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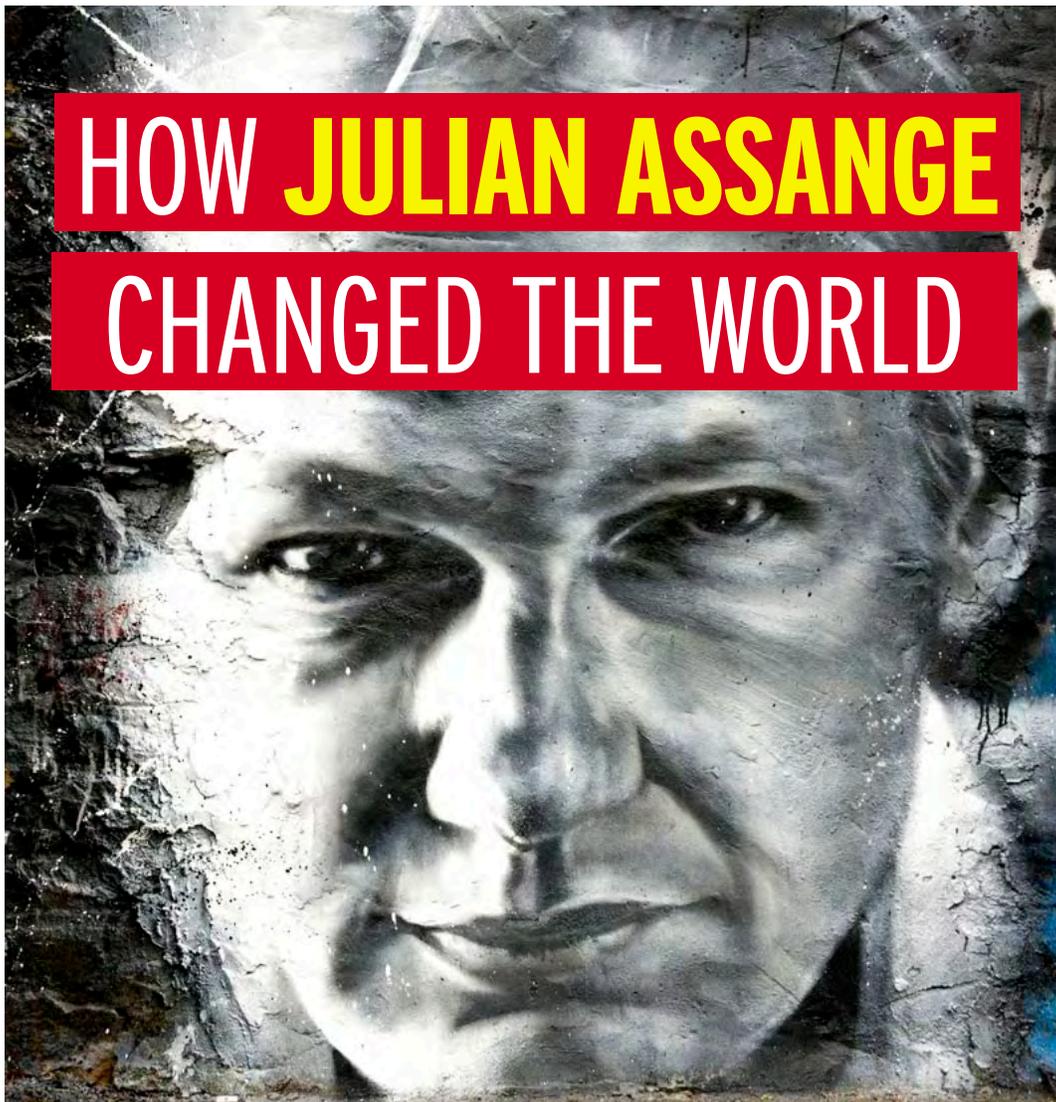
**TRAPPED IN THE 'GIG ECONOMY'** | Robert MacDonald  
**LESSONS FROM THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL** | James Carroll  
**SEEKING ANSWERS TO THE WRONG QUESTIONS** | Caitlin Johnstone

ISSUE 194

# ColdType

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MID-NOVEMBER 2019



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# ColdType

Issue 194 | MID-November 2019

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Ken Loach's new film about the UK's 'gig economy' tells a harrowing tale of labour exploitation in a broken society, writes **Robert MacDonald**

# Trapped in an impossible world of 'self-employment'

**K**EN Loach's film, *Sorry We Missed You*, tells the harrowing tale of Ricky, Abby and their family's attempts to get by in a precarious world of low paid jobs and the so-called "gig economy".

But how realistic is it? Can Loach's film be accused of undue pessimism? After all, UK government ministers have applauded the gig economy and the freedom and flexibility of being an "everyday entrepreneur".

A new study by myself and employment expert Andreas Giazitzoglu investigates what we know about the gig economy, in order to get a clearer picture of what is really going on in the contemporary world of work in the UK.

Narrowly conceived, the gig economy means workers (as independent contractors) doing discrete, short-term tasks – or "gigs" – for companies via digital platforms such as Deliveroo, Amazon or Uber. As one study describes them,

these are "labour contracts that are as temporary as is possible for them to be".

However, we argue that it is better to see the gig economy as part of a wider shift towards insecure forms of work. Long-term unemployment is no longer a serious social policy problem, but standard, full time, long-term employment is also much less common.

More and more people are churning from "one shit job to another shit job", as Ricky puts it in Loach's film, punctuated with periods of unemployment. And as Loach observed (in a Q&A session following a preview), *Sorry We Missed You* is a sequel to the 2016 film *I, Daniel Blake*, which explores the degradations of the UK's benefit system.

These are two sides of the same coin, as research on "the low-pay, no-pay cycle" has shown. Many of these jobs are on zero-hours contracts, which although illegal across much of the EU, have boomed in the UK.

There were fewer than 200,000 of these contracts in 2007. Ten years later, in 2017, there were over 1.8-million.

Employers insist that workers want this "flexibility". But two-thirds would prefer a fixed-hours contract.

The government celebrates high levels of employment, but two-thirds of employment growth since the 2008 financial crash has been in self-employment or other forms of "atypical work". Much of this self-employment appears to be bogus. Just as in *Sorry We Missed You*, employers designate workers as "independent contractors" to cut wage costs and employment rights

Investigative journalism has exposed the degraded work conditions of "self-employed" delivery drivers such as Ricky: intense pressure to meet delivery schedules, breaking speed limits, snatching meals on the run, urinating into plastic bottles rather than stopping, barely making the national minimum wage.



**DESPERATE TIMES:** Kris Hitchin plays Ricky Turner in *Sorry, We Missed You*, a new film by acclaimed director Ken Loach that tackles the precarious life of workers trapped in the UK's 'gig' economy.

Photo: Joss Barratt/Sixteen Films

Even a government inquiry found that “some companies are using self-employed workforces as cheap labour”, damaging workers’ well-being in order to “increase profits”.

If not bogus, then much self-employment is likely to be “forced”, perceived as the only alternative to being unemployed. This was typical of the “young entrepreneurs” I interviewed in the 1980s. Held up as role models for Margaret Thatcher’s “enterprise culture”, their ambitions were, in fact, much more prosaic. Rather than go on the dole, they used the (recently re-launched) Enterprise Allowance Scheme to set up “micro-businesses” – knitting sweaters, repairing bicycles, freelance photography – keeping going by undercutting other businesses and by gross self-exploitation. Very few succeeded over the long term.

Most plodded along until, exhausted, demoralised and in debt, they closed their busi-

nesses. Low pay is also typical of more recent forced self-employment and has been a key factor in the UK’s shift towards low paid work.

Across the research, we found ten things that were common to workers’ experiences of this new, insecure labour market:

1. Modest aspirations (people were not looking to get rich quick but wanted regular work and to be able to pay the bills)
2. Lack of choice
3. Disempowerment (employers now have “disciplinary discretion” to withhold offers of work to people on zero-hours contracts)
4. Insecurity of work
5. Insecurity of income
6. Low pay
7. Debt
8. Exploitation
9. Self-exploitation
10. Anxiety

One of the duties of critical social science is to question fashionable ideas. We should be particularly alert when com-

fortably placed, middle-aged politicians exhort younger people to “take up opportunities” that they themselves would never dream of going near.

Would government ministers be quite so “excited” about the gig economy if they had to surrender their fixed salaries, paid holidays and pension schemes in favour of working a daily schedule so gruelling that toilet stops are impossible and the minimum wage cannot be earned?

All of us – the public who rely on the services of the gig economy just as much as the politicians who proclaim its virtues – need to wake up to the reality that, in this instance, “flexibility” is just another word for exploitation. **CT**

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**Robert MacDonald** is Professor of Education and Social Justice at the University of Huddersfield in England. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).

If you are a member of the ruling class, it's easy to understand why you think Julian Assange is a dick. The rest of us, however, should realise just how much we owe to the actions of the WikiLeaks whistleblower, writes **Lee Camp**

# 18 ways in which Julian Assange changed the world

**J**ULIAN Assange is a dick. It's important you understand that.

Assange and WikiLeaks revealed the American military's war crimes, the American government's corruption and the American corporate media's pathetic servile flattery to the power elite. So, if you're a member of our ruling class, you would view those as textbook examples of dickery.

In a moment I'm going to list all the ways Julian Assange changed the world by being a dick.

In an evolved and fully realised society, the oligarchy would see Assange as a dangerous criminal (which they do), and the average working men and women would view him as justice personified (which they don't). We would celebrate him even as the mass media told us to hope for his downfall – like a Batman or a Robin Hood or an Ozzy Osbourne (the early years, not the cleaning-dog-turds-off-his-carpet years).

But we are not evolved and this is not Gotham City and average Americans don't root for the truth. Many Americans cheer for Assange's imprisonment. They believe the corporate plutocratic talking points and yearn for the days when we no longer have to hear about our country's crimes against humanity or our bankers' crimes against the economy. Subconsciously they must believe that a life in which we're tirelessly exploited by rich villains and know all about it thanks to the exhaustive efforts of an eccentric Australian is worse than one in which we're tirelessly exploited by rich villains yet know nothing about it.

"Ignorance is bliss" is the meditative mantra of the United States of America.

Julian Assange has been arrested and is now locked away in British custody. The US government wants to extradite him, regardless of the official version, for the crime of revealing our government's crimes. Nearly every govern-

ment on our third rock from the sun despises the man for bringing transparency to the process of ruling the unwashed masses. (The level of wash has increased thanks to aggressive marketing campaigns from a variety of shampoo brands.)

It is politically inconvenient at this time for the screaming corporate news to remind our entire citizenry what exactly WikiLeaks has done for us. So you won't see the following list of WikiLeaks' accomplishments anywhere on your corporate airwaves – in the same way the mainstream media did not begin every report about Chelsea Manning's trial with a rundown of the war crimes she helped reveal.

And Chelsea Manning's most famous leak is arguably also WikiLeaks' most famous leak, so it'll top this list:

1. That would be the notorious Collateral Murder video, showing a US air crew gunning down unarmed Iraqi civilians with an enthusiasm



that couldn't be matched by an eight-year-old winning a five-foot-tall stuffed animal at the county fair. They murdered between 12 and 18 innocent people, two of them Reuters journalists.

*No one has been arrested for the collateral murders. Yet Julian Assange has been arrested for revealing them.*

**2.** WikiLeaks brought us the Guantanamo Bay 'Camp Delta Standard Operating Procedures' – showing that many of the prisoners held on the US military detention facility were innocent, and that some were hidden from Red Cross officials. (Because when you're torturing innocent people, you kinda want to do that in peace and quiet, away from prying eyes. It's very easy to get distracted, and then you lose your place and have to start all over again.)

*None of the soldiers torturing innocent people at Gitmo have been arrested for it. Yet Julian Assange has been arrested for revealing it.*

**3.** Not content with revealing only war crimes, WikiLeaks in 2008 came out with the secret bibles of Scientology, which showed that aliens, um, run the world or ... aliens are inside all of us or ... aliens give us indigestion. I can't really remember.

*But no one has ever been arrested for perpetrating that nutbag cult. Yet Julian Assange has for revealing it.*

Many people believe WikiLe-

## Many of the prisoners held on the US military detention facility were innocent, and some were hidden from Red Cross officials

aks has unveiled only crimes of the American government, but that's completely false. The US corporate media doesn't want average Americans to understand that WikiLeaks has upped the level of transparency around the world.

**4-9.** WikiLeaks posted videos of Tibetan dissidents in China fighting back, videos which were not allowed to be viewed in China. They revealed the Peru oil scandal, and that Russia was spying on its citizens' cell phones, and the Minton Report on toxic dumping in Africa, and the Syria Files showing the inner workings of the Syrian government. And WikiLeaks displayed to the global audience a secret Australian supreme court gag order that stopped the Australian press from reporting on a huge bribery scandal that involved the central bank and international leaders.

Assange is hated by governments around the world. As much as they may like transparency, when it comes to other countries (specifically the United States), they don't want their own particular pile of shit on full display. It's kinda like when most people laugh heartily after an upskirt photo of a celebrity is published

in the tabloids, but at the same time, none of us want upskirt photos of us all over the web.

*As far as I know, none of the political figures involved in these scandals have gone to prison for participating in them. Yet Julian Assange has for revealing them.*

**10.** Let's not forget the Iraq War logs – hundreds of thousands of documents relating to America's illegal invasion of Iraq, which we called a 'war', but I think a war needs to have two sides. Iraq's elite Republican guard turned out to be three guys and a donkey ... and the donkey didn't even have good aim.

*As far as I can tell, no one committing the war crimes evidenced in the Iraq War logs has been locked up for them. Yet Julian Assange has for revealing them.*

**11.** WikiLeaks showed us the highly secretive Bilderberg Group meeting reports. The Bilderberg Group is made up of incredibly powerful men and women who get together and decide how to rule over all of us street people, all the while sitting on thrones made from the bones of the babies of non-believers. They're often accused of being lizard people, but really they're just regular ol' sociopaths with lizard skin they purchased from a plastic surgeon in Malibu for half a million dollars.

*I don't think anyone from the Bilderberg Group is being tortured in solitary confinement right now. Yet Julian Assange is for revealing who they are.*

**12.** The Barclays Bank tax avoidance scheme netted Barclays one billion pounds a year.

*While it was ordered to pay 500-million pounds in lost taxes, no one was arrested for that theft from citizens. Yet Julian Assange was for revealing it.*

**13.** The Afghan War Diaries consisted of 92,000 documents related to our destruction of Afghanistan. They detailed friendly fire incidents and civilian casualties. According to WikiLeaks, the diaries showed that, “When reporting their own activities US Units are inclined to classify civilian kills as insurgent kills, downplay the number of people killed or otherwise make excuses for themselves”.

It’s tough to read this without being floored at the comedy routine that our military actions have become. I picture this scenario happening every day in Afghanistan:

**US Soldier #1:** This guy we just killed was an insurgent.

**US Soldier #2:** How do you know?

**US Soldier #1:** Because we killed him.

**US Soldier #2:** Why’d we kill him?

**US Soldier #1:** Because he’s an insurgent.

**US Soldier #2:** How do you know?

**US Soldier #1:** Because we killed him.

(Repeat until lightheaded.)

*I am unaware of anyone locked away for these war crimes. Yet Julian Assange is locked away – for revealing them.*

## Millions of emails showed how a private intelligence agency was used by its US corporate and government clients to target activists and protesters

**14.** WikiLeaks also unveiled hundreds of thousands of US State Department cables that showed more clearly than ever how our secretive government rules its empire with little to no input from the American people. Among many other things, the cables revealed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ordered diplomats to spy on French, British, Russian and Chinese delegations at the UN Security Council. It also showed that Arab nations urged the US to strike Iran, and much more.

Our ruling elite, of course, view this as a massive breach of national security. That’s understandable. But that worldview comes into play only if you think the elites are the only ones who should know how our nation is run. To answer this question for yourself, do the following experiment. Pull up a photo of Donald Trump – a really close-up image of his blister-coloured, bulbous face. Now, look at it intensely for five minutes. ... After you’ve done that, tell me you want the ruling elite to be the only ones who know what the fuck is going on. Go ahead and try it – I’ll wait.

Ostensibly, the concept of our government was that the ruling

class would be accountable to us, the average Americans. To you and me. To the workers and the number crunchers. To the single moms and the cashiers and the street sweepers and the fluffers on the porn sets. We’re supposed to vote based on our knowledge of how our government is functioning. But if the entirety of our representatives’ criminal behaviour is labelled top secret for national security purposes, then we aren’t really an informed populace, are we?

*So for all that was unveiled in the State Department cables, no one has been locked up. But Julian Assange has been for revealing them.*

**15.** The Stratfor emails – this was millions of emails that showed how a private intelligence agency was used by its US corporate and government clients to target activists and protesters.

*No one at Stratfor is currently locked away. But Julian Assange is for revealing the truth.*

**16.** Then there’s the trade deals. TPP, TISA and TTIP – all three amount to one of the largest attempts at corporate takeover ever conceived. All three were more secretive than Donald Trump’s taxes. Government officials and corporate lawyers and lobbyists wrote every word in private. Not even Congress saw the Trans-Pacific Partnership until very late in the process. The only organisation to show the American citizens (and European citizens) some

of those documents before they were made into law? WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks made us aware of the corporate restraints that were about to be placed on us, and that's what allowed activists to pressure Trump to pull out of the TPP.

*None of those corporate titans are in prison for their attempted power grab, but Julian Assange is for revealing it.*

**17.** The DNC emails. I'll explain for those of you who have been living in a cave that is itself inside a yellow-and-blue-makes-green sealed Tupperware container. The Democratic National Committee's emails gave us proof concerning just how rigged the Democratic primaries really are. They proved the media was in bed with Hillary Clinton's campaign. They even showed that Obama's entire first-term cabinet was selected by Citibank. Yes, Citibank.

Whatever election integrity movement exists right now, it owes a lot to these revelations by WikiLeaks. After being sued over this matter, the DNC's lawyers admitted in court that the DNC has no obligation to have a fair primary election. It's their right to rig it.

But don't try to get angry about this, because if you do, the CIA has a myriad ways to fuck up your life.

**18.** In 2017 WikiLeaks posted a trove of CIA documents called Vault 7. It detailed their capabilities, including remotely taking over cars, smart TVs, web browsers and smartphones.

## Nothing published on WikiLeaks has ever been proven untrue. Compare that record to CNN, MSNBC, Fox News or any mainstream outlet

After I found out about that, for a solid two weeks I thought, "Screw it. I'm going full Amish. One hundred percent. Let's see the CIA hack my butter churn. Are they going to use backdoor software to get inside my rustic wooden bow-saw? Even if they could, what are they going to listen to – my conversation about how *mee bobblin fraa redd up for rutschin' 'round. Say no more! Schmunzla wunderbar!*"

*So is anybody at the CIA chained up for violating our privacy in every way possible? No, but Julian Assange is for revealing it.*

By thrusting the truth upon the people of earth, WikiLeaks helped create movements like the Arab Spring and Occupy. And don't forget, at first WikiLeaks and Assange were celebrated for their amazing work. In 2011 even Amnesty International hailed WikiLeaks as one of the Arab Spring catalysts. The *Guardian* said: "The year 2010 may well be remembered as a watershed year when activists and journalists used new technology to speak truth to power and, in so doing, pushed for greater respect for human rights. ... It is also the year when

repressive governments faced the real possibility that their days were numbered."

So why have so many outlets and people turned against Assange and WikiLeaks? Because it turned out he wasn't revealing only repressive Arab regimes. He also revealed US-backed coups and war crimes around the world. He exposed the criminality and villainy of the American ruling elite.

Nothing published on WikiLeaks has ever been proven untrue. Compare that record to CNN, MSNBC, Fox News or any mainstream outlet. Assange has been nominated for multiple Nobel Peace Prizes, and nearly every respected media outlet has used source material from WikiLeaks in their reporting. Yet after all this and after seven years in captivity, the man who laid bare our criminal leaders and showed each one of us our chains is not receiving parades and accolades. He and those who helped him reveal the truth are the only ones endlessly punished.

*We are all Julian Assange. As long as he's imprisoned, we can never be free.* **CT**

**Lee Camp** is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show *Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp on RT America*. This column is based on a monologue he wrote and performed on his TV show *Redacted Tonight*. This article first appeared at [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com).

## POET'S CORNER

# I was a Russian asset and all I got was this lousy T-shirt

I signed on with Putin some ten years ago,  
Hoping America to give the heave-ho.  
T'was a sweet ceremony with kisses on  
cheeks,  
Oceans of vodka and long speeches for weeks,  
"Assets, I salute you," Vlad said through  
interp',  
"Go create havoc and wear proud the term  
'perp'."

Then on to classes for havoc techniques,  
Like spreading fake news in the guise of wise  
geeks,  
And taking out ads in Facebooks and  
Twitters,  
Psy-ops and disinfo', some really hard-hitters.  
In five years flat we'd have Unc' Sam on the  
run,  
Or about to give in, our web-assets well spun.

There were dozens of assets devoted like me,  
Assange and Ed Snowden, for class Donald T,  
Brad not yet Chelsea, T. Gabbard, Steve  
Cohen,  
Each with his role but the same way a-rowin',  
Such hell-raisers sharp as had never been had,  
And all hoping to please our highest priest  
Vlad.

We set out to give it our very best shot,  
A try of the college type, hopeful the lot,  
But at every turn did we end up outdone,  
Confounded by the good guys, outstripped,  
undone:

Libya, Syria, Hillary went crack,  
Talibs ran rings 'round the US in  
Af-Pak.

From Moscow Vlad thundered, "Is that all you  
got?  
Free of charge do I have that Washington lot".  
"They're finished", we said, "by revelations  
and words,  
And Don's done his best to make a mess of the  
Kurds.  
And tax cuts: he's brought us to true hells of  
debt!"  
"In Congress?" said Putin, "that's a job of no  
sweat".

And he fired us all, after all those years' work,  
Adding, "Why didn't I hire that John Bolton  
jerk?  
There's a guy who can get the USA messed.  
Snowden revelations? A distraction at best,  
Assange is a sideshow, Chelsea a martyr,  
Bumbling like this I've not seen since Prez  
Carter!"

Jeez, we all figured Ed's rev's were darn good,  
Anyone can read 'em if only they would,  
T'were published and onlined with our hearts  
in our guts,  
But treated like box scores by those MSM sluts,  
Who take in stride the Constitution's been  
peeled,  
No one caring what we've informed or  
revealed.

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*Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009.*

*His website is [www.philipkraske.com](http://www.philipkraske.com).*

Caitlin Johnstone wonders why we allow the ruling class to persuade us to debate things we can't change, instead of taking control of those we can

# We're seeking answers to the wrong questions

*"The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there's free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate." – Noam Chomsky*

**T**HE plutocrat-owned narrative managers of the political/media class work constantly to shrink the Overton window, the spectrum of debate that is considered socially acceptable. They do this by framing more and more debates in terms of how the oligarchic empire should be sustained and supported, steering them away from debates about whether that empire should be permitted to exist at all.

- They get people debating whether there should be some

moderate changes made or no meaningful changes at all, rather than the massive, sweeping changes we all know need to be made to the entire system.

- They get people debating whether they should elect a crook in a red hat or a crook in a blue hat, rather than whether or not they should be forced to elect crooks.

- They get people debating violations of government secrecy laws, not whether the government has any business keeping those secrets from its citizenry in the first place.

- They get people debating how internet censorship should take place and whom should be censored, rather than whether any internet censorship should occur.

- They get people debating how and to what extent government surveillance should occur, not whether the government has any business spying on its citizens.

- They get people debating how subservient and compliant someone needs to be in order to

not get shot by a police officer, rather than whether a police officer should be shooting people for those reasons at all.

- They get people debating whether or not a group of protesters are sufficiently polite, rather than debating the thing those protesters are demonstrating against.

- They get people debating about whether this thing or that thing is a 'conspiracy theory', rather than discussing the known fact that powerful people conspire.

- They get people debating whether Tulsi Gabbard is a dangerous lunatic, a Russian asset, a Republican asset gearing up for a third party run, or just a harmless Democratic Party crackpot, rather than discussing the fact that her foreign policy would have been considered perfectly normal prior to 9/11.

- They get people debating whether Bernie Sanders is electable or too radical, rather than discussing what it says about the status quo that his



extremely modest proposals which every other major country already implements are treated as something outlandish in the United States.

- They get people debating whether Jeremy Corbyn has done enough to address the Labour antisemitism crisis, rather than whether that ‘crisis’ ever existed at all outside of the imaginations of establishment smear merchants.

- They get people debating whether Joe Biden or Elizabeth Warren would win against Trump, rather than whether either of those establishment lackeys is a worthy nominee.

- They get people debating whether politicians should have corporate sponsors, rather than whether corporations should be allowed to interfere in the elec-

toral process at all.

- They get people debating if the US should be pursuing regime change in Iran or Syria, rather than whether the US has any business overthrowing the governments of sovereign nations to begin with.

- They get people debating how many US troops should be in Syria, rather than whether that illegal invasion and occupation was ever legitimate in the first place.

- They get people debating whether to kill people slowly by sanctions or kill them quickly with bombs, rather than whether they should be killed at all.

- They get people debating whether or not some other country’s leader is an evil dictator, rather than whether it’s any of your business.

- They get people debating the extent to which Russia and Trump were involved in the Democratic Party’s 2016 email leaks, rather than the contents of those leaks.

- They get people debating what the response should be to Russian interference in the election, rather than whether that interference took place at all, and whether it would really matter if it did.

- They get people debating how much government support the poor should be allowed, rather than whether the rich should be allowed to keep what they’ve stolen from the poor.

- They get people debating what kind of taxes billionaires should have to pay, rather than whether it makes sense for billionaires to exist at all.

- They get people impotently debating the bad things other countries do, rather than the bad things their own country does which they can actually do something about.

- They get people debating what should be done to prevent the rise of China, rather than whether a multipolar world might be beneficial.

- They get people debating whether Western cold war escalations against the Russian Federation are sufficient, rather than whether they want to horrors of the Cold War to be resurrected in the first place.

- They get people debating what extent cannabis should be decriminalised, rather than whether the government should be allowed to lock anyone up for deciding to put any substance whatsoever in their own body.

- They get people debating whether or not US troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan, rather than whether or not there should be any US troops outside of the US.

- They get people debating whether or not Julian Assange is 'a real journalist', rather than whether or not they should set legal precedents that necessarily criminalise acts of journalism.

- They get people debating the subtle details of bail protocol, political asylum, embassy cat hygiene and leaking rather than whether it should ever be legal to imprison a publisher for exposing government war crimes.

- They get people debating what the punishment should be for whistleblowers, not what the punishment should be for those they blow the whistle on.

- They get people debating whether Fox or MSNBC is the real 'fake news', rather than whether the entirety of mainstream media is oligarchic propaganda.

- They get people debating about how the things everyone is freaking out over Trump doing were previously done by Obama, rather than discussing why all US presidents do the

same evil things regardless of their parties or campaign platforms.

- They get people debating what should be done with money, not whether the concept of money itself is in need of a complete overhaul.

- They get people debating what should be done with government, not whether the concept of government itself is in need of a complete overhaul.

- They get people debating whether the status quo should be reinforced or revised, rather than whether it should be flushed down the toilet where it belongs.

- They get people angrily debating things they can't change, rather than constructively working on the things that they can.

- They get people shoving against each other in opposite directions, while they swiftly build a cage around us all. **CT**

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**Caitlin Johnstone** is an Australian blogger. Her website is [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com).

**READ THE BEST OF  
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**Conn Hallinan** tells how the United States is losing its regional dominance as China, Russia, India and the European Union reshape traditional alliances

15

# A new Middle East is taking shape

**T**HE fallout from the September attack on Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil facilities is continuing to reverberate throughout the Middle East, sidelining old enmities – sometimes for new ones – and re-drawing traditional alliances. While Turkey's recent invasion of northern Syria is grabbing the headlines, the bigger story may be that major re-

gional players are contemplating some historic realignments.

After years of bitter rivalry, the Saudis and the Iranians are considering how they can dial down their mutual animosity. The formerly powerful Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of Persian Gulf monarchs is atomising because Saudi Arabia is losing its grip. And Washington's former domina-

tion of the region appears to be in decline.

Some of these developments are long-standing, pre-dating the cruise missile and drone assault that knocked out 50 percent of Saudi Arabia's oil production. But the double shock – Turkey's lunge into Syria and the September missile attack – is accelerating these changes.

Pakistani Prime Minister

Imran Khan recently flew to Iran and then on to Saudi Arabia to lobby for détente between Teheran and Riyadh and to head off any possibility of hostilities between the two countries.

“What should never happen is a war,” Khan said, “because this will not just affect the whole region ... this will cause poverty in the world. Oil prices will go up”.

According to Khan, both sides have agreed to talk, although the Yemen War is a stumbling block. But there are straws in the wind on that front, too. A partial ceasefire seems to be holding, and there are back channel talks going on between the Houthis and the Saudis.

The Saudi intervention in Yemen’s civil war was supposed to last three months, but it has dragged on for over four years. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was to supply the ground troops and the Saudis the airpower. But the Saudi-UAE alliance has made little progress against the battle-hardened Houthis, who have been strengthened by defections from the regular Yemeni army.

Air wars without supporting ground troops are almost always a failure, and they are very expensive. The drain on the Saudi treasury is significant, and the country’s wealth is not bottomless.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is trying to shift the Saudi economy from its overreliance on petroleum, but



### The drain on the Saudi treasury is significant, and the country’s wealth is not bottomless

he needs outside money to do that and he is not getting it.

The Yemen War – which, according to the United Nations is the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet – and the Prince’s involvement with the murder and dismemberment of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, has spooked many investors.

Without outside investment, the Saudis have to use their oil revenues, but the price per barrel is below what the Kingdom needs to fulfill its budget goals, and world demand is falling off. The Chinese economy is slowing – the trade war with the US has had an impact – and European growth is sluggish. There is a whiff of recession in the air, and that’s bad news for oil producers.

**R**iyadh is also losing allies. The UAE is negotiating with the Houthis and withdrawing their troops, in part because the Abu Dhabi has different goals in Yemen than Saudi Arabia, and because in any dustup with Iran, the UAE would be

ground zero. US generals are fond of calling the UAE ‘little Sparta’ because of its well trained army, but the operational word for Abu Dhabi is ‘little’: the Emirate’s army can muster 20,000 troops, Iran can field more than 800,000 soldiers.

Saudi Arabia’s goals in Yemen are to support the government-in-exile of President Rabho Mansour Hadi, control its southern border and challenge Iran’s support of the Houthis. The UAE, on the other hand, is less concerned with the Houthis but quite focused on backing the anti-Hadi Southern Transitional Council, which is trying to re-create south Yemen as a separate country. North and south Yemen were merged in 1990, largely as a result of Saudi pressure, and it has never been a comfortable marriage.

Riyadh has also lost its grip on the Gulf Cooperation Council. Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar continue to trade with Iran in spite of efforts by the Saudis to isolate Teheran,

The UAE and Saudi Arabia recently hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin, who pressed for the 22-member Arab League to re-admit Syria. GCC member Bahrain has already re-established diplomatic relations with Damascus. Putin is pushing for a multilateral security umbrella for the Middle East, which includes China.

“While Russia is a reliable ally, the US is not”, Middle East scholar Mark Katz told the *South Asia Journal*. And while many in the region have no love

for Syria's Assad, "they respect Vladimir Putin for sticking by Russia's ally".

The Arab League – with the exception of Qatar – denounced the Turkish invasion and called for a withdrawal of Ankara's troops. Qatar is currently being blockaded by Saudi Arabia and the UAE for pursuing an independent foreign policy and backing a different horse in the Libyan civil war. Turkey is Qatar's main ally.

**R**ussia's 10-point agreement with Turkey on Syria has generally gone down well with Arab League members, largely because the Turks agreed to respect Damascus's sovereignty and eventually withdraw all troops. Of course, 'eventually' is a shifty word, especially because Turkey's goals are hardly clear.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to drive the Syrian Kurds away from the Turkish border and move millions of Syrian refugees into a strip of land some 19 miles deep and 275 miles wide. The Kurds may move out, but the Russian and Syrian military – filling in the vacuum left by President Trump's withdrawal of American forces – have blocked the Turks from holding more than the border and one deep enclave, certainly not one big enough to house millions of refugees.

Erdogan's invasion is popular at home – nationalism plays well with the Turkish population and most Turks are unhap-



### Things could get really messy if Turkey decided to push into areas occupied by Russia or Syria

py with the Syrian refugees – but for how long? The Turkish economy is in trouble and invasions cost a lot of money. Ankara is using proxies for much of the fighting, but without lots of Turkish support those proxies are no match for the Kurds – let alone the Syrian and Russian military.

That would mainly mean airpower, but Turkish airpower is restrained by the threat of Syrian anti-aircraft and Russian fighters, not to mention the fact that the Americans still control the airspace. The Russians have deployed their latest fifth-generation stealth fighter, the SU-57, and a number of MiG-29s and SU-27s, not planes the Turks would wish to tangle with. The Russians also have their new mobile S-400 anti-aircraft system, and the Syrians have the older, but still effective, S-300s.

In short, things could get really messy if Turkey decided to push their proxies or their army into areas occupied by Russian or Syrian troops. There are reports of clashes in Syria's northeast and casualties among

the Kurds and Syrian Army, but a serious attempt to push the Russians and the Syrians out seems questionable.

The goal of resettling refugees is unlikely to go anywhere. It will cost some \$53-billion to build an infrastructure and move two-million refugees into Syria, money that Turkey doesn't have. The European Union has made it clear it won't offer a nickel, and the UN can't step in because the invasion is a violation of international law.

When those facts sink in, Erdogan might find that Turkish nationalism will not be enough to support his Syrian adventure if it turns into an occupation.

The Middle East that is emerging from the current crisis may be very different than the one that existed before those cruise missiles and drones tipped over the chessboard. The Yemen War might finally end. Iran may, at least partly, break out of the political and economic blockade that Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel has imposed on it.

Syria's civil war will recede. And the Americans, who have dominated the Middle East since 1945, will become simply one of several international players in the region, along with China, Russia, India and the European Union. **CT**

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*Conn Hallinan can be read at  
dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.  
wordpress.com and  
middleempireseries.  
wordpress.com*

Main Photo:  
Gary Ross,  
director,  
and Tobey  
Maguire,  
*Seabiscuit*,  
2003



18

# The wide side of Hollywood

Schoolday-era camera adds striking impact to actor's on-set photographs

**T**HE second of actor Jeff Bridges' photobooks, packed with striking black and white ultra-wide angle pictures that he has taken on movie sets over the past 35 years, has been hailed as one of the most original chronicles of modern-day Hollywood.

Explaining his unique photographic style, the actor reveals in the introduction to *Jeff Bridges: Pictures Volume 2*,

published by powerHouse Books, "Most of the photographs I take are done with a Widelux camera. ... It's got a 28mm lens that pans nearly 180 degrees. Instead of a traditional shutter, it has a slit that, as the lens pans, exposes the film. The first time I came across one was in high school. We had been gathered together to have our class photo taken. The photographer had a Widelux and



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Left:  
George  
Clooney,  
*The Men  
Who Stare  
at Goats*,  
2009



20

Top:  
Stan Winston's  
workshop,  
*Iron Man*,  
2008

Above:  
Jodelle Ferland,  
*Tideland*,  
2005

he explained how it worked. Some kids figured if they ran very quickly, they would beat the panning lens and be in the picture twice. They were right.

“Years later, I started using this technique to take pictures of actors creating the theatrical masks of Tragedy and Comedy. The result was someone frowning and smiling, all on one negative”.

Photos from Bridges’ earlier film work were first shown in *Pictures: Jeff Bridges*, published in 2003. Now, drawing on his most recent film work, *Jeff*

*Bridges: Pictures Volume 2* expands on his vision of behind-the-scenes Hollywood.

Bridges explains the genesis of his photography: “In 1984, when I was doing *Starman*, Karen Allen saw some of my Widelux shots and suggested that we combine them with Sid Baldwin’s (the unit photographer) to make a book for the cast and crew.

“Karen’s brainstorm marked the beginning of a series of privately published ‘albums.’ These have been given in appreciation to the casts and crews



I've worked with over the years. *Pictures, Volume One and Two*, are made up of selections from these albums”.

Included are images of famous actors, directors, costumers and makeup artists, and the crew members involved in movies that include *True Grit*, *Crazy Heart*, *The Giver*, *TRON: Legacy*, and *Hell or High Water*.

Bridges' proceeds from the book will be donated to the Motion Picture & Television Fund, which offers charitable care and support to film-industry workers. **CT**



**JEFF BRIDGES:  
PICTURES VOLUME 2**

**Jeff Bridges**

Essay by Kerry Brouger  
powerHouse Publishing  
[www.powerhousebooks.com](http://www.powerhousebooks.com)  
**US \$49.95 / Canada \$65.95**

Top:  
Jeff Bridges,  
*True Grit*,  
2010

Above:  
Lloyd Catlett,  
*Seventh Son*,  
2014

As we celebrate the end of the arms race that almost drove us into nuclear Armageddon, a new Cold War is under way, writes **James Carroll**

# What the fall of Berlin Wall means after 30 years

**S**OME anniversaries are less about the past than the future. So it should be with November 9, 1989. In case you've long forgotten, that was the day when East and West Germans began nonviolently dismantling the Berlin Wall, an entirely unpredictable, almost unimaginable ending to the long-entrenched Cold War.

Think of it as the triumph of idealistic hope over everything that then passed for hard-nosed 'realism'. After all, Western intelligence services, academic Kremlinologists, and the American national security establishment had always blithely assumed that the Cold War would essentially go on forever – unless the absolute malevolence of Soviet Communism led to the ultimate mayhem of nuclear Armageddon. For almost half a century, only readily dismissed peaceniks insisted that, in the nuclear age, war and endless preparations for more of it were not the answer.

When the Berlin Wall came down, such idealists were proven right, even if their triumph was still ignored.

Yet war-as-the-answer reasserted itself with remarkable rapidity. Within weeks of the Wall being breached by hope – in an era that saw savage conflicts in Central America, the Philippines, and South Africa transformed by a global wave of non-violent resolution – the United States launched Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama by a combat force of more than 27,000 troops.

The stated purpose of that act of war was the arrest of Panama's tinhorn dictator Manuel Noriega, who had initially come to power as a CIA asset. That invasion's only real importance was as a demonstration that, even with global peace being hailed, the world's last remaining superpower remained as committed as ever to the hegemony of violent force.

While President George HW Bush rushed to claim credit for ending the Cold War, the Soviet

Union's Mikhail Gorbachev was the lynchpin of that historic conclusion. It was he who, in the dramatic autumn of 1989, repeatedly ordered Communist forces to remain in their barracks while throngs of freedom-chanters poured into the streets of multiple cities behind the Iron Curtain. Instead of blindly striking out (as the leaders of crumbling empires often had), Gorbachev allowed democratic demands to echo through the Soviet empire – ultimately even in Russia itself.

**Y**et the American imagination was soon overtaken by the smug fantasy that the US had "won" the Cold War and that it was now a power beyond all imagining. Never mind that, in 1987, when President Ronald Reagan issued his famed demand in then still-divided Berlin, "Mister Gorbachev, tear down this wall", the Soviet leader was already starting to do precisely that.

As the wall came down, the



**CRUMBLING:** A man uses a hammer and chisel to chip off a piece of the Berlin Wall at Potsdamer Platz.

red-scare horrors that had disturbed American dreams for three generations seemed to dissolve overnight, leaving official Washington basking in triumphalism. The US then wrapped itself in a self-aggrandising mantle of virtue and power that effectively blinded this country's political leadership to the ways the Cold War's end had left them mired in an outmoded, ever more dangerous version of militarism.

After Panama, the self-styled 'indispensable nation' would show itself to be hell-bent on unbridled – and profoundly self-destructive – belligerence. Deprived of an existential enemy, Pentagon budgets would

decline oh-so-modestly (though without a 'peace dividend' in sight) but soon return to Cold War levels. A bristling nuclear arsenal would be maintained as a 'hedge' against the comeback of Soviet-style communism. Such thinking would, in the end, only empower Moscow's hawks, smoothing the way for the future rise of an ex-KGB agent named Vladimir Putin. Such hyper-defensive anticipation would prove to be, as one wag put it, the insurance policy that started the fire.

**E**ven as the disintegration of the once-demonised USSR was firmly under way, culminat-

ing in the final lowering of the hammer-and-sickle flag from the Kremlin on Christmas Day 1991, the United States was launching what would prove to be a never-ending and disastrous sequence of unnecessary Middle Eastern wars. They began with Operation Desert Storm, George HW Bush's assault on Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1990. In American memory, that campaign, which crushed the Iraqi autocrat's army and forced it out of Kuwait, would be a techno-war made in heaven with fewer than 200 US combat deaths.

That memory, however, fits poorly with what was actually happening that year. An inter-

nationally mounted sanctions regime had already been on the verge of thwarting Hussein without the US-led invasion – and, of course, what Bush the father began, Bush the son would, with his 2003 shock-and-awe recapitulation, turn into the permanent bedrock of American politics.

**A**s the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War approaches, it should be obvious that there's been a refusal in the United States to reckon with a decades-long set of conflagrations in the Greater Middle East as the inevitable consequence of that first American invasion in 1990.

Above all, Desert Storm, with its monumental victory parade in Washington DC, brought the Pentagon's Cold War *raison d'être* back from the brink of obsolescence. That campaign and what followed in its wake guaranteed that violence would continue to occupy the heartlands of the US economy, its politics, and its culture.

In the process, the world-historic aspirations kindled by the miracle of the Berlin Wall's dismantling would be thoroughly dashed. No wonder, so many years later, we hardly remember that November of hope – or the anniversary that goes with it.

By revisiting its astonishing promise at the anniversary, however, and by seeing it more fully in light of what made it so surprising, perhaps something of that vanished positive

### By revisiting its astonishing promise at the anniversary, perhaps something of that vanished positive energy can still be retrieved

energy can still be retrieved. So let me call to mind the events of various earlier Novembers that make the point. What follows is a decade-by-decade retracing of the way the war machine trundled through recent history – and through the American psyche – until it was finally halted in a battle-scarred, divided city in the middle of Europe, stopped by an urge for peace that refused to be denied.

Let's start with November 1939, only weeks after the German invasion of Poland that began what would become World War II. A global struggle between good and evil was just then kicking into gear. Unlike the previous Great War of 1914-1918, which was fought for mere empire, Hitler's war was understood in distinctly Manichaean terms as both apocalyptic and transcendent. After all, the moral depravity of the Nazi project had already been laid bare when Jewish synagogues, businesses, and homes everywhere in Germany were subject to the savagery of Kristallnacht, or 'the night of broken glass'. That ignition of what became an anti-Jewish genocide took place, as it happened, on November 9, 1938.

The good-versus-evil abso-

lutism of World War II stamped the American imagination so profoundly that a self-righteous moral dualism survived not only into the Cold War but into Washington's 21st-century war on terror. In such contests against enemies defined as devils, Americans could adopt the kinds of ends-justify-the-means strategies called for by 'realism'. When you are fighting along what might be thought of as an axis of evil, anything goes – from deceit and torture to the routine sacrifice of civilians, whose deaths in America's post-9/11 wars have approached a total of half a million. Through it all, we were assured of one certain thing: that God was on our side. ("God is not neutral", as George W Bush put it just days after the 9/11 attacks.)

But what if God could not protect us? That was the out-of-the-blue question posed near the start of all this – not in August 1945 when the US dropped its 'victory weapon' on two cities in Japan, but in August 1949 when the Soviet Union acquired an atomic bomb, too.

By that November, the American people were already in the grip of an unprecedented nuclear paranoia, which prompted President Harry Truman to override leading atomic scientists and order the development of what one called a 'genocidal weapon', the even more powerful hydrogen bomb. Then came the manic build-up of the US nuclear arsenal to proportions suitable less for genocide than for 'omnicide'. Such weapons mushroomed (if you'll

excuse the word in a potentially mushroom-clouded world) from fewer than 200 in 1950 to nearly 20,000 a decade later. Of course, that escalation, in turn, drove Moscow forward in a desperate effort to keep up, leading to an unhinged arms race that turned the suicide of the human species into a present danger, one measured by the Doomsday Clock, of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which was set at two minutes to midnight in 1953 – and then again in 2019, all these Novembers later.

**N**ow, let's flash forward another decade to November 1959 when the mortal danger of human self-extinction finally became openly understood, as Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began issuing blatant threats of nuclear war over – you guessed it – Berlin. Because part of that city, far inside Communist East Germany, was still occupied by American, French, and British forces, it amounted to a tear in what was then called the Iron Curtain, separating the Soviet empire from Western Europe. With thousands fleeing through that tear to the so-called Free World, the Soviets became increasingly intent on shutting the escape hatch, threatening to use the Red Army to drive the Allies out of Berlin. That brought the possibility of a nuclear conflict to the fore.

Ultimately, the Communists would adopt a quite different strategy when, in 1961, they built that infamous wall, a con-

## The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 caused the world to shudder as incipient nuclear war between Washington and Moscow suddenly loomed

crete curtain across the city. At the time, Berliners sometimes referred to it, with a certain irony, as the “Peace Wall” because, by blocking escape from the East, it made the dreaded war between the two Cold War superpowers unnecessary.

Yet, within a year the unleashed prospect of such a potentially civilisation-ending conflict had hopped the globe to Communist Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 caused the world to shudder as incipient nuclear war between Washington and Moscow suddenly loomed. That moment, just before Khrushchev and American President John F. Kennedy stepped back from doomsday, might have changed something; a relieved world's shock of recognition, that is, might have thrown the classic wooden shoe of sabotage into the purring engine of ‘realism’. No such luck, however, as the malevolent power of the war state simply motored on – in the case of the United States directly into Vietnam.

By November 1969, President Richard Nixon's cynical continuation of the Vietnam War for his own political purposes had already driven the liberal-conservative divide over that mis-

begotten conflict into the permanent structure of American politics. The ubiquitous ‘POW/MIA: You Are Not Forgotten’ flag survives today as an icon of Nixon's manipulations. Still waving over ball parks, post offices, town halls, and VFW posts across the nation, that sad black banner now flies as a symbol of red state/blue state antagonism – and as a lasting reminder of how we Americans can make prisoners of ourselves.

**B**y 1979, with the Vietnam War in the past, President Jimmy Carter showed how irresistible November's tide – the inexorable surge toward war – truly was. It was in November of that year that militant Iranian students overran the American embassy in Tehran, taking 66 Americans hostage – the event that was credited with stymying the formerly peace-minded president. In reality, though, Carter had already initiated the historic anti-Soviet arms build-up for which President Ronald Reagan would later be credited.

Then, of course, Carter would ominously foreshadow America's future reversals in the deserts of the Levant with a failed rescue of those hostages. Most momentously, however, he would essentially license future Middle East defeats with what came to be known as the Carter Doctrine – the formally declared principle that the Persian Gulf (and its oil) were ‘vital interests’ of this coun-

try, worthy of defence ‘by any means necessary, including military force’. (And of course, his CIA would lead us into America’s first Afghan War, still in a sense going on some 40 years later.)

**D**ecade by decade, the evidence of an unstoppable martial dynamic only seemed to accumulate. In that milestone month of November 1989, Washington’s national security ‘realists’ were still stuck in the groove of such worst-case thinking. That they were wrong, that they would be stunned by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent implosion of the Soviet Union, should mandate thoughtful observance of this 30th anniversary.

During the late 1980s, a complex set of antiwar and antinuclear countercurrents seemed to come out of nowhere. Each of them should have been impossible. The ruthlessly totalitarian Soviet system should not have produced in Mikhail Gorbachev a humane statesman who sacrificed empire and his own career for the sake of peace. The most hawkish American president in history, Ronald Reagan, should not have responded to Gorbachev by working to end the arms race with him – but he did.

Pressuring those two leaders to pursue that course – indeed, forcing them to – was an international grassroots movement demanding an end to apocalyptic terror. People wanted peace

## The breaching of the Berlin Wall – a transformation accomplished by ordinary citizens, not soldiers – broadened the political realm of the possible

so much, as President Dwight D Eisenhower had predicted in 1959, that, miracle of all miracles, governments got out of their way and let them have it. With the breaching of the Berlin Wall that November 9th – a transformation accomplished by ordinary citizens, not soldiers – the political realm of the possible was substantially broadened, not only to include prospective future detente among warring nations, but an eventual elimination of nuclear weapons themselves.

**Y**et, in November 2019, all of that seems lost. A new Cold War is underway, with East-West hostilities quickening; a new arms race has begun, especially as the United States renounces Reagan-Gorbachev arms-control agreements for the sake of a trillion-plus dollar “modernisation” of its nuclear arsenal. Across the globe, democracy is in retreat, driven by pressures from both populist nationalism and predatory capitalism. Even in America, democracy seems imperilled. And all of this naturally prompts the shudder-inducing question: Were the worst-case realists right all along?

This anniversary of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall should offer an occasion to say no to that. The Wall’s demise stopped in its tracks the demonic dynamic set in motion on the very same date in 1938 by that *Kristallnacht*.

If idealistic hope could so triumph once, it can so triumph again, no matter what the die-hard realists of our moment may believe. I’ve referred to that November in Berlin as a miracle, but that is wrong. The most dangerous face-off in history ended not because of the gods or good fortune, but because of the actions and efforts of human beings.

Across two generations, countless men and women – from anonymous community activists and union organizers to unsung military officials, scientists, and even world leaders – overcame the seemingly endless escalations of nuclear-armed animus to make brave choices for peace and against a war of annihilation, for life and against death, for the future and against the doom-laden past. It can happen again. It must. **CT**

*James Carroll is the author of 20 books, most recently the novel *The Cloister*. His history of the Pentagon, *House of War*, won the PEN-Galbraith Award. His Vietnam War memoir, *An American Requiem*, won the National Book Award. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. This essay first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

A ColdType / Media Lens

# Special Report



## Unfree media: State stenography and shameful silence

By David Cromwell

**A** RECENT viral clip of Jeremy Corbyn featured vital truths about the corporate media that ought to be at the forefront of public consciousness in the approach to the UK general election on December 12. The clip began:

“A free press is essential to our democracy. But much of our press isn’t very free at all.”

Corbyn continued:

“Just three companies control 71 per-

cent of national newspaper circulation and five companies control 81 percent of local newspaper circulation.

“This unhealthy sway of a few corporations and billionaires shapes and skews the priorities and worldview of powerful sections of the media.

“And it doesn’t stop with the newspapers, on and offline. Print too often sets the broadcast agenda, even though it is wedded so firmly to the Tories politically and

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to corporate interests more generally.”

Corbyn’s words were not from a recent speech. They were actually delivered as part of his Alternative Mactaggart Lecture at the Edinburgh TV Festival in August 2018. But they remain as relevant as ever; hence being picked up anew by ‘Tory Fibs’, a grassroots socialist Twitter account.

Corbyn shone on a spotlight on the BBC: “the BBC should be freed of government control, democratised and made representative of the country it serves to help it do that.

“The BBC is meant to be independent, but its charter grants governments the power to appoint the chair and four directors of the board and set the level of the licence fee.”

As regular readers will be well aware, *Media Lens* has long highlighted the BBC’s lack of independence and, more particularly, the insidious role of BBC News in protecting the establishment, promoting deference to the royal family and class system, as well as deflecting scrutiny of state and corporate crimes.

Corbyn concluded on the state of the media today:

“We need to set journalists and citizens free to hold power to account, by breaking the grip of tech giants and billionaires on our media.”

All this is arguably never more evident than when a General Election is looming. Right now, established power is fighting tooth and nail to maintain its control on society. Corporate media, including gatekeepers like the BBC and the Guardian – “thus far and no farther”, in the words of Noam Chomsky – play a central role in maintaining the destructive status quo.

### Filtering Facts

The state-corporate management and ma-

nipulation of ‘the news’ relies on a subtle filtering process whereby leading journalists select – consciously or otherwise - which facts are ‘fit’ to be reported, and which can or should be ignored.

Consider a recent item on BBC News at Ten when political editor Laura Kuenssberg reported Boris Johnson’s visit to Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge. She presented the prime minister in a favourable light, having amiable encounters with people in Addenbrooke’s. What the BBC did not show were the jeers of staff and patients ringing in Johnson’s ears as he left the hospital. Nor did Kuenssberg report on the young medical student who was “pushed aside by [a] Boris Johnson aide” while attempting to challenge Johnson on the NHS and the climate crisis. Julia Simons, who is training at the hospital to become a doctor, called his visit a ‘PR stunt’.

We challenged the BBC political editor via Twitter:

“Hello @bbclaurak,

“Why did your @BBCNews at Ten piece on Boris Johnson’s visit to a Cambridge hospital omit the part where he left with jeers from staff and patients ringing in his ears?”

Our tweet was ‘liked’ and retweeted hundreds of times, but there was no reply from Kuenssberg. Her Twitter bio states:

“I know it’s fashionable, but even in 2019 there is nothing big or clever about shooting the messenger – tweets or retweets here aren’t necessarily my view”

But, by heavily filtering the facts that Kuenssberg selects to tweet or retweet, ‘the messenger’ has transformed into an echo chamber and amplifier of government propaganda. This phenomenon of state stenography – which, of course, is far from new - was highlighted in an excellent article recently by Peter Osborne, former chief political commentator of the *Daily*

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*Telegraph*. Under the title, “British journalists have become part of Johnson’s fake news machine”, Osborne argued that:

“From the *Mail*, the *Times* to the BBC and ITN, everyone is peddling Downing Street’s lies and smears. They’re turning their readers into dupes.”

As Osborne noted, ‘mainstream’ political journalism too often relies upon whatever ‘a senior No 10 source’ says:

“This modus operandi, which allow pro-government narratives to enter the public domain unmediated by proper interrogation, has become routine among political reporters since Johnson and his Vote Leave media team entered Downing Street.”

Osborne observed:

“There is an implicit deal. In return for access and information (much of it false) the political media spins a pro-government narrative.”

**A**s a recent example, Osborne pointed to the government’s deceitful response to the leaked ‘Yellowhammer dossier’ setting out the damaging consequences of a no-deal Brexit on the UK – a news story that ‘deeply embarrassed’ Boris Johnson and senior ministers. Downing Street responded by feeding a false claim to compliant journalists that the leak happened on Theresa May’s watch; and that Remain-supporting ex-ministers led by Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer in May’s Cabinet, were responsible. Newspapers were full of convenient headlines and stories about the alleged leakers, distracting attention from the damaging analysis of the leaked dossier itself. As Osborne noted, it turned out that the leaked document was dated nine days after Johnson came to power: the leak had occurred under *his* watch, not May’s.

This issue of journalist access in return

for maintaining a power-friendly narrative has long been known. The media’s heavy reliance on state and corporate sources is one of the five ‘news filters’ – along with corporate ownership, advertising, flak and ‘anti-Communism’ – in the propaganda model of the media introduced by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988).

Focusing on the country’s two main political editors – the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg and Robert Peston of ITV News – Osborne added:

“Political editors are so pleased to be given ‘insider’ or ‘exclusive’ information that they report it without challenge or question.”

Osborne, as a senior journalist with experience and clout, was afforded follow-up media interviews to make his case. Perhaps the most noteworthy example was his fiery appearance on Radio 2 where he was interviewed by Amol Rajan, a former editor of the oligarch-owned *Independent* and now the BBC’s media editor. You do not get to such exalted positions in the corporate media, as Rajan has done, by being a thorn in the side of the establishment. In a remarkable exchange, not only did Osborne name and shame major political editors for cosyng up to power, he directly, and correctly, accused Rajan of the same.

Osborne commented:

“You, yourself, when you were *Independent* editor, notoriously sucked up to power. You are a client journalist yourself... you were a crony journalist yourself. It’s time this system was exploded”.

Rajan blustered:

“It’s unbecoming of you, Peter, it’s unbecoming.”

When Osborne added that Rajan had also ‘failed to notice’ stories as BBC media editor, there was a brief stunned silence.

In 2014, when Rajan was the *Independent*

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ent's editor, he boasted of "our proud record on coverage of Iraq". We responded at the time:

"Sorry, we have analysed the *Independent's* performance closely. Your record was and is shameful. Where to start?"

Rajan did not reply. It was around this time that he blocked us on Twitter.

### OPCW Whistleblowers Question The Douma Narrative

**A** FURTHER, grave example of present-day propaganda filtering involves the corporate media blanking of further proof that western powers, notably the US, have been manipulating the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Last month, WikiLeaks published evidence from an OPCW whistleblower showing that the international chemical watchdog had suppressed evidence suggesting that the Syrian government had not, in fact, mounted a chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, on April 7, 2018. In other words, there is clear authoritative testimony from an OPCW insider contradicting the endlessly repeated narrative that "Assad used weapons against his own civilians" in Douma. This state-approved script, propagated throughout the major western news media, served as the 'justification' for the US, UK and France to launch missile strikes on Syria seven days later.

Shockingly, as reported by WikiLeaks, a panel of experts convened by the Courage Foundation, an independent British civil society organisation, reported that:

"Not only did the panel find that OPCW tampered with the evidence to produce an outcome desired by the geopolitical actors involved in this instance, it tried to silence its own senior civil servants".

One member of the panel, Richard Falk

– an international law and international relations scholar who taught at Princeton University for forty years – noted that the credibility of the panel's conclusions were strengthened by having José Bustani, a former Director-General of the OPCW, among its members.

Falk added:

"Not only is there a lack of transparency and accountability with respect to the undertakings of major national governments, but there is a deliberate manipulation of evidence and obstruction of procedures designed to protect the citizenry against abuses of state, and in the case of major states, especially the United States, to protect the public interest."

This new testimony added to the earlier revelations in May that Ian Henderson, a senior OPCW scientist, had written a detailed report, suppressed by OPCW, calling into question the official version of events in Douma. As our media alert at the time noted, very little media coverage was devoted to this expert evidence questioning the Washington-stamped 'consensus' view.

**R**obert Fisk's article in the *Independent* ten days after the Douma incident was a vanishingly rare exception. He interviewed a Syrian doctor who told him that the victims of the alleged chemical attack had actually suffered from hypoxia – oxygen starvation in the dusty tunnels where they had taken refuge from bombing – and not gas poisoning.

BBC Syria producer Riam Dalati stated on Twitter that after almost six months of investigation he had concluded that:

"I can prove without a doubt that the Douma Hospital scene was staged."

Two days after the Douma attack, he had tweeted:

## SPECIAL REPORT

“Sick and tired of activists and rebels using corpses of dead children to stage emotive scenes for Western consumption. Then they wonder why some serious journos are questioning part of the narrative.”

Dalati later deleted his tweet and set his Twitter account to ‘private’ status (it has since become accessible to the public again).

Typically, the BBC sought to minimise any public doubts about the official narrative on Douma by including only Syrian and Russian claims of ‘fabrication’. There was little, or no, coverage of sceptical Western voices. In similar fashion, in the run-up to the Iraq war of 2003, BBC News and other ‘mainstream’ outlets had relegated credible allegations that the ‘threat’ of ‘Iraqi WMD’ was fake news to the ‘evil dictator’ Saddam Hussein.

Readers may recall that award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh had difficulty publishing his in-depth, sceptical reporting about an earlier alleged Syrian government chemical weapons attack at Ghouta in 2013. In the end, he had to publish in the *London Review of Books*, of all places.

This is so often the fate of the best journalism: pushed to the margins where it can be safely ignored.

### Corporate Eyes Averted And Tongues Bitten

The fact that a second OPCW whistleblower has now revealed extremely serious manipulation of evidence surrounding what happened at Douma has been greeted by a wall of corporate media silence. However, it was mentioned briefly by Jonathan Steele, a former senior Middle East correspondent for the *Guardian*, in a radio interview with Paul Henley on the BBC World Service on October 27, 2019.

**Jonathan Steele:** I was in Brussels last

week ... I attended a briefing by a whistleblower from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. He was one of the inspectors who was sent out to Douma in Syria in April last year to check into the allegations by the rebels that Syrian aeroplanes had dropped two canisters of chlorine gas, killing up to 43 people. He claims he was in charge of picking up the samples in the affected areas, and in neutral areas, to check whether there were chlorine derivatives there ...

**Paul Henley:** And?

**JS:** ... and he found that there was no difference. So it rather suggested there was no chemical gas attack, because in the buildings where the people allegedly died there was no extra chlorinated organic chemicals than in the normal streets elsewhere. And I put this to the OPCW for comment, and they haven’t yet replied. But it rather suggests that a lot of this was propaganda...

**PH:** Propaganda led by?

**JS:** ... led by the rebel side to try and bring in American planes, which in fact did happen. American, British and French planes bombed Damascus a few days after these reports. And actually this is the second whistleblower to come forward. A few months ago there was a leaked report by the person [senior OPCW scientist Ian Henderson – mentioned earlier in this alert] who looked into the ballistics, as to whether these cylinders had been dropped by planes, looking at the damage of the building and the damage on the side of the cylinders. And he decided, concluded, that the higher probability was that these cylinders were placed on the ground, rather than from planes.

**PH:** This would be a major revelation...

**JS:** ... it would be a major revelation ...

**PH:** ... given the number of people rubbing the idea that these could have been fake videos at the time.

## SPECIAL REPORT

**JS:** Well, these two scientists, I think they're non-political – they wouldn't have been sent to Douma, if they'd had strong political views, by the OPCW. They want to speak to the Conference of the Member States in November, next month, and give their views, and be allowed to come forward publicly with their concerns. Because they've tried to raise them internally and been – they say they've been – suppressed, their views have been suppressed.

**PH:** Very interesting.

*(Transcript courtesy of Tim Hayward of the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media.)*

**32** In May, when the suppressed engineering assessment report on Douma by the OPCW's Ian Henderson was leaked, Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent, agreed that this was 'an important story'. Despite polite nudges from *Media Lens*, and others, she said no more on the matter. Did BBC colleagues have a quiet word in her ear?

Following revelations of a second whistleblower last week, we challenged her once more. She again ignored us, but she did reply to one of our Twitter followers:

"Thanks Philip. I've been in Canada this month reporting on elections & in Afghanistan for most of Sept. I did forward the earlier information to programmes but was away during more recent news so other teams /programmes would have looked at it."

While it is heartening to see any reply – perhaps a measure of Doucet's desire to give at least the impression of being accountable to the public – it is a very evasive reply. It is remarkable that for five

months she had not been around to report vital testimony from OPCW insiders blowing a hole in the official, US-friendly narrative used to 'justify' missile attacks on Syria. Clearly, she had decided it was not that important after all.

And what does "so other teams /programmes would have looked at it" actually mean? What evidence did they examine? And how closely? Where are the BBC headlines and major coverage these revelations deserve? As far as we can tell, there has been no mention of the OPCW whistleblowers on the BBC News website; nor has there been any coverage on the main BBC News programmes. Our challenges to Paul Royall, editor of the BBC News flagship News at Six and Ten programmes, and Nick Sutton, editor of the BBC News website, have gone unanswered.

Meanwhile, the general election on December 12 may well be, as Jeremy Corbyn says:

"a once-in-a-generation chance to transform our country and take on the vested interests holding people back."

But time is rapidly running out for real change - whether that be on foreign policy, such as Syria, or the largest crisis now facing all of us. A global group of 11,000 scientists declared this week that the evidence is 'clear and unequivocal' that humanity is in a climate emergency. The stakes, then, are even higher than 'once-in-a-generation'. As Extinction Rebellion have repeatedly warned, there may not be more than one new generation of humanity that will survive, given the severity of climate breakdown. **CT**

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**David Cromwell** is co-editor of *Media Lens*, the UK media watchdog – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org)



A woman looks on as IDF soldiers stand guard on a home being demolished in Jerusalem's Old City.

The UN says action must be taken to stop the occupied territories becoming a permanent Israeli settler state. But is anyone listening? asks **Jonathan Cook**

# Israel's takes new steps to airbrush occupation

**T**HE United Nations' independent expert on human rights in "the Palestinian territories recently issued a damning verdict on what he termed 'the longest belligerent occupation in the modern world'".

Michael Lynk, a Canadian law professor, told the UN's human rights council that only urgent international action could prevent Israel's 52-year occupation of the West Bank transforming

into de facto annexation.

He warned of a recent surge in violence against Palestinians from settlers, assisted by the Israeli army, and a record number of demolitions this year of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem – evidence of the ways Israel is further pressuring Palestinians to leave their lands. He urged an international boycott of all settlement products as a necessary step to put pressure on Israel to change

course. He also called on the UN itself to finally publish – as long promised – a database that it has been compiling since 2016 of Israeli and international companies doing business in the illegal settlements and normalising the occupation.

Israel and its supporters have stymied the release, fearing a database would bolster the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign that seeks to end Israel's impunity.

Lynk sounded the alarm days after Israel's most venerated judge, Meir Shamgar, died at 94. Shamgar was a reminder that the settlers have always been able to rely on the support of public figures from across Israel's political spectrum. The settlements have been viewed as a weapon to foil the emergence of a Palestinian state.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most obituaries overlooked the chicanery of Shamgar in building the legal architecture needed to establish the settlements after Israel occupied the Palestinian territories in 1967.

But in a tweeted tribute, Benjamin Netanyahu, the interim prime minister, noted Shamgar's contribution to "legislation policy in Judea and Samaria", using the Israeli government's term for the West Bank.

It was Shamgar who swept aside the prohibition in international law on Israel as an occupying state, transferring its population into the territories. He thereby created a system of apartheid: illegal Jewish settlers enjoyed privileges under Israeli law while the local Palestinian population had to endure oppressive military orders.

Then, by a legal sleight of hand, Shamgar obscured the ugly reality he had inaugurated. He offered all those residing in the West Bank – Jews and Palestinians alike – access to arbitration from Israel's supreme court.

It was, of course, an occupier's form of justice – and a policy that treated the occupied territories as ultimately part of

## Israel's thinking is that, once the settlers become formal owners of the land they were given illegally, they can be treated as the 'local population'

Israel, erasing any border. Ever since, the court has been deeply implicated in every war crime associated with the settlement enterprise.

As Israeli lawyer Michael Sfarid noted, Shamgar "legalised almost every draconian measure taken by the defence establishment to crush Palestinian political and military organisations", including detention without trial, house demolitions, land thefts, curfews and much more. All were needed to preserve the settlements.

**S**hamgar's legal innovations – endorsing the systematic abuse of Palestinians and the entrenchment of the occupation – are now being expanded by a new generation of jurists.

Their latest proposal has been described as engineering a 'revolution' in the occupation regime. It would let the settlers buy as private property the plots of occupied land their illegal homes currently stand on.

Disingenuously, Israeli officials argue that the policy would end 'discrimination' against the settlers. An army legal adviser, Tzvi Mintz, noted recently: "A ban on making real-estate deals based on national origin raises

a certain discomfort."

Approving the privatisation of the settlements is a far more significant move than it might sound.

International law states that an occupier can take action in territories under occupation on only two possible grounds: out of military necessity or to benefit the local population. With the settlements obviously harming local Palestinians by depriving them of land and free movement, Israel disguised its first colonies as military installations.

It went on to seize huge swathes of the West Bank as 'state lands' – meaning for Jews only – on the pretext of military needs. Civilians were transferred there with the claim that they bolstered Israel's national security.

That is why no one has contemplated allowing the settlers to own the land they live on – until now. Instead it is awarded by military authorities, who administer the land on behalf of the Israeli state.

That is bad enough. But now defence ministry officials want to upend the definition in international law of the settlements as a war crime. Israel's thinking is that, once the settlers become the formal owners of the land they were given illegally, they can be treated as the 'local population'.

Israel will argue that the settlers are protected under international law just like the Palestinians. That would provide Israel with a legal pretext to annex the West Bank, saying it

benefits the 'local' settler population. And by turning more than 600,000 illegal settlers into landowners, Israel can reinvent the occupation as an insoluble puzzle. Palestinians seeking redress from Israel for the settlements will instead have to fight an endless array of separate claims against individual settlers.

This proposal follows recent moves by Israel to legalise many dozens of so-called outposts, built by existing settlements to steal yet more Palestinian land. As well as violating international law, the outposts fall foul of Israeli law and undertakings made under the Oslo accords not to expand the settlements.

All of this is being done in the context of a highly sympathetic administration in Washington that, it is widely assumed, is preparing to approve annexation of the West Bank as part of

## Their impatience has fuelled a spike in violence, including a spate of recent attacks on Israeli soldiers sent to protect them

a long-postponed peace plan.

The current delay has been caused by Netanyahu's failure narrowly in two general elections this year to win enough seats to form a settler-led government. Israel might now be heading to a third election.

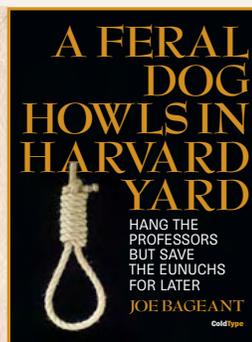
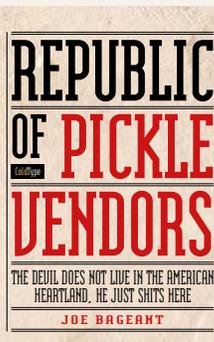
Officials and the settlers are itching to press ahead with formal annexation of nearly two-thirds of the West Bank. Netanyahu promised annexation in the run-up to both elections. Settler leaders, meanwhile, have praised the new army chief of staff, Aviv Kochavi, as sympathetic to their cause.

Expectations have soared among the settlers as a result. Their impatience has fuelled a spike in violence, including a spate of recent attacks on Israeli soldiers sent to protect them as the settlers confront and assault Palestinians beginning the annual olive harvest.

Lynk, the UN's expert, has warned that the international community needs to act swiftly to stop the occupied territories becoming a permanent Israeli settler state. Sadly, there are few signs that foreign governments are listening. **CT**

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**Jonathan Cook** won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East*, and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair*. His website is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net).

# Read the Best of Joe Bageant



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Judging by the minimal impact of the news, there will be few consequences for those who misled the world about chemical weapons attacks in Syria, nor for those who called for war on the basis of it, writes **Alan MacLeod**

# Media silent over 'fixing' of findings on Syria attack

**D**OUMA, Syria, April 2018. Dozens of people die in a suspected chemical weapons attack in the eastern suburb of the capital Damascus. The United States and many European countries immediately identify President Bashar al-Assad as responsible for the attacks, and respond with deadly violence of their own, starting a bombing campaign against his forces.

Yet new evidence leaked from whistleblowers suggests that not only is the Western story on shaky ground, but the report into the incident from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) deliberately suppressed evidence and testimony that contradicted the US narrative.

Founded in 1997 to represent the collective position of its 193 member states, the OPCW oversees and verifies adherence to the strict rules that regulate the use of chemical weapons, which it hopes to eliminate.

After its fact-finding mission

was complete, the OPCW issued a report on the alleged Douma attack. While far from conclusive or damning (it refused even to speculate on who was responsible for the attacks), it did suggest there was "likely" a chlorine attack carried out by dropping gas canisters from the air.

This seems to contradict its interim findings that stated, "No organophosphorus nerve agents or their degradation products were detected, either in the environmental samples or in plasma samples from the alleged casualties".

Nevertheless, some insinuated that the new report implicated government forces, the only groups likely to possess both the chemicals and the helicopters necessary to carry out such an attack.

**B**ut others criticised the findings. Piers Robinson, Co-Director for the Organisation for Propaganda Studies and formerly Chair in Politics, Soci-

ety and Political Journalism at Sheffield University claimed the OPCW report contained "significant anomalies" and was "unpersuasive, to put it mildly", noting contradictions on analysis of chemicals used, the method of delivery, and more.

Robinson's fears appear to have been confirmed, and on October 15 an OPCW whistleblower met in secret with a panel of international experts, including the first director-general of the organisation, Dr. Jose Bustani.

After seeing the evidence provided by the whistleblower, the panel came to the conclusion that the OPCW had suppressed and distorted its data, analysis and conclusions, noting that "key information" about chemical analysis, toxicology, ballistics investigations and witness statements were suppressed, "ostensibly to favour a preordained conclusion".

The panel also expressed alarm at efforts to exclude certain inspectors from the inves-

After Douma, the west's response to Syria's regime must be military

Simon Tisdall



Bashar al-Assad's continued mass murder of civilians means there can be no more excuses. Both morality and self-interest demand action



▲ A rocket is launched from eastern Ghouta. 'Eastern Ghouta has become a Syrian Srebrenica' Photograph: Jinhua/REX/Shutterstock

## A Reckoning Will Come in Syria

In order to have any real impact on chemical-weapons use, the American response needs to be sustained.

THANASSIS CAMBANIS APR 14, 2018



A missile crosses over Damascus. (SANA / REUTERS)

**WAR TALK:** Both The Guardian left, and The Atlantic were quick to advocate a military attack on Syria.

tigation or from allowing them to express differing opinions and observations. Dissenting assessments that concluded that the gas canisters were probably placed in Douma, rather than dropped from aircraft – suggesting an altogether different scenario to the one the US government was presenting – were suppressed.

On the new evidence provided, Dr. Bustani said it, “confirmed doubts and suspicions I already had” about the incoherent report, claiming that “the picture is clearer now, although very disturbing”.

**W**ho, if anyone, pressured the OPCW to do this? One possibility is the Trump administration, who recently awarded them a further \$4.5-million for “further investigations” into Syria.

This is particularly notewor-

thy, as the United States is infamously thrifty when it comes to paying international organisations. For decades it has refused to pay its dues to the UN, now owing billions, in retaliation for not fully complying with its wishes.

It also cut funding to UNESCO in 2011 and left the organisation in 2017 after it recognized Palestine – even though the US is officially committed to a two-state solution in the Middle East.

Many with experience in bidding for funds will know that if an organisation gives you millions of dollars for research, you know what is expected of you. On the issue, Robinson said there is “certainly an element of incentivisation ... in order to encourage the OPCW to find and reach conclusions that are going to be compatible with what they want.”

The US also previously

forced Bustani from the OPCW in 2002 for contradicting their claims on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction.

The Bush administration under Secretary of State John Bolton seemingly threatened to kill his family if he did not resign: “You have 24 hours to leave the organisation, and if you don’t comply with this decision by Washington, we have ways to retaliate against you. We know where your kids live”, John Bolton told him.

The whistleblower’s testimony goes directly against the way in which corporate media presented the Douma attack. Unquestioningly accepting the Trump administration’s line, media claiming to be the custodians of truth and defenders of democracy, immediately began to clamour for a military response.

Even as the dust in Douma was still settling, the *Wash-*

*ington Post's* editorial board claimed that "President Trump will deal another blow to US global leadership if he does not follow through" on bombing the country.

The *New York Times'* editorial team appeared to be trying to goad him into action, noting, "The president should know by now that tough talk without a coherent strategy or follow-through is dangerous". In other words, "talk is cheap, it is time for action".

For the *Guardian*, considered at the left extreme of the mainstream spectrum, even waiting for a report to ascertain what truly happened was "irresponsible obfuscation"; its top foreign affairs commentator and former foreign and US editor, Simon Tisdall insisting that, "After Douma, the West's response to Syria's regime must be military ... there can be no more excuses".

He also condemned Obama's hesitance to commit to more US involvement in Syria as "a blot on his record".

All this despite describing Trump before his election as a dangerous lunatic fascist who could not be trusted as commander-in-chief, another example of 'resistance' media uniting behind Trump when he considers aggressive action and opposing him most forcefully when he moves in a more conciliatory or dovish direction.

The media got their way; on April 14 the US, France and the United Kingdom conducted a series of coordinated airstrikes

## Of the top 100 American newspapers by circulation, not one issued an editorial opposed to the strikes, the vast majority supporting Trump

against the Syrian government, although they seemed confused about who was responsible and how effective they were.

The US's public stance was that it was "still assessing the evidence of the attack" and "did not know which chemical was used, or whether it was launched by the Syrian government or forces supporting the government".

**Y**et it was 'mission accomplished' according to Trump, with an army spokesperson claiming they had "crippled" Assad's chemical weapons producing capability, "setting him back years". Yet that same spokesperson was later quoted as saying Assad still had the capability to launch attacks "throughout the country at a variety of sites".

What is indisputable is that the corporate press was fully behind the West's military escalation in Syria. A survey done by the media watchdog, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, found that of the top 100 American newspapers by circulation, not a single one issued an editorial opposed to the April strikes, with the vast majority of those offered sup-

porting the Trump administration's actions.

The *Washington Post* was unequivocal: "Mr. Trump was right to order the strikes" and rather ominously noted he "properly left open the possibility of further action".

Other media were similarly joyous over more war; the *Atlantic* claiming bombing was "undoubtedly a good thing".

Meanwhile, the *Guardian's* chief political commentator insinuated that dishonest anti-war leftists like Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn were effectively responsible for the atrocities themselves, being "too busy looking in the mirror admiring their own halos to face the moral challenges posed by a situation like Syria".

Needless to say, the conservative end of the corporate media spectrum was no better. As media analyst Adam Johnson wrote, "On the issue of launching airstrikes against the Assad government, robust debate is nonexistent. Major publications take the bulk of the premises for war for granted – namely the US's legal and moral right to wage it – and simply parse over the details".

On the fudged OPCW report, veteran Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk wrote, "It is difficult to underestimate the seriousness of this manipulative act", worrying that this will undermine the credibility of all trustworthy international organisations and give fuel to Assadist and Russian propaganda networks.

While state-funded Russian

outlets have covered the story, the silence from the mainstream, corporate press has been deafening, with no interest whatsoever in the story (one reason why supporting independent, alternative media as a counterweight against corporate news is so important).

Judging by the minimal impact of the news, there will likely be few consequences for those who suppressed information and misled the world, nor for those who called for war on the basis of it, their assertions

**This is hardly the first, and surely not the last time that fake news is manufactured about Syria, where the fog of war obscures reality**

proving, once again, disastrously wrong.

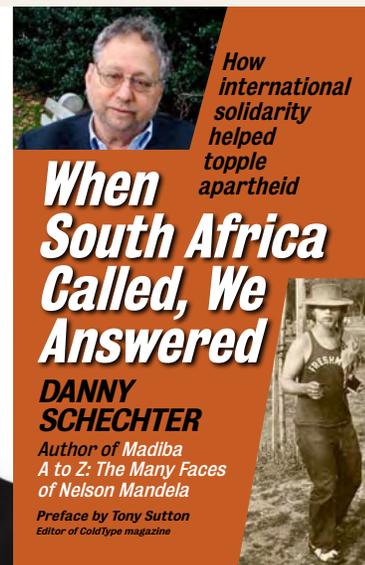
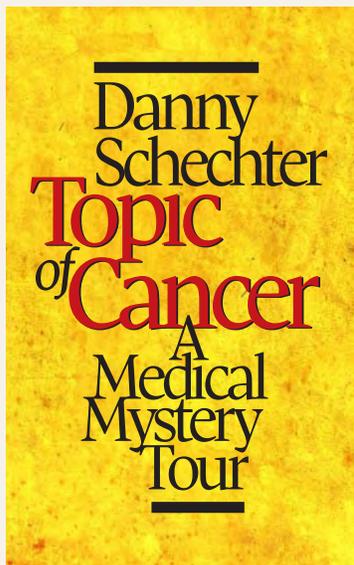
This is hardly the first, and surely not the last time that fake news is manufactured about Syria, where the fog of war and

competing claims from many sides with their own agendas obscure the reality of the situation. In war, they say, truth is always the first casualty. **CT**

*Alan MacLeod is a MintPress contributor as well as an academic and writer for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. His book, Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting was published in April. This article was first published at [www.mintpress.com](http://www.mintpress.com).*

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The ruling classes have no idea how to solve the problems posed by capitalism – massive wealth, massive inequality, climate catastrophe, and war.

**Vijay Prashad** tells how South American voters have decided it's time to try

# Neoliberalism? Never again, says South America

**T**HE slogan is pithy – *Neoliberalismo Nunca Más* (Neoliberalism Never Again). It was chanted in the streets of Santiago, Chile; it was drawn on the walls in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and in a more sober register, it is mentioned in a seminar in Mexico City, Mexico.

Elections and protests rattle the continent. The protest by Chilean students against metro fees has now become a general protest against the government. In Colombia, the right wing suffered significant defeats in local elections. Bogotá's mayor is now Claudia López, the first woman, the first gay woman, the first gay woman from the Green Party, to win the post; the mayor of Bogotá is the second most important person after the country's president. In the town of Turbaco, near Cartagena, a former guerrilla from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – Guillermo Torres or 'Julian Conrado' won the mayor's post. This is the first time that FARC

– which had been in an armed struggle for over half a century – won such a significant election (they now joke in Venezuela that FARC has more mayors than Juan Guaidó – the man set up by Washington to overthrow Nicolás Maduro).

In Argentina, the electorate tossed out the government of Mauricio Macri, who had taken his country to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), produced a harsh austerity budget, and then disregarded the pain felt by his compatriots. If Haiti and Ecuador simmer with 'IMF Riots', Argentina had an 'IMF Election'. The incoming government of Alberto Fernández and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner promises an exit from neoliberalism. Argentina's external debt is at about \$285-billion, just under \$6,500 per person. This foreign debt is almost 75 percent higher than when Macri took office in 2015.

In August, Fitch cut Argentina's rating to CCC, slipping closer and closer to the dreaded D rating. As an exporter of min-

imally processed food, Argentina is dependent on prices set elsewhere – a victim, as are many countries that export raw materials, of the financialisation of commodity prices. It has imported expensive debt and exported low-priced foods.

**F**orty years ago, the propertied classes revolted against any social democratic arrangement in their countries. As a result of fears over capitalist turbulence, Keynesians argued that the state must intervene to smooth over the instability of the business cycle. Pressure from the workers' movements and the Left forced governments to finance social security, education, health care, and elder care. Funds for state intervention and for social spending came – largely – from progressive taxation. The rich no longer wanted to make these payments. One of the earliest countries to undergo a neoliberal transformation was Chile.

As the rich withdrew from

taxation, governments – of a variety of political persuasions – struggled to fund their own borrowing and the social spending won by the workers. Multilateral organisations – such as the IMF – and ratings agencies punished countries that had high deficits; this is why many countries passed balanced budget amendments that prevented borrowing to pay for social spending. A combination of the tax strike by the rich and the balanced budget amendment squeezed government spending.

To raise funds, governments did at least five things:

- Privatised public assets. Governments sold off public assets that had been built by the sacrifices of previous generations – assets such as public banks, public utilities, and public lands.

- Commodified areas of social life. Governments allowed private firms to charge for the delivery of goods that had previously been seen as social and whose delivery was not for a fee – such as water and electricity.

- Deregulated business enterprises. Regulations allowed governments to protect the public from the excesses of profit-making – such as environmental pollution – and allow fees to be collected by the State.

- Gave subsidies to big corporations. To attract big corporations to their jurisdictions, governments began to provide massive subsidies – subsidies that were often larger than the funds laid out toward social services. In the United States,

this is called ‘corporate welfare’ – more welfare for corporations than for the indigent.

- Cut social spending. Austerity budgets became the norm, with States cutting social security, education, health care, and elder care.

This remains the core of neoliberalism. It has wrecked the world. It is why they are saying “never again” to neoliberalism in the ballot box and on the streets of South America.

**T**he new government has pledged to abandon the road of austerity, to fund the social commitments of the government, and to adopt a national development strategy. How it will do so with the debt overhang and pressure from the creditors and the multilateral organisations is to be seen.

In Argentina, debates around the exit from neoliberalism have been ongoing; the recently released book *Salir del Neoliberalismo* (Exit Neoliberalism) captures the thrust of these debates. In his essay in the book, Claudio Katz lays out four different scenarios for Argentina, which include a repetition of the story of Portugal and of Greece. Toward the end of his essay, Katz says that the cost of the crisis should not be borne by the public but by the authors of the crisis – namely, the creditors. An audit of the enormous \$57-billion IMF loan to Argentina is necessary; so too is a suspension of payment to service that debt. Drawing from Katz, one can go further:

- All subsidies to corporations should be suspended.

- There should be an audit of each of these subsidies.

- An audit should be immediately ordered of the taxation department.

- Letters of intent should be sent off to tax havens that hold the money of Argentinian nationals.

- And so on.

Such means – fairly straightforward – should be part of a national debate about tax revenues and subsidies to corporations. If subsidies are suspended and if taxes are collected, there should be enough money to finance food sovereignty schemes that tackle endemic hunger, and cooperative production for food and goods.

We are in a period of transition. There is no doubt that the ruling classes have no idea how to solve the problems posed by capitalism – massive wealth, massive inequality, climate catastrophe, and war. Neoliberalism, their policy framework of the past 40 years, is now in serious crisis. No full alternative is available. We have glimmers of the future; experiments need to be tried. Argentina’s government will be under pressure to test an exit to neoliberalism. There will be excluded workers and feminists in the streets making sure that it does not betray their hopes. **CT**

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**Vijay Prashad** is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.

**Ted Rall** says the gloating in the US over the assassination of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi suggests that the country has lost its moral moorings

# Al-Baghdadi killing: Illegal, disgusting and degenerate

**A**S a society degenerates, life cheapens. The rhetoric that follows death coarsens. Respect paid to fallen rivals is replaced by triumphalism.

Historians observed this trend in ancient Rome. As republic turned to empire and domain expanded, so did arrogance and hubris. Vanquished chieftains, who previously might have been allowed to keep their thrones as heads of vassal states, were gruesomely executed in public. Early Christians got tossed to the lions. Gladiatorial combat became all the rage.

The assassination of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by US special forces operating under orders from President Trump reminds us that ours is a nation in moral decline – bloodthirsty and crass, functioning more like a vengeful crime family sending a message to its rivals than a nation of laws, a hellpit so devoid of basic ethics that it doesn't even occur to its ruling

party's adversaries to raise the question of legality.

Nor does it cross the minds of journalists to mention the United States' responsibility for the rise of ISIS. Rather than defend the secular socialist government of Bashar al-Assad or staying out of it, the Obama Administration armed and funded the Free Syria Army, parts of which allied with ISIS. This began the civil war. By most accounts, al-Baghdadi was radicalised by his time in a hellish prison in US-occupied Iraq – that's on George W Bush.

**I**nserting the caveat that ISIS committed many terrible crimes under al-Baghdadi ought not to be necessary. Alas, such is the depth of our depravity, that to omit such a mention is to risk being accused of approving of ISIS – its religious extremism, its kidnapping, enslavement, torturing and beheading – and because one suggests, as I do here, that a culture that had not lost its moral moorings would

not tolerate what Trump did, what the media fails to question, and what even those on what passes for the 'left' not only tolerate but cheer.

So here: ISIS sucks. Moving on ...

"Thank you and congratulations to our special operations forces and others involved in tracking and getting rid of ISIS/Daesh leader Baghdadi", tweeted Tulsi Gabbard.

*Getting rid of.*

Gabbard is, by far, the least militaristic candidate for president.

"In tone and substance", *Vox* noted, "the announcements of the deaths of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Osama bin Laden couldn't have been more different". In 2011 Barack Obama used "nearly clinical tones" in his taped statement; Trump made fun of the dead jihadi, dubiously claiming that he left this world "whimpering and crying and screaming all the way" before detonating a suicide vest. He "died like a dog, died like a coward", Trump told a press

IF THE ROLES WERE REVERSED, AND ISIS HAD ASSASSINATED PRESIDENT TRUMP



conference. Perhaps Caesar had something similarly classy to say about Vercingetorix.

If ISIS had been defeated as the president previously stated, the death of al-Baghdadi wasn't a military victory. Worse than the BS was the undiluted repulsiveness of the president's statement. Trump's degeneracy did not spring out of thin air; rather, it was the culmination of his predecessors' increasingly shameless contempt for the human lives we have given them the power to snuff out, and their discovery that holding up a severed head as a trophy can get you votes.

Obama played it cool. He put

his surrogates in charge of his death-gloating. "If you are looking for a bumper sticker to sum up how President Obama has handled what we inherited, it's pretty simple: Osama bin Laden is dead and General Motors is alive", Vice President Joe Biden bragged as he stumped for Obama in 2012. No one in the media questioned the White House about the lack of legal justification for the operation.

"We came, we saw, he died", Secretary of State Hillary Clinton cackled in 2011 after she watched on TV as a US drone missile hit Moammar Gaddafi's car, driving him into the hands of American-armed radi-

cal Islamists who sodomised the Libyan leader with a bayonet. Running for president in 2016, she reminded audiences that she'd been in the Situation Room watching bin Laden being whacked.

"Good riddance", George W Bush said after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was hung and decapitated. Bush invaded Iraq on the pretext that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. In fact, Colin Powell admitted to associates that the evidence he presented in a ballyhooed speech to the United Nations was "bullshit". Saddam never threatened the US. Impeaching Bush for conning America into

war, Nancy Pelosi said in 2006, was “off the table”.

We have come a long way since 1981, when Ronald Reagan, a conservative Republican, signed Executive Order 12333, which states: “No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination”.

EO 12333 – which remains in force – was part of the aftermath of the Church Committee hearings of the 1970s, which exposed assassinations and other illegal acts committed by the CIA in Latin America and elsewhere

## When US spooks conspired to murder political adversaries during the Cold War, the political class had the grace to pretend to be ashamed

at the height of the Cold War. American spooks conspired to murder political adversaries and heads of state, mainly on the left, all over the world. Back then, the political class had the grace to pretend to be ashamed.

When asked whether they had ordered extrajudicial assassinations, presidents of

that era issued what came to be known as the Glomar response: they refused to confirm or deny. They would never have admitted, much less boasted about, murdering people. The press would never have looked the other way. If they had, the American people would not have tolerated either the politicians or the journalists. **CT**

*Ted Rall (Twitter: @tedrall), the political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, is the author of Francis: The People's Pope. His website is [www.rall.com](http://www.rall.com).*



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# Insights

## Did this happen in the home of Magna Carta?

By John Pilger

*John Pilger describes the scene inside a London courtroom when the WikiLeaks publisher, Julian Assange, appeared at the start of a landmark extradition case that will define the future of free journalism*

**T**HE worst moment was one of a number of ‘worst’ moments. I have sat in many courtrooms and seen judges abuse their positions. This judge, Vanessa Baraitser – actually she isn’t a judge at all; she’s a magistrate – shocked all of us who were there.

Her face was a progression of sneers and imperious indifference; she addressed Julian Assange with an arrogance that reminded me of a magistrate presiding over apartheid South Africa’s Race Classifica-



WARNING: Poster on a wall near St Paul’s Cathedral in London.

tion Board. When Julian struggled to speak, he couldn’t get words out, even stumbling over his name and date of birth.

When he spoke truth and when his barrister spoke, Baraitser contrived boredom; when the prosecuting barrister spoke, she was attentive. She had nothing to do; it was demonstrably preordained. In the table in front of us were a handful of American officials, whose directions to the prosecutor were carried by his junior; back and forth this young woman went, delivering instructions.

The judge watched this outrage without a comment. It reminded me of a newsreel of a show trial in Stalin’s Moscow; the difference was that Soviet show trials were broadcast.

Here, the state broadcaster, the BBC, blacked it out, as did the other mainstream channels.

Having ignored Julian’s barrister’s factual description of how the CIA had run a Spanish security firm that spied on him in the Ecuadorean embassy, she didn’t yawn, but her disinterest was as expressive. She then denied Julian’s lawyers any more time to prepare their case – even though their client was prevented in prison from receiving legal documents and other tools with which to defend himself.

Her knee in the groin was to announce that the next court hearing would be at remote Woolwich, which adjoins Belmarsh prison and has few seats for the public. This will ensure isolation and be as close to a secret trial as it’s possible to get. Did this happen in the home of the Magna Carta? Yes, but who knew?

Julian’s case is often compared with Dreyfus; but historically it’s far more important. No one doubts – not his enemies on the *New York Times*, not the Murdoch press in Australia – that if he is extradited to the United States and the inevitable supermax, journalism will be incarcerated, too.

Who will then dare to expose anything of importance, let alone the high crimes of the West? Who will dare publish ‘Collateral Murder’? Who will dare tell the public that

democracy, such as it is, has been subverted by a corporate authoritarianism from which fascism draws its strength.

Once there were spaces, gaps, boltholes, in mainstream journalism in which mavericks, who are the best journalists, could work. These are long closed now. The hope is the samizdat on the internet, where fine disobedient journalism is still practised. The greater hope is that a judge or even judges in Britain's court

of appeal, the High Court, will rediscover justice and set him free. In the meantime, it's our responsibility to fight in ways we know but which now require more than a modicum of Julian Assange's courage. **CT**

*John Pilger is an Australian journalist and BAFTA award-winning documentary film maker. His web site is [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com). This article first appeared at [www.consortiumnews.com](http://www.consortiumnews.com).*

executioner and polices the streets of Mega-City One, itself a hyper-constructed metropolis riddled with criminal activity.

The aesthetic of the character is reminiscent of the iconography of fascist Spain and with '70s punk-style overtones. It further established that Dredd was to be received as extreme. It is interesting to note that today the riot uniforms of police, with their padding, shields and knee pads, put even Dredd's uniform to shame.

**T**he world of Dredd was to be an exaggerated depiction of Western society. A radical population spike coupled with a lack of liveable land (because it was all radioactive), sets the scene for a dystopian comic. In this world, the only course of action to maintain order and overcome lawlessness is through instant justice.

Drawing on the cultural capital of Dredd is a shortcut to justify his particular brand as a solution to rampant crime. It can also be invoked as a warning to avoid the dilution of civilian freedoms and ideals. But it seems that Dredd is increasingly becoming prophetic rather than fiction.

In Western society, a perceived prevalence of shoot-to-kill responses, the militarising of the police,

## Who is Judge Dredd and why does he matter?

By **Justin Matthews**

**A**CCORDING to a recent study, the sixth leading cause of death for young men in the United States is the warranted and unwarranted use of police force.

With the US president himself frequently alluding to America's military prowess and right-wing media hosts suggesting the US embrace a police state after each mass shooting, it is not surprising journalists are invoking the image of Judge Dredd, a character in the science fiction comic 2000AD.

The parallels between

Judge Dredd and contemporary society appear uncanny. They symbolise the demise of democracy and freedom in favour of an authoritarian regime.

The character of Judge Dredd was first introduced in the 1977 second issue of the comic 2000AD. His creators envisioned the character as a no-nonsense cop – as writer John Wagner put it, “a psycho character with no feelings”.

From the outset, the Dredd comics were designed to be satirical. They depicted “the ultimate draconian cop”, who acts as judge, jury and

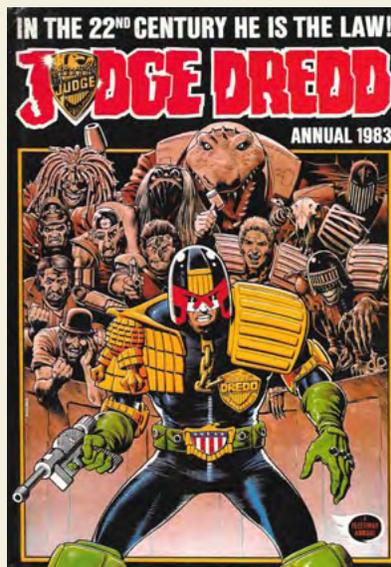
the invasive surveillance of people and the urbanisation in response to over-population mimics the fictive universe of *Judge Dredd* comics.

For instance, in 2005, a top ranking British police officer, metropolitan police commissioner Sir Ian Blair, was accused of embracing the Judge Dredd ideology when he suggested that police officers should have more autonomy. He believed they should be able to confiscate licenses and vehicles, and issue infractions for anti-social behaviour, circumventing the rules of law and moving towards a process of instant justice.

The world of Dredd emphasises authoritarianism in relation to the police and government. The comics include harsher penalties and laws against outsiders, walls that encase cities and a system of rule that is so restrictive it denies people basic human rights. It also takes no responsibility for the brutality and injustice felt by those who have become collateral damage.

It's unsurprising then, that media use the symbol of Dredd in discussions of countries where similar trends are becoming apparent. This includes the continued debate about a wall between the US and Mexico and tighter immigration policies in the US, France, post-Brexit Britain and Australia.

The Dredd comics become a cautionary tale suggesting



HE'S THE LAW: Cover of *Judge Dredd* magazine.

that, if we continue down the authoritarian path proposed in the comics, it may have real-world consequences for global citizens.

A recent study explored if increased militarisation of law enforcement agencies leads to an increase in violent behaviour among officers. It found that when law enforcement is supplied with military materials, it inevitably becomes more militarised and affects the relationship between police and citizens.

**W**riting about their study, the researchers argued that adopting a more militarised approach to police practice and procedures could lead to more citizens killed by the police force. To support their point, they say when a county goes

from receiving no military hardware to a large quantity (more than \$2.5-million to one agency) the number of civilians killed within a county is likely to double.

When social systems, such as the police force, are under pressure to respond to increased population density, criminal activity and acts of terrorism, it's not surprising society is seeing the devolution of police powers towards Dredd-like mechanisms of control. But what is the cost?

If society were to continue paralleling the Dredd universe, police may no longer be considered civic guardians that maintain community values or upholders of moral authority. Citizens could be forced to forfeit freedoms in favour of perceived protection, and an authoritarian regime could reign supreme.

For the moment, Dredd remains a fictitious world, but there is a deep and inherent trust that underlines the process of civilian policing. Devolving this fragile balance even a little bit may well be the difference between living in a policed state versus a police state. **CT**

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BLOODY CONTRAST: Libya used to look like this (left). Noe it looks like this (right).

## Brexit isn't Cameron's legacy - Libya is

48

By Kit Knightly

*"The strong man with the dagger is followed by the weak man with the sponge."*

– Lord Acton

**F**ORMER British Prime Minister David Cameron has a book out. You've probably heard. There's a lot of press coverage. The BBC did a retrospective documentary about him to coincide with it, the *Guardian* had a review of the book, a review of the documentary, and an interview with the man himself.

Oh, and then another article about how it's selling less well than Tony Blair's biography. This is obviously just about journalists reporting the news, you understand. It is absolute-

ly not at all a mass marketing strategy camouflaged as "current events".

Shame on you for thinking otherwise.

Naturally, as is always the case when ex-prime ministers make appearances or churn out autobiographies, there is plenty of talk about "legacy".

Well, what is David Cameron's legacy? The media are pretty clear: Brexit.

The BBC documentary is entitled *The Cameron Years*. It's in two parts, somehow bloated out to two whole hours, and is only concerned with the Brexit vote. The first part is entirely dedicated to it, that's literally all it's about, with the second half being more general, but

still very Brexit-centric.

The reviews of the book are no better. In fact they are worse. The *Telegraph* liked it, as did the *Times*. The *Guardian* and *Independent* didn't, as much, but still praised its "honesty". They all talk almost entirely about Brexit. Bloomberg headline, "David Cameron Wants You to Remember Him for More Than Just Brexit", pointing out: "The former prime minister's new memoir, *For the Record*, spends just 50 of 700 pages on the disastrous referendum" ... before going on to review just those 50 pages.

In fact, I've read over half-a-dozen reviews of this book, and none of them talks about anything but Brexit.

There is not a single use of the word "Libya" in any of them. Not anywhere. Not even in passing.

You would think that the total and complete destruction of the most developed nation on the African continent would warrant at least brief discus-

sion in the “legacy” of the Prime Minister responsible but, apparently, you would be wrong. (I know we’re only Britain, and we only do what America tells us, but “Only following orders” didn’t work for Goering and probably shouldn’t work for anybody else. Cameron included).

**T**he press silence on Libya is on another level. They grudgingly discuss Iraq as a ‘mistake’ or ‘blunder’, they carry on their insane propaganda-war on Syria with fresh gusto every few months (or whenever they need a distraction), but Libya ... Libya is the country that must not be named.

Take the *Guardian*’s Jonathan Freedland. He was ALL OVER Libya back in 2011. He campaigned for NATO to do something, preaching about the West’s ‘responsibility to protect’. Does he mention Libya once in his review of this book? Nope. He even has the gall to open the piece with this: “Just as the 700 pages of Tony Blair’s autobiography could not escape the shadow of Iraq, so the 700 pages of David Cameron’s memoir are destined to be read through a single lens: Brexit”.

As if his decision to totally disregard a war crime he not only apologised for, but cheerfully encouraged, was somehow just fate and totally beyond his control.

That’s probably got something to do with the organ-

trafficking and open-air slave markets.

This was no accident, you understand, Libya is exactly what NATO set-out to make it – a failed state where absolutely everything is for sale. A true capitalist paradise. But discussing that would make it harder to sell ‘R2P’ in the future.

Better to just endlessly rant on about Brexit instead.

Now, obviously, Brexit is (potentially) an important decision for the fate of the country. You can’t deny that. But, let’s be real here. Even IF we leave the EU (and right now that is

far from guaranteed), and even IF our leaving is as bad as the worst doom-sayers are predicting, London isn’t going to end up like Tripoli, Libya’s capital ....

And at the end of the day, THAT is Cameron’s legacy.

Just as it’s the legacy of the all slimy apologists who cheered him on, and the narrow-minded, self-centred xenophobes who clean up after him. **CT**

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*Kit Knightly is the co-editor of OffGuardian – [www.off-guardian.org](http://www.off-guardian.org) – where this article was first published.*

## They live, we sleep: The growing evil in our midst

By **John W. Whitehead**

**W**E’RE living in two worlds, you and I. There’s the world we see (or are made to see) and then there’s the one we sense (and occasionally catch a glimpse of), the latter of which is a far cry from the propaganda-driven reality manufactured by the government and its corporate sponsors, including the media.

Indeed, what most Americans perceive as life in America – privileged, progressive and free – is a far cry from real-

ity, where economic inequality is growing, real agendas and real power are buried beneath layers of Orwellian doublespeak and corporate obfuscation, and ‘freedom,’ such that it is, is meted out in small, legalistic doses by militarised police armed to the teeth.

All is not as it seems.

This is the premise of John Carpenter’s film *They Live*, which was released more than 30 years ago, and remains unnervingly, chillingly appropriate for our modern age.

Best known for his horror film *Halloween*, which assumes that there is a form of evil so dark that it can't be killed, Carpenter's larger body of work is infused with a strong anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment, laconic bent that speaks to the filmmaker's concerns about the unravelling of our society, particularly our government.

Time and again, Carpenter portrays the government working against its own citizens, a populace out of touch with reality, technology run amok, and a future more horrific than any horror film.

For instance, in Carpenter's *They Live*, two migrant workers discover that the world is not as it seems. In fact, the population is actually being controlled and exploited by aliens working in partnership with an oligarchic elite. All the while, the populace – blissfully unaware of the real agenda at work in their lives – has been lulled into complacency, indoctrinated into compliance, bombarded with media distractions, and hypnotised by subliminal messages beamed out of television and various electronic devices, billboards and the like.

It is only when homeless drifter John Nada (played to the hilt by the late Roddy Piper) discovers a pair of doctored sunglasses – Hoffman lenses – that Nada sees what lies beneath the elite's fabricated reality: control and bondage.



**SAME AGAIN!:** Poster for the re-release of the film *They Live*.

When viewed through the lens of truth, the elite, who appear human until stripped of their disguises, are shown to be monsters who have enslaved the citizenry in order to prey on them.

Likewise, billboards blare out hidden, authoritative messages: a bikini-clad woman in one ad is actually ordering viewers to MARRY AND REPRODUCE. Magazine racks scream CONSUME and OBEY. A wad of dollar bills in a vendor's hand proclaims, THIS IS YOUR GOD.

**W**hen viewed through Nada's Hoffman lenses, some of the other hidden messages being drummed into the people's subconscious include: NO INDEPENDENT THOUGHT, CONFORM, SUBMIT, STAY ASLEEP, BUY, WATCH TV, NO IMAGINATION, and DO NOT QUESTION AUTHORITY.

This indoctrination cam-

paign engineered by the elite in *They Live* is painfully familiar to anyone who has studied the decline of American culture.

A citizenry that does not think for themselves, obeys without question, is submissive, does not challenge authority, does not think outside the box, and is content to sit back and be entertained, is a citizenry that can be easily controlled.

In this way, the subtle message of *They Live* provides an apt analogy of our own distorted vision of life in the American police state, what philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to as dictatorship in democracy, “the invisible order which sustains your apparent freedom”.

We're being fed a series of carefully contrived fictions that bear no resemblance to reality.

The powers-that-be want us to feel threatened by forces beyond our control (terrorists, shooters, bombers).

They want us afraid and dependent on the government and its militarised armies for our safety and well-being.

They want us distrustful of each other, divided by our prejudices, and at each other's throats.

Most of all, they want us to continue to march in lockstep with their dictates. Tune out the government's attempts to distract, divert and befuddle us and tune into what's really going on in this country, and you'll run headlong into an unmistakable, unpalatable truth: the moneyed elite who

rule us view us as expendable resources to be used, abused and discarded.

In other words, we are being ruled by an oligarchy disguised as a democracy, and arguably on our way towards fascism – a form of government where private corporate interests rule, money calls the shots, and the people are seen as mere subjects to be controlled.

For the final hammer of fascism to fall, it will require the most crucial ingredient: the majority of the people will have to agree that it's not only expedient but necessary.

But why would a people agree to such an oppressive regime? As the Bearded Man in *They Live* warns, "They are dismantling the sleeping middle class. More and more people are becoming poor. We are their cattle. We are being bred for slavery."

**S**o where does that leave us?

The characters who populate Carpenter's films provide some insight. Underneath their machismo, they still believe in the ideals of liberty and equal opportunity. Their beliefs place them in constant opposition with the law and the establishment, but they are nonetheless freedom fighters.

When, for example, John Nada destroys the alien hypno-transmitter in *They Live*, he restores hope by delivering America a wake-up call for freedom. That's the key right

there: we need to wake up. Stop allowing yourselves to be easily distracted by pointless political spectacles and pay attention to what's really going on in the country.

The real battle for control of this nation is not being waged between Republicans and Democrats in the ballot box, the real battle between freedom and tyranny is taking place right in front of our eyes, if we would only open them.

All the trappings of the Amer-

ican police state are now in plain sight. Wake up, America.

If they live (the tyrants, the oppressors, the invaders, the overlords), it is only because 'we the people' sleep. **CT**

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**John W. Whitehead** is a constitutional lawyer and founder and president of *The Rutherford Institute*. His new book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## Trident is the crime we should be prosecuting

By **Kathy Kelly**

**O**N October 24, following a three-day trial in Brunswick, GA, seven US Catholic workers who acted to disarm a nuclear submarine base were convicted on three felony counts and one misdemeanour.

The defendants face 20 years in prison, yet they emerged from their trial seeming quite ready for next steps in their ongoing witness.

Steve Kelly, a Jesuit priest who has already spent 10 years in prison for protesting nuclear weapons, returned, in shackles, to the local jail.

Because of an outstanding warrant, Steve has been

locked up for more than 18 months, since the day of the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 action. On that day, April 4, 2018, the group had entered a US Navy Submarine base which is a home port for the Trident nuclear missile fleet.

Just one of those nuclear missiles, if launched, would cause 1,825 times more damage than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The Plowshares activists aimed to expose illegal and immoral weapons that threaten all life on earth.

They had spent two years in prayerful preparation for their action. Two of them, Mark Colville and Liz McAlister,

spent most of the months before their trial began in the Glynn County jail. Three others, Martha Hennessy, Carmen Trotta and Clare Grady wore ankle monitors and were subject to strict curfews for many months while they engaged in outreach and prepared for trial. Because federal law requires 60-90 days before sentencing to allow for background checks, the seven probably won't be sentenced before late December.

My colleague Brian Terrell, who attended all of the trial, described the chief prosecutor as a bully. In a series of accusations, this prosecutor claimed that Clare Grady and her co-defendants believed themselves to be "a law unto themselves". Clare calmly pointed out that "the egregious use of weapons is bullying, not the painted peace messages".

Emerging from the courthouse, the defendants and their lawyers thanked the numerous supporters who had filled the courtroom, the overflow court room and the sidewalks outside the court. Bill Quigley, the main lawyer for the defence, thanked the defendants for their efforts to save "all of our lives", noting the jury was not allowed to hear about weapons with enough power to destroy life on earth as we know it.

Liz McAlister, who, with Phil Berrigan, had helped found the Plowshares movement, turned 79 years old while in jail. She thanked support-

ers, but also urged people to be active in opposing nuclear weapons and the abuses of the US prison system.

**W**hen I learned of the jury's verdict, I had just signed a postcard to Steve Kelly. The Glynn County jail only allows correspondence crammed into one side of a pre-stamped 3 x 5 post card. In tiny cursive, I told him about events in Kashmir where the Muslim majority has engaged in 80 days of civil resistance to the Indian government's abrogation of two articles of the Indian constitution which allowed Kashmiris a measure of autonomy. India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed states, have twice gone to war over control of Kashmir.

It's a deeply disconcerting flashpoint representing the possibility of nuclear armed states triggering an exchange of bombs which could cause a nuclear winter, mass starvation and widespread, long-lasting environmental destruction.

Some years ago, Steve and I had participated in a delegation to visit human rights advocates in Pakistan, and I recall marvelling at his grasp of the nuclear threat manifested in the conflict between India and Pakistan. Yet he and his companions have clearly asserted that US possession of nuclear weapons already robs the poorest people on the planet

of resources needed for food, shelter and housing.

After learning the verdict I wrote a second card, telling Steve that we who love him long for his release, but know we must also be guided by his choice to remain silent in the court. Steve believes the US nuclear weapon arsenal should be tried in the court of public opinion. He says the US legal system protects those who maintain and build the criminal, deadly arsenal of nuclear weapons. Inside the court, people didn't hear Steve's strong, clear voice.

In 1897, from England's Reading Gaol, Oscar Wilde wrote a letter titled *De Profundis*. He was serving the final four months of a two-year sentence to hard labour. One of his main jailers was certain he would never survive the harsh conditions. Wilde found himself transformed during the prison time, and he developed a profound understanding of human suffering.

"Where there is sorrow", Wilde wrote, "there is holy ground".

The US nuclear weapon arsenal creates anguish, fear and futility worldwide. Yet 'holy ground' exists as activists work toward abolition of nuclear weapons. **CT**

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**Kathy Kelly** is the co-coordinator for *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*. She can be reached at: [Kathy@vcnv.org](mailto:Kathy@vcnv.org).

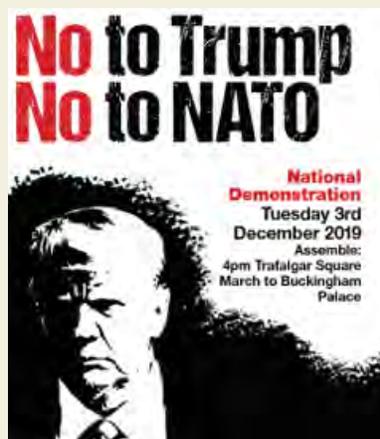
## Trump's UK visit will be major election moment

By Lindsey German

**D**ONALD Trump decided to intervene in the British election before it even formally began. And guess how he chose to do it? By taking part in a phone-in with Brexit party leader Nigel Farage. Trump's message was that Farage and Boris Johnson had to get together in order to create a right-wing block and that people shouldn't vote for Jeremy Corbyn because he was bad for the country.

This is a completely unwarranted and undemocratic interference in British politics, but if I were Corbyn I would take it as a compliment. Trump's impact on politics has been wholly negative, ushering in a rule of brutal racist scapegoating of migrants, heralding new levels of Islamophobia, and demanding that countries allied to the US through NATO pay more on military spending at the expense of their public services. His unpopularity among British people can only help Labour.

So far, Farage has failed to take Trump's advice, demanding a pact with the Tories and withdrawing his Brexit deal, or the Brexit party will contest



Poster promotes demonstration against Donald Trump on Dec 3.

every seat. But what the episode does show is that Trump wants the 'special relationship' that is firmly rooted in the politics of the far right.

**B**ritain's 'special relationship' has endured successive presidents and prime ministers in the past decades, most toxically in the joint enterprise between Bush and Blair which took us into the illegal war in Iraq. While Trump based some of his pre-election appeal on ending wars that America couldn't win, he has found himself embroiled in a series of wars, with US backing for the

Saudi war in Yemen, troops in Syria and Iraq, and an escalation of conflict with Iran.

Trump regards both Johnson and Farage as political allies, but he and they face major problems. Britain is facing the reality of its much-reduced place in the world post empire which is brought into sharp relief by Brexit. Meanwhile, the US is also trying to come to terms with its declining role. While it is by far the largest military power in the world it faces increasing competition, especially from China.

This is a dangerous moment, and one where we desperately need an anti-war government. The election will be closely fought, and we have not heard the last of Trump. A week before the election, on December 3, Trump will be in Britain for a NATO leaders' summit and will be again hosted by the queen in Buckingham Palace. He and Johnson will be met with mass protests saying that he and NATO are not welcome.

If an anti-war government is to mean anything, it needs to confront the growing militarism and expansionism of NATO, especially in Eastern Europe. It also needs to oppose the intervention in Turkey – a NATO member – against the Kurds in Syria. Trump has a massive audience online, but he is vulnerable to protest. **CT**

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*Lindsey German is convenor of the Stop The War Coalition – [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).*

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