

"The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain world-view and a certain way of life ... A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors... Who wields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same." – George Orwell, 1984

Douma: Deception In Plain Sight

By Editor
Media Lens

Media Lens, July 07, 2018 "[Information Clearing House](#)" – UK corporate media are under a curious kind of military occupation. Almost all print and broadcast media now employ a number of reporters and commentators who are relentless and determined warmongers. Despite the long, unarguable history of US-UK lying on war, and the catastrophic results, these journalists instantly confirm the veracity of atrocity claims made against **Official Enemies**, while having little or **nothing to say about the proven crimes of the US, UK, Israel and their allies**. They shriek with a level of moral outrage from which their own government is forever spared. They laud even the most obviously biased, tinpot sources blaming the 'Enemy', while dismissing out of hand the best scientific researchers, investigative journalists and academic sceptics who disagree.

Anyone who challenges this strange bias is branded a 'denier', 'pro-Saddam', 'pro-Gaddafi', 'pro-Assad'. Above all, one robotically repeated word is generated again and again: 'Apologist... Apologist... Apologist'.

Claims of a chemical weapons attack on Douma, Syria on April 7, offered yet another textbook example of this reflexive warmongering. Remarkably, the alleged attack came just days after US president Donald Trump had [declared of Syria](#):

'I want to get out. I want to bring our troops back home. I want to start rebuilding our nation.'

The 'mainstream' responded as one, with instant certainty, exactly as they had in response to atrocity and other *casus belli* claims in [Houla](#), [Ghouta](#), [Khan Sheikhoun](#) and many other cases in Iraq ([1990](#)), Iraq ([1998](#)), Iraq ([2002-2003](#)), [Libya](#) and [Kosovo](#).

Once again, the Guardian editors were [sure](#): there was no question of a repetition of the fake justifications for war to secure non-existent Iraqi WMDs, or to prevent a fictional Libyan massacre in Benghazi. **Instead, this was 'a chemical gas attack, orchestrated by Bashar al-Assad, that left dead children foaming at the mouth'.**

Simon Tisdall, the Guardian's assistant editor, had clearly decided that enough was enough:

'It's time for Britain and its allies to take concerted, sustained military action to curb Bashar al-Assad's ability to murder Syria's citizens at will.'

This sounded like more than another cruise missile strike. But presumably Tisdall meant something cautious and restrained to avoid the terrifying risk of nuclear confrontation with Russia:

'It means destroying Assad's combat planes, bombers, helicopters and ground facilities from the air. It means challenging Assad's and Russia's control of Syrian airspace. It means taking out Iranian military bases and batteries in Syria if they are used to prosecute the war.'

But surely after Iraq - when UN weapons inspectors under Hans Blix were prevented from completing the work that would have shown that Saddam Hussein possessed no WMD – 'we' should wait for the intergovernmental Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons inspectors to investigate. After all, as journalist Peter Osborne noted of Trump's air raids:

'When the bombing started the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was actually in Damascus and preparing to travel to the area where the alleged chemical attacks took place.'

Osborne added:

'Had we wanted independent verification on this occasion in Syria surely we ourselves would have demanded the OPCW send a mission to Douma. Yet we conspicuously omitted to ask for it.'

Tisdall was having none of it:

'Calls to wait for yet another UN investigation amount to irresponsible obfuscation. Only the Syrian regime and its Russian backers have the assets and the motivation to launch such merciless attacks on civilian targets. Or did all those writhing children imagine the gas ?'

The idea that *only* Assad and the Russians had 'the motivation' **to launch a gas attack simply defied all common sense**. And, as we will see, it was not certain that children *had* been filmed 'writhing' under gas attack. Tisdall's pro-war position was supported by just 22% of British people.

Equally gung-ho, the oligarch-owned Evening Standard, edited by veteran newspaperman and politically impartial former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, headlined this plea on the front page:

'HIT SYRIA WITHOUT A VOTE, MAY URGED'

Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland, formerly the paper's comment editor, also poured scorn on the need for further evidence:

'Besides, how much evidence do we need?... To all but the most committed denialists and conspiracists, Assad's guilt is clear.'

Freedland could argue that the case for blaming Assad was clear, if he liked, but he absolutely could *not* argue that disagreeing was a sign of denialist delusion.

Time and again, we encounter these jaw-dropping efforts to browbeat the reader with fake certainty and selective moral outrage. In his piece, Freedland linked to the widely broadcast social media video [footage](#) from a hospital in Douma, which showed that Assad was guilty of 'inflicting a death so painful the footage is unbearable to watch'. **But when we actually click Freedland's link and watch the video, we do not see *anyone* dying, let alone in agony, and the video is *not* in fact unbearable to watch. Like Tisdall's claim on motivation, Freedland was simply declaring that black is white.**

But many people are so intimidated by this cocktail of certainty and indignation – by the fear that they will be shamed as 'denialists' and 'apologists' – **that they doubt the evidence of their own eyes. In 'mainstream' journalism, expressions of moral outrage are offered as evidence of a fiery conviction burning within. In reality, the shrieks are mostly hot air.**

In the Observer, Andrew Rawnsley also [deceived](#) in plain sight by blaming the Syrian catastrophe on Western inaction:

'Syria has paid a terrible price for the west's disastrous policy of doing nothing'.

However terrible media reporting on the 2003 Iraq war, commentators did at least recognise that the US and Britain were *involved*. **We [wrote](#) to Rawnsley, asking how he could possibly not know about the CIA's billion dollar per annum [campaign](#) to train and arm fighters, or about the 15,000 high-tech, US anti-tank missiles [sent](#) to Syrian 'rebels' via Saudi Arabia.**

Rawnsley ignored us, as ever.

Just three days after the alleged attack, the Guardian's George Monbiot was [asked](#) about Douma:

'Don't you smell a set up here though ? Craig Murray doesn't think Assad did it.'

Monbiot replied:

'Then he's a fool.'

Craig Murray [responded](#) rather more graciously:

'I continue to attract attacks from the "respectable" corporate and state media. I shared a platform with Monbiot once, and liked him. They plainly find the spirit of intellectual inquiry to be a personal affront.'

Monbiot [tweeted](#) back:

'I'm sorry Craig but, while you have done excellent work on some issues, your efforts to exonerate Russia and Syria of a long list of crimes, despite the weight of evidence, are foolish in the extreme.'

The idea that Murray's effort has been 'to exonerate Russia and Syria of a long list of crimes' is again so completely false, so obviously *not* what Murray has been doing. But it fits perfectly with the corporate media theme of Cold War-style browbeating: **anyone challenging the case for US-UK policy on Syria is an 'apologist' for 'the enemy'.**

If Britain was facing imminent invasion across the channel from some malignant super-power, or was on the brink of nuclear annihilation, the term 'apologist' might have some merit as an emotive term attacking free speech – understandable in the circumstances. But Syria is *not* at war with Britain; it offers no threat whatsoever. If challenging evidence of Assad's responsibility is 'apologism', then why can we not describe people *accepting* that evidence as 'Trump apologists', or 'May apologists', or 'Jaysh al-Islam apologists' ? **The term really means little more than, 'I disagree with you' – a much more reasonable formulation.**

As Jonathan Cook has previously [commented](#):

'Monbiot has repeatedly denied that he wants a military attack on Syria. But if he then weakly accepts whatever narratives are crafted by those who do – and refuses to subject them to any meaningful scrutiny – **he is decisively helping to promote such an attack.**'

Why Are These Academics Allowed ?

The cynical, apologetic absurdity of questioning the official narrative has been a theme across the corporate media. In a Sky News discussion, Piers Robinson of Sheffield University urged caution in blaming the Syrian government in the absence of verifiable evidence. In a remarkable response, Alan Mendoza, Executive Director of the Henry Jackson Society, [screached](#) at him:

'Who do you think did it ? Was it your mother who did it ?'

Again, exact truth reversal – given the lack of credible, verified evidence, it was absurd to declare Robinson's scepticism absurd.

Mendoza later linked to an article attacking Robinson, and [asked](#):

'Why are UK universities allowing such "academics" – and I use the term advisedly because they are not adhering to any recognised standard when promoting material with no credible sourcing, and often with no citation at all – to work in their institutions ?'

In 2011, Mendoza [wrote](#) in The Times of Nato's 'intervention' in Libya:

'The action in Libya is a sign that the world has overcome the false lessons [sic] of Iraq or of "realism" in foreign policy.'

The UN had 'endorsed military action to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding'.

In fact, the unfolding 'humanitarian catastrophe' was fake news; Mendoza's mother needed no alibi. A September 9, 2016 [report](#) on the war from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons commented:

'Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence...!'

The Times launched a shameful, front-page [attack](#) on Robinson and other academics who are not willing to accept US-UK government claims on trust. The Times cited Professor Scott Lucas of Birmingham University:

'Clearly we can all disagree about the war in Syria, but to deny an event like a chemical attack even occurred, by claiming they were "staged", is to fall into an Orwellian world.'

In similar vein, in a second Guardian comment piece on Douma, Jonathan Freedland [lamented](#): 'we are now in an era when the argument is no longer over our response to events, but the very existence of those events'. Echoing Soviet propaganda under Stalin, Freedland warned that this was indicative of an intellectual and moral sickness:

'These are symptoms of a post-truth disease that's come to be known as "tribal epistemology", in which the truth or falsity of a statement depends on whether the person making it is deemed one of us or one of them.'

And this was, once again, truth reversal – given recent history in Iraq and Libya, it was *Lucas and Freedland* who were falling into an Orwellian fantasy world. Mail on Sunday columnist Peter Hitchens [made](#) the obvious point:

'Given the folly of the British government over Iraq and Libya, and its undoubted misleading of the public over Iraq, it is perfectly reasonable to suspect it of doing the same thing again. Some of us also do not forget the blatant lying over Suez, and indeed the Gulf of Tonkin'

Hitchens clearly shares our concern at media performance, particularly that of the Guardian, [commenting](#):

'Has Invasion of the Bodysnatchers been re-enacted at Guardian HQ ? Whatever the dear old thing's faults it was never a Pentagon patsy until recently. Rumours of relaunch as The Warmonger's Gazette, free toy soldier with every issue.'

Hitchens [questioned](#) Guardian certainty on Douma:

'But if facts are sacred, how can the Guardian be so sure, given that it is relying on a report from one correspondent 70 miles away, and another one 900 miles away.. **and some anonymous quotes from people whose stories it has no way of checking ?'**

He [added](#):

'The behaviour of The Guardian is very strange & illustrates just what a deep, poorly-understood change in our politics took place during the Blair years. We now have the curious spectacle of the liberal warmonger, banging his or her jingo fist on the table, demanding airstrikes.'

Indeed, in discussing the prospects for 'intervention' in the Guardian, Gaby Hinsliff, former political editor of the Observer, [described](#) the 2013 vote that prevented Britain from bombing Syria in August 2013 as 'that shameful night in 2013'. Shameful ? After previous 'interventions' had completely wrecked Iraq and Libya on false pretexts, and after the US regime had been [told](#) the evidence was no 'slam dunk' by military advisers ?

In the New Statesman, Paul Mason [offered](#) a typically nonsensical argument, linking to the anti-Assad website, Bellingcat:

'Despite the availability of public sources showing it is likely that a regime Mi-8 helicopter dropped a gas container onto a specific building, there are well-meaning people prepared to share the opinion that this was a "false flag", staged by jihadis, to pull the West into the war. The fact that so many people are prepared to clutch at false flag theories is, for Western democracies, a sign of how effective Vladimir Putin's global strategy has been.'

Thus, echoing Freedland's reference to 'denialists and conspiracists', sceptics can only be idiot victims of Putin's propaganda. US media analyst Adam Johnson of FAIR accurately described Mason's piece as a 'mess', [adding](#):

'I love this thing where nominal leftists run the propaganda ball for bombing a country 99 yards then stop at the one yard and insist they don't support scoring goals, that they in fact oppose war.'

Surprisingly, the Bellingcat website, which publishes the findings of 'citizen journalist' investigations, appears to be taken seriously by some very high-profile progressives.

In the Independent, Green Party leader Caroline Lucas also [mentioned](#) the Syrian army 'Mi-8' helicopters. Why ? Because she had read the same Bellingcat blog as Mason, to which she linked:

'From the evidence we've seen so far it appears that the latest chemical attack was likely by Mi-8 helicopters, probably from the forces of Syria's murderous President Assad.'

On Democracy Now!, journalist Glenn Greenwald [said](#) of Douma:

'I think that it's—the evidence is quite overwhelming that the perpetrators of this chemical weapons attack, as well as previous ones, is the Assad government...'

This was an astonishing comment. After receiving fierce challenges (not from us), Greenwald partially retracted, [tweeting](#):

'It's live TV. Something [sic – sometimes] you say things less than ideally. I think the most likely perpetrator of this attack is Syrian Govt.'

We wrote to Greenwald asking what had persuaded him of Assad's 'likely' responsibility for Douma. (Twitter, April 10, direct message)

The first piece of evidence he sent us (April 12) was the Bellingcat blog mentioning Syrian government helicopters cited by Mason and Lucas. Greenwald also sent us a [report](#) from Reuters, as well as a [piece](#) from 2017, obviously prior to the alleged Douma event.

This was thin evidence indeed for the claim made. In our discussion with him, Greenwald then completely retracted his claim (Twitter, April 12, direct message) that there was evidence of Syrian government involvement in the alleged attack. Yes, it's true that people 'say things less than ideally' on TV, but to move from 'quite overwhelming' to 'likely', to declaring mistaken the claim that there is evidence of Assad involvement, was bizarre.

Political analyst Ben Norton [noted](#) on Twitter:

'Reminder that Bellingcat is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is funded by the US government and is a notorious vehicle for US soft power'

Norton [added](#): 'It acts like an unofficial NATO propagandist, obsessively focusing on Western enemies.'

[And](#):

'Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins is a fellow at the Atlantic Council, which is funded by NATO, US, Saudi, UAE, etc.'

[And](#):

'According to Meedan, which helps fund Bellingcat — along with the US government-funded NED — Bellingcat also works with the group Syrian Archive, which **is funded by the German government**, to jointly produce proopposition "research"

[And](#):

'The board of the directors for Meedan, which funds Bellingcat, includes Muna AbuSulayman—who led the Saudi oligarch's Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation—and Wael Fakharany—who was the regional director of Google in Egypt & North Africa (US gov. contractor Google also funds Bellingcat)'

[And](#):

'Bellingcat—which gets money from the US gov-funded NED and fixates obsessively on Western enemies—claims to be nonpartisan and impartial, committed to exposing all sides, but a website search shows it hasn't published anything on Yemen since February 2017.'

Although Bellingcat is widely referenced by corporate journalists, we are unaware of any 'mainstream' outlet that has seriously investigated the significance of these issues for the organisation's credibility as a source of impartial information. As we will see in Part 2, corporate journalism is very much more interested in challenging the credibility of journalists and academics holding power to account.

[Douma: Part 2 - 'It Just Doesn't Ring True'](#)

Media Lens, Last Updated on April 26, 2018

By Editor

Jonathan [Freedland's](#) 'committed denialists and conspiracists', and Paul [Mason's](#) victims of Putin's 'global strategy' clutching at 'false flag theories', presumably include Lord West, former First Sea Lord and Chief of Defence Intelligence. In an [interview](#) with the BBC, West commented:

'President Assad is in the process of winning this civil war. And he was about to take over and occupy Douma, all that area. He'd had a long, long, hard slog, slowly capturing that whole area of the city. **And then, just before he goes in and takes it all over, apparently he decides to have a chemical attack. It just doesn't ring true.**

'It seems extraordinary, because clearly he would know that there's likely to be a response from the allies – what *benefit* is there for his military ? Most of the rebel fighters, this disparate group of Islamists, had withdrawn; there were a few women and children left around. What benefit was there militarily in doing what he did ? I find that *extraordinary*. Whereas we know that, in the past, some of the Islamic groups have used chemicals [see [here](#)], and of course there would be *huge* benefit in them labelling an attack as coming from Assad, because they would guess, quite rightly, that there'd be a response from the US, as there was last time, and possibly from the UK and France...

'We do know that the reports that came from there were from the White Helmets – who, let's face it, are not neutrals [see [here](#)]; you know, they're very much on the side of the disparate groups who are fighting Assad – and also the World Health Organisation doctors who are there. And again, those doctors are embedded in amongst the groups – doing fantastic work, I know – but they're not neutral. And I am just a little bit concerned, because as we now move to the next phase of this war, if I were advising some of the Islamist groups – many of whom are worse than Daish – I would say: "Look, we've got to wait until there's another attack by Assad's forces – particularly if they have a helicopter overhead, or something like that, and they're dropping barrel bombs – and we must set off some chlorine because we'll get the next attack from the allies...." **And it is the only way they've got, actually, of stopping the inevitable victory of Assad.'**

Another senior military figure, Major General Jonathan Shaw, former commander of British forces in Iraq (his responsibilities have included chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear policy), was shut down by a Sky News journalist 30 seconds after he started [saying](#) the wrong thing:

'The debate that seems to be missing from this... was what possible motive might have triggered Syria to launch a chemical attack at this time in this place ? You know, the Syrians are winning... Don't take my word for it. Take the American military's word. General Vergel [sic – Votel], the head of Centcom – he said to Congress the other day, "Assad has won this war, and we need to face that".

'Then you've got last week the statement by Trump – or tweet by Trump – that America has finished with ISIL and we were going to pull out soon, very soon.

'And then suddenly you get this...'

At which point Shaw's sound was cut and the interview terminated. Peter Hitchens [asked](#):

'Can anyone tell me what was so urgent on Sky News, which made it necessary to cut this distinguished general off in mid-sentence?'

Sky News gave their version of events [here](#), claiming they had to take an ad break.

Also taking a more cautious view than Tisdall, Freedland, Rawnsley, Lucas, Mendoza, Monbiot, Mason and the Guardian editors (see [Part 1](#)), is James 'Mad Dog' Mattis, the US Secretary of Defence, who [said](#):

'I believe there was a chemical attack and we are looking for the actual evidence.'

Only *'looking'* for actual evidence ?

'As each day goes by — as you know, it is a non-persistent gas — so it becomes more and more difficult to confirm it.'

The evidence clearly, then, had *not* yet been found and the claims had *not* yet been confirmed.

Peter Ford, former British ambassador to Syria, [voiced](#) scepticism:

'The Americans have failed to produce any evidence beyond what they call newspaper reports and social media, whereas Western journalists who have been in Douma [see below] and produced testimony from witnesses – from medics with names so they can be checked – to the effect that the Syrian version is correct.'

Before Trump's latest attack, Scott Ritter, former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, [made](#) the point that mattered:

'The bottom line, however, is that the United States is threatening to go to war in Syria over allegations of chemical weapons usage for which no factual evidence has been provided. This act is occurring even as the possibility remains that verifiable forensic investigations would, at a minimum, confirm the presence of chemical weapons...'

Even a BBC journalist managed some short-lived scepticism. Riam Dalati [tweeted](#):

'Sick and tired of activists and rebels using corpses of dead children to stage emotive scenes for Western consumption.'

'Then they wonder why some serious journos are questioning part of the narrative.'

'#Douma #ChemicalAttack #EasternGhouta'

The tweet was quickly deleted.

Craig Murray [wrote](#):

'For the FCO, I lived and worked in several actual dictatorships. The open bias of their media presenters and the tone of their propaganda operations was – always

– less hysterical than the current output of the BBC. The facade is not crumbling, it's tumbling.'

Robert Fisk – Hypoxia, Not Gas

Veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk visited Douma and [reported](#) his findings in the Independent. He spoke to a senior doctor who works in the clinic where victims of the alleged chemical attack had been brought for treatment. Dr Rahaibani told Fisk what had happened that night:

'I was with my family in the basement of my home three hundred metres from here on the night but all the doctors know what happened. There was a lot of shelling [by government forces] and aircraft were always over Douma at night – but on this night, there was wind and huge dust clouds began to come into the basements and cellars where people lived. People began to arrive here suffering from hypoxia, oxygen loss. Then someone at the door, a "White Helmet", shouted "Gas !", and a panic began. People started throwing water over each other. Yes, the video was filmed here, it is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia – not gas poisoning.'

Not gas poisoning ? Why was this not immediately headline news in the 'mainstream' press and on BBC News ? In fact, almost throughout the 'MSM', it was quietly buried. The glaring exception was an [article](#) in The Times with the pejorative headline:

'Critics leap on reporter Robert Fisk's failure to find signs of gas attack'

The piece suggested that there were big question marks over Fisk's record:

'Fisk is no stranger to controversy.'

A list of Fisk's 'controversies' followed. There was no mention that, among many accolades, the Arabic-speaking Fisk has won Amnesty International press awards three times, the Foreign Reporter of the Year award seven times and the Journalist of the Year award twice.

In an article published by open Democracy, **Philip Hammond, professor of media and communications at London South Bank University**, [observed](#) that:

'In seeking to close down such dissident thought, Times journalists are acting, not as neutral defenders of truth, but as partisan advocates for a particular understanding of the war.'

A Guardian [article](#) by diplomatic editor Patrick Wintour and world affairs editor Julian Borger commented of Douma:

'A group of reporters, many favoured by Moscow, were taken to the site on Monday. They either reported that no weapon attack had occurred or that the victims had been misled by the White Helmets civilian defence force into mistaking a choking effect caused by dust clouds for a chemical attack.'

Not only was Fisk not mentioned by name, he was lumped in with reporters 'favoured by Moscow'. Jonathan Cook's [observation](#) said it all:

'They managed the difficult task of denigrating his account while ignoring the fact that he was ever there.'

In The Intercept, columnist Mehdi Hasan [wrote](#) an impassioned open letter addressed to 'those of you on the anti-war far left who have a soft spot for the dictator in Damascus: Have you lost your minds ? Or have you no shame ?' The piece began:

'Dear Bashar al-Assad Apologists,

'Sorry to interrupt: I know you're very busy right now trying to convince yourselves, and the rest of us, that your hero couldn't possibly have used chemical weapons to kill up to 70 people in rebel-held Douma on April 7. **Maybe Robert Fisk's mysterious doctor has it right — and maybe the hundreds of survivors and eyewitnesses to the attack are all "crisis actors."**

So, Fisk's evidence with its 'mysterious doctor' was clearly worthless, something shameless 'apologists' were using to try and convince themselves of an absurdity. Hasan named no other names, but readers could guess from the many smear pieces in The Times, Huffington Post, on the BBC, and spread by the likes of Oliver Kamm, George Monbiot and Alan Mendoza.

Hasan portrayed Assad as a satanic figure while the US and its allies – countries that have sent 15,000 high-tech anti-tank missiles, as well as billions of dollars of other weapons and training to fighters in Syria – are mere 'meddlers'. The jihadists are 'rebels' (a generally noble term), not fanatical invaders from Libya and Iraq. Hasan referenced biased sources including Ken Roth of Human Rights Watch, Martin Chulov of the Guardian, and the White Helmets.

The Intercept's co-editor, Glenn Greenwald, [defended](#) the piece:

'There is a meaningful debate to be had on Syria and, as I've said before, most media outlets (including us) have been quite one-sided about it. That said, Mehdi's article, well-documented though it was, didn't name anyone who guilty of loving Assad so I'm not sure who is offended'

We [replied](#):

""Mehdi's article, well-documented though it was, didn't name anyone". That's the problem. Hasan's article arrives in the context of a cross-spectrum, name-and-shame smear campaign making similar points'

We linked to three high-profile examples from the [BBC](#), [The Times](#) and [Huffington Post](#).

Political analyst Ian Sinclair [declared](#) Hasan's article a 'Necessary and important piece'.

It certainly wasn't 'necessary' to damn Assad yet again – the world's corporate media have been packed with news and comment pieces doing exactly that for years. As for the need to expose left 'apologists' – as we have seen, corporate media are currently mounting a fierce [campaign](#) targeting leftist university academics, apparently with the intention of getting them fired.

The question of importance is less clear-cut. The piece will, of course, have no effect whatsoever on Assad, whom Western 'apologists' on 'the anti-war far left' would be

powerless to influence even if they came round to Hasan's view. On the other hand, as a purported 'leftist', Hasan's piece is important as ammunition for foreign policy warmongers, neocons and others. Thus, Jonathan [Freedland](#) tweeted:

'Strong piece from @mehdirhasan'

George [Monbiot](#):

'To all those who have been trying to persuade me that the Assad government is simply maintaining order, please read this excellent article by @mehdirhasan #Syria'

Oliver [Kamm](#) of The Times:

'"Is this atrocity denial really necessary ?" Well said by Mehdi on the extraordinary, scandalous spectacle of people purporting to be anti-imperialists while denying the crimes of Assad.'

Hasan, of course, knew his article would receive this kind of favourable attention, and he has form in reaching out to this audience. In 2010, whilst senior political editor at the New Statesman, he [wrote](#) a letter offering his services to Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre:

'I have always admired the paper's passion, rigour, boldness and, of course, news values. I believe the Mail has a vitally important role to play in the national debate, and I admire your relentless focus on the need for integrity and morality in public life, and your outspoken defence of faith, and Christian culture, in the face of attacks from militant atheists and secularists. I also believe... that I could be a fresh and passionate, not to mention polemical and contrarian, voice on the comment and feature pages of your award-winning newspaper.

'For the record, I am not a Labour tribalist and am often ultra-critical of the left – especially on social and moral issues, where my fellow leftists and liberals have lost touch with their own traditions and with the great British public... I could therefore write pieces for the Mail critical of Labour and the left, from "inside" Labour and the left (as the senior political editor at the New Statesman).'

Because, as we all know, being 'ultra-critical' of the left 'from "inside" Labour and the left' – for example, asking 'the anti-war far left who have a soft spot for the dictator in Damascus: Have you lost your minds ? Or have you no shame ?' – carries enormous weight.

In his piece for The Intercept, Hasan commented:

'And, look, we can argue over whether or not to support... regime change in Damascus (I don't).'

And yet, in 2013, he [wrote](#):

'I want Assad gone and I believe him to be a brutal and corrupt dictator.'

Hasan's angry mockery of doubters on Douma is ironic indeed, given his own record on Libya. At a crucial time in March 2011, with NATO jets bombing Gaddafi's troops, Hasan [commented](#):

'The innocent people of Benghazi deserve protection from Gaddafi's murderous wrath.'

The reality, as we saw in [Part 1](#), is that the [claim](#) was 'not supported by the available evidence'.

Fisk's account, irrationally scorned by Hasan, was backed by on-the-ground [testimony](#) from reporter Pearson Sharp from One America News Network:

'Not one of the people that I spoke to in that neighbourhood said that they had seen anything, or heard anything, about a chemical attack on that day... they didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary.'

As far as we could tell, there was nothing on the flagship BBC News at Six and Ten about any of this testimony from doctors and residents claiming that there was no evidence of a chemical attack in Douma on April 7.

It is shocking that the BBC ignored evidence supplied from Syria by Fisk – one of Britain's finest journalists – when it has cited hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times evidence **supplied by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is run by a [clothes shop owner](#) in Coventry who supports regime change in Syria.**

On BBC News at Ten on April 15, presenter Mishal Husain, Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen and political editor Laura Kuenssberg discussed the missile strikes on Syria and the political fallout here at home. There was no mention that the strikes had taken place just as OPCW inspectors had arrived in Damascus. Nor was there any discussion of expert [opinion](#) from international lawyers contradicting the government's assertion that the attacks were legal. A group of international law experts [warned](#):

'We are practitioners and professors of international law. Under international law, military strikes by the United States of America and its allies against the Syrian Arab Republic, unless conducted in self-defense or with United Nations Security Council approval, are illegal and constitute acts of aggression.'

Meanwhile, the BBC joined the McCarthyite witch-hunt against anyone challenging the official narrative. In a [piece](#) titled, 'Syria war: The online activists pushing conspiracy theories', an anonymous BBC journalist commented:

'Despite the uncertainty about what happened in Douma, a cluster of influential social media activists is certain that it knows what occurred.'

Of course, the irony is that an incomparably bigger and better funded 'cluster of influential' state-corporate media has been vociferously claiming certainty about what is happening in Syria; not least 100% conviction of Assad's guilt for a string of chemical weapon attacks.

We have no idea who was responsible for the event in Douma – we don't know even if there was a chemical weapons attack. Our point is not that credible, sceptical voices are right, but that they should be heard.

On April 12, novelist Malcolm Pryce [sent](#) us this poignant tweet:

'I remember in the run-up to the Iraq War a friend I had known all my life suddenly said to me, "We must do something about this monster in Iraq." I said, "When did you first think that?" He answered honestly, "A month ago".'

This is the power of the corporate media to shape the public mind it is supposed to serve.

But to achieve this effect, it must present a black and white view of the world – 'we' are 'good', 'they' are 'bad'; 'we' are 'certain', 'they' are morally bewildered 'apologists'. When reality threatens to get in the way, when there is no choice, an increasingly extreme 'mainstream' will resort to deception in plain sight.