official account that said the following, quote, 'Dear Ben, I hope you're sleeping soundly as Aleppo burns. At least we have the Russians to sort it out. Best wishes, Clarissa.'".

So I don't think I even need to prove that this is somebody who is a long-time activist for US policy of removing Bashar al-Assad and for putting in whoever these rebels are, because she herself admitted that "I crossed a line". She's sending these like angry, enraged emails to Obama officials, sarcastic and embittered. That's not a journalist. It's fine if people go around wanting to advocate for Obama doing more to remove Assad beyond giving the CIA a billion dollars a year, as he was doing, to fight alongside ISIS and al-Qaeda. But to be a journalist covering Syria and at the same time berating the government for not unleashing the CIA even more to do a regime change in a country – obviously that's crossing the line journalistically, but also it's a good reason why we ought to be skeptical when then she starts putting out this kind of propaganda that is highly questionable. Now, here she – previously, in what became controversial in October of 2023 – showed herself on CNN, laying on the ground to avoid what she said was rocket fire. Here's what happened.

CNN Reporter 3: Clarissa is on the ground right now. Clarissa, tell us what's happening.

CW: Hi, John. So forgive me, I have a slightly unelegant position, but we have just had a massive barrage of rockets coming in here not too far from us. So we have had to take shelter here by the roadside. We're just about five minutes away. Gaza is in that direction. We can now hear a lot of jets in the sky. We can also hear the iron dome intercepting a number of those rockets as they were whizzing overhead and making impact in that direction.

GG: So that was very helpful. She was lying on the ground, out of breath, in Israel on October 9th, 2023, talking about these primitive crude rockets that Hamas was sending, when Israel was sending 2000-pound bombs and 1000-pound bombs to destroy Gaza. She was there to convey the drama of being in Israel, the dangers of that. Now, I'm just offering these facts about what we know. As I said, I'm not here to assert that CNN staged that very melodramatic and convenient prison rescue. If I had to bet, I'd say it's likelier that the Syrian handlers or rebels did it for CNN, but I don't even know that. It could be just this huge coincidence that CNN stumbled into some forgotten prisoner and he grabbed her by the arm, even though she's speaking English to him. And he has perfectly manicured nails and he's holding onto her arm and she's saying: get water, get water. And she gives him water and he just drinks it down out of great thirst. That could all have happened. It could be a very excellent stroke of good luck for CNN and for Clarissa Ward, who is a strong advocate, as she said, of this policy to remove Assad. But I think that it is very worth remembering – and I want to be as fanatical or at least as emphatic as I can be about how I phrase this, because every single time there's a major geopolitical event that the United States cares about, extreme, deliberate, blatant material lies come spewing forth both before and afterward to

influence public opinion in the way that Washington wants it to be. They disseminate those lies themselves or through their media. It happens all the time.

In 1964, when Lyndon Johnson wanted to involve the United States directly and militarily in combat in Vietnam, the story that the media told and that came from the government was that the North Vietnamese had attacked American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. And that was proof that this was an aggressive regime that we had to go and confrontationally and militarily confront that became the Iraqi WMD of the Vietnam War. And that led to the Senate to enact what was called the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that authorized the deployment of direct combat forces in Vietnam. And it turned out it was all completely a lie. The story that led to the US entrance into the Vietnam War in 1964, where we stayed for the next 11 years, lost tens of thousands of American lives, killed hundreds of thousands, more than a million, Vietnamese, destroyed that country, used Agent Orange, had an illegal war in Cambodia, all that – the story that was in the media that convinced Americans to support it and the entire Senate to support it was an absolute lie.

It's not me saying that. Here's the US Naval Institute in February of 2008. The headline is, if we put this up on the screen: *The Truth about Tonkin*. "Questions about the Gulf of Tonkin incident have persisted for more than 40 years, but once classified documents and tapes released in the past several years, combined with previously uncovered facts, made clear that high government officials distorted facts and deceived the American public about events that led to full US involvement in the Vietnam War." And again, this is from the US Naval Institute. A lot of people know about Iraq and WMDs, not as many people know about the lies that led to the Vietnam War. When President Obama announced the intervention, the US participation in the war in Libya, he swore to the public that it had nothing to do with regime change. It was not about removing Muammar Gaddafi. The only thing we were there to do, he said, was to protect the population in Benghazi, who the Western narrative said was about to be massacred by Gaddafi. We were just there to impose a no-fly zone. And of course, that was a massive lie. The only point of that was to remove Gaddafi because he had been talking about using his oil no longer for the West, but for the benefit of his own people.

And here in Foreign Policy magazine in 2016, and this is a journal that is highly accommodating to and friendly toward the US security state, they published an article that was entitled: *The Big Lie About the Libyan War*. "The Obama administration said it was trying to protect civilians. Its actions reveal it was looking for regime change." And that was obvious all along. The war in Ukraine was filled with so many lies and such blatant myth and disinformation that even The New York Times, early in the war, was forced to admit that, despite how much they supported the war in Ukraine and the US involvement in it. The New York Times in March of 2022, less than a month, just a couple of weeks after the Russian invasion, had an article entitled: *Fact and Mythmaking Blend in Ukraine's Information War*. "Experts say stories like the Ghost of Kiev", which was this supposed heroic Ukrainian fighter pilot who had, on his own, taken down 41 different Russian airplanes. It was spread by Adam Kinzinger and a whole variety of other Ukraine fanatics. And Snake Island, do you remember that? When the Ukrainians were supposedly on an island and a Russian warship

came and said: either surrender or we're going to kill you. And these brave feisty Ukrainian fighters said: F you Russia warship. And then the Russians murdered them all. All of that was an absolute lie too. But look how gentle The New York Times is being: fact and mythmaking, fact and mythmaking blend. Imagine if Donald Trump said something that was slightly inaccurate. You'd think The New York Times would say: Donald Trump blends fact and mythmaking? But when it comes to lies, absolute fairy tales, fabrications to influence public opinion about the war in Ukraine, The New York Times is very gentle about it. But the sources say, "Experts say stories like the Ghost of Kiev and Snake Island, both of questionable veracity, are propaganda or morale boosters, or perhaps both."

And obviously, you can go down the list. The first Gulf War, the United States brought an Iraqi exile, a young woman who claims that she saw Saddam Hussein's troops pulling babies out of incubators as a way of punishing the parts of the country that had been hostile to him, particularly the Iran-linked militias, the parts of the country that are Shia. And that became, in the minds of the public, the thing that made Saddam Hussein the new Hitler, as George H. W. Bush 41 called Saddam Hussein. And that story was everywhere. Saddam Hussein pulls babies out of incubators to kill them to punish dissenting parts of the country. And it turned out the young woman who went and testified that, unbeknownst to anyone, had worked for an exile group that had long been advocating for the US to go and do regime change in Iraq. It was promoted by Neocons. And the whole story proved to be a fabrication.

Obviously, we did a whole show on the lies that were told about October 7th, including the fact that babies were beheaded and put into the oven by Hamas. And these are all deliberate lies. These are necessary because the Israeli government knew what it was about to go do in Gaza. And they needed to be able to say to the public, Hamas is worse than ISIS, which is what Netanyahu said. And so it's not enough to just go and say, oh, they killed about 600 civilians and another 600 active military soldiers and police officers. And some of those 600 people died by the Israeli military because of the Hannibal Doctrine that says we should kill our own citizens rather than let them be taken hostage or through tanks that were being used to fight Hamas that killed huge numbers of people as well. The idea had to be: no, Hamas did something so morally repulsive that not even Hitler would do it, not even ISIS would do that. And so these lies are not just arbitrary casual lies. They're very deliberate. They're very deliberate. They're very purposeful. And obviously, when it comes to Muslims and making the West hate Muslims, the caricature is that they chop people's heads off. And so saying that they chop people's heads off, but not just any people, they chop the heads off of babies – and Joe Biden said he went to Israel and saw the pictures of beheaded babies. And none of this proved to be true. It all proved to be lies. Babies in ovens. We've gone over the evidence many times from Israeli newspapers, from European newspapers, from official documents, that only one baby died on October 7th and he was shot in crossfire. He wasn't put in an oven. He wasn't beheaded. And you just go down the list of every major conflict. So when you see things coming out of Syria designed to convince people that the goal of removing Bashar al-Assad from power was justified and that the aftermath is good, and you see very emotionally powerful, heart stringing stories – like the one CNN purported to have discovered in this prison rescue where CNN itself heroically rescued a prisoner – of course,

you should be extremely skeptical. In fact, if you're using rationality, if you're being rational, it's far more justified to be reflexively skeptical. Skeptical, not saying assume everything is lie, but be reflexively skeptical that it is to put credence into what the government is saying given the unbroken, constant, easily documentable record of the US government and its media allies lying, not just in some cases of wars and coups that they care most about, but in every single case.

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