



And must have whiskey
Oh, you know why

« Syria Sitrep - Cleanup Around Damascus - WMD Rumors Prepare For New U.S. Attack | Main | The MoA Week In Review And Open Thread 2018-19 »

April 21, 2018

The Media War On Truthful Reporting And Legitimate Opinions - A Documentary

Early in life I have noticed that no event is ever correctly reported in a newspaper, but in Spain, for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie. I saw great battles reported where there had been no fighting, and complete silence where hundreds of men had been killed. I saw troops who had fought bravely denounced as cowards and traitors, and others who had never seen a shot fired hailed as the heroes of imaginary victories; and I saw newspapers in London retailing these lies and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures over events that had never happened. I saw, in fact, history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various 'party lines'.

George Orwell, [Looking back on the Spanish War](#), Chapter 4

Last week saw an extreme intensifying of the warmongers' campaign against individuals who publicly hold and defend a different view than the powers-that-be want to promote. The campaign has a longer history but recently turned personal. It now endangers the life and livelihood of real people.

In fall 2016 a [smear campaign was launched](#) against 200 websites which did not confirm to NATO propaganda. Prominent sites like [Naked Capitalism](#) were among them as well as this site:

This website, [MoonofAlabama.org](#), is now [listed](#) as "Russian propaganda outlet" by some neoconned, NATO aligned, anonymous "[Friendly Neighborhood Propaganda Identification Service](#)" [prominently promoted by today's Washington Post](#). The minions running that censorship list also [watch over](#) our "Russian propaganda" Twitter account [@MoonofA](#).



While the *ProPornOT* campaign was against websites the next and larger attack was a general defaming of specific content.

The [neoconservative Alliance For Securing Democracy](#) declared that any doubt of the veracity of U.S. propaganda stories discussed on Twitter was part of a "Russian influence campaign". Their '[dashboard](#)' shows the most prominent hashtags and themes tweeted and retweeted by some 600 hand-selected but undisclosed accounts. (I have reason to believe that @MoonofA is among them.) The dashboard gave rise to an [endless line of main-stream stories](#) faking concern over alleged "Russian influence". The *New York Times* published several such stories including [this recent one](#):

POLITICS | Trump Scraps New Sanctions Against Russia, Overruling Advisers

A snapshot on Friday night recorded a 2,000 percent increase in Russian troll activity overall, according to Tyler Q. Houlton, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security. One known Russian bot, #SyriaStrikes, had a 4,443 percent increase in activity while another, #Damsucs, saw a 2,800 percent jump, Mr. Houlton said.

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Russia did not respond militarily to the Friday strike, but American officials noted a sharp spike in Russian online activity around the time it was launched.

A snapshot on Friday night recorded a 2,000 percent increase in Russian troll activity overall, according to Tyler Q. Houlton, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security. **One known Russian bot, #SyriaStrikes, had a 4,443 percent increase in activity while another, #Damsucs, saw a 2,800 percent jump, Mr. Houlton said.**

A person on Twitter, or a bot, is tagged by a chosen name led with an @-sign. Anything led with a #-sign is a 'hashtag', a categorizing attribute of a place, text or tweet. Hashtags have nothing to do with any "troll activity". The use of the attribute or hashtag #syriastrike increased dramatically when a U.S. strike on Syria happened. Duh. A lot of people remarked on the strikes and used the hashtag #syriastrike to categorize their remarks. It made it easier for others to find information about the incident.

The hashtag #Damsucs does not exist. How could it have a 2,800% increase? It is obviously a mistyping of #Damascus or someone may have used as a joke. In June 2013 an *Associated Press* story famously [carried](#) the dateline "Damsucs". The city was then under artillery attack from various Takfiri groups. The author likely felt that the situation sucked.

DAMSUCS , Syria (AP) — The leader of Syria's main opposition group vows the rebels will continue to battle President Bashar Assad's troops after the fall of the strategic town near the border with Lebanon.

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The spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security Tyler Q. Holton, to which the *Times* attributes the "bot" nonsense, has a Twitter account [under his name](#) and also tweets as @SpoxDHS. Peter Baker, the NYT author, has some 150,000 followers on Twitter and [tweets](#) several times per day. Holton and Tyler surely know what @accounts and #hashtags are.

educated non-U.S. citizen the first association with the term 'polygraph' is the term 'fake'.)

On April 4 the *Polygraph* wrote a smear piece about the Twitter account Ian56 (@Ian56789). Its headline: [Disinfo News: Doing the Kremlin's Work: A Fake Twitter Troll Pushes Many Opinions](#):

Ben Nimmo, the Senior Fellow for Information Defense at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, studies the exploits of "Ian56" and similar accounts on Twitter. His [recent article](#) in the online publication Medium profiles such fake pro-Kremlin accounts and demonstrates how they operate.

...

Nimmo, and several other dimwits quoted in the piece, came to the conclusion that Ian56 is a Kremlin paid troll, not a real person. Next to Ian56 Nimmo 'identified' other 'Russian troll' accounts:

Ben Nimmo @benimmo - [10:50 UTC - 24 Mar 2018](#)

One particularly influential retweeter (judging by the number of accounts which then retweeted it) was @ValLisitsa, which posts in English and Russian. Last year, this account joined the troll-factory #StopMorganLie campaign.

Nimmo's employer, the Atlantic Council, is a lobby of [companies who profit from war](#).

Had Nimmo, a former NATO spokesperson, had some decent education he would have know that [Valentina Lisitsa](#) is a famous American-Ukrainian pianist. Yes, she sometimes tweets in Russian language to her many fans in Russia and the Ukraine. Is that now a crime? The [videos](#) of her performances on Youtube have more than 170 million views. It is absurd to claim that she is a 'Russian troll' and to insinuate that she is taking Kremlin money to push 'Russian troll' opinions.

Earlier this month *Newsweek* also [targeted](#) the journalists Beeley and Bartlett and smeared a group of people who had traveled to Syria as 'Assad's pawns'.

On April 14 Murdoch's *London Times* took personal aim at the members of a group of British academics who assembled to scientifically investigate dubious claims against Syria. Their first investigation report though, [was about](#) the Skripal incident in Salisbury. The *London Times* also targeted Bartlett and Beeley. The piece was [leading on page one](#) with the headline: "Apologists for Assad working in universities". A page two splash and an editorial complemented the full fledged attack on the livelihood of the scientists.



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Tim Hayward, who initiated the academic group, published a (too) mild response.

On April 18 the *NPR* station *Wabnews* smeared the black activists Anoa Changa and Eugene Puryear for appearing on a Russian TV station. It was the begin of an ongoing, well concerted campaign launched with at least seven prominent smear pieces issued on a single day against the opposition to a wider war on Syria.

On April 19 the *BBC* took aim at Sarah Abdallah, a Twitter account with over 130,000 followers that takes a generally pro Syrian government stand. The piece also attacked Vanessa Beeley and defended the 'White Helmets':

In addition to pictures of herself, Sarah Abdallah tweets constant pro-Russia and pro-Assad messages, with a dollop of retweeting mostly aimed at attacking Barack Obama, other US Democrats and Saudi Arabia.

...
The Sarah Abdallah account is, according to a recent study by the online research firm Graphika, one of the most influential social media accounts in the online conversation about Syria, and specifically in pushing misinformation about a 2017 chemical weapons attack and the Syria Civil Defence, whose rescue workers are widely known as the "White Helmets".

...
Graphika was commissioned to prepare a report on online chatter by The Syria Campaign, a UK-based advocacy group organisation which campaigns for a democratic future for Syria and supports the White Helmets.

The Syria Campaign Ltd. is a for profit 'regime change' lobby which, like the White Helmets it promotes, is sponsored with millions of British and U.S. taxpayer money.

Brian Whitaker, a former Middle East editor for the *Guardian*, [alleged](#) that Sarah Abdullah has a 'Hizbullah connection'. He assumes that from two terms she used which point to a southern Lebanese heritage. But south Lebanon is by far not solely Hizbullah and Sarah Abdallah certainly [does not dress herself](#) like a pious Shia. She is more likely a Maronite or secular whatever. Exposing here as 'Hizbullah' can easily endanger her life. Replying to Whitaker the British politician George Galloway asked:

George Galloway @georgegalloway - [14:50 UTC](#) - Replying to @Brian_Whit

Will you be content when she's dead Brian?

...

Will you be content Brian when ISIS cut off her head and eat her heart?
You are beneath contempt. Even for a former Guardian man

Whitaker's smear piece was not even researched by himself. He plagiarized it, without naming his source, [from](#) Joumana Gebara, [a CentCom approved](#) Social Media Advisor to parts of the Syrian 'opposition'. Whitaker is prone to fall for scams like the 'White Helmets'. Back in mid 2011 he [promoted](#) the "Gay Girl in Damascus", a scam by a 40 year old U.S. man [with dubious financial sources](#) who pretended to be a progressive Syrian woman.

Also on April 19 the *Guardian* [stenographed](#) a British government smear against two other prominent Twitter accounts:

Russia used trolls and bots to unleash disinformation on to social media in the wake of the Salisbury poisoning, according to fresh Whitehall analysis. Government sources said experts had uncovered an increase of up to 4,000% in the spread of propaganda from Russia-based accounts since the attack, – many of which were identifiable as automated bots.

Notice that this idiotic % increase claim, without giving a base number, is similar to the one made in the *New York Times* piece quoted above. It is likely also based on the lunatic 'dashboard'.

[C]ivil servants identified a sharp increase in the flow of fake news after the Salisbury poisoning, which continued in the runup to the airstrikes on Syria.

One bot, @Ian56789, was sending 100 posts a day during a 12-day period from 7 April, and reached 23 million users, before the account was suspended. It focused on claims that the chemical weapons attack on Douma had been falsified, using the hashtag #falseflag. Another, @Partisangirl, reached 61 million users with 2,300 posts over the same 12-day period.

The prime minister discussed the matter at a security briefing with fellow Commonwealth leaders Malcolm Turnbull, Jacinda Ardern and Justin Trudeau earlier this week. They were briefed by experts from GCHQ and the National Cyber Security Centre about the security situation in the aftermath of the Syrian airstrikes.

The political editor of the *Guardian*, Heather Stewart, admitted that her 'reporting' was a mere copy of government claims:

Heather Stewart @GuardianHeather - [10:38 UTC - 20 Apr 2018](#)

It's not my analysis - as the piece makes quite clear - it's the government's.

The government claim was also picked up by other British outlets like [Sky News](#) (vid).



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A day earlier Ian56/@Ian56789 account with 35,000 followers had suddenly been blocked by Twitter. Ben Nimmo was [extremely happy](#) about this success. But after many users protested to the Twitter censors the account was revived.

Neither Ian, nor Partisangirl, are 'bots' or have anything to do with Russia. Partisangirl, aka Syria Girl, is the twitter moniker of Maram Susli, a Syrian-Australian scientist specialized in quantum chemistry. The first time she was [interviewed on Australian TV](#) (vid) is four years ago. She has published videos of herself talking about Syria [on Youtube](#) and [on Twitter](#) and held presentations on Syria at several international conferences. Her account is marked as 'verified' by Twitter. Any cursory search would have shown that she is a real person.

The claim of bots and the numbers of their tweets the government gave to the *Guardian* and *Sky News* are evidently [false](#). With just a few clicks the *Guardian* and *Sky News* 'journalists' could have debunked the British government claims. But these stenographers do not even try and just run with whatever nonsense the government claims. *Sky News* even manipulated the picture of Partisangirl's Twitter homepage in the video and screenshot above. The original shows Maram Susli speaking about Syrian refugees at a conference in Germany. The picture provides that she is evidently a living person and not a 'bot'. But *Sky News* did not dare to show that. It would have debunked the government's claim.



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After some negative feed back on social media *Sky News* contacted the 'Russian bot' Ian and invited him to a [live interview](#) (vid). Ian Shilling, a wakeful British pensioner, managed to deliver a few zingers against the government and *Sky News*. He also [published](#) a written response:

I have been campaigning against the Neocons and the Neocon Wars since January 2002, when I first realised Dick Cheney and the PNAC crowd were going to use 9/11 as the pretext to launch a disastrous invasion of Iraq. **This has nothing to do with Russia. It has EVERYTHING to do with the massive lies constantly told by the UK & US governments about their illegal Wars of Aggression.**

...

Brian Whitaker could not hold back. Within the 156,000 tweets Ian wrote over seven years Whitaker [found](#) one(!) with a murky theory (not a denial) about the Holocaust. He alleged that Ian believes in 'conspiracy theories'. Whitaker then linked to and discussed one [Conspirador Norteño](#) who peddles 'Russian bots' conspiracy theories. Presumably Whitaker did not get the consp-irony of doing such.

On the same day as the other reports the British version of the *Huffington Post* [joined](#) the *Times* in its earlier smear against British academics, accusing Professor Hayward and Professor Piers Robinson of "whitewashing war crimes". They have done no such thing. Vanessa Beeley was additionally attacked.

Also on the 19th the *London Times* aimed at another target. [Citizen Halo](#), a well known Finnish grandma, [was declared](#) to be a 'Russian troll' based on Ben Nimmo's pseudo-scientific trash, for not believing in the Skripal tale and the faked 'chemical attack' in Syria. The *Times* doubted her nationality and existence by using quotes around its of her as a "Finnish activist".

Meanwhile the defense editor of the *Times*, Deborah Haynes, is [stalking](#) Valentina Lisitsa on Twitter. A fresh smear-piece against the pianist is surely in the works.

The obviously organized campaign against critical thinking in Britain extended beyond the Atlantic. While the *BBC*, *Guardian*, *HuffPo*, *Times* and *Sky News* published smear pieces depicting dissenting people as 'Russian bots', the *Intercept* pushed a piece by Mehdi Hasan bashing an amorphous 'left' for rejecting a U.S. war on Syria: [Dear Bashar al-Assad Apologists: Your Hero Is a War Criminal Even If He Didn't Gas Syrians](#).

Mehdi Hasan is of course eminently qualified to write such a piece. Until recently he worked for *Al Jazeera*, the media outlet of the Wahhabi dictatorship of Qatari which supports the Qatari sponsored al-Qaeda in its war against Syria. The Mehdi Hasan's piece repeats every false and debunked claim that has been raised against the Syrian government as evidence for the Syrian president's viciousness. Naturally many of the links he provides point back to *Al Jazeera*'s propaganda. A few years ago Mehdi Hasan tried to get a job with the conservative British tabloid *Daily Mail*. The Mail did not want him. During a later TV discussion Hasan slammed the *Daily Mail* for its reporting and conservative editorial position. The paper responded by [publishing](#) his old job application. In it Mehdi Hasan emphasized his own conservative believes:

I am also attracted by the Mail's social conservatism on issues like marriage, the family, abortion and teenage pregnancies.

A conservative war-on-Syria promoter is bashing an anonymous 'left' which he falsely accuses of supporting Assad when it takes a stand against imperial wars. Is that a 'progressive' Muslim Brotherhood position? (Added: Stephen Gowans and Kurt Nimmo [respond to](#) Hasan's screed.)

On the same day Sonali Kolhatkar at *Truthdig*, as pseudo-progressive as the *Intercept*, published a quite similar piece: [Why Are Some on the Left](#)

[Falling for Fake News on Syria?](#). She bashes the 'left' - without citing any example - for not falling for the recent scam of the 'chemical attack' in Douma and for distrusting the U.S./UK government paid White Helmets. The comments against the piece are lively.

Those working in the media are up in arms over alleged fake news and they lament the loss of paying readership. But they have only themselves to blame. They are the biggest creators of fake news and provider of government falsehood. Their attacks on critical readers and commentators are despicable.

Until two years ago Hala Jaber was foreign correspondent in the Middle East for the *Sunday Times*. After fourteen years with the paper and winning six awards for her work she was 'made redundant' for her objective reporting on Syria. She remarks on the recent media push against truth about Syria and the very personal attacks against non-conformist opinions:

Hala Jaber @HalaJaber - [18:36 UTC - 19 Apr 2018](#)

In my entire career, spanning more than three decades of professional journalism, I have never seen MSM resolve to such ugly smear campaigns & hit pieces against those questioning mainstream narratives, with a different view point, as I have seen on Syria, recently.

.2/ This is a dangerous manoeuvre, a witch hunt in fact, aimed not only at character assassination, but at **attempting to silence those who think differently** or even sway from mainstream & state narrative.

.3/ It would have been more productive, to actually question the reason why more & more people are indeed turning to alternative voices for information & news, than to dish out ad hominem smears aimed at intimidating by labelling alternative voices as conspirators or apologists.

.4/ **The journalists, activists, professors & citizens under attack are presenting an alternative view point. Surely, people are entitled to hear those and are intelligent enough to make their own judgments.**

.5/ Or is there an assumption, (patronizing, if so), that the tens of thousands of people collectively following these alternative voices are too dumb & unintelligent to reach their own conclusions by sifting through the mass information being dished at them daily from all sides?

.6/ Like it or hate it, agree or disagree with them, the bottom line is that the people under attack do present an alternative view point. **Least we forget, no one has a monopoly on truth. Are all those currently launching this witch hunt suggesting they do?**

The governments and media would like to handle the war on Syria like they handled the war in Spain. They want reports without "any relation to the facts". The media want to "retail the lies" and eager propagandists want to "build emotional superstructures over events that never happened."

The new communication networks allow everyone to follow the war on Syria as diligently as George Orwell followed the war in Spain in which he took part. We no longer have to travel to see the differences of what really happens and what gets reported in the main stream press. We can debunk false government claims with freely available knowledge.

The governments, media and their stenographers would love to go back to the old times when they were not plagued by reports and tweets from Eva, Vanessa, Ian, Maram and Sarah or by blogposts like this one. The vicious campaign against any dissenting report or opinion is a sorry attempt to go back in time and to again gain the monopoly on 'truth'.

It is on us to not let them succeed.

Posted by b on April 21, 2018 at 07:02 PM | [Permalink](#)

Comments

[next page »](#)

Excellent.

The good news about both The Intercept and Truthdig pieces is that the comments quickly showed that readers knew what the publishers were up to. The Intercept seemed to have removed Hasan's obscene act of prostitution within a day.

The reality is that we simply have to expect the imperialists, now reduced to propaganda and domestic repression, to act in this way: there is no point in attempting to shame them and they never did believe in journalistic principles or standards or ethics. They are the scum who serve a cannibalistic system for good wages and a comfortable life style- that is what the 'middle class' always did do and always will.

Posted by: bevin | Apr 21, 2018 7:23:33 PM | [1](#)

No longer is it possible to control TV, Radio and printed newspapers and use them to set the message. There are now an almost infinite set of channels including youtube, twitter, blogs, podcasts,streamed radio... It's like there is a public bitcoin/bitnewsledger where new information only gets written into the ledger if it is authenticated by sufficient endorsements.

In the past, a lie could travel around the world before the truth got its shoes on (Mark Twain I believe) but the truth is catching up. We are in the midst of the great changeover where older people still rely on traditional information channels yet younger internet enabled people can leverage the new channels more effectively to educate themselves.

Posted by: Kaiama | Apr 21, 2018 7:56:36 PM | [2](#)

Western propagandists are freaking out because nobody believes their lies anymore. The more they freak out, the more we know they have lost the narrative.

I just fear for the safety of these independent journalists. It is not beneath the deep state to assassinate their enemies. These people need to be very careful.

Posted by: Cycloben | Apr 21, 2018 8:01:32 PM | [3](#)

A fine example of the reason i read the content here. Good post.

Posted by: Alan Reid | Apr 21, 2018 8:07:24 PM | [4](#)

Thanks Alan.

Posted by: [b](#) | Apr 21, 2018 8:12:10 PM | [5](#)

Thank you b. I think this Strangelovian effort to turn what was the Western media into PURE, unadulterated propaganda is the most important thing going on right now on our side of the world. There's a huge need for alternatives.

Posted by: [fairleft](#) | Apr 21, 2018 8:18:18 PM | [6](#)

PropornOT.com thats pretty good.....

Posted by: heath | Apr 21, 2018 8:24:10 PM | [7](#)

Great piece, Great site only just discovered. Will be making regular visits from now on