

British Killing Trend - U.K. Foreign Policy Limited to “Humanitarian” Pro-War Choices

The Cruise Missile Liberals

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[Media Lens](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

News that 2015 might turn out to be the first year since 1914 when British troops will not be fighting a war somewhere in the world appeared to come as a shock to many. But in fact, the British record of Permanent War stretches back much further. Seumas Milne [commented](#) in the Guardian that empire forces ‘were involved in violent suppression of anti-colonial rebellions every year from at least the 1760s for the next 200 years, quite apart from multiple other full-scale wars’.

One might think a rational society would try to identify and counter the institutional forces responsible for hundreds of years of continuous war. Basic questions could be asked: Who actually shapes foreign policy? What are their goals? How much influence does the public really have? In our society, as we have [noted](#), defence issues are barely mentioned at election time, while foreign policy options among the major parties are limited to pro-war choices.

If the great and good of politics, academia and media are to be believed, there is nothing to discuss, UK policy has always been guided by humanitarian values. Winston Churchill described ‘the reputation of the British empire as a valiant and benignant force in the history of mankind’. (Quoted, Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power*, Zed Books, 1995, p.1)

A professor of government at the University of Manchester described Britain as ‘a defender of political freedom’. (Ibid, p.2)

Shortly after Nato began pounding Afghanistan in 2001, the Guardian’s editors commented on a speech by Tony Blair:

‘The core of the speech – intellectual as well as moral – came when he contrasted the west’s commitment to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties and the terrorists’ proven wish to cause as many civilian casualties as possible... Let them do their worst, we shall do our best, as Churchill put it. That is still a key difference.’ (Leader, ‘Blair plays it cooler – A new tone, but few new answers,’ *The Guardian*, October 31, 2001)

Alternatively, we can turn to the official record. Released government documents indicate, for example, the thinking behind the mid-twentieth century wars in Southeast Asia. The UK, the US and France agreed that it was ‘important for the economy of Western Europe that Western Europe trading and business interests in Southeast Asia should be maintained’, since it was ‘rich in natural resources and certain countries in the area at present produce

surplus foodstuffs'. (Quoted, Ibid, p.20)

Similarly: 'The position of the rulers of the Persian Gulf might be thought of as that of independence, regulated, supervised and defined' by the British government. (US Department of State memorandum, 15 March, 1946. Quoted, Ibid, p.22)

Similar perspectives and motives for 'intervention' are revealed wherever we look and universally labelled 'defence of democracy'.

Syria – The Liberals Lament

Despite hundreds of years of conflict, the documentary record, and the West's disastrous 'humanitarian' wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, the Pew Research Journalism Project [found](#) last September that 'the No. 1 message' on CNN, MSNBC, Fox News and Al Jazeera, was 'that the U.S. should get involved in the conflict' in Syria.

The surprise failure to achieve that war has been a festering wound in the psyches of cruise missile liberals everywhere ever since.

In the New York Times last month, establishment intellectual Michael Ignatieff, one-time favourite of the Observer and BBC, [commented](#) that the near-certainty that Russia would veto any UN authorisation of air power meant 'stopping the war in Syria will stretch domestic and international legality. But if legality is not stretched, the killing will go on indefinitely... Above all, using force would make the president "own" the Syrian tragedy. So far he has tried to pretend he doesn't have to.'

International law needs to be 'stretched' – more accurately, broken – so that Obama can 'own' the Syrian conflict; by right, presumably, of his might.

Ignatieff's compassion for the many civilian victims in Syria quickly made way for more 'pragmatic' concerns:

'The fact is he owns it already. American inaction has strengthened Russia, Hezbollah and Iran. It has turned Syria into the next front in the war with Islamic extremism. And it has put in jeopardy the stability of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey and risks leaving a failed state next door to Israel.

'If the president already owns the deadly consequences of inaction, it is only prudent now to back diplomacy with force so that the consequences do not become deadlier still.'

Like all cruise missile liberals, Ignatieff portrays himself as a man of peace reluctantly forced to endorse war as a last resort. In March 2003, the Guardian gave him space to [write](#):

'I don't like the company I am keeping, but I think they are right on the issue... Bush is right when he says Iraq would be better off if Saddam were disarmed and, if necessary, replaced by force.'

There was no real moral argument:

'The problem is not that overthrowing Saddam by force is "morally unjustified". Who

seriously believes that 25 million Iraqis would not be better off if Saddam were overthrown?’

In fact people far more knowledgeable than Ignatieff believed exactly that of Iraq in 2002 and 2003. No rational person can doubt it now after one million post-invasion deaths.

Again, like all cruise missile liberals, Ignatieff likes to emphasise his former leftist leanings, now discarded as hopelessly naïve:

‘During Vietnam, I marched with people who thought America was the incarnation of imperial wickedness...’

Thus, also, James Bloodworth, editor of the UK’s deceptively named Left Foot Forward blog, [wrote](#) in the Independent of his dismay at the 2002 coup that temporarily overthrew Hugo Chavez:

‘Looking back, I have no trouble remembering which side I was on.’

But like David Aaronovitch, Nick Cohen, the late Christopher Hitchens, Ignatieff, and many others, Bloodworth claims to have woken up to the left’s ‘blind spots’ – a hard-right satori that pretty much guarantees a job for life in the corporate media. Bloodworth’s piece asked of ‘the left’:

‘When will it acknowledge that Chavez’s socialist dream has turned into a nightmare?’

In similar vein, former BBC, now Channel 4, journalist Paul Mason earned much kudos from his enthusiasm for the Occupy movement. He [commented](#) to the Occupy Times:

‘What unites activists and bloggers on the right and left – in the USA and increasingly here – is how little they trust or care about what the mainstream media says.’

Right on! Mason, on the other hand, cares enough about these media to actually work for them. He also appears to have swallowed their line on Western benevolence, hook, line and sinker. In an [article](#) for his Channel 4 News blog last month titled, ‘How the west slipped into powerlessness,’ Mason offered a view that was not exactly common currency in the Occupy movement:

‘When the USA decided, last summer, it could not sell military intervention in Syria – either to its parliaments, its people or its military – it sent a signal to every dictator, torturer and autocrat in the world that only diplomats, at the time, truly understood. The British diplomat in charge of Syria, Reza Afshar, tweeted a one-word summary of the UK parliamentary vote on Syria: “Disaster!”’

Mason cited Afshar’s view but also endorsed it:

‘Only now are we beginning to understand how widely that judgement applied.’

Mason argued that China-Russia influence ‘has succeeded in preventing any effective action against the mass slaughter in Syria’. And so, ‘the west’s diplomacy has become a series of “can’t dos”: ... can’t protect Syrians from mass murder’.

We [challenged](#) Mason on Twitter and he invited us to write to him: ‘feel free to email me at

ITN.'

This we did, [pointing out](#) that it is simply wrong to claim that the US is not intervening in Syria. We also asked what right the US has to act as world policeman, noting that the US case for waging war without UN approval was clear: the alleged Syrian government use of chemical weapons. Given that this claim has been [seriously challenged](#), we asked Mason what other basis he had in mind for waging war.

Finally, we asked him if the utterly horrific death toll resulting from the US-UK wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya caused him to question his view that the obstruction of a US attack was a 'disaster' for Syria. We quoted epidemiologist Les Roberts, co-author of the 2004 and 2006 Lancet studies on the Iraq death toll:

'There are a series of surveys now implying ½ million deaths is a low side estimate... I think the 650,000 estimate in the second Lancet study was low...

'Thus, I think there is little doubt ½ million died violently. I suspect the direct and indirect deaths exceeded 1,000,000...' (Email to Media Lens, Les Roberts, January 11, 2014)

Despite numerous email and Twitter nudges, Mason refused to reply.

Last month, Kim Ghattas, BBC State Department Radio and TV correspondent, also [expressed](#) frustration at the lack of 'action' on Syria:

'So where is the public outrage about a war so chaotic and dangerous that even the UN has stopped keeping track of the death toll? Have we all become numb to the pain of others?'

Can we imagine a free and independent BBC journalist writing anything comparable of the US-UK's occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, or the bombing of Libya?

Ghattas recently authored a [book](#) titled, 'The Secretary - A Journey With Hillary Clinton from Beirut to The Heart of American Power.' For Ghattas, Clinton is 'a rock star diplomat who finally let her hair down'. In her BBC website article, Ghattas continued:

'There is a renewed chorus to do "something" about Syria, with appeals to people's conscience. Nobel Prize-winning physicist Stephen Hawking recently wrote:

"What's happening in Syria is an abomination, one that the world is watching coldly from a distance. Where is our emotional intelligence, our sense of collective justice?"

'In a similar vein, Nicholas Burns, a former senior state department official, asked: "How many more lives will be claimed by Syria's ceaseless civil war before we are finally shamed to stop the killing?"

'(Spare a thought for the North Koreans, too. A UN report out last week, too horrific even to read, compares the abuses committee [sic] by the government to Nazi Germany. I have yet to see much outrage or calls for action.)'

North Korea being another Official Enemy, and thus fair game for this kind of demonising comparison. We might also spare a thought for Iraqis still dying in large numbers, or civilians

trying to survive in a country where, 'Without a central government with any real power, Libya is falling apart', as Patrick Cockburn [notes](#) in the Independent. Cockburn added a timely reminder for the likes of Ghattas, Ignatieff, Bloodworth and Mason:

'Western and regional governments share responsibility for much that has happened in Libya, but so too should the media. The Libyan uprising was reported as a simple-minded clash between good and evil.'

Or spare a thought for people struggling to survive in Afghanistan. Or people dying under drone attack in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Or people dying under the tyrannies 'we' arm and support in Egypt, Israel, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and so on.

Ghattas asked her readers:

'But would our sense of shame and public outrage actually make a difference?

'Lack of public pressure conveniently reinforces Mr Obama's conclusion that it's too difficult and politically too risky to take action in Syria, but it's in fact up to the president to galvanise public opinion.'

According to this BBC journalist, it is the US president's job to 'galvanise' the US *and* UK public to fight wars – specifically, a war on Syria. Ghattas even had some helpful advice for Obama on how best to achieve the desired result:

'In early March 2011, when the Libyan uprising turned violent, there was little appetite in the US for military action. Americans were in the same mood then as they are now about the rest of the world. By the end of March, the US was engaged in military strikes against Libya, and polls showed a plurality supported the strikes.'

The lesson?

'people didn't have a sudden change of heart about Libya. They were becoming more exposed to the story in the media in a consistent way and hearing clearly and repeatedly from the president and others as to why the US was involved'.

This is correct. What the public did not hear was that the assault on Libya was a major war crime, a blatant abuse of UN resolution 1973 in pursuit of regime change – illegal under international law. But for Ghattas this was a happy outcome. Ghattas made no mention of the current militia-run chaos, killing, torture and terror in Libya, for which, as Cockburn notes, Western media show 'little interest'. Instead, Ghattas added:

'The military operations in Libya didn't come with guarantees, but an assessment was made that there was reasonable hope for success.'

And how accurate was that assessment in light of conditions in Libya now? Or did she just mean regime change? That illegal aim was indeed pursued successfully.

It takes a special kind of talent to use Libya to argue for Western 'action' to relieve civilian suffering in Syria without so much as mentioning the impact of that earlier 'action' on civilian suffering in Libya.

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