

Undermining Democracy - Corporate Media Bias on Jeremy Corbyn; Boris Johnson and Syria

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Global Research, February 07, 2017

[Media Lens](#) 6 February 2017

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Are we able to prove the existence of a corporate media campaign to undermine British democracy? Media analysis is not hard science, but in this alert we provide compelling evidence that such a campaign does indeed exist.

Compare coverage of comments made on Syria by a spokesman for Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in October 2016 and by UK foreign secretary Boris Johnson in January 2017.

Boris Johnson's 'Triple Flip' On Assad

There is little need for us to remind readers just how often Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad has been [described](#) as 'a monster' and 'a dictator' in the UK press. Assad has of course routinely been reviled as a tyrant and genocidal killer, compared with Hitler and held responsible, with Putin, for the mass killing and devastation in Syria. The [role](#) of the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and others has often been ignored altogether.

Assad has been UK journalism's number one hate figure for years, on a par with earlier enemies like Slobodan Milosevic, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi (arguably, Assad is essentially the same archetypal 'Enemy' in the minds of many corporate journalists).

In December 2015, the Daily Telegraph [reported](#) that Boris Johnson accepted Assad was a monster, but that he had made a further remarkable comment:

Let's deal with the Devil: we should work with Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Johnson wrote that 'we cannot afford to be picky about our allies'. And so:

Am I backing the Assad regime, and the Russians, in their joint enterprise to recapture that amazing site [Palmyra from occupation by Isis]? You bet I am.

Seven months later, after he had been made UK foreign secretary, Johnson exactly [reversed](#) this position:

I will be making clear my view that the suffering of the Syrian people will not end while Assad remains in power. The international community, including Russia, must be united on this.

Six months further forward in time, in January 2017, Johnson's position flipped once again. The Independent [reported](#):

President Bashar al-Assad should be allowed to stand for election to remain in power in Syria, Boris Johnson has said in a significant shift of the Government's position.

Johnson was not coy about admitting the reason for this further flip:

I see downsides and I see risks in us going in, doing a complete flip flop, supporting the Russians, Assad. But I must also be realistic about the way the landscape has changed and it may be that we will have to think afresh about how to handle this.

The changed 'landscape', of course, is a new Trump presidency that is famously opposed to Obama's war for regime change in Syria. The Mail [reported](#) how Johnson had recalled a trip to Baghdad after the Iraq war when a local Christian had told him:

It is better sometimes to have a tyrant than not to have a ruler at all.

Johnson's observation on this comment:

There was wisdom... in what he said and that I'm afraid is the dilemma...

When we at Media Lens have even highlighted the US-UK role in arming, funding and fighting the Syrian war, and have discussed the extent of US-UK media propaganda - while holding not even the tiniest candle for Assad - we have been crudely [denounced](#) as 'pro-Assad useful idiots', [as](#) 'just another leftist groupuscule shilling for tyrants' [that](#) 'defends repression by President Assad'.

Other commentators have suffered similar abuse for merely pointing out, as Patrick Cockburn recently [noted](#) in the London Review of Books, that 'fabricated news and one-sided reporting have taken over the news agenda [on Syria] to a degree probably not seen since the First World War'.

Nothing could be easier, then, than to imagine the corporate media lining up to roast Boris Johnson for what simply had to be, from their perspective, the ultimate example of someone who 'defends repression by President Assad': actually suggesting that the media's great hate figure might contest elections and even remain in power.

We can imagine any number of spokespeople for Syrian 'rebel' groups, human rights organisations and others, enthusiastically supplying damning quotes for news and comment pieces. We can imagine the headlines:

Anger at Johnson's "shameful apologetics" for Syria regime

Boris slammed for "monstrous" U-Turn On Assad

Johnson's sympathy for Assad the devil shames us all

And so on...

A second critical theme cries out for inclusion. Donald Trump has been relentlessly lambasted as racist, sexist, fascist, and in fact as a more exotically coiffured version of Hitler. Given that Johnson openly admits the UK government has reversed policy on hate figure Assad to appease hate figure Trump, the headlines are again easy to imagine:

UK Government slammed for "selling out ethics and the Syrian people" to appease Trump regime

"Britons never, never will be slaves"? Boris Johnson's bended knee before Trump shames us all

And so on...

Instead, these were the actual headlines reporting Johnson's policy shift:

The Telegraph (January 27):

Armed Forces could have peace role in Syria, suggests Boris

The Guardian (January 26):

Boris Johnson signals shift in UK policy on Syria's Assad

A comment piece in the Guardian was [titled](#):

Theresa May looks for new friends among the world's strongmen; Saturday's meeting with Erdogan in Turkey shows how Britain is re-ordering its international priorities after the Brexit vote

No talk of apologetics, shame, or supping with the devil; just Britain 're-ordering its international priorities'.

The i-Independent (January 27):

Johnson signals shift in policy over Assad's future

The Times (January 27):

Johnson: Britain may accept Assad staying in power

The headline above an opinion piece in the same paper (February 1) merely counselled caution:

May will have to take a stand over Russia. In this new age of realpolitik, Britain must beware bending to Trump's shifting foreign policy

The article was careful not to criticise Johnson: 'It would be wrong to pin' his Syrian 'triple flip' on 'Borisian dilettantism. We have entered an era of intensified realpolitik... That means rethinking everything...'

The Sun (January 27), having raged apoplectically at Assad for years, would have been expected to rage now at Johnson. The headline:

UK TROOPS FOR SYRIA

The only comment:

In a break with UK policy [Johnson] also said a political solution might see tyrant Bashar al-Assad allowed to stand in UN-supervised elections.

The Daily Mail (January 26):

Assad could run in a future Syrian presidential election, Boris Johnson says in shift of UK foreign policy

Clearly, then, there was nothing the least bit excitable or outraged in any of these headlines – the news was presented as undramatic and uncontroversial.

But the point we want to emphasize is that, in fact, *none of these news reports contained a single word of criticism of Johnson*. They included not one comment from any critical source attacking Johnson for siding with the press's great *bête noire* of the last several years, Assad, in bowing to their great *bête orange*, Trump.

In an important recent [book](#), the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh refers to the present era of corporate-driven climate crisis as '*The Great Derangement*'. For almost 12,000 years, since the last Ice Age, humanity has lived through a period of relative climate stability known as the Holocene. When *Homo sapiens* shifted, for the most part, from a nomadic hunter-gatherer existence to an agriculture-based life, towns and cities grew, humans went into space and the global population shot up to over seven billion people.

Today, many scientists believe that we have effectively entered a new geological era called the [Anthropocene](#) during which human activities have 'started to have a significant global impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems'. Indeed, we are now faced with severe, human-induced climate instability and catastrophic loss of species: the [sixth mass extinction](#) in four-and-a-half billion years of geological history, but the only one to have been caused by us.

Last Thursday, the [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#) moved their symbolic [Doomsday Clock](#) forward thirty seconds, towards apocalypse. It is now two and a half minutes to midnight, the closest since 1953. Historically, the Doomsday Clock represented the threat of nuclear annihilation. But global climate change is now also recognised as an '[extreme danger](#)'.

Future generations, warns Ghosh, may well look back on this time and wonder whether humanity was deranged to continue on a course of business-as-usual. In fact, many people alive today already think so. It has become abundantly clear that governments largely pay only lip service to the urgent need to address global warming (or [dismiss it altogether](#)), while they pursue policies that deepen climate chaos. As climate writer and activist Bill McKibben [points out](#), President Trump has granted senior energy and environment positions in his administration to men who:

know nothing about science, but they love coal and oil and gas – they come from big carbon states like Oklahoma and Texas, and their careers have been lubed and greased with oil money.

Rex Tillerson, Trump's US Secretary of State, is the former chairman and CEO of oil giant, ExxonMobil. He once [told](#) his shareholders that cutting oil production is 'not acceptable for humanity', adding: 'What good is it to save the planet if humanity suffers?'

As for Obama's 'legacy' on climate, renowned climate scientist James Hansen only [gives him a 'D' grade](#). Obama had had a 'golden opportunity'. But while he had said 'the right words', he had avoided 'the fundamental approach that's needed'. Contrast this with the [Guardian view on Obama's legacy](#) that he had 'allowed America to be a world leader on climate change'. An [article](#) in the *Morning Star* by Ian Sinclair highlighted the stark discrepancy between Obama's actual record on climate and fawning media comment, notably by the BBC and the *Guardian*:

Despite the liberal media's veneration of the former US president, Obama did very little indeed to protect the environment.

And so while political 'leaders' refuse to change course to avoid disaster, bankers and financial speculators continue to risk humanity's future for the sake of making money; fossil fuel industries go on burning the planet; Big Business consumes and pollutes ecosystems; wars, 'interventions' and arms deals push the strategic aims of geopolitical power, all wrapped in newspeak about 'peace', 'security' and 'democracy'; and corporate media promote and enable it all, deeply embedded and complicit as they are. The 'Great Derangement' indeed.

Consider, for example, the notorious US-based Koch Brothers who, as The Real News Network [notes](#), 'have used their vast wealth to ensure the American political system takes no action on climate change.' Climate scientist Michael Mann is [outspoken](#):

They have polluted our public discourse. They have skewed media coverage of the science of climate change. They have paid off politicians.

He continues:

The number of lives that will be lost because of the damaging impacts of climate change – in the hundreds of millions. [...] To me, it's not just a crime against humanity, it's a crime against the planet.

But the Koch Brothers are just the tip of a state-corporate system that is on course to drive *Homo sapiens* towards a terminal catastrophe.

Earlier this month, the world's major climate agencies [confirmed](#) 2016 as the hottest since modern records began. The global temperature is now 1C higher than preindustrial times, and the last three years have seen the record broken successively – the first time this has happened.

Towards the end of 2016, scientists [reported](#) 'extraordinarily hot' Arctic conditions. Danish and US researchers were 'surprised and alarmed by air temperatures peaking at what they say is an unheard-of 20C higher than normal for the time of year.' One of the scientists said:

These temperatures are literally off the charts for where they should be at this time of year. It is pretty shocking.

Another researcher emphasised:

This is faster than the models. It is alarming because it has consequences.

These 'consequences' will be terrible. Scientists have [warned](#) that increasingly rapid Arctic ice melt 'could trigger uncontrollable climate change at global level'.

It gets worse. A [new study](#) suggests that global warming is on course to raise global sea level by between six and nine metres, wiping out coastal cities and settlements around the world. Mann describes the finding, with classic scientific understatement, as 'sobering' and adds that:

we may very well already be committed to several more metres of sea level rise when the climate system catches up with the carbon dioxide we've already pumped into the atmosphere.

It gets worse still.

The Paris Climate Accord of 2015 repeated the international commitment to keep global warming below 2C. Even this limited rise would threaten life as we know it. When around a dozen climate scientists were asked for their honest opinion as to whether this target could be met, not one of them thought it likely. Bill McGuire, professor emeritus of geophysical and climate hazards at University College London, was most adamant:

there is not a cat in hell's chance [of keeping below 2C].

But wait, because there's even [worse news](#). Global warming could well be happening so fast that it's 'game over'. The Earth's climate could be so sensitive to greenhouse gases that we may be headed for a temperature rise of *more than 7C within a lifetime*. Mark Lynas, author of the award-winning book, [Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet](#), was '[shocked](#)' by the researchers' study, describing it as 'the apocalyptic side of bad'

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