

# Life or Death - Corporate Media or Honest Media?

By [Media Lens](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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*Relying on the corporate media, including BBC News, to provide a reliable account of the world is literally a matter of life or death, on many levels.*

Imagine, for example, a Russian dissident living in the UK who had published copious evidence of Russian war crimes, and who had then sought political asylum in an embassy in London. Imagine if that dissident were then expelled from the embassy, under pressure from Russia, immediately imprisoned in a high-security prison here and faced with the prospect of extradition to Russia to face life imprisonment or the death sentence. There would be a massive uproar in the Western media. Western political leaders would issue strong statements of disapproval and demand the freedom of a brave dissident. The case of Julian Assange, co-founder of WikiLeaks, is much worse. He is being pursued relentlessly by a powerful country, the United States, of which he is not even a citizen.

US prosecutors are now [reportedly](#) helping themselves to Assange's possessions, including medical records and two manuscripts. Baltasar Garzon, international legal co-ordinator for the defence of Assange and WikiLeaks, [urged](#) international bodies to intervene in what he called:

'an unprecedented attack on the rights of the defence, freedom of expression and access to information.'

He added:

'It is extremely worrying that Ecuador has proceeded with the search and seizure of property, documents, information and other material belonging to the defence of Julian Assange, which Ecuador arbitrarily confiscated, so that these can be handed over to the agent of political persecution against him, the United States.'

The US is undoubtedly looking for evidence to build a bogus case against Assange to lock him away for life for alleged crimes against the world's number one rogue state. As Noam Chomsky has long [observed](#), the US behaves like the Mafia writ large. You go against their power at your peril.

The incentives for Ecuador, under a Washington-friendly government led by Lenín Moreno since 2017, to behave in this appalling manner are obvious. A report in *The Canary* [spelled it out](#):

‘Ecuador is raking in new [trade] deals with the UK and US after handing over Julian Assange’.

In Sweden, surely under US pressure, prosecutors have now applied for a warrant for Assange’s arrest. Craig Murray [provided](#) the vital background to this latest disgraceful development, pointing to the:

‘incredible and open bias of the courts against Assange [...] since day 1.’

The former British diplomat is clear about the crucial importance of the work of WikiLeaks and Assange:

‘Julian Assange revolutionised publishing by bringing the public direct access to massive amounts of raw material showing secrets the government wished to hide. By giving the public this direct access he cut out the filtering and mediating role of the journalistic and political classes.’

Murray pointed out the contrast with the [Panama Papers](#), detailing how the super-rich hide their money, covered by the *Guardian* and other ‘mainstream media’ outlets with great fanfare. However, contrary to media promises, such coverage:

‘only ever saw less than 2% of the raw material published and where major western companies and individuals were completely protected from revelation because of the use of MSM [“mainstream” media] intermediaries.’

He continued:

‘Or compare Wikileaks to the Snowden files, the vast majority of which have now been buried and will never be revealed, after foolishly being entrusted to the *Guardian* and the Intercept. Assange cut out the intermediary role of the mediating journalist and, by allowing the people to see the truth about how they are governed, played a major role in undercutting public confidence in the political establishment that exploits them.’

John Pilger, a staunch defender of Assange and WikiLeaks source Chelsea Manning, as all journalists should be, [said](#) via Twitter:

‘The filthy war on Julian #Assange and Chelsea Manning, whose heresy is to have revealed the crimes of great power, intensifies. Craven Sweden plays to its theatre of darkness while Assange the prisoner is denied even his glasses.’

Manning is yet again [back in prison](#), following a brief spell of freedom. She has steadfastly [refused](#) to testify to a secret grand jury in Virginia that is attempting to entrap her into revealing incriminating evidence about her past communications with WikiLeaks. The reluctance of corporate journalists, and even human rights groups, to support Manning, Assange and WikiLeaks is symptomatic of a broken political system still masquerading as ‘democracy’.

## Missing Headlines On Douma



The freedom of the Western media, then, is a cruel deception. In reality, the corporate media has paved the way for war after war: Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen; and possible future wars in Venezuela and Iran. On and on it goes. Last week, a [leaked document](#) from the headquarters of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), directly contradicted the concocted 'consensus' that Syrian President Assad's forces dropped canisters containing poison gas from helicopters over Douma on April 7, 2018, killing dozens of civilians. The claim was crucial to the justification given by Western governments for launching air strikes on Syria one week later, [relayed](#) dutifully by the *Guardian* in its headline:

'Syria: US, UK and France launch strikes in response to chemical attack'

The leaked report was published by the [Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media](#) (WGSPM), a group of independent scholars and researchers, and signed by Ian Henderson, an engineering expert who, as independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone [noted](#), has been listed in leadership positions on OPCW documents [as far back as 1998](#) and as recently as [2018](#). The report concluded:

'In summary, observations at the scene of the two locations, together with subsequent analysis, suggest that there is a higher probability that both cylinders were manually placed at those two locations rather than being delivered from aircraft.'

WGSPM [concluded](#) in their analysis of the leaked engineering report that it is:

'beyond reasonable doubt that the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April 2018 was staged.'

Theodore Postol, professor of science, technology, and international security at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, [gave](#) his initial assessment of the leaked report and concurred that the alleged chemical attack was staged:

'The OPCW engineering assessment unambiguously describes evidence collected by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) that indicates two analyzed chlorine cylinder attacks were staged in April 2018 in Douma. The holes in the reinforced concrete roofs that were supposedly produced by high-speed impacts (impact at speeds of perhaps 100 m/s or more, 250 mph) of industrial

chlorine canisters dropped from helicopters were instead created by earlier explosions of either artillery rockets or mortar shells. In one event a chlorine canister that was damaged on another occasion was placed on the roof with its head inserted into an existing crater hole, and in the other case a damaged chlorine cylinder was placed on a bed supposedly after it penetrated the building roof and bounced from its original trajectory into a bed. In both cases the damage to the chlorine cylinders was incompatible with the damage to the surroundings that was allegedly caused by the cylinder impacts.'

Shockingly:

'35 deaths that were originally attributed to these staged chlorine events cannot be explained and it cannot be ruled out that these people were murdered as part of the staging effort.'

Postol emphasised:

'the voices that come through the engineering report are those of highly knowledgeable and sophisticated experts.'

But the dissenting engineering analysis was 'entirely unmentioned in the report that went to the UN Security Council'. Postol concluded:

'This omission is very serious, as the findings of that report are critical to the process of determining attribution. There is absolutely no reason to justify the omission of the engineering report in the OPCW account to the UN Security Council as its policy implications are of extreme importance.'

Caitlin Johnstone [commented](#):

'This should be a major news headline all around the world, but of course it is not. As of this writing the mass media have remained deathly silent about the document despite its enormous relevance to an international headline story last year which occupied many days of air time. It not only debunks a major news story that had military consequences, it casts doubt on a most esteemed international independent investigative body and undermines the fundamental assumptions behind many years of western reporting in the area.'

The OPCW [confirmed](#) that the document is genuine. However, rather than address the serious questions about its omission in its official report to the UN, the OPCW merely said that they would now be 'conducting an internal investigation about the unauthorised release of the document in question.' They added that they would not be commenting further 'at this time'.

Journalist Peter Hitchens [asked](#):

'What is going on at the OPCW? It is a valuable organisation, containing many fine people, with a noble purpose, but has it been placed under pressure, or even hijacked, by political forces which seek a justification for military intervention in Syria? Given that a decision between war or peace, affecting

the whole world, could one day hang on its judgements, I think the whole world is entitled to an inquiry into what is happening behind its closed doors.'

Our searches of the ProQuest newspaper database confirm that there has not been a single mention of this devastating document in any 'mainstream' US or UK national newspaper except in an [opinion column](#) by Hitchens in the *Mail on Sunday*. It is truly remarkable, but predictable, that corporate media journalists have ignored an expert assessment that casts serious doubt on the official narrative on Douma and, therefore, the West's 'justification' for bombing Syria.

There is no mention on the BBC News website of the leaked OPCW report. This is consistent with the 'public' broadcaster's central role in maintaining and supporting the case for UK state policies. As Caitlin Johnstone astutely [observed](#), the BBC's preferred mode when it comes to foreign policy is fact-free war propaganda. Even when the press [reported](#) fresh US claims of a 'possible Assad chemical attack in Syria' - likely a [propaganda effort](#) intended to deflect attention from the leak - journalists managed to avoid mentioning the newly published OPCW report.

A [news article](#) in the small-circulation *Morning Star* is the only other exception to the craven silence in the national press. The overwhelming media acquiescence for Western foreign policy is surely a performance that the old Soviet press of *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, et al. could only have dreamt of.

## Human Extinction

But the greatest calamity resulting from the myth of a free and fair media is the inexorable rush towards climate breakdown. In 1982, Exxon scientists [predicted](#) that atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide would reach 415 parts per million (ppm) by around this year; which is exactly what has happened. In pre-industrial times, the concentration was much lower; around [280 ppm](#). The last time it was this high was 2.5 to 5 million years ago, during the Pliocene epoch, well before modern humans evolved. Global sea level was 25m higher than now and global temperatures were 2-3 degrees Celsius higher.

As Kyla Mandel [noted](#) in an article for *ThinkProgress*:

'Despite this knowledge, the company chose not to change or adapt its business model. Instead, it chose to invest heavily in disinformation campaigns that promoted climate science denial, failing to disclose its knowledge that the majority of the world's fossil fuel reserves must remain untapped in order to avert catastrophic climate change.'

Over ten years ago, in January 2009, *New Scientist* [reported](#) that:

'Billions could go hungry from global warming by 2100'.

As we have documented in media alerts and books since then, there has been warning after warning from reputable scientists, and things are worse now than they were in 2009. Governments have not merely 'done nothing'; they have promoted and perpetuated corporate policies that are destroying the planet's ecosystems and unleashing climate

instability.

The World Health Organisation [states](#) that climate change is already leading to 150,000 deaths annually around the world. Researchers [fear](#) that the number may well double by 2030, even if serious emissions reductions begin today. Relevant factors include malnutrition, heat stress and increased incidence of diseases such as malaria. Death rates will likely [worsen](#) even further because of population displacement, reductions in labour productivity from farmers trying to work in hotter conditions, and disruptions to health services because of destructive weather and climate. Climate change could also force more than 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, increasing their vulnerability to ill health and disease.

The [corporate disinformation campaign](#) to block or slow action to tackle climate breakdown has therefore already led to huge numbers of people dying and suffering from illness. It will only get worse, potentially leading to a mass extinction of species, including humans.

When will senior BBC News editors and journalists, funded by the public licence fee, make the climate emergency central to their reporting? How long before economics and business correspondents notice the utter absurdity of ignoring climate breakdown in their reports, day after day? Last December, we [asked](#) BBC News business editor Simon Jack when he would address the climate crisis. He had never responded to us before. He [replied](#) this time:

‘Very soon’.

Over four months later, he published a [piece](#) on his blog titled, ‘UK’s biggest money manager warns on climate catastrophe’.

It began:

‘The world is facing a climate catastrophe and businesses around the world must address it urgently or face the ultimate sanction for a public company, shareholders who refuse to back them any more.

‘That is not a message from an environmental action group but from the largest money manager in the UK, Legal & General Investment Management, which manages £1 trillion worth of UK pension fund investments.

‘Its climate warning was the top of a list of concerns about the way companies are run.’

A serious message indeed; surely there could be nothing more pressing. ‘Climate catastrophe’; ‘top of a list of concerns’, ‘ultimate sanction’. Would this mark a sea change in the business editor’s reporting? Seemingly not. Simon Jack’s reporting since then has been business as usual.

Our [previous media alert](#) highlighted the valiant campaigning and protests by Extinction Rebellion, and at least some degree of serious media coverage has been generated recently. But peaceful protests need to proliferate, intensify and seriously disrupt government policies and industry practices that are continuing to pump up dangerous global levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Bill McKibben and Elizabeth Kolbert, two well-respected writers on climate, believe that although ‘the political tide could be turning on climate change’, they are both deeply concerned that it is too little, too late.



McKibben, whose book ‘The End of Nature’ was published thirty years ago, told journalist David Remnick in a *New Yorker* [interview](#):

‘The argument about climate change was over by the early nineteen-nineties, when scientists had reached a very robust consensus. We’d won the argument. We were just losing the fight, because the fight was not about data and reason and evidence. It was about the thing that fights are always about: money and power.’

Kolbert, author of ‘The Sixth Extinction’ about the human-driven mass loss of species, warned in the same interview:

‘We have not yet experienced the full impact of the greenhouse gases we have already put up there. And once we do [in] a decade or so, there’s a sort of a long tail to that, we will have put up that much more. So we’re always chasing this problem [...] Once we decide, “Oh, we really don’t like this climate,” you don’t get the old climate back for [...] many, many, many generations. So we are fighting a very very, very uphill battle. [...] maybe we can avoid the worst possible future. But I don’t think at this point we can avoid a lot, a lot, a lot of damage.’

The outlook is so pessimistic that the best McKibben can hope for is that global warming is slowed down ‘to the point where it doesn’t make civilizations impossible.’ But it is ‘an open question’ as to whether even that is attainable.

McKibben added:

‘There are scientists who tell you we’re already past that point. The consensus, at least for the moment, is that we’ve got a narrow and closing window, but that if we move with everything we have, then, perhaps, we’ll be able to

squeeze a fair amount of our legacy through it.'

This is terrifying, and it should drive media coverage of the problem with huge urgency and scope. The real prospect that all of humanity's achievements – in art, science, music, literature, philosophy – might be wiped out of existence, should compel dramatic action.

Journalist Jonathan Cook, freed from the need to kowtow to state or corporate interests in his reporting, [states](#) our predicament clearly and honestly:

'Climate collapse is so close at hand, the window to avert our fate so narrow, that only the insane, the deeply propagandised and those so alienated from the natural world that they have lost all sense of themselves and what matters can still ignore the reality. We are teetering over the precipice.'

Now is the time, says Cook, for 'genuine populism': a widespread, grassroots struggle to overturn 'turbo-charged neoliberal capitalism', including the corporate media, before it destroys us all.

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