

Propaganda by Omission: Libya, Syria, Venezuela and the UK

By [Media Lens](#)

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We live in a war-like society; one that supports, and is in league with, the world's number one terrorist threat: the United States of America. Corporate media propaganda plays a key role in keeping things that way.

Ten years ago this month, the US, UK and France attacked oil-rich Libya under the fictitious cover of ‘humanitarian intervention’. The bombing was ‘justified’ by **Barack Obama, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy** by the supposed imminent massacre of civilians in Benghazi by forces under Libyan leader **Muammar Gaddafi**. As we have [documented](#) previously, the propaganda claims were fraudulent.

Libya, previously a [wealthy state](#) with free health care and education, was essentially destroyed. An estimated 600,000 Libyans were killed. Many more were displaced from their homes. In the barbarous conditions of the failed state, black people have been ethnically ‘[cleansed](#)’, [lynched](#) and [auctioned off as slaves](#), illicit arms transfers and terrorism have become rife, and many Libyans have attempted to flee to better lives across the Mediterranean, [thousands](#) of them drowning *en route*.

As Jeremy Kuzmarov, managing editor of CovertAction Magazine and author of four books on US foreign policy, [pointed out](#) recently, the powerful Western perpetrators of this human calamity have never been brought to justice. He added:

‘In hindsight, it is clear that the U.S. was completing a 40-year regime change operation targeting Colonel Qaddafi for which media disinformation was pivotal.

‘It is important today as such to revisit the 2011 war so that U.S. citizens can learn from the history and not be duped again into supporting an intervention of this kind.’

The Stunning Silences Over Syria And Venezuela

But, when it came to Syria several years later, media disinformation was once again pivotal in unleashing Western firepower. As we have [described](#) in [numerous media alerts](#), the corporate media declared with instant unanimity and certainty that Syria’s President Bashar

Assad was responsible for a chemical weapons attack on the Damascus suburb of Douma on 7 April, 2018. One week later, the US, UK and France attacked Syria in response to the unproven allegations. Since then, there has been a mounting deluge of evidence that the UN's Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has perpetrated a massive cover-up to preserve the Western narrative that Assad gassed civilians in Douma.

Earlier this month, five former OPCW officials joined a group of prominent [signatories](#) to urge the UN chemical weapons watchdog to address the controversy. Aaron Maté, an independent journalist with [The Grayzone](#) website, has been following developments closely since the beginning (see his in-depth [article](#), 'Did Trump Bomb Syria on False Grounds?').

He [noted](#) that:

'Leaks from inside the OPCW show that key scientific findings that cast doubt on claims of Syrian government guilt were censored, and that the original investigators were removed from the probe. Since the cover-up became public, the OPCW has shunned accountability and publicly attacked the two whistleblowers who challenged it from inside.'

In an interview, Maté [pointed](#) out the remarkable silence from the corporate media:

'the western media, across the spectrum, has buried this story - which is pretty incredible. You have extraordinary allegations of a cover-up, you have whistleblowers; and not only...do you have allegations, you have documents - a trove of documents released by WikiLeaks.'

We have observed a similar shameful silence in the UK, including BBC News; even after initial interest in the 'important story' had been [expressed](#) by Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent.

But Western violence against other nations, and the 'justifications' trotted out to defend 'our' crimes, or simply ignoring them, has become normalised in 'mainstream' journalism.

Consider the case of Venezuela, harbouring one of the largest oil reserves on the planet, and which, as a left-leaning democracy, has long been targeted by the US for regime change. This was seen very clearly when the late [Hugo Chávez](#) was the Venezuelan president - temporarily deposed in a failed US-supported coup in 2002, and who was often wrongly described by corporate media as a 'dictator' - and continues today under Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro.

As John McEvoy observed in a [piece](#) for Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, a recent UN rebuke of crippling US and European sanctions on Venezuela has been met with 'stunning silence'.

McEvoy wrote:

'The report laid bare how a years-long campaign of economic warfare has asphyxiated Venezuela's economy, crushing the government's ability to provide basic services both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.'

According to Alena Douhan, the UN special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, the Venezuelan government's revenue was reported to have shrunk enormously, 'with the country currently living on 1% of its pre-sanctions income,' impeding 'the ability of Venezuela to respond to the Covid-19 emergency.'

Douhan urged US and European governments:

'to unfreeze assets of the Venezuela Central Bank to purchase medicine, vaccines, food, medical and other equipment.'

The US-led campaign to overthrow the Venezuelan government, Douhan added, 'violates the principle of sovereign equality of states and constitutes an intervention in domestic affairs of Venezuela that also affects its regional relations'.

Almost exactly two years ago, we [noted](#) in a media alert that the US-based Center for Economic and Policy Research, a respected thinktank, had published a study showing that US sanctions imposed on Venezuela in August 2017 had since caused around 40,000 deaths. With the exception of a [single piece](#) in the Independent, there was zero coverage in the national UK press, and no BBC News coverage at all, as far as we could ascertain.

McEvoy wrote:

'By omitting the devastating impact of sanctions, corporate media attribute sole responsibility for economic and humanitarian conditions to the Venezuelan government, thereby using the misery provoked by sanctions to validate the infliction of **even more** misery.'

He continued:

'Loath to abandon belief in the fundamentally benign nature of Western foreign policy, corporate scribes have typically presented the devastating effects of sanctions as a mere accusation of Nicolás Maduro'.

This is a pattern of deception seen over and over again. For example, in 2002-2003, the 'mainstream' media repeatedly attributed claims that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein. Doing so buried the evidence-backed testimony of senior UN weapons inspectors concluding that Iraq had been 'fundamentally disarmed' of 90-95 per cent of its weapons of mass destruction by December 1998. (Scott Ritter and William Rivers Pitt, 'War On Iraq', Profile Books, 2002, p.23)

McEvoy noted that the Guardian's reporting of Venezuela sticks to the Washington script:

'Often, they fail to [mention](#) sanctions at all. In June 2019, for instance, the Guardian's [Tom Phillips](#) reported that "more than 4 million Venezuelans have now fled economic and humanitarian chaos," citing would-be coup leader Juan Guaidó's claim that the country's economic collapse "was caused by the corruption of this regime," without making any reference to Washington's campaign of economic warfare.

'Keeping with tradition, Douhan's damning report has been met with stunning silence by establishment media outlets. Neither the Guardian, New York Times, Washington Post nor BBC reported on Douhan's findings'.

Imagine if Russia had been responsible for imposing sanctions on another country, violating that country's sovereignty, with tens of thousands dead and many more lives at risk in the months to come. Imagine, moreover, that Russia had been condemned in a hard-hitting [UN report](#) for engaging in economic warfare, described as 'a violation of international law' that was causing a serious 'growth of malnourishment in the past 6 years with more than 2.5 million people being severely food insecure.' Imagine that such a report pointed to the 'devastating effect of unilateral sanctions on the broad scope of human rights, especially the right to food, right to health, right to life, right to education and right to development.' The headlines and in-depth coverage in the West would be incessant. The Russian ambassador in London would be given a stern dressing-down by the UK Foreign Secretary. MPs would address Parliament, condemning Putin in the strongest possible terms. There would be global demands for the UN to intervene.

The ideological discipline required to ignore such crimes under Western policy is remarkable, but it is standard in the corporate media system. Propaganda by omission, routinely carried out by BBC News and the rest of the 'mainstream' news media, is a crucial tool enabling Washington and London to pursue their aims; whether that be 'regime change', exploitation of oil and other natural resources, and geopolitical domination.

'Grand Wizards' And Client Journalism

Occasionally, the strict enforcement of ideological purity imposed on corporate journalists is laid bare when they step out of line by the merest millimeter. Thus, for example, BBC television presenter Naga Munchetty had to issue an apology on Twitter for 'liking' tweets that mocked Tory government minister Robert Jenrick for appearing on a BBC [Breakfast interview](#) with a Union Jack prominently displayed behind him.

She [tweeted](#):

'I "liked" tweets today that were offensive in nature about the use of the British flag as a backdrop in a government interview this morning. I have since removed these "likes". This do [sic] not represent the views of me or the BBC. I apologise for any offence taken. Naga'

This read like a statement that had been dictated from lofty levels within the BBC hierarchy. When you are a high-profile BBC figure, you are obliged to tweet out an apology for daring to question the trappings of 'patriotism'. But when have BBC journalists ever apologised for catastrophically platforming government propaganda on Iraq, Libya, Syria, the NHS, 'austerity', militarism, the royal family? The list is endless.

On Twitter, tweets from the broadcaster RT are flagged with the warning, 'Russia state-affiliated media.' Rather than apologise for broadcasting Western propaganda, it is far more likely that a senior client journalist working for the UK state-affiliated media known as 'BBC News' will send out whitewashing tweets to minimise or deflect any challenges to the government. Take BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg, a prime example of this key propaganda function. On the National Day of Reflection on 23 March, the anniversary of the

start of the first UK Covid-19 lockdown, Boris Johnson had [boasted](#) during a private meeting of Tory MPs:

'The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed, my friends.'

There was a huge outcry on social media. Rachel Clarke, a palliative care doctor who has been outspoken in her criticism of the government during the pandemic, [tweeted](#) in response to Johnson's crassly insensitive and smug comment:

'But he's wrong.

'Human nature is bigger & better & bursting with more grace & decency than he'll ever know.'

Wise and compassionate words.

By contrast, Kuenssberg went into full damage-limitation mode, [tweeting](#):

'More on PM's "greed" comments - one of those present says Johnson was having a crack at Chief Whip, Mark Spencer, who was gobbling a cheese + pickle sandwich while he was talking about the vaccine, "it was hardly Gordon Gekko", "it was banter" directed at the Chief, it's said'

It is a fair point: probably not even Gordon Gekko would have joked about the virtue of capitalism and greed on a day when his very clear responsibility for the deaths of 149,000 people was at the forefront of many people's minds.

Newspaper cartoonist Dave Brown [depicted](#) brilliantly what the day of reflection should have meant: Johnson reflected in the mirror as the Grim Reaper carrying a scythe with the number 149,000 engraved on it.

Kam Sandhu, head of advocacy at the independent thinktank Autonomy, reminded her Twitter followers that, in 2019, Kuenssberg had [brushed](#) off the revelation that Brexiteer MPs visiting Chequers, the prime minister's 16th century manor house, had called themselves '[the Grand Wizards](#)'. The BBC political editor had [tweeted](#):

'just catching up on timeline, for avoidance of doubt, couple of insiders told me using the nickname informally, no intended connection to anything else'

Presumably the use of an infamous Ku Klux Klan term of white supremacy was to be considered mere 'banter'. There are countless other examples of Kuenssberg deflecting criticism of Tories, while echoing and amplifying their propaganda. You may recall that she acted to defend the government when it belatedly went into the first lockdown one year ago. She [misled](#) the public, as Richard Horton, editor of the prestigious medical journal The Lancet [noted](#) last March:

'Laura Kuenssberg says (BBC) that, "The science has changed." This is not

true. The science has been the same since January. What has changed is that govt advisors have at last understood what really took place in China and what is now taking place in Italy. It was there to see.'

Her insidious role in endlessly propping up the government narrative on any given topic is a 'courtesy' conspicuous by its absence when it came to the 'impartial' BBC political editor's reporting of Jeremy Corbyn and, in particular, the manufactured crisis of supposedly institutional antisemitism in the Labour party.

On 26 November 2019, just prior to the general election on 12 December, Kuenssberg tweeted about Tory-supporting chief rabbi Ephraim Mirvis' suggestion that Corbyn should be 'considered unfit for office', [23 times in 24 hours](#). This at a time when journalistic impartiality was obviously never more essential.

Kuenssberg is not an exception within BBC News, although given her very high-profile position, it is not always as blatant with other BBC journalists. Take BBC diplomatic correspondent James Landale, for instance: another serial offender. An [item](#) that he presented on BBC News at Ten on 16 March added to the ever-rising steaming pile of 'impartial' journalism scaremongering about Official Enemies that must be countered by the peace-loving West.

In line with a new UK government report on 'defence', Landale depicted China and Russia as threats that required this country to 'show Britain can project force overseas'. As part of the strategy, the new £6.1 billion aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, will hold joint operations with allies in the Indo-Pacific later this year. 'But will it be enough?', intoned Landale, 'impartially' cheerleading the UK's 'projection of force' across the globe.

Continuing his virtually government spokesperson role, Landale added:

'And the cap on Britain's stockpile of nuclear warheads will be lifted because of what the report says is "the evolving security environment".'

The likely increase in the UK's nuclear weapons was just slipped out, almost as an after-thought. There was no mention that nuclear weapons are now [prohibited](#) under international law after the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was ratified earlier this year. The Treaty includes:

'a comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapon activities. These include undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.'

In July 2017, over 120 countries voted to adopt the Treaty. In October 2020, the 50th country ratified the Treaty which meant it became international law on 22 January, 2021. Where were the BBC News headlines?

As Double Down News [observed](#):

'Boris Johnson set to expand Nuclear Warheads by 40%

'No money for Nurses but money for Armageddon'

But all this must have slipped Landale's mind. Or perhaps there was no time to include information deemed unimportant by him or his editors. There was, however, ample room for a major item on that evening's BBC News at Ten titled, '[Duke leaves hospital](#)'. This covered Prince Philip's return to Buckingham Palace after one month in hospital for heart treatment. And why was this a major 'news' headline on the BBC? Because BBC News is staunchly royalist, fervently establishment and an upholder of the unjust UK class system.

All of this just goes to show that BBC News really is the world's most refined state propaganda service. As BBC founder John Reith confided in his diary during the 1926 General Strike:

'They [the government] know they can trust us not to be really impartial.'

('The Reith Diaries', edited by Charles Stewart, Collins, 1975; entry for 11 May, 1926)

The same holds true today.

In this era of Permanent War, potential nuclear Armageddon and climate breakdown, the enormous cost to victims of UK and Western state-corporate policy around the world is incalculable.

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