

A Tale of Two Reports: The Guardian's Propaganda on Syria and Israel

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Today saw the release of [a report](#), commissioned by the regime in Qatar via the law firm Carter Ruck, alleging the systematic mass killing and torture of detainees by the Assad regime in Syria. Up to 11'000 people, and perhaps more, could have died in this fashion, according to the report.

Given that it was commissioned by the regime in Qatar - which is a [key backer](#) of certain Syrian rebel groups - and that it has been released immediately prior to the Geneva peace conference scheduled to begin this week, some have questioned the intent of the report. Quite reasonably, if you ask me.

Is it an attempt by Qatar to, simply, document regime abuses in the hope of securing justice for the victims, and furthering the cause of human rights in Syria?

Or given Qatar's own poor track record on human rights and repression, might they be cynically exploiting the Assad regime's crimes and victims to further their own geo-political aims?

My hunch is that the latter scenario is much more likely - which isn't at all to say that some or all of the things documented in the report never happened.

The Guardian have today [published](#) an article on the report by Jonathan Freedland. In it, he writes that:

'The report's authors, who interviewed the source for three days, have no obvious axe to grind and are eminently credible: they served as prosecutors at the criminal tribunals on Sierra Leone the former Yugoslavia. Those facts will surely offset any misgivings over the report's origins: it was commissioned and funded by the government of Qatar, a player in the Syrian conflict on the anti-government side. The evidence is too overwhelming, and the reputations of those who have assessed it too strong, for this report to be dismissed as Qatari propaganda (though some will try)'.

The implication being that, just because the report was commissioned by Qatar, no-one can surely question the veracity of it, because the people who researched it are all eminent international jurists. Which - my own misgivings about the *political intent* of the report aside - isn't an unreasonable point.

He finishes by telling the reader that the release of the report could aid international efforts

to end the conflict in Syria, but:

‘ . . . first Russia needs to feel the heat of global outrage. These photos, and the horrific story they tell, might just generate it’.

It's a fairly typical liberal trick to place all of the blame for prolonging and feeding the conflict in Syria on Russia, while overlooking the role played by our own government, the U.S. and their GCC allies. But Freedland wants Russia to 'feel the heat of global outrage' over the contents of the report nonetheless.

Compare that to [an article](#) he wrote for The Guardian in April 2011, on the so-called Goldstone Report.

The Goldstone Report accused Israel of committing both War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity during their assault on the Gaza Strip (dubbed 'Operation Cast Lead') in December 2008 and January 2009. It also accused Hamas of committing far smaller scale war crimes.

It had been commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council, and like the Qatar/Carter Ruck report, was researched by eminent international jurists. It was [subsequently adopted](#) in a vote by the U.N. General Assembly.

All sounds very formal and very credible, no? The UNHCR is at least as credible a body as the regime in Qatar, if not far more so, and the fact the Goldstone Report focused on both sides, rather than just one, gives it a greater claim to being balanced than the Qatar/Carter Ruck report in my opinion.

Well, not necessarily. Writes Freedland of the Goldstone Report:

‘For who was it that commissioned Goldstone and his team to look into Gaza? It was the UN Human Rights Council. That sounds like an eminently respectable body – until you look at its record. A 2010 analysis showed that very nearly half of all the resolutions it had passed related to Israel: 32 out of 67. And guess which country is the only one to be under permanent review, on the agenda for every single meeting? Israel. There is only one rapporteur whose mandate never expires. No, it's not the person charged with probing Belarus, North Korea or Saudi Arabia, despite the hideous human rights records of those nations. It is Israel’.

So while the fact Qatar – who constitute one side of the conflict in Syria – commissioned the report into detainee abuse in Syria doesn't give anyone grounds to question it according to Freedland, he strongly implies that the fact the UNHRC commissioned the Goldstone Report does give grounds to question that one, because of its bias against Israel.

Apparently, then, the genesis of a human rights report *can* be relevant in judging the veracity or credibility of it – at least when that report is critical of a state or regime we support.

Freedland then adds:

'There is no Goldstone or Churchill to probe the 4 million deaths in the Congo, the slaughtered in Darfur or the murdered in the Ivory Coast, let alone the civilian deaths inflicted by the US and Britain in Iraq and Afghanistan. No one is proposing an academic boycott of those nations or any of the other serial violators of human rights'.

So rather than using the release of the Goldstone Report as a platform to call for Israel and its international backers to 'feel the heat of global outrage', as he did with the Qatar/Carter Ruck report, he instead asks why other abusive states aren't being similarly criticised, and again implies bias against Israel.

To summarise, then:

- When reports are published alleging crimes by states who are our Official Enemies, the background of the people who commissioned the report is irrelevant in judging its veracity and objectivity, and it should cause 'global outrage' against the accused and their international backers.
- When (arguably more credible) reports are published alleging crimes by states who are our Official Allies, the background of the people who commissioned the report is relevant in judging its veracity and objectivity, and we must question why this state, but not others, is being singled out.

Reading the two articles side by side, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Freedland judges and responds to reports of this nature based not on the credibility of their contents, but on the identity of the perpetrators, while presenting himself as a neutral and impassioned humanitarian.

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