

# British “Progressive” Media Promotes Colonialism: Illegal Invasion of Afghanistan Was an “Opportunity” for the Victims

'Hard Clay' - Remaking Afghanistan In 'Our' Image

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[Media Lens](#)

Region: [Asia](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#), [IRAQ](#)  
[REPORT](#)

Last month, we [reviewed](#) the mind-boggling contrast between corporate media coverage of the January 2005 election in Iraq and the March 2014 referendum in Crimea.

Whereas all media accepted the basic legitimacy of an Iraq election conducted under extremely violent US-UK military occupation, they all rejected the legitimacy of a Crimea referendum conducted 'at [Russian] gunpoint'.

It was not difficult to guess how the same media would respond to the Afghan presidential election of April 5 under the guns of Britain and America's occupying force.

The Daily Telegraph had welcomed 'the first democratic elections' in Iraq (Leader, 'Mission accomplished,' December 6, 2004) and dismissed the Crimea vote as 'an illegal referendum conducted at gunpoint'. As for [Afghanistan](#):

'The sight of millions of Afghans defying the Taliban to vote in their country's presidential election should induce genuine humility. We might take democracy for granted; they emphatically do not.'

Democracy it was, then. Had the editors forgotten that the vote was taking place under US-UK military occupation? In fact, no:

'The idea that the Taliban are waiting to sweep back to power as soon as American and British troops depart has also taken a knock. If this poll continues to proceed smoothly, the country should have the inestimable benefit of a legitimately elected leader.'

The election was thus declared both democratic and legitimate. As in Iraq, the delegitimising effect of military occupation was ignored - 'our' occupations are simply accepted as legitimate and uncontroversial.

A Sunday Times leader hailed 'democratic elections' in Iraq, noting only that they were threatened by 'terrorists' - Iraqis, not the illegal foreign invaders who had wrecked the country with war, sanctions, bombing and more war (Leader, 'Send more troops,' October

10, 2004). By contrast, The Times claimed that the Crimea referendum was made absurd by Russian troops 'massing on their western border'. (Leading article, 'Russian Pariah,' March 17, 2014)

But The Times found nothing absurd about the Afghan election:

'We should honour and celebrate the resolve of these voters, their commitment to the democratic process.'

To be sure, military involvement had been a problem:

'The Taleban has been malignly active in the run-up to the election, attacking foreigners in restaurants and showering death threats on democratic activists.'

What about the occupation?

'As US and British troops ready themselves for withdrawal by the end of this year, the Afghans are evidently eager to take command of their own political destinies.'

And yet this was impossible in Crimea, although Russian troops were not occupying and fighting, merely said to be 'massing' on the border.

For the BBC, the Iraq election was 'the first democratic election in fifty years'. (David Willis, BBC1, News at Ten, January 10, 2005) But the West had [dismissed](#) the Crimea referendum 'as illegal and one that will be held at gunpoint'.

The BBC felt no need to reference the West's view on Afghanistan, [stating](#) baldly:

'The election marks the country's first democratic transfer of power.'

On Channel 4 News, Alex Thomson, a courageous and comparatively honest reporter, covered the Afghan vote from Kabul. We [tweeted](#) him:

'How free are these elections, Alex? What's the state of press freedom, for example?'

We [supplied](#) some context:

'In 2004-5, press supplied no analysis of state of press freedom prior to elections in Iraq, January '05. Will you in Afghanistan?'

Thomson [responded](#): 'huge questions gents'. He [added](#):

'quick honest answer? I probably won't regrettably. There's a civil war on and it's not too priority...'. [Moreover](#): 'I can only work 18-20 hours a day and there

isn't time is truthful answer. Someone should find research.'

Establishing whether the elections were actually free and fair – or not – was not 'too priority', somebody else's job. A few moment's research, and indeed thought, would have told Thomson that an election under US-UK occupation could *not* be described as free and fair.

Thomson later [commented](#) on his Channel 4 blog:

'So enjoy your election in all its colour, noise, excitement and yes, valid democratic exercise up to a limited point.'

Guardian – Working The 'Very Hard Clay'

The vote in Iraq was 'the country's first free election in decades' for the Guardian (Leader, 'Vote against violence,' January 7, 2005), which [dismissed](#) the Crimea referendum as 'irrelevant' because 'it took place while the autonomous region was under military occupation'.

No surprises there. As for the [election](#) in Afghanistan:

'And yet, in spite of Taliban attacks, Afghans will go to the polls on Saturday to elect a new president, with the turnout expected to be high, and media coverage voluminous and varied. Irregularities will be high, too, and more difficult to measure because of Taliban threats to monitors and foreign observers. But the leading candidates, even given their warlord connections, are credible figures. Ethnic deals should permit some transcending of regional loyalties. There is a woman candidate for vice-president.'

Far from 'irrelevant', then. The only identifiable military problem involved the usual bad guys – Afghans:

'The Taliban may have changed... behind an unyielding facade. Or it will have to if the shift in public mood is reinforced by a successful election.'

Despite US-UK military occupation, the election could be 'successful'.

From the lofty moral and intellectual heights of British civilisation, the Guardian editors patronised effortlessly:

'Could we make the Afghans more like us? That has been the question ever since the Americans and their allies went into Afghanistan 12 years ago...'

This indeed was the central theme of the editorial, as indicated by the title:

'Afghanistan: more like us: It is hard to resist the feeling that Afghans, responding to the chaos and opportunity of foreign intervention, have changed.'

Changed for the better, thankfully. That is, they have become 'more like us'. The 'intervention' – in fact an illegal invasion – was an 'opportunity' for the victims, according to the UK's leading liberal newspaper. As with every colonial mission, there have been difficulties:

'Afghanistan is a very hard clay in which to work, and those who tried to work it were very slow and unskilled.'

Naturally, the British and American states that have ravaged the people and planet of this earth for hundreds of years have the right to 'work' the lowly Afghans, who are such 'very hard clay', in an attempt to remake them in 'our' exalted image. As for the problems:

'The failures, the follies, and the tragedies which followed have been well documented. Generals, ambassadors, high representatives, aid experts and special envoys have come and gone. Nato soldiers have died, including 448 British, many more in the ranks of the Taliban, and more still among Afghan civilians.'

Chief among the failures, follies, tragedies, and indeed criminal complicity, has been the inability of our 'free press' to perceive the criminality of 'our' 'unskilled' work. This simply isn't done. As for the Afghan 'clay', why even offer a ballpark figure for the [casualties](#) of 'our' blood-drenched pottery?

Passing over the criminal record of master potter Tony Blair, the Guardian splashed his complementary views across its front page. Independent commentator John Rentoul [summarised](#) the shared worldview with approval:

'Now he [Blair] is calling on us to rescue true Muslims not just from dictators but from a perversion of their own religion.'

Blair's comments were also treated to front-page coverage in the Independent and on the BBC website. Seumas Milne [noted](#) the perversity in the Guardian:

'Quite why the views of a man whose military interventions in the Muslim world have been so widely discredited... should be treated with such attention by the media isn't immediately obvious. But one reason is that they chime with those of a powerful section of the political and security establishment.'

Milne failed to mention his own newspaper's front-page, or the ugly example of its 'hard clay' editorial. In fact, the Guardian has always been Blair's greatest cheerleader. In May 2005, even *after* the invasion of Iraq, the editors wrote:

'We believe that Mr Blair should be re-elected to lead Labour into a third term this week.' (Leader, 'Once more with feeling,' The Guardian, May 3, 2005)

The Guardian-Blair view has a long, violent history stretching back many hundreds of years. In the nineteenth century, English civil servant Herman Merivale offered guidelines for

government administrators interested in the control of native customs:

'It will be necessary, in short, that the colonial authorities should act upon the assumption that they have the right in virtue of the relative position of civilised and Christian men to savages, to enforce abstinence from immoral and degrading practices, to compel outward conformity to the law of what we regard as better instructed reason.' (Quoted, John Bodley, *Victims of Progress*, Mayfield Publishing, 1982, p.105)

In 2000, senior Guardian commentator Polly Toynbee updated the doctrine in an article titled, 'The West really is the best':

'In our political and social culture we have a democratic way of life which we know, without any doubt at all, is far better than any other in the history of humanity. Even if we don't like to admit it, we are all missionaries and believers that our own way is the best when it comes to the things that really matter.' (Toynbee, *The Observer*, March 5, 2000)

Back in the real world, [a study](#) by Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, 'Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizen', to be published in the autumn 2014 issue of the academic journal, 'Perspectives on Politics', finds that 'the democratic way of life' of the United States is in fact oligarchy masquerading as democracy:

'When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or well organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.'

The authors add:

'When the preferences of economic elites and the stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy... we believe that if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democracy are seriously threatened'.

To compound the comedy, the Guardian [reported](#) of the June 3 presidential election in Syria, the latest unfortunate to be added to the list of official enemy states:

'Western and Gulf Arab countries that back Assad's opponents had called plans for the vote a "parody of democracy" and said it would wreck efforts to negotiate a peace settlement.'

The US oligarchy's allies, the 'Gulf Arab countries' – currently waging merciless war on Syria – are themselves, of course, violent, unaccountable tyrannies. The Guardian failed to mention the irony, being itself a parody of an independent, progressive newspaper.

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