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How We Were Misled About Syria: George Monbiot of The Guardian

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George Monbiot is an influential journalist, and his words on Syria over the past seven years will have carried weight in shaping public opinion. Some critical readers, however, have been concerned. For while Monbiot has declared himself morally opposed to military intervention, and is demonstrably aware of how the media can manipulate news reports, he has repeatedly published statements – in his weekly Guardian column and on Twitter – that lend significant support to key interventionist arguments. His position is premised on acceptance of the mainstream narrative about the war in Syria. Not only does he defend this, in the face of serious questions about it, he even criticises – at times with some hostility – its questioners.

I have sought to understand the reasoning that has brought Monbiot to the position he holds with such apparent moral certainty and factual assurance. This inquiry falls into three parts: in the first I trace his public thinking about Syria and the war until the end of 2016; in the second I discuss some of his responses to critics concerning the verifiability of knowledge claims about certain events of 2017; in the third I analyse more closely the moral stance that Monbiot has adopted. In each part I show how the public could have been misled about the basis and morality of foreign policy on Syria.

I

Before 2011, Monbiot had not written about Syria, but he had demonstrated awareness of United States involvement in regime change interventions elsewhere. In 2001 he had written about a training camp in the United States that had for 55 years been turning out regime change operatives, the number of whose victims dwarfed those of officially designated terrorist organisations ([‘Backyard Terrorism’](#)). In 2002 he wrote deploring how the officially independent Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was in reality vulnerable to manipulation by the US State Department ([‘Chemical Coup d’Etat’](#)).^[1] In 2003 he foresaw that the USA looked like invading other countries after Iraq, and Syria was potentially high on the list. He feared there might be [‘No Way Out’](#) of instability and conflict in the Middle East ‘until the oil runs out.’ Nor was he under any illusion that the choice of US presidents would ever be other than between [‘The Bad or the Terrible’](#). For none was very likely to ‘take on the corporations which have bought the elections, and challenge the newspapers and television stations which set the limits of political debate.’^[2]

In sum, Monbiot’s writings prior to 2011 indicate a clear awareness of the US having the means, the opportunity, and a motive to stimulate a regime change war in Syria. One would expect this awareness to provide some critical perspective on events as reported by those media organisations that, as he says, ‘set the limits of political debate’. One would also expect his intimate acquaintance with the British establishment to leave him under no illusions about the depth of transatlantic synergies in matters of war.

Monbiot’s [first Guardian article on Syria appeared in September 2011](#). It comes on the heels of several articles in the Guardian during August 2011 bearing titles like [‘Bashar Al-Assad’s Fall Is Inevitable’](#) and [‘the end of Assad is near’](#). The Guardian was evidently supportive of intensifying efforts to hasten ‘the inevitable’. Monbiot, however, was not an overt advocate of military intervention, and his article discusses economic sanctions. On the face of it, he offers morally serious, and sombre, reflection:

‘I would rather not be writing this column. To argue against the course of action I’m discussing is to tolerate collusion with a murderous regime. To argue in favour is to risk promoting wider human suffering. The moral lines are tangled and the progressive response is confused...’

He suggests that the ‘obvious means of resolving this question is to ask the Syrian people what they want’. He follows this suggestion by reporting that ‘there is no clear consensus’: ‘Of the three opponents of the Assad regime I’ve consulted,’ he tells us, ‘two are in favour of wide-ranging sanctions, one is against.’ He had consulted Ghassan Ibrahim, a business advisor living in London since 2002, Samir Seifan, a business economist and consultant who left Syria around 2011, and Chris Doyle, a British opposition sympathizer writing for the Guardian in London. ***So two expat businessmen and a British man were relied on as proxies for the Syrian people.***

On that basis, Monbiot concludes, in a posture of apparent humility, that he finds himself in an ‘unusual place for a polemicist. There is no right answer.’

In fact, he has *not* shown there is no right answer, for given that *nobody did ask the Syrian people*, it cannot be ruled out that they could have been overwhelmingly *against* sanctions. What Monbiot has done – intentionally or otherwise – is prevent *this* option even being considered. His very construction of the question – ‘should sanctions be supported, *given that they will do some harm to the population*’ – tacitly begs the more fundamental question, ‘are sanctions *in principle justified at all?*’ The possibility that they are not is constructively excluded from discussion. By taking that question as settled in advance, Monbiot treats concerns about Syrian people’s welfare as a matter for moral trade-offs. A strong counter-argument would accord them instead a priority of commitment as a matter of human rights.

Nor is it the only question begged in his article, as Monbiot will have been aware. He will have been aware because, prior to writing the article, he had taken the unusual step of appealing to his readers to send in their views. Between them, [their comments](#) in response offered a wealth of very valuable thoughts. For instance: ‘surely the first issue is “what is to be achieved?” Without knowing what you want, it is hard to tell whether sanctions would achieve it.’ Given the risk that ‘Syria will collapse into a violent sectarian civil-war’, Monbiot is cautioned, ‘before proposing a solution surely one should outline what one wishes to prevent first?’ Furthermore, someone suggests, ‘we don’t have a clear idea of who is involved in the protests.’ Another notes that ‘there are no great calls for sanctions or outside interference from the protestors’, and more emphatic is the reader who claims the Syrian people have ‘made it abundantly clear that they do not want the west’s help or involvement as they consider it an internal matter.’ In any case, a crucial question about objectives ‘is whether or not the democratic forces inside the country are in a position to replace the existing regime and whether or not those forces are asking for sanctions to be imposed.’ Readers also caution about taking a one-sided view: ‘I’m no fan of Assad, but as with Libya, the reporting in the west about the violence in Syria has been blatantly lopsided. There have been many brutal killings by the anti-government forces as well.’ Not least, there is the question why it is even Syria we are so concerned about: ‘why not start with the countries we aid the most? ... Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are as bad, if not worse, and we actively aid them. Which should be our first concern?’

In short, already in 2011, members of the public were setting out concerns that have continued to animate critics of the West’s approach to Syria to this day. Yet Monbiot’s article disregarded them. It presented as a simple fact that the country was in the grip of a ‘murderous regime’, because, Monbiot claims, it ‘has killed some 2,600 Syrian people since March.’ In fact, [the source he cites for this claim](#) alleges that 88 people had died in detention in Syria since March, while reporting also a UN estimate of a total of 2,200 deaths on all sides in the widespread violence at large. So the cited article’s content does not actually support Monbiot’s gloss of it. The level of deaths in custody is certainly not something to make light of, but a responsible journalist would be careful to avoid conflating that specific concern with a quite distinct concern about the far greater numbers dying on all sides at a time of armed insurgency in civilian areas. Still, perhaps Monbiot feels justified in aggregating the various numbers cited

because his point is that all the deaths are in some way the fault of ‘Assad’s murderous regime’. The question then is how had he come to form such a definite and damning view by September 2011.

It is evident, from all his writings and tweets relating to Syria, that Monbiot takes information from his Guardian colleagues. Yet by September 2011 it was public knowledge that not all of them were entirely reliable. In the critical period of the initial protests in Syria, at a time when public opinion was first being formed, the Guardian’s correspondent there, said to be in Damascus, wrote under the pseudonym Katherine Marsh. She authored 36 Guardian articles on Syria between 21 March and 9 May 2011. One was entitled [‘A Gay Girl in Damascus becomes a heroine of the Syrian revolt’](#). This introduced to the public one Amina Abdallah Araf al Omari, and Marsh gives a wealth of factual information about this heroic blogger said to be writing from the same town as Marsh herself, Damascus. As later came to light, however, ‘Amina’ was in fact a fictional character generated from an IP address accessed by an American couple then based 3000 miles away in *my* town, Edinburgh! The husband was a literature student and the wife was doing postgraduate research on the Syrian economy. Obviously a lot more could be said about that story, but what is noteworthy here is the doubt it raises about Marsh’s journalistic standards – and those of the Guardian too, given that three other Guardian writers had also meanwhile written purportedly factual reports about the Gay Girl.[3] Worse, though, is that the pseudonymous ‘Marsh’ had produced much more serious disinformation during her short but historically critical time at The Guardian. Near the very start of trouble in Syria, on 12 April, she had posted a sensational and inflammatory story alleging [‘Syrian soldiers shot for refusing to fire on protesters’](#). This story exercised a lot of influence on public opinion, being amplified also on social media via [812 tweets and 4457 FB direct links](#). [4] Yet it was [revealed to be false](#). [5]

Monbiot can have been in no doubt, then, that the Guardian was capable of publishing unreliable accounts of Syria and of retaining unreliable journalists. He would certainly know to be discerning regarding which colleagues to rely on. While some – like the dubious Marsh – were pushing a strongly anti-Assad message, others, like the Senior Foreign Correspondent Jonathan Steele, were still engaging in more dispassionate reporting, with articles like that of 17 January 2012 pointing out that [‘Most Syrians back President Assad, but you’d never know from western media’](#). [6] ***Has Monbiot ever cited or recommended articles on Syria by Jonathan Steele? [7] If not, it would be interesting to know why not.***

In February 2012 Monbiot was to tweet about grim reports of a *genocide* in Homs. These are from an article, [‘Syrian siege of Homs is genocidal, say trapped residents’](#), filed in the name of three Guardian colleagues who based most of it on a skype call with activist Karam Abu Rabea. This informant, we could read in [The Independent](#), was an organiser of the Local Coordinating Committee, ‘an activist group whose purpose is to publicise the uprising’. Given that the source is not an independent observer, a conscientious journalist would ask how his testimony could be verified. In fact, there were major open questions at the time, and they have been more fully fleshed out since, about who exactly was responsible for what. [8] Furthermore, it is in no way to diminish the suffering of people in Homs at that time to question the characterization of events there as *genocide*.

A rather uncritical attitude to reports from Homs is further shown in Monbiot’s next two mentions. One is his commendation of a piece by Martin Chulov on 16 February 2012: [‘They are pushing Syria into a religious war that they will certainly get’](#), reports Chulov, thereby depicting committed sectarian fighters as being ‘pushed’ into a sectarian conflict that they give some appearance of seeking out. [9] On 22 February, when the reporter Marie Colvin was killed in Homs, Monbiot tweeted about ‘Assad’s forces murdering anyone who moves’. While sympathy for the death of a fellow journalist is understandable, this accusation goes beyond what had been ascertained, either in relation to the specific case or as a more general proposition. Colvin’s clandestine entry into the country to embed with insurgent fighters on active operations had put her at definite risk; the suggestion that she was targeted answers to no clear rationale, and no evidence is offered to support it. [10] Nonetheless, Monbiot tweets: ‘Colvin’s murder yet more evidence of total war fought by Assad in Homs. Dumbfounded that anyone can deny it.’ The questions to have *dumbfounded* Monbiot, it appears, came from the independent press monitors at

MediaLens concerning casualty figures released by the opposition. Monbiot cites an article by [Rupert Read](#) by way of response. Read's article actually confirms that the estimates of deaths due to bombing are likely exaggerated, while also admitting a more general uncertainty about casualty counts. It nevertheless offers this extraordinary non sequitur in condemnation of MediaLens: 'human beings killed by enemies of the western imperium don't matter as much to MediaLens as human beings killed by the western imperium.'^[11] ***Does Monbiot really think this good journalism?***

The next significant incident Monbiot comments on publicly coincides – as did the previous one – with a major international vote due to be taken on action relating to Syria. This was the incident involving chemicals in Ghouta in August 2013. The allegations were the subject of debate in the UK parliament, where significant doubts about them were aired (as [I discussed in an earlier blog post](#)) and they have since been analysed with great scrupulousness in [a guest post by Paul McKeigue](#) who estimated the likelihood Syrian government responsibility as disappearingly small. Yet Monbiot responds to sceptical interlocutors on Twitter in a manner to which I have since become personally accustomed: 'Depressing to see fellow opponents of bombing getting grassy knoll about [@hrw](#), due to its report fingering Assad govt for chemical weapons' (1:45 AM – 13 Sep 2013). The 'grassy knoll' trope would be a metonymic suggestion of conspiracism on the part of critical questioners. Sadly, however, the reliability of reporting by HRW (Human Rights Watch) on Syria is deservedly, like that of [Amnesty International](#) too, the subject of criticism.^[12]

A particularly unexpected dimension of Monbiot's moral world came into view in February 2014 with an article [comparing Al Nusra with the International Brigades that went to Spain to fight Franco](#). Monbiot writes:

'Last week a [British man who called himself Abu Suleiman al-Britani](#) drove a truck full of explosives into the gate of Halab prison in Aleppo. The explosion, in which he died, allowed rebel fighters to swarm into the jail and release 300 prisoners. Was it terrorism or was it heroism? Terrorism, according to many commentators.'

And, according to Monbiot, which was it?

'It's true that he carried out this act in the name of the [al-Nusra Front](#),' he admits, 'which the British government treats as synonymous with al-Qaida.'

So terrorism then?

Monbiot says this: 'should we not be celebrating this act of extraordinary courage? Had [David Cameron not lost the intervention vote](#), and had al-Britani been fighting for the British army, he might have been awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.'

So Monbiot thinks that Al Qaeda affiliates engaging in demonstrable acts of terrorism (and if the released prisoners were themselves terrorists, likely increasing its scale) are heroes worthy of British honours?

I literally have nothing to say in response to this.

Monbiot himself fell silent about Syria for a prolonged period.^[13]

Towards the end of 2016, the final weeks of the siege of Aleppo saw him tweeting in this vein: 'Assad and Putin's destruction of [#Aleppo](#) and its people is a crime beyond reckoning' (30 Nov 2016). Despite the assuredness of his hyperbolic opinion, though, once the siege of Aleppo ended in December, Monbiot fell silent about Syria.

Did Monbiot notice that there was no massacre in Aleppo, that fighters were allowed to leave with families and weapons, and that for the remaining civilian population their departure was a

cause of relief and celebration?

II

Monbiot did not publicly comment on Syria again until Spring 2017. By then, I had learned of my colleague Paul McKeigue's studies of the earlier chemical attacks in Syria, which suggested powerful reasons for scepticism about the government's responsibility for them. So I was taken aback to find Monbiot – who I had presumed well aware of the need for a critical perspective on such matters – was aggressively attacking people who voiced scepticism about this new alleged chemical attack at Khan Sheikhoun. In my innocence, I wrote him an open letter on the subject, which I posted on my blog. That letter, readers' comments, and a rejoinder to Monbiot's own tweeted response, are [here](#) and [here](#).

It hadn't occurred to me to doubt Monbiot's good faith or question his motivations, and I was quite convinced that engaging in serious debate could bring together some meeting of minds. That never happened. I regretted this, but left the matter lie.

Then on 15 November 2017 Monbiot produced a column for the Guardian with the title '[A lesson from Syria: it's crucial not to fuel far-right conspiracy theories](#)'. He was attacking sceptics about chemical weapons allegations. His readiness to apply the 'conspiracy theory' slur is something I had already called out in an [earlier post](#) and a [presentation](#) at a Media On Trial event. Others were as concerned as me about his persistence on this tack. [Philip Roddis](#) wrote of his bemusement at how Monbiot 'repeatedly shows himself prepared to suspend his critical faculties – while projecting that very sin on his opponents'. [Jean Shaoul](#) was frank in deploring this 'thoroughly lazy and dishonest' propaganda presented as a defence of democracy and free choice. The award-winning former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook, writing on '[Syria, "experts" and George Monbiot](#)', expressed his dismay at 'what has become an ugly habit with Monbiot', namely, of adopting 'the role of Witchfinder General': for Monbiot, it seems, listening to 'a ballistics expert like Ted Postol of MIT, or an experienced international arms expert like Scott Ritter, or a famous investigative journalist like Seymour Hersh, or a former CIA analyst like Ray McGovern, is apparently proof that one is an atrocity denier or worse.'

Meanwhile, public debate was somewhat intensifying around the White Helmets, an organisation funded by UK, US and other governments and embedded in opposition-held areas of Syria. The White Helmets organisation is the primary source of information that the Western media shares about events on the ground in Syria. While the organisation's personnel are lauded as heroes in the Western mainstream, based on the evidence of its own video production operation, many ordinary members of the public find its outputs unconvincing and too conspicuously propagandistic.^[14] In December, Reporters Without Borders – an organisation that is supposed to defend press freedom – took the extraordinary step of [lobbying the Swiss Press Club](#) to dis-invite a speaker with known critical

views about the White Helmets. To the Club's credit, this was rejected, and the presentation by Vanessa Beeley can be viewed [here](#).

As if in response to the rising profile of critical perspectives on the White Helmets, The Guardian commissioned a piece called '[How Syria's White Helmets became victims of an online propaganda machine](#)', from a lifestyle journalist called Olivia Solon, in California. This was widely perceived as an attempt to discredit the critics – notably Eva Bartlett and Vanessa Beeley – and to explain away their influence as a product of Russian propaganda! A number of us sought to reply to that piece, but the Guardian declined to publish any of our responses, or even allow comments on its own site. (Bartlett was to put out her own reply [here](#), and Beeley responds [here](#). I highlighted my own concerns in a post on '[The Guardian, White Helmets, and Silenced Comment](#)'. [John Schoneboom](#) criticises Solon's hitpiece as 'astonishingly shabby', and [Mike Raddie](#) emphasises the importance of resisting such attacks. [UK Column News](#) closely analyses the attack on independent critical journalism. From America [Philip Roddis](#) considers it 'a fact-lite hatchet job', and [Brandon Turbeville](#) calls it 'perhaps one of the most ridiculous propaganda pieces of the year', while James Corbett in Japan is decisive in declaring Solon's article [the fakest fake news story of 2017!](#))

Monbiot, however, was apparently determined to press the charge against critics that they are instruments of a Russian disinformation machine: out of the blue, he tweeted a hostile message to myself and colleague Professor Piers Robinson. Here is what he said, and alongside it you can see what I tweeted in response.



It is interesting to compare the reception of these tweets (particular as my Twitter following was less than 1% of Monbiot's in size). The numerous comments under Monbiot's tweet were predominantly critical of it, with the two exceptions being from Eliot Higgins and Oz Katerji. (Higgins has featured in my posts before, as [here](#); and Katerji I shall have something to say about shortly.)

In the wake of Monbiot's smears, several critical responses followed, including in articles by [Caitlin Johnstone](#) and [Philip Roddis](#). MediaLens criticised Monbiot's '[disreputable behaviour](#)'. Jonathan Cook was forthright: '[Monbiot is not only a hypocrite, but a bully too](#)'. [OffGuardian's Catte](#) wrote 'George, if you're reading this, it's you, not Hayward and Robinson, who has disgraced himself here.'

In short, among former Guardian readers, and even its own former journalists, the frustration at Monbiot's stance was palpable. This reflects a widespread concern that is shared by the section of the public that has been taking a close interest in the media's coverage of Syria.

The unreliability of the media is a concern also for academics. Some of us have become very troubled that the historical record of events relating to the war in Syria may be subject to serious distortion as a result of misleading media accounts; we are concerned that political analyses and humanitarian strategies may meanwhile be misdirected by misleading information. Quite generally, we believe, there is a need for impartial and independent monitoring of reports of the kind that peer-reviewed academic research is supposed to provide. For that reason we created the [Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media](#).^[15]

The creation of the working group seems to have ruffled feathers in some quarters. The erstwhile Guardian journalist Brian Whitaker was quick to publish an article with the apparent intention of discrediting it, as his title indicates: [‘The Syrian conflict’s anti-propaganda propagandists’](#). When the group added members to its International Advisory Board, Whitaker evidently saw it as his further public duty to warn the public that the [‘Russia-friendly “Syria propaganda” group names more supporters’](#).^[16] For his efforts, Whitaker earned the admonishment of Jonathan Cook, with a swingeing reply about [‘The authoritarians who silence Syria questions’](#). He criticised his old colleague for ‘using every ploy in the misdirection and circular logic playbook to discredit those who commit thought crimes on Syria, by raising questions both about what is really happening there and about whether we can trust the corporate media consensus banging the regime-change drum.’ He detects at work ‘transparently authoritarian instincts of a political and media elite – and of supposedly “liberal” journalists like Whitaker and Monbiot – to silence all debate, all doubt, all counter-evidence.’

Meanwhile Monbiot (on 10 February) had tweeted to our attention a piece by an anonymous blogger demanding answers from “the professors” to five questions that were, in my opinion, rather specious. My response to Monbiot was that if he wanted a debate with us, then let us have it properly, not via tweets or using anonymous proxies. Instead of accepting an invitation to serious debate, however, Monbiot continued to goad us on Twitter – conduct I still find frankly surprising. When, two days on, he put out a link to [Channel 4’s 2016 supposed ‘factcheck’](#) of Eva Bartlett’s critique of the media coverage of Aleppo, I pointed out Eva had been [vindicated on her most important claims](#).

At this point, Oz Katerji entered the conversation. Although I’d had no prior dealings with this journalist, he launched into some astonishing invective:

“you egregious, shameless liar ... you’re a war crimes denier who busies himself slandering victims of war crimes. Others may choose to treat you with respect, I will treat you the way you deserve to be treated, the same as any neo-Nazi or Holocaust denier.”

What stunned me all the more was that Monbiot, instead of being embarrassed by this rowdy ally of his, actually commended that I should ‘[g]et past his rough language and listen to him. He’s telling you things you need to hear, for your own sake.’

Now it makes me uncomfortable when people tell me what I need to do *for my own sake*, but I can take advice, so I decided to listen to Katerji. I quickly discovered that he has caught the attention of quite a few influential people. He moves in circles that get him seen in photos shaking hands with the head of the White Helmets (who in turn has been photographed with leading USUK politicians), and he has been photographed in a friendly encounter with convicted ISIS recruiter [Anjem Choudary](#). He has spoken at the invitation of Baroness Janet Royall at the [House of Lords](#), and [chatted on Twitter](#) afterwards with [Hamish de Bretton-Gordon](#) about how they are getting MPs onside with their view on Syria. Apparently he may have been a ghostwriter for the 15 year-old Muhammad Najem who has lately been broadcasting from Ghouta; and we see him posing too with [Bana Alabed](#) (which found me idly wondering if he could have been involved in supplying the colloquial English language competence that is so evident in the tweets from the Bana Twitter account).



Where I recalled actually seeing Katerji before, though, was in [this video](#) from a Stop the War meeting where he is aggressively heckling Jeremy Corbyn – because, he [later explained](#), Corbyn was ‘ignoring war crimes in Syria’ and ‘refused to call for Assad to step down’. This was October 2016, when Aleppo, according to Katerji, was at risk of being ‘wiped off the map’. So the Labour party was morally complicit in ‘ethnically cleansing East Aleppo’. In Katerji’s view what was happening in Aleppo was *genocide*. He criticises Corbyn for wanting a negotiated political settlement; he criticises Stop the War for opposing a No Fly Zone^[17] and for being against American intervention. In [another interview](#), Katerji reaffirms his advocacy of ‘enforcement of a no-fly-zone in Aleppo, as well air and naval strikes on military installations being used by the Assad regime’.

So what is it that Monbiot would have me learn from Katerji? Is it about the morality of foreign policy? Or is it about the facts on the ground in Syria? Thinking about these questions helped pull into focus some serious concerns I have about Monbiot’s own position.

(1) Is Monbiot’s moral posture on Syria coherent? Regarding Katerji’s take on moral questions, a striking thing is that he fervently advocates military intervention for regime change. Given that Monbiot has always pronounced himself *opposed* to military intervention, why would he think to have me schooled by such a vociferous and implacable advocate of it? In fact, the content of Monbiot’s writings does lend fulsome support to the arguments of interventionists, including, recently, by going out on a very precarious limb to defend the Western narrative about the White Helmets. The effect of Monbiot’s approach is to give his readers the impression that one can in principle be morally opposed to war on Syria, and yet have no strong moral argument to dissuade those who are in favour of it.^[18] Monbiot does not offer principled objections to intervention in general. On the contrary, in this [2004 article](#) he defends military intervention as a matter of humanitarian principle. So it remains to be clarified what exact reason of principle would support his posture of opposition to it in the specific case of Syria. The practical import of his writings on Syria, in fact, has been very much to bolster the case for intervention that others overtly press. This is why I engaged with him over his rush to judgment about Syrian government responsibility for the chemical incident at Khan Sheikhoun in 2017. He cannot credibly deny that this attribution was *questionable*, if only because so many people no less intelligent or informed than himself formulated very clear *questions*. Instead of addressing these, however, he criticised sceptics for ‘denying a mountain of evidence’, appealing to Higgins as an authority in the matter.^[19] When Paul McKeigue offered a critical assessment of the available evidence, Monbiot dismissed it out of hand. His posture thus rests on his confidence in his own understanding of facts.^[20]

(2) Are Monbiot’s factual assumptions credible? Was it then about facts, rather than morality, that Monbiot would have me learn from Katerji? Monbiot did mention that listening to him would help me be less cut off from reality. Given that my purely vicarious experience of realities in Syria comes only from testimony of people from government-held areas, I was eager to learn what Katerji could relay from civilians in opposition-held areas. It turned out to be rather less than hoped, but I did track down some short video clips of a trip he made across the Turkish border to a refugee camp. He shows several seconds of a car journey in Idlib province where, he

tells us, 'life goes on normally', although he does not show us that happening or interview anybody. Back at the refugee camp, he interviews an Ahrar al-Sham fighter who tells us that *although they have lost the battle for Aleppo, they have not lost the war*. Katerji does not mention that his interlocutor is from a salafist faction close to Al Qaeda which, were it ever to have won the war, would *not* have ushered in the progressive new constitutional order that the peaceful Syrian activists had hoped for in 2011. Fighters like these had turned the schools in opposition areas into headquarters for operations that included shelling residents of government-held Western Aleppo and imprisoning, torturing and killing residents caught in the Eastern enclave with them. So when Katerji rightly mourns how the kids in refugee camps have no access to education and are a 'lost generation' his moral outrage could, I think, be misdirected. The reality of the refugee camps and of the suffering in them is undeniable. What Katerji makes of it, however, is quite another thing. He interviews some men and boys who say their greatest goal in life is to *remove Assad*. He wants us to think they 'speak for Syria'. But this is a misleading proposition on demographic, journalistic, political, moral, and ideological grounds. If there is a section of the population that would prefer an Islamist state in Syria over the current secular constitution, it is not a majority; and to suggest that 'getting rid of Assad' is a priority for the mass of people living in Syria now is to be in denial about how they have become obliged to look upon him as their protector, regardless of whether they had otherwise wanted him to remain president. To suggest to an audience in the West that what the Islamist fighters want is freedom or democracy or dignity, as it would understand these terms, would not be honest. Honesty would also commend being clear that the very fact of these interviews refutes the premise of Katerji's earlier attack on Corbyn: the civilians and even the armed opposition in East Aleppo were not 'wiped out' by government forces: they were escorted out in green buses (and even allowed to take their arms with them). There was no 'genocide'.

So I remain unclear what exactly Monbiot would have me learn from Katerji about either the moral or material dimensions of the reality in Syria. That would lead me to suggest, once again, that it is best for people to make their own arguments for themselves.

III

In this final part I shall attempt to analyse the arguments that Monbiot has himself set out in the course of his writings and comments.

Monbiot adopts a moral posture of opposition to military intervention in Syria. He does not, however, endorse arguments of principle against military intervention in general. In fact, [he rejects them](#), and he would not criticise an intervention provided it was appropriately triggered. It follows that *he is not opposed to military intervention in Syria as a matter of principle*. It is just that the conditions would have to be right.^[21] The conditions would be those set out according to principles of Just War Theory. Already in 2002, ahead of the Iraq invasion,^[22] Monbiot had explained his view that military intervention for the purpose of regime change is permissible if the [criteria of Just War](#) are met.

Monbiot has generally been doubtful whether all of those conditions are met in the case of Syria: avoidance of harm to civilians, for instance, or a sufficiently clear chance of success, could be hard to ensure; and he also thinks the question of legitimate authority for enforcing regime change requires some clarification in international law. But those are conditions that could potentially be met if would-be interveners had sufficient political will. For the likelihood of success can be improved through enhanced military commitment, avoidance of harm to civilians can be met by concentrating lethal force against combatants, and legal treaties can be amended.

There is a crucial condition, however, that does not depend on anything would-be interveners do, and it either holds *ex ante* or it just does not hold. This is the requirement of a *just cause*.

Because just cause is an essential requirement of a just war, any argument that appears to establish it has great significance. It is not like the other requirements that can potentially be met with a practical work around. A just

cause for military intervention is exactly what a great many of Monbiot's statements relating to Syria have tended in substance to assert. He has inveighed repeatedly and forcefully against Assad's 'murderous regime', deeming it impervious to political dissuasion from a strategy of violent oppression of the Syrian people.^[23] By comparison, his contingent opposition to intervention could appear little more than a moral scruple to be politely acknowledged. Certainly, Jonathan Cook thinks the net effect of Monbiot's half-hearted opposition to military intervention has served to minimise the public sense of any real objection to war.^[24]

So it becomes clear why people who oppose war have reason to feel dissatisfied with Monbiot's position, even though he can truthfully declare himself opposed to war, in the qualified terms he does.

It is time to analyse the grounds of that dissatisfaction and bring this discussion to some conclusions. In Part 1 we saw how Monbiot repeatedly asserts claims in relation to 'Assad's regime' that substantially affirm a just cause for military intervention; in Part 2 we saw that Monbiot is prepared to go to great lengths to defend that affirmation. Some people will be convinced by his arguments; others of us are not. There are two arguments I want to advance on behalf the sceptical position. The first is a strong one, I believe, whereas the second is unanswerable.

My first argument has to do with the burden of proof. Any appeal to just war principles proceeds in recognition that the burden of proof rests on the party that is contemplating recourse to war. For such a momentous course of action there must be great seriousness of deliberation. It should not be informed by simplistic, frivolous, partial or slippery arguments; it should certainly not be an occasion for jeering or sneering at people who differ in their views. This is why those of us who have recently been in disputes with Monbiot on Twitter have tried to urge him to come with us to a more appropriate forum for a more suitable sort of debate. The fact that he has declined our invitation does not necessarily imply that he thinks a serious debate would not go well for him, but it very directly serves to show that we are right to say there are unanswered questions. For we are putting questions and he is offering no answer to them. Monbiot is not obliged to respond, but he cannot claim that certain putative facts are established beyond dispute simply by denying the dispute. That is just not how disputes are settled!

So my first argument is that the burden of proof rests with him and, since he has not discharged it, he cannot claim to be right in the view he holds. But to show he cannot claim it has been proven is not to show that it cannot be proved. This is where the second argument comes in.

My second argument does not rest on showing Monbiot has failed to rebut some reasonable objections. The argument is that a Just Cause for foreign military intervention in Syria has not been proven for the reason that it *cannot* be proven. It cannot be proven because *the principle of just cause cannot be applied to the situation in Syria*.

The criteria of a just war apply in a situation where a people can legitimately take up arms against the forces of an aggressor. In the context of intervention, the taking up of arms is vicarious, but it is still done for the protection, and on behalf, of the people under threat. The point, then, is that before we can apply just war criteria, we have to have a situation that they *can* apply to: there has to be a threatened people and a threatening force.

In the case of Syria, a very elementary question concerns the identities of the two parties. Monbiot invariably insists that Bashar Al Assad is the aggressor, and on this basis Monbiot supposes that, if and when the Just War conditions are met, intervening against Assad is permissible. Yet an elementary fact is that Assad is not and could not conceivably be an aggressor single-handedly. Assad and his government have *an army*; that army is *drawn from the Syrian people*; and that body of Syrian men and women has *remained loyal for seven hard years of fighting*. So the very first question any would-be interventionist must ask is this: **under what conceivable conditions could that body of loyal Syrian men and women be regarded as an aggressor against the Syrian people?**

The only thought that prevents the question being a purely rhetorical one is that there are armed sectarians who would answer it by asserting a right to speak for the Syrian people even without their assent – as we saw Katerji's Ahrar al-Sham fighter does. I assume Monbiot would not endorse this answer.

I don't know what Monbiot thinks about the Syrian army. I am not aware of his ever having explained where the Syrian army stands in his framing of the situation in Syria. I have not been able to track down any mention by him of it.

My argument is that *sufficient* reason for opposing military intervention against "Assad" is that he is literally not an aggressor against the Syrian people, and nor could his government or 'regime' be. ***For the possibility of even arguing there is a just cause of intervention in Syria, it would have to be claimed that the Syrian Arab Army is an aggressor against the Syrian people.***

I cannot conceive how anyone could decently make such a claim.

The Syrian government and the people living under that government in Syria take the view that foreign military intervention in the Syrian Arab Republic would be illegitimate under any circumstances whatsoever. Syria has the rule of law under a constitution, and, imperfect as it may be, its imperfections are for Syrians to deal with. Both international law and human morality are on their side.

To suggest there is any justification for foreign powers to intervene for the purpose of 'regime change' in Syria is to mislead the public. Because I believe Monbiot has suggested just that, I have felt an obligation to engage in this extended critical analysis of his contribution to public opinion formation about Syria.

Notes

[1] In his 2002 article, '[Chemical Coup d'Etat](#)', Monbiot lauds the impressive achievements of OPCW under Jose Bustani and laments that the US state department worked hard to have him removed. "What the Americans are doing," Bustani says, "is a coup d'etat. They are using brute force to amend the convention and unseat the director-general." As the chemical weapons convention has no provisions permitting these measures, the US is simply ripping up the rules. If it wins, then the OPCW, like Unscow, will be fatally compromised. Success for the United States on Sunday would threaten the independence of every multilateral body.' Shortly afterwards he also noted, in '[Diplomacy US Style](#)', that "The US justification for war with Iraq is that Saddam Hussein may possess weapons of mass destruction. So the two foremost obstacles to war were Mr Blix and Mr Bustani' If OPCW does not do what State Dept wants, it will get rid of 'wrong' people at the top. Next day a Guardian Leader adds "The US denies a conspiracy to unseat Mr Bustani. But some OPCW members, such as close ally Mexico, say it ignored the organisation's rules. One account reports a senior US envoy telling American OPCW staff that the US will "screw" the organisation if it does not get its way. It is widely believed that the US warned other countries, including Britain, that failure to support Mr Bustani's sacking could destroy the Chemical Weapons Convention.' ('[Toxic Diplomacy](#)')

[2] In 2004 Monbiot was arguing for Ralph Nader's presidential candidacy over John Kerry: 'Only when the Americans choose a man or woman who is prepared to turn the system upside down and reintroduce democracy to the greatest democracy on earth will these exceptional circumstances come to an end. In choosing the bad rather than the terrible in 2004, in other words, Americans will be voting for a similar choice in 2008. Whereupon they will again be told that they'd better vote for the bad, in case the terrible gets in. Any president who seeks to change this system requires tremendous political courage. He needs to take on the corporations which have bought the elections, and challenge the newspapers and television stations which set the limits of political debate. Kerry, who demonstrated plenty of courage in Vietnam, has shown none whatsoever on the presidential stump.' ('[The Bad or the Terrible?](#)') (His opinion was hardly altered in the later Obama presidency. Later, even when

attacking Assad, Monbiot could still be critical of '[Obama's Rogue State](#)' and, in relation to Somalia, of '[The careless, astonishing cruelty of Barack Obama's government](#)'.) In [an article from 2006](#), meanwhile, it is also interesting to note that Monbiot criticises Israel from a perspective that takes account of the perspectives of Hizbollah and Syria.

[3] Other of the paper's journalists who had also written factual reports about the fictitious woman included Esther Addley, Nesrine Malik, and even one said to have been based in Damascus, whose byline, Nidaa Hassan, appears on 31 Guardian articles between 12 May and 10 July 2011. [Esther Addley](#) and [Nidaa Hassan](#) Tue 7 Jun 2011 '[Gay Girl in Damascus blogger joins ranks of Syria's detained](#)' reported the story that 'Amina Abdallah Araf al Omari is the among the best known of many thousands of Syrians detained since mid-March'.

As late as 8 June, when others are now doubting the blogger's existence, [Nesrine Malik](#) writes about the influence of Amina as if she were a real person and one to be counted among '[The 'fallen' heroines of the Arab spring](#)'. Even later, on 9 June, [Esther Addley](#) is pondering the question '[A gay girl in Damascus – or a cynical hoax?](#)' and offers the surprising thought 'concrete evidence that it is all a fiction remains absent'. (Yet the day before she herself had stated that nobody knew Amina and that the IP address was in Scotland.)

[4] The best discussion of the case that I am aware of is provided by Sophia <https://lespolitiques.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/>.

[5] In fact, whether anything 'Katherine Marsh' wrote was reliable, and even whether the unidentified journalist was ever really in Syria, we may never know for sure.

[6] Steele quotes a piece by Philip Giraldi from 19 December 2011 '[NATO vs. Syria](#)' in which he says: 'NATO is already clandestinely engaged in the Syrian conflict, with Turkey taking the lead as U.S. proxy.' However, 'CIA analysts are skeptical regarding the march to war. The frequently cited United Nations report that more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by Assad's soldiers is based largely on rebel sources and is uncorroborated. The Agency has refused to sign off on the claims. Likewise, accounts of mass defections from the Syrian Army and pitched battles between deserters and loyal soldiers appear to be a fabrication, with few defections being confirmed independently. Syrian government claims that it is being assaulted by rebels who are armed, trained, and financed by foreign governments are more true than false. ... The best organized and funded opposition political movement in Syria is the Muslim Brotherhood.'

[7] I stand to be corrected on this, hence it is phrased as a question, but I my own search turned up nothing. Given the experience, first hand knowledge, and evident integrity of this senior correspondent on his own newspaper, I find it remarkable that Steele's reports appear to have been disregarded by Monbiot.

[8] At the time, genuinely independent observers knew there were questions to be asked about the opposition activists and their reports, and with hindsight we also have very unsettling answers to those questions (for a comprehensive digest of information and discussion see the relevant sections of the website [A Closer Look On Syria](#)).

[9] Questions about how Chulov assures impartiality in his reporting have been examined recently by Vanessa Beeley in '[The Guardian Journalist who takes 'Afternoon Tea' with ISIS and Survives](#)'.

[10] That said, a lawsuit for wrongful death was filed in 2016, as reported in [The Washington Post](#). Recently, [The Guardian has reported](#) (9 April 2018) that in a civil action, ongoing in the United States, 'testimony has been given by a Syrian intelligence defector, codenamed Ulysses.' For a strongly critical perspective on the case, it is interesting to note [these observations of Declan Hayes](#).

[11] Read's article offers an example of smear by chain of association: 'I drew attention in my previous article to their positive citation in relation to what is happening in Syria of Chossudovsky: a 9/11 conspiracy theorist who also believes that 7/7 was an "inside job" by MI6, and whose fantasies about a global Muslim threat (of which, naturally, the heroic Slobodan Milosevic was a noble opponent, hence his murder by the New World Order) vastly outstrip the jeremiads of Mark Steyn & Melanie Phillips...'

As for MediaLens, I have to say that in the course of research for this article I have discovered far more than I had previously known about the depth and seriousness of their work, including their engagement with Monbiot on a number of occasions over the years. They are doing a remarkable job in trying to maintain the highest standards of journalistic inquiry. It is perhaps telling that the same people who are tempted to smear them are also prepared to smear the likes of Noam Chomsky and John Pilger.

[12] For some examples of critical discussions see:

https://www.democracynow.org/2014/6/11/debate_is_human_rights_watch_too ;

<https://www.antiwar.com/rep/treanor1.html> ; <https://www.mintpressnews.com/human-rights-watch-rated-among-least-transparent-think-tanks-us/218205/> ; <https://www.telesurvtv.net/english/opinion/Human-Rights-Watch-The-Empires-Human-Rights-Group-20160210-0010.html> ;

<http://www.wrongkindofgreen.org/category/non-profit-industrial-complex-organizations/organizations/human-rights-watch/> ; <https://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-human-rights-watch-key-player-in-the-manufacture-of-propaganda-for-war-and-foreign-intervention/5366987> .

[13] Interestingly, the one piece he tweeted a recommendation to during the next two years was an critical article by Seamus Milne (3 June 2015):

[Now the truth emerges: how the US fuelled the rise of Isis in Syria and Iraq](#)

This may well be the only critical perspective on the war in Syria that he has cited, and may be the only time he has referred to Milne. I would note, incidentally, that Oz Katerji, an associate of Monbiot's that I shall be introducing later, has latterly been a relentlessly aggressive critic of Milne for his stance in relation to Syria.

[14] I came to be writing about Syria in the first place myself as a result of misgivings initially stirred by the Netflix film's utter silence about the activities – or even existence – of militants in the streets plied by the rescuers. When the elephant in the room is so well armed as to keep a national army at bay I didn't see how anyone could pretend it wasn't there.

[15] Its aim is to coordinate 'rigorous academic analysis of media reporting of this war, the role that propaganda has played in terms of shaping perceptions of the conflict and how these relate to broader geo-strategic process within the ME region and beyond.' We want 'to encourage networking amongst academics to provide a source of reliable, informed and timely analysis for journalists, publics and policymakers.'

[16] I probably don't need to explain to readers that, in the media bubble of the Monbiots and the Whitakers, to be 'Russia-friendly' is a Bad Thing. Speaking for myself, and I do so from the location that hosted the [Edinburgh Conversations in the 1980s](#) – and, in fact, I do so as a former departmental colleague of their initiator, the late Professor John Erickson – I see friendly and grown-up relations between opposing parties as a highly constructive and humanly necessary thing. Very much to be regretted, in my opinion, is the readiness of our so-called thought leaders today to indulge the neo-McCarthyite knee jerking towards escalated belligerence.

[17] He makes the claim that you cannot compare Russia with US in Syria, surprisingly, not because of how US just destroyed e.g. Raqqa, but because he says Russia is deliberately targeting schools. We have in fact seen that schools in Aleppo were commandeered as HQs by terrorists: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

[v=G7omLaKwRT4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7omLaKwRT4); as were hospitals <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWxQHPwoNMk&t=166s> , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEXQ1wLJ4Dc>); while children were kept from receiving education: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7P8HqpDykw>. Katerji says the idea that Russia is defending Syria is ‘bonkers’. He talks as if what he advocates is in the interests of the ‘freedom of the Syrian people’. He does not produce evidence for these strident assertions.

[18] This, in fact, is something [Cook noticed](#) before I did: ‘Monbiot has repeatedly denied that he wants a military attack on Syria. But if he then weakly accepts whatever narratives are crafted by those who do – and refuses to subject them to any meaningful scrutiny – he is decisively helping to promote such an attack.’ Not only that, those who do insist on closer scrutiny are attributed [nefarious motives](#). This, Cook concludes, ‘is the behaviour of a propagandist, not a free thinker.’ I only discovered this particular piece by Cook when the present article was nearly completed, and so it is interesting to note the similarity of the assessments independently arrived at by an experienced journalist and a curious academic: ‘he has posed not as a cheerleader for intervention but as a weary onlooker, reluctantly conceding that whatever US, British and other western intelligence agencies say – and the largely uncritical reports of these statements by liberal media like his own newspaper the Guardian – should be given the benefit of the doubt. The fact that these official assurances have so often turned to mush on closer inspection, whether in Iraq, Libya or now Syria, never strengthens his resolve to maintain more critical distance next time. Nor does it seem to raise any concern that, by failing to adopt a posture of rigorous scepticism, he is inadvertently conspiring in the promotion by the west and its allies, like Saudi Arabia, of their right to meddle in and attack official “enemy” states.’

[19] For example, in this tweet: <https://twitter.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/882309513172406272>

[20] The justification Monbiot has offered for criticising people like myself is that we ‘do not seem to realise what a mountain of evidence we are denying’. However, as my colleague Paul McKeigue has shown, there is not merely reasonable doubt in the matter but the balance of probabilities can be seen to be very greatly against Monbiot’s conclusion when the facts are looked at dispassionately.

[21] He confirms this in a tweet of 11 Oct 2015 where he says: ‘If I could be persuaded that UK military action in [#Syria](#) would improve people’s plight, not exacerbate it, I’d support it. But hard to see.’

[22] This is recorded in an exchange with MediaLens from the time: <http://www.medialens.org/index.php/alerts/alert-archive/2002/226-update-george-monbiot-responds-on-iraq-and-just-war.html> .

[23] Given that Monbiot’s thinking on these matters diverges from that of MediaLens in ways that tend to leave him siding with Rupert Read against them, it is instructive to read this 2011 piece by Read taking MediaLens to task for failing to see the clear just cause for invading both Libya and Syria: <http://rupertread.uk/medialens-under-lens-over-syria-and/> . Read here exemplifies the confident view of the interventionist Western ‘progressives’ of his time that Monbiot helped fuel. The accusations against MediaLens of ‘dogmatism’ look bitterly ironic in hindsight.

[24] [Cook](#) writes: “Monbiot has repeatedly denied that he wants a military attack on Syria. But if he then weakly accepts whatever narratives are crafted by those who do – and refuses to subject them to any meaningful scrutiny – he is decisively helping to promote such an attack.’



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16 Responses to *How We Were Misled About Syria: George Monbiot of The Guardian*

Pingback: [Monbiot On Syria \(the shorter read\)](#), [Tim Hayward](#)

 [dblackal](#) says:
April 11, 2018 at 11:36 am

How can Monbiot substantiate such a silly position: “Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power”?

How, oh how, could you write such stupidity? Fukushima told the world of the dangers of nukes. An earthquake and tsunami cut the grid, backup emergency power failed, wrecking the cooling systems, which resulted in the meltdown of three reactors. Monbiot writes in 2011: “Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power”. Fukushima’s decommissioning and clean-up will take 40 years, a decade more than the half-life of its deadliest contaminant, Caesium 137. While Westinghouse and General Electric corporations develop safer reactors with emergency cooling systems that rely on gravity to pour coolant over hot spots, rather than relying on electricity driving cooling pumps; the technology is far from safe. Once it comes unstuck, the results are catastrophic, as Fukushima and Chernobyl demonstrate. Jonathan Cook on January 12, 2018, writes: ‘Monbiot is not only a hypocrite but a bully too’. Turning a blind eye to Monbiot’s behaviour has only encouraged him to intensify his attacks on dissident writers, those who – whether right or wrong on any specific issue – are slowly helping us all to develop more critical perspectives on western foreign policy goals, and stupid environmental policy, that amount to neo-colonialism. A report by Whitney Herndon and John Larsen of the Rhodium Group says that 24 gigawatts of old nuclear power plants are likely to be retired between now and 2030: “we expect power sector emissions to decline by 38 million tons relative to 2015 levels by 2020 but then start to rise”. Some of these plants are like Fukushima’s, on the Californian coast, in an earthquake zone, and so how can Monbiot substantiate such a silly position: “Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power”?

George Monbiot. Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/21/pro-nuclear-japan-fukushima>

Reply.

**ingridsykes** says:

April 11, 2018 at 9:28 pm

Thank you for a solid, eloquent and somehow gracious article. Restoring my faith in journalism. Outstanding.

[Reply](#)**Irri** says:

April 12, 2018 at 12:41 am

I couldn't stop reading this. Thorough, evidence-based writing. I'm glad this has been documented now, history won't be kind to Monbiot and Katerji. Their attempts to shut down discussion and the arrogance of their simplified perspectives has only heaped further pain on the Syrian people.

[Reply](#)**mog** says:

April 12, 2018 at 9:47 am

Tim, that is a great, coherent and thorough piece of writing.

Monbiot is something of an enigma to me.

I am another one who would say that he was – at a certain formative moment in my young adulthood, probably the most influential mainstream writer that I read. It has been distressing to see his writing diverge so far from my viewpoint. Monbiot's opinions are no small matter I would say. He was cited, maybe ten or so years ago, as 'the most read online journalist in the world' at the time. He was, and still is to an extent, a mainstream figurehead for critical views that encompass the scope of our civilisational catastrophe, and I am sure that he has taken along no small number of 'followers' on his Syrian dark vision quest.

It's probably worth re-stating some well covered context to all this. Obviously, The Guardian's change into a primary, if not the primary pro-war media outlet. Much political dissent has changed radically the past fifteen years, partly being criminalised and partly professionalised into a pseudo world of infiltrated, elitist NGOs and identitarian diversions. Monbiot is not alone in holding some strange positions on Syria (witness Paul Mason and Richard Seymour). Nor are Monbiot's more bizarre antics restricted to this issue, as covered well by Jonathan Cook and Medialens.

For me, Monbiot first showed his 'other side' back in Spring 2007 with his attack on any and all critics of the Keane&Hamilton/Zelikow inquiry. Strangely, he wrote an article in 2014 linking to evidence of Saudi complicity in 9/11, but since then has continued to attack anyone who takes a sceptical position- as if the '28 pages' had not changed the narrative at all (!). This is not joined up thinking. The slurs, the venom, the appeal to ignorance, the projections, the citing of discredited sources and the stonewalling, which are all equally present in his position on Syria, betray a tragically deep intellectual bankruptcy. It is no wonder the Left is in a mess about Syria when it cannot understand (cannot discuss even) the founding event of this century, and so cannot grasp the real relationship between Western powers and faux-Islamic proxies.

What do we make of it all?

Is George's allegiance to what has become a Neocon propaganda outlet (The Guardian) stronger than his adherence to principles of journalistic integrity, reason, peace? Does he have other undisclosed, over-riding allegiances? Is he simply caught in a reality tunnel, but so personally flawed that he cannot admit error or bias?

Maybe he is compromised in ways that we are not aware of? Perhaps bullied, and thereby has taken on the role of bully? An enigma to me, and one with consequences that seem more and more significant as these terrifying days go by.

[Reply](#)**ragheadthefriendlyterrorist** says:

April 13, 2018 at 5:20 am

Actually, such people as Monbiot or Richard Dawkins are wonderful recruits for the liberal imperialist cause. They already have huge followings who are easily led into blindly supporting anything they say.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [How We Were Misled About Syria: George Monbiot of The Guardian | homosociologicusblog](https://timhayward.wordpress.com/2018/04/11/how-we-were-misled-about-syria-george-monbiot-of-the-guardian/).

**Lars Jorgensen** says:

April 12, 2018 at 2:12 pm

BRILLIANT WORK!! Tim – I have put it on my page ON WESTERN BACKING TERRORISTS

<http://homosociologicus.com/western-nations-back-terrorists>

[Reply](#)



timhayward says:

April 12, 2018 at 2:53 pm

Thanks, Lars.

[Reply](#)



Martyn Healer says:

April 12, 2018 at 2:54 pm

EXCELLENT ,,,,I CAN FIND NOTHING I DISAGREE WITH. THANK YOU FOR OLD FASHIONED DECENT JOURNALISM

.

[Reply](#)



Allan Saunders says:

April 12, 2018 at 3:38 pm

Quite a journey from the time when he tried to arrest John Bolton as one of the architects of the Iraq war. Does he now see himself as another George Orwell, once espousing radical causes, but now alerting the world to those perfidious lefties?

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [How We Were Misled about Syria: George Monbiot of The Guardian | OffGuardian](http://homosociologicus.com/western-nations-back-terrorists)



ragheadthefriendlyterrorist says:

April 13, 2018 at 4:58 am

There's a very simple answer to your questions, Dr Hayward:

In 2011, George Monbiot's pay cheque suddenly became dependent on his supporting the imperialist regime change agenda in Syria. Keep that in mind and all your questions are answered very easily and simply.

[Reply](#)



wildtalents says:

April 13, 2018 at 10:38 am

Fantastic article which really unpicks the hypocrisy at the heart of this scribes articles and belligerent tweets. Mog has captured precisely the response I had, so this is mainly a "me too" comment. The repost at OffGuardian appears to have broken, which is hopefully only a glitch rather than something sinister.

Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [How We Were Misled about Syria: George Monbiot of The Guardian | OffGuardian](http://homosociologicus.com/western-nations-back-terrorists)



Alan Edwards says:

April 14, 2018 at 10:52 am

Thank you.

[Reply](#)