

The British Foreign Office and the Propaganda War on Syria

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Global Research, December 23, 2016

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Region: [Europe, Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),

[Terrorism](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

On his first official visit to Turkey in September 2016, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson announced that the British government was giving about [£2.3 billion](#) in aid to Syria. Of course when Johnson said 'aid to Syria' he meant anything but – Britain may be contributing to the odd refugee camp outside of Syria, but most of that £2.3 billion goes to support al Qaeda and ISIS-linked groups in order to bring down the legitimate government in Syria.

Since 2011 **the British government has had an [official policy of regime change in Syria - Assad must go](#)**. While the UK has not yet formally invaded Syria, it has played a significant military role, including [training insurgents](#) in Jordan from 2012. The British air force has a presence in Syria, ostensibly to fight terrorism, though whether it has ever targeted anyone but the [soldiers of the Syrian Arab Army](#) is open to question (the presence in Syrian airspace of the British airforce is in clear breach of international law).

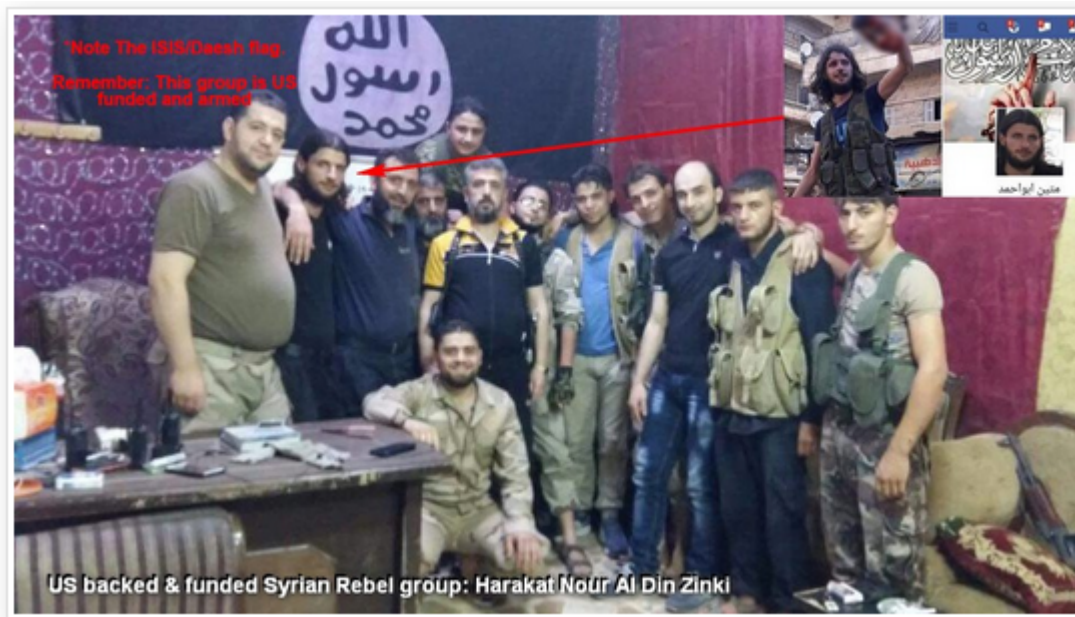
Perhaps the biggest role played by the British government is that of creating propaganda designed to undermine the Syrian government and its supporters in their fight against 'insurgents'.

The official position of the NATO states is that the Syrian government has 'lost legitimacy', and that there is a 'legitimate opposition' made up of 'moderate rebels'. To create support for this view NATO states, including the UK, the US, France and the Netherlands, have invested heavily in a two-pronged propaganda campaign to shape public perception of the war by:

1. Demonising the Syrian administration, particularly the person of Syria's popular president, Bashar al Assad, and all the forces that support the administration: the Syrian Arab Army; the National Defence Forces (part-time reservists, rather like a Home Guard); non-Syrian forces from neighbouring countries, such as Hezbollah.
2. Creating a false perception of a popular uprising spearheaded by 'moderate', 'democratic' forces that are acceptable to the Syrian people, and thus can eventually form or be part of a viable government.

The target audience is the West – Syrians themselves are not going to swallow the bizarre fiction that groups who look like ISIS, act like ISIS and have the same ideology as ISIS, should somehow be seen on the one hand as heroes in preference to their own sons and daughters in the Syrian Arab Army, and on the other as a legitimate political opposition to their government.

A typical example of the moderate opposition in the eyes of NATO is the al Zinki gang, whose crimes include [sawing off the head](#) of a 12 year old child, and who clearly identify with ISIS (they were careful to pose in front of the ISIS flag in this picture).



In the context of Aleppo, the State Department has claimed throughout 2016 that it has been endeavouring to separate out the 'moderate rebels' from the extremists. This is clearly nonsense: al Nusra dominates in eastern Aleppo, and when a a ceasefire was agreed in September 2016, 20 'moderate' groups including Ahrar al Sham and al Zinki [refused to take part](#) because al Nusra, as an officially designated terrorist group, was not included.

The propaganda campaign also serves to draw attention away from the role NATO have played in creating instability in Syria - it is painfully clear that British anti-war politicians and organisations such as Stop the War UK believe that honour is satisfied as long as Britain is not openly bombing in Syria.

The immediate aim of the propaganda is to gain acceptance for increased NATO intervention in Syria, above all a no-fly zone, as was approved by the UN for Libya in 2011, which would then be interpreted by NATO forces as a license to bomb with impunity, and destroy Syria as a functioning independent country.

The UK's propaganda effort for the Syrian armed opposition began after the government failed to persuade parliament to support military action against the Assad regime. In autumn 2013, the UK embarked on behind-the-scenes work to influence the course of the war by shaping perceptions of opposition fighters. ([Cobain, Ross, Evans, Mahmoud](#), 3 May 2016)

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), working with the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office and the Prime Minister's Office funds or contracts companies for the express purpose of creating 'targeted information' in relation to the war on Syria.

In effect the British government has funded a comprehensive top of the range advertising campaign to promote sectarian extremists in Syria who function as units of al Qaeda and ISIS.

Contractors hired by the Foreign Office but overseen by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) produce videos, photos, military reports, radio broadcasts, print products and social media posts branded with the logos of fighting groups, and effectively run a press office for opposition fighters.’ (Cobain and co., 3 May 2016)

The contractors also develop specific public relations projects such as the [White Helmets](#), [Bana Tweets From Aleppo](#) and the [Civil March on Aleppo](#).

In parallel with these operations the British Government funds social media trolls to get the desired message across. In January 2015 the Ministry of Defence announced the formation of its 77th Brigade, which would consist of social media activists engaged in ‘non-lethal warfare’, by attempting to control the narrative in media such as Facebook and Twitter. (According to the report in the [Guardian](#), the US and Israel were already heavily engaged in such operations)

Two closely aligned companies working with the Foreign Office and other UK departments are [Incostrat](#) and [Mayday Rescue](#).

Mayday Rescue

‘Mayday Rescue supports vulnerable communities in the most dangerous and challenging places in the world by training and equipping local groups to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the impact of war, disasters, and emergencies.’ (Mayday)

At the present time Mayday’s sole responsibility appears to be management of the ‘Syrian Civil Defense’ or White Helmets, a supposed first responder organisation staffed by ordinary Syrians, which are in fact an extension of the terrorist groups in Aleppo and Idlib. Their function is to cooperate with the [Aleppo Media Center](#) in the production of material which shows the White Helmets both as heroes and legitimate authorities on the Syrian conflict on the ground, and the Syrian and Russian governments as war criminals, deliberately targeting hospitals, schools, bakeries, animal shelters etc.

To that end, Mayday is generously [funded](#) by the UK, US and other governments, with offices in Amsterdam, Turkey, Jordan and Dubai. As at [March 2016](#) its operational headquarters in Istanbul employs 30 staff, located in the operational centres of Istanbul, South-East Turkey, and has an annual operating budget of US\$35,000,000.

Founder **James le Mesurier**, according to [Mayday](#),

‘has spent 20 years working in fragile states as a United Nations staff member, a consultant for private companies and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and as a British Army Officer. [...] Since 2012, James has been working on the Syria crisis where he started the Syrian White Helmets programme in March 2013. In 2014, he founded Mayday Rescue.’

Incostrat

‘We are a communications and media consultancy that provides a customised end-to-end service for government and private clients: we specialise in

strategic campaign planning, narrative development, message distribution and feedback generation in support of policymaking [...]

'We have proven track records of designing and delivering complex communications and media projects in conflict and post-conflict environments. We have over two and a half years of continuous experience of Syria-specific work, co-operating with the moderate armed opposition, politicians, tribal and civil society'

Incostrat was founded by **Paul Tilley**, who has a similar background to le Mesurier, with experience of both the army and the Foreign Office. His CV on [LinkedIn](#) reveals the following:

"2011-12 Director of Strategic Communication (STRATCOM) in the Ministry of Defence for the Middle East and North Africa.

2012-current. Developed and Project managed several multi-million dollar media and communications projects that are at the leading edge of UK and US foreign and security policy objectives in the Middle East."

Both Incostrat and Mayday Rescue were formally founded in November 2014, according to the LinkedIn profiles of their respective founders, but le Mesurier and Tilley were doing development work 2013 or earlier. The White Helmets first officially appeared on the scene in April 2014, when the BBC assisted in the launching of the brand by producing a documentary on 'Civil Defence' in Aleppo, which coincided with the White Helmets appearance on social media.

Incostrat is described by [Thierry Meysen](#) as 'a communications company in the service of the jihadist groups. It designed logos, made video clips by portable telephone, and printed brochures for a hundred of these groups, thus giving the impression of a popular uprising against the Republic.'

The difference between the older ISIS flag with the Incostrat designs for groups like Jaish al Islam, Jaish al Fatah is striking.



(left: ISIS; centre Jaish al Fatah; right: Jaish al Islam)

Meysen continues:

'together with the SAS, [Incostrat] made a spectacle of the most important

group, Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam). Saudi Arabia supplied the tanks which were delivered from Jordan. Uniforms were made in Spain and distributed to the jihadists for an officer promotion ceremony. All this was choreographed and filmed by professionals in order to give the impression that the army was organised like regular forces and was capable of rivaling with the Syrian Arab Army. The idea was planted that this really was a civil war, and yet the images only showed a few hundred extras, most of whom were foreigners.'

Who actually does what in the Syrian theatre is not quite clear.

On the one hand Mayday Rescue appears to have total responsibility for 'Syrian Civil Defense'. On the other there are similarities in the branding and marketing of the terrorist groups with their logos, letterheads and social media pages, and projects like the White Helmets. One possibility is that Incostrat, as well as having responsibility for the design aspects of the propaganda campaigns, may also have the task of finding 'creative solutions' in broad terms, such as the Bana Project, the Civil March and maybe the White Helmets.

Mayday's responsibility would then be the management of the White Helmets and the Aleppo Media Center both of which function as part of terrorists groups in Syria. Whether the Bana Project and the Civil March are managed from within Incostrat or whether there are separate groups or companies overseeing these projects too is not clear.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

SOHR, founded in 2011, is a UK-based organisation that provides information on the Syrian conflicts to the world's media. The Observatory is run from Coventry, England by Rami Abdulrahman, a three-term convicted criminal in Syria who left that country more than 10 years before the war started, and is openly opposed to the Syrian government.

The Observatory is almost certainly the brainchild of the Foreign Office:

His funding comes from the European Union and "an unnamed European state," most likely the UK as he has direct access to former Foreign Minister William Hague, who he has been documented meeting in person on multiple occasions at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. [...] it was the British government that first relocated Abdul Rahman to Coventry, England after he fled Syria over a decade ago because of his anti-government activities. Beau Christensen, [Propaganda spin cycle: 'Syrian Observatory for Human Rights' is funded by US and UK governments](#)

Although the Observatory is manifestly biased, only showing the conflict from the perspective of the insurgents, and consistently showing the Syrian government in a bad light, the information provided is considered by the corporate media, the United Nations and trusted non-government organisations to be authoritative, and is widely quoted.

Clearly for real journalists, Abdulrahman is a useless, utterly compromised source of information who has every reason to twist reality to suit his admittedly politically-motivated agenda of overthrowing the Syrian government. However, for a propagandist, he is a goldmine. That is why despite the overt conflict of interests, the lack of credibility, the obvious disadvantage of being nearly 3,000 miles away from the alleged subject of his "observations," [...] the Western media still eagerly laps up his constant

torrent of disinformation. (Tony Cartalucci, [West's Syrian Narrative Based on "Guy in British Apartment"](#))

These organisations by no means represent the total of British spending when it comes to creating or influencing propaganda while dressing it up as humanitarian endeavour or intellectual objectivity. The government is a major funder of a number of NGOs that are openly committed to 'humanitarian intervention' (regime change) in countries like Syria, such as [Amnesty International](#). In his article [Unravelling Bana, Qoppa](#) has raised the question of the relationship of the [much derided](#) 'research organisation' Bellingcat with the British government, pointing out that one of the authors of Bellingcat's own article on Bana is an ex-army officer.

Incostrat, Mayday and SOHR however have direct and undeniable links with the Foreign Office. Their function is to create, via tools such as Bana Alabed and the White Helmets, or directly in the case of the SOHR, fake news for Western consumption that bears little or no relation to the reality within Syria.

The fake news is distributed via the corporate media and the reports of the industrial human rights complex. Social media, however, is by no means forgotten. There is an incestuous relationship between the Foreign Office projects, in that Bana promotes the White Helmets, and the activists of the Civil March promote both Bana and the White Helmets. At the same time the MOD's 77th Brigade push incessantly the general themes of Assad and Russian war crimes versus the 'popular uprising' on social media, but also reinforce the FCO's major projects – such trolls are easily detected on Twitter accounts like Bana's.

So what we have is the UK government, on behalf of the British taxpayer, openly funding multi-million dollar projects to create an assumption of war crimes by Syria and Russia against the Syrian people, while also creating a false image of a legitimate opposition, all of which the said taxpayer is then supposed to take in good faith. The purpose of all this is to garner support for a no-fly zone over Syria, imposed by the UK, the US and allied countries, as the first step to overthrowing the legitimate government.

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