



What's next for the team behind Syria Deeply? Arctic Deeply

"It's underreported, it's highly consequential, and there are many layers of complexity," says Lara Setrakian, Syria Deeply's co-founder.

By **JOSEPH LICHTERMAN** @ylichterman March 20, 2014, 1:29 p.m. [✎](#)



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Syria isn't the only news topic worth going into Deeply.

Since Syria Deeply, a news site solely focused on covering the crisis there, went live in late 2012, Lara Setrakian hasn't hid the fact that she wants to create additional sites that closely cover specific topics. At Columbia's Tow Center, she's been engaged in a research project around the idea of news sites that cover a single subject in depth. News Deeply, the media company the former ABC News and Bloomberg TV correspondent cofounded, has considered plenty of topics to focus on, but later this year it plans to launch its next platform: Arctic Deeply.

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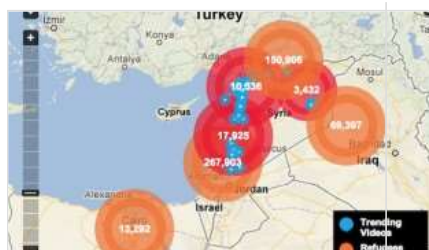
With climate change causing rising temperatures and melting ice caps, what's occurring in the Arctic region is an "ideal candidate" for Deeply to take on as its next platform, Setrakian told me, as it brings in topics ranging from the environment to geopolitics.

"It's underreported, it's highly consequential, and there are many layers of complexity," she said.

"Most importantly, for me, I have a certain catchphrase I've coined with our team — that we should be covering species-level issues. If it's a species-level issue, and we're not seeing it adequately covered in the news cycle, than that makes it a candidate."

Other candidates for the Deeply treatment? Possibly Congo, Myanmar — or even Alzheimer's. But they're focused on not growing too quickly, Setrakian said. Deeply is most concerned with continuing to build its Syria site while it gets Arctic Deeply off the ground. "The most important thing is choosing one and focusing on execution until we find that it's reached an adequate level of development," Setrakian said.

"It's underreported, it's highly consequential and there are many layers of complexity."



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Arctic Deeply's main sponsor is the World Policy Institute, a New York-based think tank. Setrakian said she is in conversations with other think tanks and institutions, but would not disclose them since the deals aren't final. Setrakian is also considering publishing Arctic Deeply content in languages other than English, but that will depend on who its other partners are. Similarly, Syria Deeply is in the process of developing an Arabic-language version that is slated to launch in the coming months.

Syria Deeply, on its best days, attracts 10,000 unique visitors, Setrakian said, but its content is also often crossposted on other partner sites, which allow more readers to view the content.

To that end, they also this week unveiled a redesigned Syria Deeply website which ditches WordPress for its own custom content management system. Setrakian said she believed the site had outgrown WordPress and its new system will allow it to more seamlessly display stories, maps, and timelines while allowing it to apply the framework to Arctic Deeply and its other

future sites.



“We had, for example, the issue of bringing so many third-party widgets to bear and creating a modular design, which was sensible for a prototype but it slowed down our load time,” she said “It also made us very susceptible to whatever happened to each one of the third-party bits and pieces. So when it came to speeding up the user experience of our content, we felt that we needed to create something of our own.”

Last Saturday, March 15, marked the third anniversary of the Syrian civil war, and with the conflict showing no signs of abating, Setrakian said strong, nuanced coverage of Syria is needed more than ever. Syria Deeply has two full-time employees and a network of two-dozen freelancers contributing from both inside and outside Syria. And while explanatory journalism is all the rage of late, Syria Deeply has emphasized its ability to provide context for Syrian conflict since it began operating in late 2012, more than a year after the conflict began.

News Deeply plans to apply the same principles to the forthcoming Arctic Deeply as it adds new staff and creates a similar group of contributors who can cover the myriad topics that stem from the arctic. It aims to optimize the way the content is presented to best suit the topic — so while videos are prevalent in its Syria coverage, users might expect to see more maps or charts on Arctic Deeply because they’ll better suit the topic, Setrakian said.

“We learned how to create an optimal mix of on-the-ground content and external knowledge and reporting,” Setrakian said. “I think that’s vital, because usually you get just one or the other, and I think it’s extremely important that we integrate inherent knowledge, which is what we get from our Syrian writers, with that capacity to serve as translator and editors for a global audience. That’s become our specialty and it has enhanced our deliverables and it has enhanced our credibility quite a lot.”

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