

War on ISIS and Media Lies: The Comic Book Simplicity Of Propaganda

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The referendum campaign on Scottish independence heightened many people's awareness of the [pro-elite bias](#) of the 'mainstream' news media. The grassroots power of social media in exposing and countering this bias was heartening to see. But the issue of independence for Scotland is just one of many where the traditional media consistently favour establishment power.

The essential feature of [corporate media performance](#) is that elite interests are routinely favoured and protected, while serious public dissent is minimised and marginalised. The BBC, the biggest and arguably the most globally respected news organisation, is [far from being an exception](#). Indeed, on any issue that matters, its consistently biased news coverage – propped up, by a horrible irony, with the financial support of the public whose interests it so often crushes – means that BBC News is surely the most insidious propaganda outlet today.

Consider, for example, the way BBC editors and journalists constantly portray Nato as an organisation that maintains peace and security. During the recent Nato summit in Wales, newsreader Sophie Raworth dutifully told viewers of BBC News at Ten:

'Nato leaders will have to try to tackle the growing threat of the Islamist extremists in Iraq and Syria, and decide what steps to take next. (September 4, 2014)

As we have since seen, the 'steps' that were taken 'next' meant a *third war waged by the West in Iraq in just 24 years*.

The same edition of BBC News at Ten relayed, uncontested, this ideological assertion from Nato Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen:

'Surrounded by an arc of crisis, our alliance, our transatlantic community, represents an island of security, stability and prosperity.'

In fact, the truth is almost precisely the reverse of Rasmussen's assertion. Nato is a [source](#) of insecurity, instability, war and violence afflicting much of the world. True to form, BBC News kept well clear of that documented truth. Nor did it even remind its audience of the awkward fact that Rasmussen, when he was Danish prime minister, had once [said](#):

'Iraq has WMDs. It is not something we think, it is something we know.'

That was embarrassing enough. But also off the agenda was any critical awareness that the Nato summit's opening ceremony was replete with [military grandeur and pomposity](#) of the sort that would have elicited ridicule from journalists if it had taken place in North Korea, Iran or some other state-designated 'enemy'. Media Lens challenges you to watch this charade without dissolving into laughter or switching it off before reaching the end.

Manic Waving Of The 'Islamic Threat' Flag

For months now, BBC News has been diligently broadcasting pronouncements from Washington and London about the hyped 'threat' of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Newsreader Huw Edwards stuck to this official script when he gravely told the nation on BBC News at Ten:

'We'll be looking at the options to contain the threat of Islamic State.'
(September 3, 2014)

The assumption of senior BBC news managers, to be swallowed wholesale by the public, is that there is a 'threat' that 'we' in the civilised West must 'contain'. BBC News is following the ideological path laid down by US-UK state power, while robotically claiming its reporting is 'balanced' and 'impartial'.

This propaganda campaign, enabled by BBC News and other corporate news media, prepared the way for the US-led bombing on 'Isis group targets' in Syria that began overnight on 22-23 September. In line with other power-friendly reporting, the Independent [described](#) the illegal intervention as 'air strikes' forming 'part of the expanded military campaign authorised by President Obama, who has vowed to "degrade and destroy" Isis militants.'

The Guardian [reported](#) that 'US and allies have deployed jets and missiles against militants'. The emphasis on 'militants' and 'Isis targets' overlooked the fact that, as usual, innocent civilians would suffer; as indeed they have, with seven civilians, including five children, [killed](#) in a bombing raid on a village in northern Syria. The Guardian's report was based heavily on rhetoric deployed by high-ranking Pentagon figures, an anonymous 'US official' and President Obama. Tucked away at the end of the lengthy Guardian article was a tentative foray into the illegality of this latest US act of aggression:

'The escalation of the war into Syria comes without explicit congressional authorisation. [...] Obama has asserted that the 2001 Authorisation to Use Military Force against al-Qaida provides him with sufficient legal authority, something few legal scholars have embraced...'

This was a token, handwaving gesture that obscured the brute reality of yet more US violence in the superpower's self-appointed role as the world's policeman. More to the point, the US attack happened without the approval of the Syrian government, making it a [war crime](#). But it would be beyond the pale for journalists in 'the mainstream' to report it as such.

Jon Sopel, embedded in Washington as BBC North America editor, reported on BBC News at Ten (September 23, 2014) that 'the US has the vital support that it needs – that of the moderate Sunni states': Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. These countries are all closely allied to, and supported by, US power. Moreover, particularly in the case of the [oppressive, torture-ridden regime](#) in [Saudi Arabia](#), Sopel stretched the term 'moderate' beyond the limits of credibility.

Meanwhile, in a BBC news article purporting to explain the propaganda aspects of 'the US-led campaign to confront IS in the Middle East', BBC 'security' correspondent Frank Gardner [wrote](#):

'For Islamic State, the prospective benefits of Western troops engaging them on the ground are obvious.

'They would at last have a chance to fight soldiers at close quarters, with all the propaganda impact that would have on people in the West.'

What was missing from Gardner's analysis, [as usual](#), were the 'prospective benefits' of yet another Western-led attack in the Middle East: he made no attempt to address the longstanding US need for strategic control of the region's natural resources. Nor did [Gardner](#) broach the 'propaganda impact' of White House, Pentagon and Downing Street manipulation of the public in its channelling of disinformation via compliant Western news media. Again, this is the norm. If any young aspiring BBC journalist were to demonstrate a dangerous tendency for questioning this norm, never mind defying it, then he or she would never get within visible range of the 'security' correspondent's exalted position.

On September 27, when the House of Commons voted to approve RAF strikes against 'IS targets' in Iraq, all three major political parties were in agreement. Serious opposition was virtually non-existent: a perennial feature of 'our' supposedly vibrant and stable Western politics. An [overwhelming majority](#) of MPs were in favour of bombing Iraq: 524 (81% of all MPs) and just 43 against (7%).

Among the general population, a [massive propaganda campaign](#) had succeeded in boosting [support for bombing](#) in just six weeks from 37% to 57%. That support amongst MPs (81%) was much higher than amongst voters (57%) gives the lie, yet again, to the notion that parliamentary 'democracy' is a real reflection of public interests and opinion.

Just as the Observer did when it [infamously supported](#) the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the paper showed its pro-war colours, couched in [hand-wringing rhetoric](#) about 'doing the right thing'. Raining British bombs down on Iraq once again 'was the right and moral thing to do.' The refrain was echoed throughout Britain's national newspapers, a remarkable indictment of 'our free press'. A tweet from the Independent even [opined](#):

'Bringing democracy to the Middle East will not happen overnight, but could take generations'

It is beyond tragicomedy for a 'left-leaning' newspaper to claim that bombing countries is a precursor to 'democracy'. Likewise, it defies rationality to proclaim that the West is motivated by concern for genuine self-determination in Middle East countries rather than, as [history clearly shows](#), to crush the threat of any such indigenous development and thus

maintain the West's grip on the region's rich resources

Our Caring, Truthful And Fearless Leaders

Propaganda can be, and is, ramped up whenever necessary; particularly in times of war, as we saw above. But propaganda also operates by diverting attention away from uncomfortable truths. For example, reporting from within an establishment framework ensures that serious and sustained news reporting of Israel's criminal role in brutally oppressing the Palestinian people is suppressed.

When the pro-Palestinian Respect MP George Galloway was recently subjected to a brutal street attack by a supporter of Israel, political and media elites closed ranks and refused to condemn what had happened. Imagine the uproar if an enraged Muslim had attacked a *pro-Israel* MP in the street. There would have been an outpouring of revulsion from the political and media establishment. Neil Clark [noted](#) the craven 'mainstream' silence to the attack on Galloway which:

'speaks volumes about the type of country Britain has become and how our democracy and the freedom to speak our minds on foreign policy issues has been eroded.'

Galloway later [told](#) his followers on Twitter:

'Labour leader [Ed] Miliband just passed me, struggling on the stairs with my walking stick, looked straight at me and walked on without a word...'

Of course, it is ironic that leading politicians constantly strive to foster a media image of themselves as caring, truthful and fearless. In reality, they are all beholden to powerful business and financial interests, and even afraid to step out of line; notably so when it comes to criticism of [Israel](#). Political 'leaders' are virtual puppets with little, if any, autonomy; condemned to perform an elite-friendly role that keeps the general population as passive and powerless as possible. The corporate media plays an essential role here, as the British historian and foreign policy analyst Mark Curtis observes:

'The evidence is overwhelming that BBC and commercial television news report on Britain's foreign policy in ways that resemble straightforward state propaganda organs. Although by no means directed by the state, their output might as well be; it is not even subtle. BBC, ITV and Channel 5 news simply report nothing seriously critical on British foreign policy; the exception is the odd report on Channel 4 news. Television news – the source of most people's information – provides the most extreme media distortion of [foreign policy news coverage], playing an even greater ideological function than the press.' (Mark Curtis, 'Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World', Vintage, London, 2003).

Andrew MacGregor Marshall, the former Reuters bureau chief in Baghdad, recently [related](#) that:

'there is tendency for the Western media to claim that it is neutral and unbiased, when in fact it's clearly propagating a one-sided, quite nationalistic

and selfish view of its own interventions in these countries.'

He continued:

'If you want to accuse the US military of an atrocity, you have to make sure that every last element of your story is absolutely accurate, because if you make one mistake, you will be vilified and your career will be over. And we have seen that happen to some people in recent years. But if you want to say that some group of militants in Yemen or Afghanistan or Iraq have committed an atrocity, your story might be completely wrong, but nobody will vilify you and nobody will ever really check it out.'

The Dutch journalist Karel Van Wolferen recently wrote an insightful [piece](#) exposing the state-corporate propaganda that is so crucial to keeping the public in a state of general ignorance and passivity. There 'could hardly be a better time than now', he said, to study the effects of this 'insidious propaganda' in the so-called 'free world'. He continued:

'What makes propaganda effective is the manner in which, through its between-the-lines existence, it inserts itself into the brain as tacit knowledge. Our tacit understanding of things is by definition not focused, it helps us understand other things. The assumptions it entails are settled, no longer subject to discussion.'

Much of this propaganda originates in centres of power, notably Washington and London, and 'continues to be faithfully followed by institutions like the BBC and the vast majority of the European mainstream media'. Thus, BBC News endlessly trumpets Western 'values' and takes as assumed that parliamentary 'democracy' represents the range of acceptable public opinion and sensible discourse. Underpinning this elite-supporting news framework is a faith-based ideology which Van Wolferen calls 'Atlanticism'. This doctrine holds that:

'the world will not run properly if the United States is not accepted as its primary political conductor, and Europe should not get in America's way.'

The result?

'Propaganda reduces everything to comic book simplicity' of 'good guys' and 'bad guys'.

As we have frequently noted in our media alerts, a major feature of this 'comic book simplicity' is that 'our' governments have benign motives and that their overriding concern is to keep the general population [safe and secure](#). Sadly, the truth behind this '[web of deceit](#)' is not so comforting.

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