

# Survival? Symptoms of Breakdown

By [Media Lens](#)

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*If the human species survives long enough, future historians might well marvel at what passed for [‘mainstream’](#) media and politics in the early 21st century.*

They will see that a UK Defence Secretary had to resign because of serious allegations of sexual misconduct; or, as he put it euphemistically, because he had [‘fallen short’](#). But he did not have to resign because of the [immense misery](#) he had helped to inflict upon [Yemen](#). Nor was he made to resign when he told MPs to stop criticising Saudi Arabia because that would be [‘unhelpful’](#) while the UK government was trying to sell the human rights-abusing extremist regime in Riyadh more fighter jets and weapons. After all, the amount sold in the first half of 2017 was a mere £1.1 billion. (See our recent [media alert](#) for more on this.) Right now, the UK is [complicit](#) in a Saudi blockade of Yemen’s ports and airspace, preventing the delivery of vital medicine and food aid. 7.3 million Yemenis are already on the brink of famine, and the World Food Programme has [warned](#) of the deaths of 150,000 malnourished children in the next few months.

Meanwhile, [Robert Peston](#), ITV political editor, and [Laura Kuenssberg](#), BBC News political editor, have seemingly never questioned the British Prime Minister Theresa May about the UK’s shameful role in arming and supporting Yemen’s cruel tormentor. Nor have they responded when [challenged](#) about their own [silence](#).

Future historians will also note that British newspapers, notably *The Times* and the ‘left-leaning’ *Guardian*, published several sycophantic PR pieces for Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, ‘a risk-taker with a zeal for reform’. ‘Is he taking on too much too fast?’, [asked](#) a swooning [Patrick Wintour](#), the *Guardian*’s diplomatic editor. [Martin Chulov](#), the paper’s Middle East correspondent, [waxed lyrical](#) about the Crown Prince’s ‘bold move’ in arresting senior royals, a prominent Saudi billionaire and scores of former ministers as part of a ‘corruption purge’. The dramatic action was designed to ‘consolidate power’ while bin Salman ‘attempts to reform [the] kingdom’s economy and society’. As Adam Johnson noted in a media analysis [piece](#) for [Fairness in Accuracy And Reporting](#), the *Guardian*’s coverage was akin to a ‘breathless press release.’ A follow-up [article](#) by Chulov, observed Johnson, ‘took flattering coverage to new extremes’. The ‘rush to reform’ was presented uncritically by the paper, painting the Crown Prince as a kind of populist hero; ‘a curious framing that reeks more of PR than journalism.’

Meanwhile, [Richard Spencer](#), Middle East editor of *The Times*, wrote articles proclaiming, [‘Prince’s bold vision drives progress in Saudi Arabia’](#) and [‘It’s wrong to blame all terror on the Saudis’](#), featuring such propaganda bullet points as:

‘the Saudis are on our side, arresting militants and giving us vital intelligence’.

In October 2017, *The Times* even ran a four-part series promoting a Saudi conference to attract investment in the head-chopping kingdom with the lure of 'sweeping social and economic reforms'. As for any awkward questions about the brutality Saudi Arabia was inflicting on Yemen, well, they were swept away.

Historians examining media archives from this time will also observe that Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Tony Blair's government, [opined](#) that the UK had been 'misled' about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction:

'Top-secret US intelligence casting serious doubt over [Saddam Hussein's] destructive capabilities was not shared with Britain.'

As a result, claimed Brown, Blair was '[duped](#)' into invading Iraq. And thus 'duped' into shared responsibility for the deaths of around [one million Iraqis](#).

'Mainstream' news journalists blandly reported Brown's miserable excuses without demur. They failed to mention that former UN chief weapons inspector Scott Ritter had comprehensively dismissed the propaganda notion of Saddam as a threat well before the US-led invasion of March 2003. Ritter's team had concluded that Iraq had been '[fundamentally disarmed](#)', with anything that remained being simply 'useless sludge' because of the limited 'shelf-lives' of chemical and biological weapons. This crucial information was already available by October 2002, five months before the invasion, in a handy short [book](#) that somehow 'escaped' the attention of the British government, including Brown, and that of a compliant corporate media that broadcast endless Western propaganda.

Nevertheless, millions of people around the world marched against the Iraq war before it began, because they did not swallow the torrent of deceits emanating from Washington and London. Brown, however, had always backed Blair to the hilt, [telling](#) the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war in 2010 that Blair took 'the right decision for the right reasons' and insisting that 'everything that Mr Blair did during this period, he did properly'.

Future historians will also study the media hysteria in 2017 over '[Russiagate](#)' that focused obsessively on outraged claims of supposed pivotal Russian interference in Trump's election as US President. But, as US investigative reporter Glenn Greenwald [noted](#):

'Inflammatory claims about Russia get mindlessly hyped by media outlets, almost always based on nothing more than evidence-free claims from government officials, only to collapse under the slightest scrutiny, because they are entirely lacking in evidence.'

Greenwald is not saying that there was definitely *no* Russian interference. But the 'evidence' for *decisive* intervention presented thus far is unconvincing, to say the least. The crucial point is that Western corporate media have only ever given minimal coverage to major longstanding US government efforts to intervene in other countries – from [propaganda campaigns](#), [meddling in foreign elections](#), and all the way up to [assassinations, coups and full-blown invasions](#). A *Time* magazine [cover story](#) in 1996 even boasted that US interference helped Boris Yeltsin to be re-elected as president of Russia:

'Exclusive: Yanks to the Rescue. The Secret Story of How American Advisers Helped Yeltsin Win.'

The historical record will also reveal, in apparent blindness and deafness to this extensive record of US criminal behaviour, that BBC News journalists based there frequently end up [gushing](#) about the greatness of 'America'. It is a rite of passage that demonstrates their *bona fides* as servants of power.

It will not surprise future historians that prestigious press and broadcasting awards were [given](#) to [those](#) who [reported within the limits](#) circumscribed by established power. Such rewards were few for those who [dared to expose crimes](#) by the West or 'our' allies.

One of these 'allies', arguably the most important in the Middle East, is Israel. Earlier this month, Priti Patel resigned as Britain's minister for international aid after it had been revealed that she had had numerous [secret meetings with Israeli officials](#), including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while on a 'family holiday'. She had also visited an Israeli military field hospital that treats Al Qaeda-affiliated fighters. Following her trip, Patel had actually wanted to send UK aid to the powerful Israeli army, even while cutting Palestinian aid to vital projects in Gaza. The episode briefly opened 'a small, opaque window on the UK's powerful Israel lobby', [observed](#) Jonathan Cook. But the topic of the [Israel lobby](#) is seemingly taboo in polite British society. Laura Kuenssberg quickly [deleted](#) a tweet she had sent out quoting an unnamed senior Tory MP complaining about the 'corrupt' relationship that has enabled Israel to 'buy access' in Westminster.

Perhaps, then, it was no surprise that when the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Territories published a strongly-worded report in New York on October 26, 2017, the resulting media silence was deafening. Michael Lynk, a Canadian professor of law and a human rights expert, [called](#) on the world to hold Israel accountable for fundamental violations of international law during fifty years of occupation. This was especially timely with the 100-year anniversary of the [Balfour Declaration](#) that effectively stole Palestine from the Palestinians who were '[ethnically cleansed](#)' from the land that became the state of Israel.

Lynk [encouraged](#) the international community to take 'unified actions on an escalating basis' to declare the occupation illegal and to demand Israel's withdrawal. Gaza, he said, was 'in misery', and Israel's continued illegal occupation of the West Bank and east Jerusalem was a 'darkening stain'. Despite the seriousness of these charges, and their authoritative UN source, *we could not find a single mention* in the UK press or on the BBC News website. Scholars in the future will marvel at this stunning media obedience to Western power, obtained without visible coercion.

'An Existential Threat To Our Civilisation'

Undoubtedly, what will appal future historians most is that the urgent calamitous risks of human-induced climate change were well known, but that nothing was done to stop the looming chaos. Worse than that: powerful private business, financial and economic elites, and the governments they had essentially co-opted, forged ahead with policies that *accelerated the climate crisis*.

The evidence has already been unequivocal for many years. In November 2017, a comprehensive review of climate science by thirteen US federal agencies concluded in a

477-page [report](#) that evidence of global warming was ‘stronger than ever’. They said that it was ‘extremely likely’ – meaning with 95 to 100% certainty – that global warming is human-induced, mostly from carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

One climate scientist [said](#):

‘A lot of what we’ve been learning over the last four years suggests the possibility that things may have been more serious than we think.’

The language was couched in typical scientific caution. But the horror at what was unfolding was surely not far from the surface of academics’ minds.

And yet, in a further sign of the short-term insanity that drives state and corporate policy, governments continued to channel huge sums of public money into planet-killing industries. European states, including the UK government, gave more than [€112bn \(£99bn\) every year in subsidies](#) to support fossil fuel production and consumption.

In 2016, gas companies [spent €104m in intensive lobbying campaigns](#) to try to encourage European policymakers to accept the myth that natural gas is a ‘clean fuel’ in an attempt to ‘lock in’ fossil fuels for decades to come. Moreover, fossil fuel companies [lobbied hard](#) behind the scenes of the Paris climate talks, as well as follow-up negotiations, to manipulate outcomes in their private favour. After all, cynical corporate madness has no boundaries when profits are the overriding concern. Absurdly, the text of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change did not even include the words [‘fossil fuels’](#). Scientists [warned](#) that fossil fuel burning is set to hit a record high in 2017.

Meanwhile, it has been [reported](#) that 2017 is set to be one of the top three hottest years on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization. The WMO also [noted](#) that atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide have ‘surged at unprecedented speed’ to *the highest level in 800,000 years*.

The signs of ecological breakdown are all around us. Last month, a new [study](#) revealed that the abundance of flying insects has plunged by three-quarters over the past 25 years. The results had ‘shocked scientists’. This matters hugely because flying insects are, of course, a vital component of a healthy ecosystem upon which we are crucially dependent for food, water and oxygen. Robert Hunziker [observes](#) succinctly that this ecosystem, ‘the quintessential essence of life on our planet’, is breaking down. Our life support system is being destroyed.

One of the many symptoms of this breakdown that is likely to overwhelm human society is mass migration as a result of climate change. [Tens of millions of people](#) will be forced to move because of climate disruption in the next decade alone. This flood of human refugees will make the numbers of those who fled the Syrian conflict into Europe look like a trickle.

Sir David King, the former chief scientific adviser to the UK government, [said](#):

‘What we are talking about here is an existential threat to our civilisation in the longer term. In the short term, it carries all sorts of risks as well and it requires a human response on a scale that has never been achieved before.’

However, if governments really were motivated to protect the public, as they always [claim](#) when amplifying the threat of terrorism, they would have already announced a halt to fossil fuels and a massive conversion to renewable energy. A landmark [study](#) recently showed that global pollution kills nine million people a year and threatens the 'survival of human societies'. If terrorism was killing nine million people every year, and the very survival of human society was threatened, the corporate media and politicians would be reacting very differently. But because it's global pollution, merely an economic 'externality', private power can continue on its quest for dominance and profits.

The situation now is truly desperate. We are literally talking about the survival of the human species. There will be those who declare, either with black humour or a morally-suspect flippancy, that 'the planet would be better off without us'. But we surely cannot so casually dismiss the lives and prospects of literally billions of people alive today and their descendants too.

Government policies are driven primarily by short-term political gain and corporate power, so there needs to be a massive public demand for control of the economy towards sustainability. The alternative is no human future. But just at a time when public resistance and radical action are most needed, [social media networks](#) owned and controlled by huge corporations are [suppressing dissent](#). A major part of the struggle for human survival, then, will be to overcome the unaccountable media corporations and tech giants that are attempting to define what is [deemed](#) 'acceptable' news and commentary.

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