

# French media attack Damascus after French journalist dies in Syria

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The recent death of France 2 TV reporter Gilles Jacquier in the city of Homs in Syria during a pro-Assad demonstration targeted by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), has received extensive coverage in the French media. They allege a possible manipulation by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in an attack which also resulted in the death of eight pro-Assad soldiers.

The event occurred at a time when France, along with Turkey, the US and other Western powers, is intervening to support the rebel forces in a civil war which has developed from demonstrations in Syria in March 2011, inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Following the example of the NATO war against the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011, these powers want to install a puppet regime in Damascus and then possibly in Iran, an ally of Syria.

It is in this context that one must assess the French press's assertions that the Syrian regime could be an accomplice in Jacquier's death.

The daily *Libération* quotes statements by Rémy Pflimlin, the president of France-Télévisions, who implicitly supports the line that the attack was ordered by the regime: "Our colleagues were fully authorized to be there with official visas and supposedly protection, which suddenly withdrew when the strikes occurred. That then is what we are asking questions about."

Quoting "a source close to the French president," the daily *Le Figaro* asserts: "The only people who knew that a group of western journalist were visiting Homs that day, and in which neighborhood they were, were the Syrian authorities."

A *Le Figaro* article by Philippe Gelie reports that, on the very morning of the day of the murder, Jacquier had complained of being the hostage of a "propaganda operation," after he was prevented from filming certain

streets in Damascus.

The pro-Assad demonstration had been organized for the journalists' visit, *Le Figaro* explains: "The visit was not only authorized—an exceptional decision—but also closely supervised by the regime, limited to areas completely under its control."

The assertion that Homs was "completely" under Damascus's control, thus encouraging the reader to think that Jacquier's death necessarily involved the regime's complicity, is both astonishing and false. Homs is well known to be a center of the anti-Assad rebellion. The neighborhood where Jacquier died—which is Alawite Muslim, like the Assad clan—is, moreover, often targeted by anti-Assad forces, who are largely Sunni.

*Le Monde* admitted that in the area, "witnesses have mentioned the firing of shells, either rockets or even grenades. The [Western-backed] Free Syrian Army (FSA) is known for its use of RPGs, rather than mortars, contrary to the regime's army."

This revelation by *Le Monde* confirms that of the journalist Mohammed Ballout, a BBC Arabic service special reporter, who was beside the French journalist at that moment. "Zahira is an Alawite bastion which has been targeted on several occasions in the past by demonstrators. In this neighborhood there is often sniper fire from the demonstrators."

The more or less explicit accusations by the French media against Damascus raise many questions. Is it credible to say that the Syrian regime, which invited journalists to a demonstration to show that Bashar al-Assad was popular, should have wished to kill journalists, and several of its own soldiers, at such a time? Wouldn't Assad have feared that such an attack would provoke hostile reactions from the French government?

Why are the French media avoiding any mention of the possibility that it was fire from the Free Syrian Army which had hit Jacquier and the Syrian soldiers? As the accounts in the press of witnesses show, it is a perfectly plausible hypothesis, although completely neglected.

Despite having raised the possibility of rebel fire close to Jacquier, *Le Monde* concluded its article by writing: “The international community has called on the [Syrian] authorities to provide protection for journalists on their territory.”

The hypocrisy of the French bourgeoisie, which is demanding that the Syrian regime should protect civilians on its territory at the same time as it is authorizing the massive supply of weapons to the Syrian rebels in order for them to attack the government’s troops, knows no bounds. (See, “France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party backs imperialist intervention in Syria”).

The bourgeoisie’s calculations arise from the political situation after the development of revolutionary working class struggles in Tunisia and Egypt, overthrowing the dictators Ben Ali et Moubarak. These movements of the working class in North Africa mean the re-emergence of the class struggle throughout the world.

The imperialist powers’ response was to seize the opportunity provided by demonstrations in Libya in March 2011 to engage in a military intervention and to overthrow the Gaddafi regime. At the request of the Libyan rebels, NATO supported them with a so-called “humanitarian” air cover. The overthrow of Gaddafi was intended to establish a regime more amenable to the imperialist powers, who could exploit the oil wealth of the country.

The imperialist powers, including France, were able to make a military intervention with the support of the petty bourgeois parties, which did their utmost to present the imperialist offensive as “democratic.” (See, “A tool of imperialism: France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party backs war on Libya”)

As time went on, however, this war, which cost some 50,000 Libyan lives, became very unpopular. Now, as the western powers are considering the possibility of

military intervention in Syria, they are seeking another pretext to poison the political atmosphere, weaken the Assad regime, and perhaps allow the rebels and NATO to attack Syria.

This is why the death of Gilles Jacquier is being treated not as a tragic event, but rather as a pretext for a politically biased press campaign.



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