

Anatomy Of A Propaganda Blitz. “Demonization and Destruction of Establishment Enemies”

Part 1

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Global Research, May 13, 2016

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

We live in a time when state-corporate interests are cooperating to produce propaganda blitzes intended to raise public support for the demonisation and destruction of establishment enemies.

Below, we will examine five key components of an effective propaganda campaign of this kind.

1: Dramatic New Evidence

A propaganda blitz is often launched on the back of ‘dramatic new evidence’ signifying that an establishment enemy should be viewed as uniquely despicable and targeted with ‘action’.

The Blair government’s infamous September 2002 dossier on Iraqi WMD contained four mentions of the claim that Iraq was able to deploy WMD against British citizens within 45 minutes of an order being given. But senior intelligence officials [revealed](#) that the original 45-minutes claim referred to the length of time it might have taken the Iraqis to fuel and fire a Scud missile or rocket launcher. The original intelligence said nothing about whether Iraq possessed the chemical or biological weapons to use in these weapons. The government had turned a purely hypothetical danger into an immediate and deadly threat.

In 2011, it was claimed that the Libyan government was planning a massacre in Benghazi, exactly the kind of action that Gaddafi knew could trigger Western ‘intervention’. Investigative journalist Gareth Porter [commented](#):

‘When the Obama administration began its effort to overthrow Gaddafi, it did not call publicly for regime change and instead asserted that it was merely seeking to avert mass killings that administration officials had suggested might approach genocidal levels. But the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which had been given the lead role in assessing the situation in Libya, found no evidence to support such fears and concluded that it was based on nothing more than “speculative arguments”.’

In 2013, the Syrian government was said to have launched a chemical weapons attack in Ghouta, Damascus, just as UN chemical weapons experts were visiting the city. It was claimed that Assad had ordered the crossing of Obama’s very clear ‘red line’ for ‘intervention’ – a war that would have destroyed the Syrian government and quite possibly

resulted in Assad's violent death. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh [reported](#) on the Ghouta attack:

'The quick announcement that Bashar al-Assad did it is simply not true.'

Western dissidents are subject to continuous smears but also full-on propaganda blitzes of this kind.

In 2012, after WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange requested asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, the corporate media rose up as one to [denounce](#) him as a vile 'narcissist' and buffoon. Always 'controversial', journalists now presented Assange as a fully-fledged hate figure.

In 2013, a single comment in an interview caused large numbers of journalists across the 'spectrum' to [conclude](#) that Russell Brand – then promoting a vocal form of anti-corporate dissent – was a 'vicious sexist', 'narcissist' and 'idiot'. The intensity of the attacks on him, which are [ongoing](#), eventually resulted in Brand withdrawing from the public eye.

It is hardly in doubt that Assange, Brand and others are being targeted by state-corporate propagandists because they are challenging state-corporate power. How else can we explain the fact that criticism of the many hundreds of journalists and MPs who have repeatedly agitated and voted for wars that have wrecked whole countries is off the agenda? It is not even that criticism of Assange, Brand and co is disproportionate; there is very often *no criticism at all* of people who have brought death, injury and displacement to literally millions of human beings. But when Brand [joked](#) about his then girlfriend: 'When I was asked to edit an issue of the New Statesman I said yes because it was a beautiful woman asking me', these words were viewed as infinitely more deserving of vicious attack right across the media 'spectrum' than political *actions* destroying whole countries.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has also, of course, been subject to a relentless, almost surreal, year-long propaganda [campaign](#). As we will see in Part 2, this has most recently taken the form of [accusations](#) that 'Labour now seems to be a party that attracts antisemites like flies to a cesspit.'

Propaganda blitzes are fast-moving attacks intended to inflict maximum damage. State-corporate propagandists know that media attention will quickly move on from the claim of 'dramatic new evidence', so the durability of the claim is not a key concern. Marginalised media blogs and rare 'mainstream' articles may quickly expose the hype, but most corporate media will not notice and will not learn the lesson that similar claims should be received with extreme caution in future. A prime example was the campaign justifying war on Libya in 2011, which faced minimal corporate media scepticism just eight years after the obvious deception on Iraq.

2: Emotional Tone And Intensity

A crucial component of the propaganda blitz is the tone of political and corporate commentary, which is always vehement, even hysterical. High emotion is used to suggest a level of deep conviction fuelling intense moral outrage.

The rationale is clear enough: insanity aside, in ordinary life outrage of this kind is usually a

sign that someone has good reason to be angry. People generally do not get extremely angry in the presence of significant doubt. So the message to the public is that there *is* no doubt. Thus the eruptions of moral outrage demanding that ‘something must be done’ to ‘save’ Libya and Syria from impending [massacre](#) (delivered by journalists blithely indifferent to the consequences of their earlier moral outrages, for example in Iraq). Thus the [talk](#) of ‘The fascists at the poisoned heart of Labour’ with their ‘chilling’ race hatred.

3: Manufacturing ‘Consensus’

A third component of a propaganda blitz is the appearance of informed consensus. The dramatic claim, delivered with certainty and outrage, is typically repeated right across the political and media ‘spectrum’. This cross-‘spectrum’ ‘consensus’ generates the impression that ‘everyone knows’ that the propaganda claim is rooted in reality. This is why the myth of a media ‘spectrum’ is so vital.

While a demonising propaganda blitz may arise from rightist politics and media, the propaganda *coup de grace* with the power to end public doubt comes from the ‘left-liberal’ journalists at the Guardian, the Independent, the BBC and Channel 4. Again, the logic is clear: if *even* celebrity progressive journalists – people famous for their principled stands and colourful socks – join the denunciations, then there *must* be something to the claims. At this point, it actually becomes difficult to doubt it.

Thus, in 2002, it was [declared](#) ‘a given’ by the Guardian that Iraq still retained WMD that *might* be a threat, despite the fact that both claims were easily refutable.

In 2007, George Monbiot [wrote](#) in the Guardian: ‘I believe that Iran is trying to acquire the bomb.’ In October 2011, Monbiot [wrote](#) of Nato’s war on Libya: ‘I feel the right thing has been happening for all the wrong reasons.’ At a crucial time in August 2013, Monbiot [affirmed](#): ‘Strong evidence that Assad used CWs [chemical weapons] on civilians.’ He subsequently [wrote](#) in the Guardian of the Assad government’s ‘long series of hideous crimes, including the use of chemical weapons’.

News of the killings of Syrian ministers in a bomb explosion were [greeted](#) by the Guardian’s Owen Jones with: ‘Adios, Assad (I hope).’ Jones [tweeted](#) that ‘this is a popular uprising, not arriving on the back of Western cruise missiles, tanks and bullets’. As was clear then and is indisputable now, Jones was wrong – the West, directly and via regional allies, has played a [massive role](#) in the violence. As if reading from the Nato playbook, Jones [added](#):

‘I’m promoting the overthrow of illegitimate and brutal dictatorships by their own people to establish democracies.’

This is why the mythology of the ‘liberal-left’ Guardian and Independent with their handful of noisy, tub-thumping progressives is so important and why we work so hard to challenge it. It is why expressions of progressive support for the Guardian – with occasional articles appearing by Noam Chomsky and others, and with Russell Brand, for example becoming a ‘Guardian partner’ – are so important.

The public is not for one moment fooled by a hard-right consensus. Agreement must appear to have been reached among ‘all right-thinking people’, including the ‘lefties’ at the Guardian.

4: Demonising Dissent

To challenge a propaganda blitz is to risk becoming a target of the blitz. Dissidents can be smeared as 'useful idiots', 'apologists', 'genocide deniers'. Anyone who even questioned the campaigns targeting Julian Assange and Russell Brand risked being labelled a 'sexist', a 'misogynist' and, in the case of Assange, a 'rape apologist'. Even as this media alert was being written, [Oliver Kamm](#) of The Times once again [tweeted](#) that Media Lens has 'long espoused genocide denial, misogyny & xenophobia'.

In fact we have been accused of supporting, or apologising for, everyone from Stalin to Milosevic, from the Iranian Ayatollahs to the North Korean dictatorship, Assad, Gaddafi, Saddam and so on. It seems we are so deranged that we support completely contradictory political and religious movements and beliefs, even enemies who despise each other. This may be a function of our swivel-eyed hatred of the West, or perhaps because we are challenging state-corporate media bias.

When moral outrage is directed at people challenging a propaganda blitz, reputations can be easily and irreparably damaged. The public can be left with a vague sense that the target is 'dodgy', almost morally unhygienic. The smear can last for the rest of a person's career and life.

5: Timing and Strange Coincidences

The 'dramatic new evidence' fuelling a propaganda blitz often seems to surface at the worst possible time for the establishment target. On one level, this might seem absurdly coincidental – why, time after time, would the Official Enemy do *the one thing* most likely to trigger invasion, bombing, electoral disaster, and so on, at exactly the wrong time?

But remember, we are talking about 'bad guys' who, as everyone knows, are famously perverse. It is part of the Dr. Evil mind-set to strut provocatively and laugh in the face of disaster. Idiotic, blindly self-destructive behaviour is what being a 'bad guy' is all about. So the implausibly perfect timing may actually help persuade the public to think: 'This guy really is a nutcase. He's absolutely *asking* for it!' Much 'journalism' covering Official Enemies is about suggesting they are comically, in fact cartoonishly, foolish in exactly this way.

We have no doubt that, with sufficient resources, media analysts could easily prove that propaganda blitzes consistently arise with impeccable timing just ahead of key votes at the UN, in parliament and in elections.

In November 2002, before the UN vote on Resolution 1441, which 'set the clock ticking' for war, the Blair regime began issuing almost daily warnings of imminent terror threats against UK ferries, the Underground, and major public events. In 2003, Blair actually surrounded Heathrow airport with tanks – an action said to be in response to increased terrorist 'chatter' warning of a 'missile threat', of which nothing more was subsequently heard. Even the Guardian editors expressed scepticism about this sudden flood of 'threats':

'It cannot be ruled out that Mr Blair may have political reasons for talking up the sense of unease, in order to help make the case for a war against Iraq that is only backed by one voter in three.' (Leading article, 'Gloom in Guildhall,' The Guardian, November 12, 2002)

John Pilger cited a former intelligence officer who described the government's terror warnings as 'a softening up process' ahead of the Iraq war and 'a lying game on a huge scale'. (Pilger, 'Lies, damned lies and government terror warnings,' Daily Mirror, December 3, 2002) In fact, Blair was perpetrating a form of psychological terrorism on his own people.

Likewise, atrocity claims from Syria clearly peaked as the US drew closer to war in the summer of 2013. After Obama chose not to bomb, it was extraordinary to see the BBC's daily front page atrocity claims suddenly dry up.

In 2012, the pro-Assad 'shabiha' militia became globally infamous when they were blamed for the May 2012 Houla massacre in Syria. In September 2014, Lexis found that in the preceding three years, the 'shabiha' had been mentioned in 933 UK national newspaper articles. But in the twelve months from September 2013 to September 2014 – a time when Western crosshairs shifted away from Assad towards Islamic State – there were just 28 mentions of 'shabiha' (Media Lens search, September 15, 2014). In the last year, Nexis finds just 12 articles mentioning the terms 'Syria' and 'shabiha' in the entire UK national press.

Similarly, in Part 2, we will see how a propaganda blitz targeting Jeremy Corbyn coincided perfectly to damage his chances ahead of local elections in the UK.

In combination, the 'dramatic new evidence', moral outrage and apparently wide consensus, generate several important impacts.

Most people have little idea about the status of WMD in Iraq, about Gaddafi's intentions and actions in Libya, or what Corbyn thinks about anti-semitism. Given this uncertainty, it is hardly surprising that the public is impressed by an explosion of moral outrage from so many political and media 'experts'.

Expressions of intense hatred targeting 'bad guys' and their 'apologists' persuade members of the public to keep their heads down. They know that even declaring mild scepticism, even requesting clarification, can cause the giant state-corporate Finger of Blame to be cranked around in their direction. Perhaps they, too, will be declared 'supporters of tyranny', 'apologists for genocide denial', 'sexists' and 'racists'. The possibility of denunciation is highly intimidating and potentially disastrous for anyone dependent on corporate employment or sponsorship. Corporations, notably advertisers, hate to be linked to any kind of unsavoury 'controversy'. It is notable how 'celebrities' with potentially wide public outreach very often stay silent.

It is easy to imagine that people will often prefer to decide that the issue is not *that* important to them, that they don't know *that* much about it – not enough to risk getting into trouble. And, as discussed, they naturally imagine that professional journalists have access to a wealth of information and expertise – best to just keep quiet. This is the powerful and disastrous chilling effect of a fast-moving propaganda blitz.

Propaganda And Climate Change

The most devastating impact, however, is on the public perception of threats.

A series of propaganda blitzes have taught the public to associate an alarming situation with a unified eruption of concern and outrage right across party politics and media. This is a problem because genuine threats that do *not* trigger a propaganda blitz naturally appear to be far less urgent and threatening than they really are. And this is exactly what has

happened with climate change.

Despite the endlessly and ominously tumbling records for temperature and extreme weather events – see [here](#) and [here](#) – despite increasingly urgent attempts to [warn](#) the public of a very real ‘climate emergency’, scientists are not close to being able to match the kind of alarm generated by a propaganda blitz.

These campaigns are rooted in vast power and resources defending establishment greed. They are motivated by the need to remove obstacles to power and profit, to control natural resources, to justify bloated arms budgets (‘socialism for the rich’). Naturally, then, a propaganda blitz is not triggered by a threat requiring action that will harm these same elite interests.

As the state-corporate response to climate change makes very clear, propaganda blitzes are *not* really about averting ‘threats’. It is tragicomic indeed to see high state officials and corporate media commentators endlessly emphasising ‘security concerns’ while doing little or nothing to address the truly existential threat of climate change. It is simply the wrong kind of threat requiring the wrong kind of action!

The result is that the climate emergency is felt by the public to be a medium-sized, manageable problem surrounded by uncertainty. A YouGov [survey](#) in January found that the ‘British public is far more concerned about the threat posed by population growth than it is about climate change.’ The case for dramatic new evidence *has* been made, but the emotional intensity, consensus and denunciation of climate denier ‘dissidents’ – for once, all justifiable – are lacking.

This is an awesome price to pay for corporate domination of politics and media. It seems the ultimate victims of propaganda will be the propagandists themselves and the public deceived by them.

In Part 2, we will see how a recent propaganda blitz aimed at Corbyn fits the pattern outlined above.

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