

# War, Abuse and Other Peoples: Why Support Other Peoples, Especially during Conflict?

A Personal Account

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*Featured image: A row of craters from exploded mines, left by DAESH throughout Palmyra. (Image credit: Prof. Tim Anderson)*

***Why support other peoples, especially during conflict?*** *Some explanation seems necessary because wartime debates often degenerate into simplistic clichés, personal abuse and confusion. I am one of many who have been subject to this abuse. Even the sanity of the critics of war is attacked, in attempts to disqualify opposing voices. Confusion is sown through the extreme nature of war propaganda, and its invented pretexts.*

In the most recent half dozen Middle East wars, all driven by Washington and its minions, it has become common to dismiss dissenters as ‘apologists’ for this or that enemy. In reality, whatever the virtues or flaws of these ‘regimes’, they are all independent, and targeted precisely for their independence. For this same reason they are branded ‘dictatorships’. Consequently the loyal western corporate and state media, on a war footing, replaces reasonable discussion with abuse and shows little interest in respect for other peoples under attack.

The clichés and abuse replicate the aggression of war mentality. People abandon their normal rules of verbal engagement, reducing discussion to combative point scoring. Having been subject to some of these attacks in recent years, mainly for my defence of Syria, here is a personal account of motives and some of that abuse.

As I see it, human society is founded on cooperation and reinforced by communities determining their own affairs and building their own social structures. We are social beings and our natural human urge is to help others. Social dysfunction comes after social cooperation, and the most toxic of all such dysfunctions is imperialism. Those outside interventions are always disastrous, destructive and tainted with the ambitions of the interveners. That is why uninvited interventions are rightly banned, these days, under international law.

I believe that support for popular self-determination, and the defence of peoples under attack, is an essentially human urge. In my opinion this comes before the pathological drive to dominate. The natural sense of support for other human communities must especially include support for formerly colonised peoples. **That is consistent with human values such as respect for others, and not putting one’s voice in the place of others.**

At any rate, that is the thinking behind **my support for independent peoples under threat or attack**. In my experience of recent decades this has included support for the peoples of Cuba, Venezuela, Papua New Guinea, East Timor, Palestine, Iraq, Iran and Syria. However I have refused to be part of the multi-billion dollar aid industry, remaining an independent writer, academic and volunteer.

This is not only altruism. Engaging with other peoples in this way is a rewarding learning experience, indeed a privilege. I believe in and remain open to learning from other cultures.

Yet imperial pathology is also a reality. Its demands, the refusal to listen, domineering, interventions and outright war represent a fundamentally anti-social mentality. From that perspective I came to see the wars of the 21st century – propaganda, economic and real wars – as a continuation of the older politics of imperialism, while often adopting the contemporary language of ‘human rights’.

I saw such abuses in my own country’s intervention in neighbouring East Timor, in 2006. There an internal conflict attracted Australian intervention, largely on false pretexts. Australian state media gave prominence to claims that East Timor’s then **Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri** had killed dozens of political opponents (Jackson 2006). The Prime Minister was deposed, the journalists involved were given awards; but the claims turned out to be quite false (Anderson 2006).

I spent years defending Cuba and Venezuela from a barrage of fake ‘human rights’ propaganda, including from supposedly independent agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (Anderson 2005; Anderson 2010, Anderson 2013).

Amnesty International, for example, attacked Cuba in 2003 for arresting several dozen US-paid agents (dubbed ‘dissidents’ in the US media), just as Havana anticipated that the mad emperor **George W. Bush**, having just invaded Iraq, was about to invade Cuba (Amnesty 2003). In fact, Cuba had documented US payments to these people as part of a Washington program to overthrow the Cuban government and its constitution (Elizalde and Baez 2003). There is virtually no state in the world that would not criminalise such activity.

Yet these agents became the ‘Cuban dissidents’ of Amnesty, which used ‘human rights’ as the pretext to back US aggression against its island neighbour (Barahona 2005; Anderson 2008; Lamrani 2014). That same human rights group took several years to say anything about the torture prison President Bush established at an illegally occupied part of Cuba, in Guantanamo Bay (Anderson 2009). The prisoners there (unlike the US agents in Cuba) faced no charges or trial, abuses that used to be the substance of Amnesty International’s activity.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), for its part, made repeated savage political attacks on Venezuela and Cuba, while saying next to nothing about the appalling human rights violations by Washington and its close allies. Many western liberals went along for the ride, but the partisan nature of HRW was obvious to any serious observer. A group of academics and writers assailed HRW over its heavily politicised reports on Venezuela (NACLA 2009). Later several Nobel Prize winners condemned HRW for its refusal to cut ties with the US Government (Alternet 2014).

So when this ‘human rights’ industry (Anderson 2018) turned on Libya and Syria I was half-prepared. I had already written on my own country’s shameful involvement in the aggressions against Afghanistan and Iraq, detailing Australian involvement in war crimes in

both countries (Anderson 2005b; Kampmark 2008; Doran and Anderson 2011). [I would go on to document Australian war crimes against Syria (Anderson 2017a).]

However in early 2011 I did not have detailed knowledge about Libya or Syria. In March 2011 I had to look on a map to find Daraa, the border town where the violence in Syria began (Anderson 2013a). Further, I did not then know that the petro-monarchy Qatar – owner of the successful Al Jazeera media network – was funding and arming sectarian Islamist terrorists in both Benghazi (Libya) and Daraa (Syria) (Khalaf and Smith 2013; Dickinson 2014).

Once President Gaddafi was murdered and the state was destroyed, Amnesty International (France) would admit that most of the claims they had made against the Libyan President were baseless (Cockburn 2011). US analysts confirmed the fakery (Kuperman 2015).

The violence in both countries deserved scrutiny, especially when Washington, the main aggressor in the world, was urging ‘regime change’, and most independent countries were urging caution. I wrote a dozen articles against the war on Libya, over the NATO ‘double speak’, ‘regime change’ motives and NATO’s ‘humanitarian’ missile attacks (Anderson 2011a, 2011b). Yet that little country, with the highest living standards in Africa, was rapidly destroyed.

My first article on Syria in May 2011, ‘Understanding the Syrian Violence’, simply urged people to read more widely. The conflict was clearly not just ‘demonstrators v. police’ (Anderson 2011). After that I searched on a wider range of sources, of course including Syrian sources. I began to document the ‘propaganda war’, the deceptive doctrine of ‘humanitarian intervention’, the failures of the western ‘left’, and ‘the lies that fuel regime change’. I shared a detailed list of sources for ‘Reading Syria’ and began to explore several ‘false flag’ massacres (Anderson 2011c, 2012, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

There was very little western critical discussion of the conflict in Syria so, in 2012, a number of us, mainly Syrian-Australians, formed the group ‘Hands Off Syria’. Later that year I wrote of a ‘malignant consensus’ which had been created over Syria, one which supported a foreign-backed insurgency and a drive to wider war (Anderson 2012d). It was clear to me that a campaign of lies was afoot, just as there had been with the attacks on Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

The official war narrative – from Washington and its minions – was that ‘peaceful protestors’ were being slaughtered by the forces of a ‘brutal dictator’ intent on ‘killing his own people’. This was said to be a ‘civil war’, with no foreign aggression (see Anderson 2016: Chapter 3). It was an extraordinary claim, with little reason, but reliance on jihadist-linked sources and repetition of the claims made it effective, at least amongst western populations.

Yet sectarian Islamist insurrections, linked to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, had a long history in Syria. Since the 1950s such violence had always been backed by Syria’s enemies, particularly Washington and Israel. There was virtually no recognition of this in the loyal western media. Their governments demanded an extreme, fabricated story which could serve as a basis for ‘humanitarian’ intervention.

However the ‘peaceful protestor’ lie was contradicted by independent witnesses and fatally undermined by multiple admissions of US Government officials. The witnesses spoke of sectarian violence from the beginning, which drove political reform rallies off the streets.

The leaked documents showed that Washington knew, from the beginning, that extremists were fomenting the violence, with the aim of imposing a religious state.

Regardless, Washington, Israel and the former colonial powers Britain and France armed these extremists, both directly and indirectly, through allies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Anderson 2016: Chapters 2, 4, 6 and 12). The 'peaceful protestors v regime' fiction served as the basis for arming terrorists, while imposing a cruel economic blockade on the entire Syrian nation.

In late 2013 I helped organise an Australian delegation to Syria, to meet with government and non-government people to find out more about Syria and to express solidarity with a people under attack. Most of us stayed on after the official tour to meet new friends, exploring Damascus. On our return we were attacked by much of the Australian state and corporate media, in particular for a meeting we had with **President Bashar al Assad**, the principal target of mindless western demonization (Worthington 2013). I had expected criticism from those who backed the war, but the Murdoch media made some special efforts.

In January 2014 **Christian Kerr** from The Australian newspaper rang me up for a very brief interview about the trip. It lasted less than one minute. The next day Kerr published a 1,600 front page article 'Academic with a murky past stirs fresh controversy with trip to Damascus' (Kerr 2014). This was mainly a personal attack, with little reference to the actual visit. The reporter dishonestly claimed that I was on "a pilgrimage to honour a dictator". The hit piece says I was an 'extremist' for supporting Cuba, Venezuela and Palestine, for opposing Aboriginal deaths in custody and for writing about the destructive role of the World Bank in the Pacific.

The Murdoch paper called on then then Education Minister, **Christopher Pyne**, to "remind" universities that they "should be partners" to the government in the goal to "build revenue ... by growing the international student market ... and ensure that their reputations support rather than hinder that ambition". This meant that universities should distance themselves from controversy. Pyne presented a nice summary of the commercial imperatives placed by successive Australian governments on universities. These days that same commercialisation is regarded by an overwhelming majority (84%) of academics as at the root of a decline in the quality of Australian tertiary education (Evans 2017).

Soon after that the Channel Seven television program Today Tonight invited me into their studio for an interview with presenter **Nick Etchells**. However, once there, the Chanel Seven people placed me in a separate room of the same building, so that I could not hear Etchells' introduction, which was a vicious personal attack on me. They had only pretended an interest in the Syria visit. They cut out any answers they did not like. The Australian and Channel Seven personal attacks show how closed the Australian corporate media was to hearing another side to the war in Syria.



Over 2014-2015 I wrote a book 'The Dirty War on Syria' (Anderson 2016), to address the western myths and to begin a documented history of the conflict. The book was published in Canada in January 2016 and, over the next two years, was translated into and published in ten languages (English, Arabic, German, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Bosnian, Swedish, Farsi and Icelandic). Over 2016-2018 I did an average of 4 or 5 interviews per week, from media in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Korea, Italy, China, Canada, Germany, Russia and the USA. I was

invited to speak at conferences in Greece, Iraq and Germany. There was less interest in my own country.

After September 2015, when Russia and Iran began a more direct involvement in the conflict, in defence of Syria, the tide of the war began to turn in Syria's favour. But the propaganda war remained strong. Personal attacks against me and other prominent defenders of Syria became more organised. Dissident voices were seen as a threat to the war's legitimacy.

Independent journalists Eva Bartlett (Canada) and Vanessa Beeley (England), in particular, attracted hostile attention for helping expose the grossly distorted western media coverage of the liberation of the city of Aleppo, in late 2016. The UK Guardian for example – a strong backer of the 'humanitarian war' against Syria – commissioned a long hit piece from a San Francisco based journalist with no experience in the Middle East (Solon 2017). Britain's Channel 4 (Worrall 2016) and self-appointed 'fact checkers' – like the US family business 'Snopes' – pretended to debunk the consistent critical reports from Bartlett and Beeley. The would-be gatekeepers backed the Washington-led 'humanitarian' war story on Syria: this was a 'civil war' in which 'we' had to help the people of Syria overthrow their 'brutal dictator'.

In early 2017 the new US President Donald Trump ordered a missile attack on Syria's Shayrat airbase, after a chemical weapon provocation had been carried out by terrorist groups in Khan Sheikhoun (Idlib). This happened just as we were preparing an academic conference on the Syrian conflict at the University of Sydney (CCHS 2017). On social media I called Trump, Obama and Bush 'the masterminds of terrorism in the Middle East' (Anderson 2017).

The Murdoch media responded with another personal attack, running front page smears against myself and a colleague. This abuse began with a *Daily Telegraph* article by Kylar Loussikian (2017), titled 'Sarin Gasbag: academic claims Trump a terrorist and tyrant Assad didn't launch chemical attack', next to a picture of me in Syria. This was a response to my assertions – based on detailed research – that chemical weapons claims against the Syrian Army were baseless (Anderson 2016: Chapter 9). There was not the slightest corporate media interest in evidence over the chemical weapons allegations. When we criticised journalist Loussikian on social media, he ran to university authorities, complaining he was a victim of a 'personal attack'.

Underlining the absurdity of Trump's 2017 attack, in 2018 the US Secretary of Defence admitted that, while 'others' were saying it, 'we do not have evidence' of Syria's use of sarin gas (Wilkie 2018; **Graphic 1**). This had been one of the key pretexts for US aggression against Syria, over several years. But war propaganda was never concerned with evidence.



Graphic 1

A similar media attack occurred after I visited North Korea, in July 2017. By this time I had begun studying several countries subject to Washington-led 'sanctions'. These included Cuba, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Venezuela and North Korea (DPRK). Not that the loyal western media was interested in any such study.

On seeing some social media photos, Murdoch reporter Loussikian penned another smear



story, titled 'Sydney University's Tim Anderson praises North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a solidarity visit'. An introductory paragraph read:

"A controversial Sydney University lecturer who backed Syria's murderous al Assad regime has travelled to Pyongyang and pledged "solidarity with the North Korean dictatorship against "aggression" from the west (Loussikian 2017a).

It certainly was a solidarity visit, but the lie behind the headline and its sub-head should have been obvious. There was no quote in Loussikian's article to justify that claim that I had praised any North Korean leader. I did not even mention them. Nor had I mentioned solidarity with the government ('dictatorship'). In principle, solidarity is always with peoples.

Further, the night before the article Loussikian had asked me, by email: "It was unclear whether you were expressing concern about warfare ... or whether you had a view in supporting the North Korean Government". Because of his previous dishonesty over Syria I did not reply.

This sort of abuse, mostly launched because of my defence of Syria, also came from some of the western 'left'; or rather what many of us now call 'the imperial left'. These are small groups of Trotskyists and Anarchists who swallowed the Washington line that the conflicts in Libya and Syria were popular 'revolutions'. They repeated the western state and corporate media clichés that the highly internationalised conflict in Syria was a 'civil war', and that the fanatical jihadist-terrorists were 'revolutionaries' (e.g. Karadjis 2014; and in Norton 2014).

Some of these people - having observed that some extreme right wing figures also questioned the war on Syria, or supported Russia, or opposed Israel - decided to smear me with the lie that I 'work with' or am 'friends' with fascists. The 'evidence' they show for this is that some extremist and right figures attended some of my many public talks; and that those figures and I both attended a funeral wake for the murdered Russian Ambassador to Turkey, at the Russian consulate in Sydney. On that basis I was said to 'work with Nazis' (see **Graphic 2**).



Graphic 2

My first response to this sort of childish abuse was to just ignore it. Now I think there might be some educational value in showing others the worst cases.

Such attacks do not mean much from tiny groups, barely relevant except when they oppose imperial wars. Yet many western liberal-leftists today join with Washington, NATO, the Saudis, Israel - and their fanatical, reactionary mercenaries - against the remaining independent states of the Middle East.

What these left-liberals miss is that the new fascism in the world is precisely that chain of wars aimed at destroying independent African, Arab and other West Asian states. Western cheer squads for these wars are necessary to minimise opposition and keep imperial plans alive.

This century's military, economic and propaganda wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya and Syria have successfully conscripted western liberals, leftists, NGOs and of course the corporate and state media. Very few question the war narrative; and those

who do are abused.

But that is not the future. The world is changing. BRICS and other regional groupings and states, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, are on the rise. In my opinion, support and respect is due to all independent peoples. It is not about whether we agree with everything they do. It is about respect for other peoples. Their self-determination is also our human responsibility.

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**Dr Tim Anderson** is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

See details regarding his book on Syria below.

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