

White Helmets, Black Hearts

By Jeremy Salt

Source: [American Herald Tribune](#)

In 2016 the White Helmets were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Justin Timberlake thought they should get it. So did Bear Grylls, Ben Affleck, Michael Palin, Daniel Craig, Rowan Williams, Ridley Scott, George Clooney, Sacha Baron Cohen, Vanessa Redgrave and various other artists, writers, and politicians who put their signatures to the petition on the White Helmets web site.

'Give it to Syria's White Helmets' theGuardian, a media mainstay of the terrorist war on Syria from the beginning, implored the Nobel committee. 'They embody a spirit of civic resistance.'

The actor George Clooney also identified their essential goodness. 'In a world full of hate these people put on helmets and run towards violence while everyone else is running away from it,' he said in London when attending a showing of the glowing documentary the White Helmets made about themselves.

On their website, the White Helmets describe themselves as 'former tailors, bakers, teachers and other ordinary Syrians' who had come together to form the 'Syria Civil Defence'. In fact, Syria has, and has had since the 1950s, a government civil defense organization of the same name, which operates across the country, unlike the White Helmets, which has operated only in 'rebel' held areas.

Furthermore, far from being an organization set up by 'ordinary Syrians' who saw a need for 'civil defense' and decided to fill it, the White Helmets were not even Syrian in origin but the brainchild of a former British intelligence officer. Furthermore, again, they were never financially

independent, as they claimed, but were funded from the beginning by the same governments making war on Syria through armed proxies tied to their intelligence services. They were a carefully constructed arm of this war.

The White Helmets were a sustained lie from the start. They were deliberately packaged to give the corporate media the images it wanted, dominated by the White Helmet hero scurrying across a rubble-strewn foreground with a dusty, crying child in his arms. In the background, out of sight but figuratively represented in the wailing of children and the bodies on the street were the architects of these horrors, the 'regime' in Damascus and the dictator sitting in his palace.

It was not long before holes began to appear in the narrative. These rescues were not genuine but were being staged for media consumption. Journalists Vanessa Beeley and Eva Bartlett were the first to pick holes in the narrative and the more they picked the more the holes widened, to the point where it was clear that the White Helmets were a scam of the first order.

But they were a scam the governments making war on Syria wanted their people to believe and a scam that the corporate media perpetuated, when the most cursory research would have revealed the lies.

The White Helmets were not just working in 'rebel-held' areas, a media euphemism for civilian districts taken over by the most violent terrorist groups on the face of the earth. They were an extension of these groups. They boasted of their affinities on their Facebook pages. They hated the Syrian government with the same fervor as the takfiris. They also reviled the Alawi, the Shia, Christians and Sunni Muslims who fell short of the takfiris' exacting standards.

Many White Helmets doubled up as 'first responders' and takfiri gunmen. They operated completely under the instructions of the takfiris. They took away the bodies of the

newly executed for burial and staged chemical weapons attacks as required. As evidence gathered by Russian researchers indicates, they were also involved in the harvesting of body organs from the bodies of wounded civilians.

These activities were all funded by the 'liberal democracies,' including the UK, the US, the EU and individual EU governments, including Denmark and Germany, nominally committed to fighting terrorism around the world.

By 2017 the British Foreign Office alone had paid the White Helmets an acknowledged \$80 million. Outside money had even come from the Jo Cox Foundation, set up in memory of the British Labor politician, murdered in 2016, to work for a 'fairer, kinder and more tolerant world.'

The contradictions in western attitudes were exemplified when Raed Saleh, the head of the White Helmets, and the recipient of millions of dollars in US aid, travelled to the US in 2016 to receive a humanitarian award and was turned back at Dulles International Airport in Washington.

Although the Department of Homeland Security never makes its reasons public, Saleh was clearly on a security/terrorist watch list. He had been allowed into the country before but this time he was turned away.

Waiting to greet him, the well-meaning but naïve members of the InterAction NGO alliance donned white helmets in his absence. Unfortunately, they are not likely to see the White Helmets being outed anywhere in the US media.

The Russian Foundation for the Study of Democracy recently compiled evidence based on extensive interviews in Syria with hundreds of witnesses, including former White Helmets and takfiri fighters, physicians and civilians living in areas that had been taken over by takfiri groups.

The interviews indicated that many of the White Helmets were

not volunteers as claimed. In East Aleppo men were imprisoned and given time to decide whether to join Jabhat al Nusra or the White Helmets. It had to be one or the other. There was no third option unless saying 'no' to both and facing execution can be considered an option.

For some, joining the White Helmets was the only means of survival for themselves and their families but once inside the organization, everyone knew orders had to be obeyed whatever they were.

These orders came from the takfiri groups. A member of Jaysh al Islam's internal security services told Russian researchers that instructions were delivered to the White Helmets by phone or personal messenger but either way, they were under the full control of Jaysh al Islam.

After eastern Ghouta was taken over by the takfiris it was divided into four sectors. The White Helmets in the district were integrated with the takfiri group assigned responsibility for each sector.

Along with faked chemical weapons attacks, setting up faked 'regime' bombings in line with instructions from the takfiri groups was a specialty of the White Helmets media unit. Witnesses gave evidence of bodies being brought from the morgue and the wounded from the hospital in preparation for faked attacks. Wrecked cars would be dragged to the site. The stage having been set with the apparent consequences of a 'regime' bombing, tyres and trash would be set on fire and the cameras would begin to roll.

In Douma, the White Helmets constructed barriers, dug trenches and tunnels, and transported fighters, weapons, and ammunition to the front lines. According to witness evidence, they were permanently engaged in preparing battle positions for the takfiris. White Helmet or 'rebel' media rooms or centers kept the global corporate media supplied with a steady flow of lies

which were eagerly lapped up, no questions asked. The lies included the faked 2018 chemical weapons attack in Douma.

Theft was a common perquisite of being a White Helmet. Money and gold would be stolen from houses and jewelry stripped from the living – usually women – as well as the dead. Senior White Helmet figures enriched themselves, one in Douma buying cars and summer houses.

In the districts, they occupied the takfiris and the White Helmets shared office space. They took over schools and kindergartens. Under the threat of death, teachers in eastern Ghouta were told to send their students to religious schools. Students at the Gaza school in Aleppo were told to seek their education at the mosque.

The most heinous of White Helmet activities was the harvesting of body organs. Statements made to the Russian researchers indicated that organs were being removed in Turkey for transplantation into the bodies of wounded fighters and that the White Helmets and takfiri groups such as Ahrar al-Sham acted as an integrated team throughout the whole process.

The Russian researchers heard extensive prima facie evidence of the wounded being taken away for treatment by the White Helmets and being returned as corpses stripped of their body parts. A doctor in Aleppo gave evidence relating to a driver in Aleppo who weighed about 70 kgs when taken away and about 30-45 kgs when his corpse was returned. He had been cut from his throat to his stomach.

‘The skin almost touched his back,’ the doctor said. ‘I touched him with my hand and understood that there were clearly no organs left.’

In Aleppo the mother of a boy whose organs had been removed was only allowed to see his head and neck. An injured girl was taken to Turkey for ‘treatment’ and her body returned three days later with her internal organs missing. Even a person

with a minor injury would be taken away and returned with the stomach cut open and the organs removed. It was understood, according to witnesses, that people taken away for medical treatment by the White Helmets often did not come back alive.

In July, 2018, 429 members of the White Helmets were smuggled out of Syria across the occupied Golan Heights and moved immediately to Jordan. The transfer was facilitated by the government of Israel which had armed the takfiris and given hospital care to their wounded since the beginning of the war. It had also helped and protected them by attacking Syrian military installations and now it was saving their White Helmet enablers from the retribution of the Syrian state and people.

From Jordan, the White Helmets were dispersed among the countries whose governments had supported them. They were quickly whisked away into a life of anonymity, supported by the British, European or American taxpayer. No one would know where they were or who they were so no critical questions could be asked. The truth was being buried with them.

This is a shocking story, of government criminality and media irresponsibility, of which the lies fed to the world about the White Helmets is only part.

The Russian report is a significant addition to the enormous body of prime facie evidence about the real nature of the White Helmets but as anything coming out of Russia is instantly dismissed as 'fake news' the corporate media already has a licensed reason to ignore this report.

The caravan of celebrities who moved quickly to capture some of the limelight created by the White Helmets, without asking any questions about what they were actually supporting, without caring as long as some of the spotlight fell on them, will move on in their narcissistic, feckless fashion.

The truth must have dawned on George Clooney by now.

Certainly, it would be surprising to see him going ahead with his feature film on the White Helmets unless he intends to show what they were really like behind the lies he and many others swallowed. That's the story that certainly needs to be told.

[Carla Ortiz video on White Helmets HQ in Aleppo](#)

UN Panel Details Organ Theft, Staged Attacks by the White Helmets

As 2018, a year of staggering corporate media fake news, drew to a close so do the last vestiges of credibility of media lauding the White Helmets.

By Eva Bartlett

Source: [Mint Press News](#)

Utter silence. That is the sound of Western corporate media days after a more than one-hour-long panel on the White Helmets at the United Nations on December 20.

Journalists were present, so the silence isn't due to lack of access. And in any case, it was live streamed on the UNTV channel and remains available on Youtube for keen observers to watch.

More likely, the silence is due to the irrefutable documentation presented on the faux-rescue group's involvement in criminal activities, which include organ theft, working with terrorists – including as snipers – staging fake rescues, thieving from civilians, and other non-rescuer behavior.

On the panel was one of corporate media's favourite targets to smear, British journalist Vanessa Beeley, who gave a fact-based lecture on her years of research into the founding, funding and nefarious activities of the White Helmets, research which includes numerous visits to White Helmets centers, countless testimonies from Syrian civilians, and even an interview with a White Helmets leader in Dara'a al-Balad, Syria.

Maxim Grigoriev, the director of the Foundation for the Study of Democracy (a member of the UN's Global Counter-Terrorism Research Network) spoke at length, detailing some of the over 100 eyewitnesses his foundation has conducted interviews with.

These include over 40 White Helmets members, 15 former terrorists, 50 people from areas where terrorists and WH operated, with another over 500 interviewed by survey in Aleppo and Daraa.

Among testimonies presented by Grigoriev were numerous accounts of the White Helmets' involvement in organ theft.

A head of nursing in Aleppo is cited as seeing the body of his neighbor who had been taken by the White Helmets to Turkey for "treatment."

I lifted the sheet and saw a large wound cut from the throat to the stomach... I touched him with my hand and understood there were clearly no organs left."

Another interviewee said:

A person receives a minor injury, is rescued... and then brought back with their stomach cut open and with their internal organs missing."

The interviews with civilians, White Helmets and terrorist members themselves put to rest NATO's and their lapdog media's explanations that in the White Helmets there are a few bad apples but in general these are humanitarian rescuers.

For example, a Syrian civilian, Omar al-Mustafa, is cited as stating:

Almost all people who worked in nearby White Helmets centers were al-Nusra fighter or were linked to them. I tried to join the White Helmets myself, but I was told that if I was not from al-Nusra, they could not employ me."

Still, more testimonies detail staged fake rescues and staged chemical attacks. Omar al-Mustafa was cited as stating:

I saw them (White Helmets) bring children who were alive, put them on the floor as if they had died in a chemical attack.”

The testimonies incriminate not only the White Helmets organization but also the doctors who, in 2016, Western corporate media fawned over.

According to one interviewee, Mohamed Bashir Biram, his attempt to take his father to a White Helmets affiliated al-Bayan hospital, failed. He said:

Since my father was not a fighter, the doctors in the hospital refused to help him and he died.”

But in 2016, the Western media was praising the same valiant doctors, in their crescendo of war propaganda around Aleppo.

Many other independent journalists have corroborated aspects of what the panelists – also comprising Syrian journalist Rafiq Lotef, and Russian and Syrian Representatives to the UN, Ambassadors Vassily Nebenzia and Bashar al-Ja’afari – described in detail.

In my own visits to eastern Ghouta towns last April and May, residents likewise spoke of organ theft, staged rescues, the White Helmets working with Jaysh al-Islam, while an Aleppo man likewise described them as thieves who steal from civilians, not rescuers.

Copy-paste corporate media silence

Journalists present at the panel were not interested in asking follow-up questions on organ theft, staged rescues, or any of the content presented, unsurprisingly, instead of asking questions about other Syrian issues.

A CBS journalist didn’t have a single question about what had just been presented, although CBS has previously repeatedly

reported on the White Helmets. But their reporting, like most in corporate media, spun the transparent propaganda that is corporate media coverage of the group.

Four days after the UN panel, to my knowledge, not a single corporate media outlet has covered the event and its critical contents.

This is in spite of the fact that the Western corporate media has been happy to propagandize about the White Helmets for years and to attack those of us who dare to present testimonies and evidence from on the ground in Syria which contradicts the official narrative.

Russian, Syrian, and Lebanese media did report on the panel, and of course, if Western corporate journalists ever do bother to mention it, they will ignore the incriminating evidence presented by panelists and instead accuse Russia of bullying the White Helmets.

Prior to the panel, a number of publications came out with articles echoing one another, and in fact echoing claims already repeatedly uttered about a "Russian disinformation campaign" against the White Helmets.

That's right, that's the best they've got.

'Big bad Russia' tarnishing the pristine image of the White Helmets, a theme rerun ad nauseum over the last year or two, and one which I addressed in early January 2018 when I was under attack for questioning the White Helmets.

In my rebuttal to a mid-December 2017 Guardian smear, I pointed out that it was not Russia which began looking into the White Helmets' affiliations, funding, and role in the propaganda war, but two independent North American researchers.

Canadian journalist Cory Morningstar in September 2014 exposed

the role of the New York-based PR firm, Purpose Inc, in marketing campaigns for the White Helmets.

And as I wrote, "In April 2015, American independent journalist revealed that the White Helmets had been founded by Western powers and managed by a British ex-soldier, and noted the "rescuers" role in calling for Western intervention—a No Fly Zone on Syria."

These, and the subsequent numerous investigations by Vanessa Beeley, including on the ground in Syria, taking countless testimonies of Syrian civilians on the matter of the White Helmets, far precede any Russian media reporting on the group.

That Russian media and bodies have since done their own investigations does not equate to a "disinformation campaign", but rather doing the job corporate media are clearly incapable of, and unwilling to do.

Why haven't the media written about the panel, or as per the corporate media norm, issued yet more smears against panelists?

They haven't because they are cornered, and while they can always try their standard juvenile character smears and libel, they cannot refute the facts, the countless testimonies which corroborate yet still more testimonies taken by independent journalists over the years.

Or as Ambassador Nebenzia said:

We understand why #WhiteHelmets are being defended by #Western capitals. They do not hide that they provided substantial financial support to this organization and instrumentalized it to pursue political goals under humanitarian cover. It's logical to protect your asset."

Last week, it came out that German reporter for Der Spiegel, Claas Relotius, winner of the German Reporter Award 2018, had

falsified a number of his articles. One article on the fakery noted Relotius had:

Confessed to have fabricated at least 14 of 55 articles," including a "story about a Syrian boy who believed he triggered the civil war in the country with his graffiti, an article that won the German Reporter Prize just three weeks ago but which was made up."

Former German journalist, Udo Ulfkotte, in 2014 reached his tipping point and admitted to having for years lied for Western, anti-Russia interests, admitting to making propaganda against Russia after having been bribed by billionaires, and by the Americans, to "not to report exactly the truth."

As 2018, a year of staggering corporate media fake news draws to a close, so do the last vestiges of credibility of media lauding the White Helmets.

Given the scandalous depth of their lies, it is unlikely corporate journalists will have an Ulfkotte moment and admit to their manifold deceptions.

But it doesn't really matter, because more and more, Western corporate media, and the propaganda construct known as the White Helmets they support, are becoming irrelevant.

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Source | RT

How We Were Misled About Syria: Channel 4 News

Source: [Tim Hayward WordPress](#)

Difficulties faced news organisations attempting to cover events in the war in Syria, particularly in the eastern part of Aleppo when under siege. Western journalists had stopped even trying to enter that area for fear of being kidnapped, or worse, at the hands of one or other of the armed factions holding the area. International relief agencies and NGO's were not to be found on the ground either, for the same reasons.

This is one of the two main problems for media coverage of Syria that Eva Bartlett highlighted at a UN press conference in November 2016 when talking about her first hand experience of conditions in Aleppo.[1] Asked by a journalist from a mainstream publication why she seemed to be challenging 'all these absolutely documentable facts that we've seen from the ground', she pointed out that he was referring to a hearsay narrative, not facts, because 'sources on the ground? You don't have them.'

Channel 4 News editor Ben de Pear had earlier in 2016 grappled with this problem, of "safe access denied to objective independent journalists from outside", and had devised a strategy for circumventing it. He commissioned coverage from a Syrian woman called Wa'ad Alkateab who could move safely in the opposition-held area. She went on to make a series of films – Inside Aleppo – that, thanks to the prominence Channel 4 gave them, became influential in forming public opinion about the circumstances in Aleppo.

This neat side-stepping of the first problem, however, put Channel 4's coverage at risk of succumbing to the second problem highlighted by Eva Bartlett: any testimony coming out

of opposition-held areas has to be considered compromised. For we have to assume that whatever is reported from the opposition-held area is only what those with the guns will permit. So the presumption must be that information coming out is unlikely to be the whole truth and may contain untruths.

For some reason, this presumption – which follows from the most basic principles of credible journalism – seems at times to have been suspended by Channel 4 News in its coverage of Syria. It entered no caveats about the reports and tended to treat their content – without corroboration or independent evidence – as if it had come from verified sources.[2] Channel 4 was thus knowingly complicit in promoting a narrative that was necessarily one-sided.

To take just one obvious example of partiality: Alkateab's films prominently feature the medical facility where her husband Hamza Al-Khatib played a central role, and we hear repeatedly how the Syrian government and its Russian allies are bombing areas with civilians including the children they treat. What we would never know from these films is that there are many more hospitals in the larger part of Aleppo treating children and other civilians who are victims of rockets and mortars launched into residential areas by fighters from the opposition enclave in the eastern part.[3] These, moreover, can be corroborated.[4]

It should go without saying that a single individual will always have their own limited perspective; an individual with a strong ideological commitment who is deeply embedded with oppositional militants must be assumed to be partial. (The commitment may be sincere and held with good intention but this does not diminish the questions about its partiality.)

This may be why people at Channel 4 responded in a particularly defensive manner to the simple moral force of Eva Bartlett's cautionary words. They engaged in a rather disingenuous attempt to discredit her. An article published on

their website, that merely took issue with one incidental in Bartlett's account, was promoted by Channel 4 people – from Jon Snow and Ben de Pear down – as if it had disposed of her critique of mainstream coverage in Syria.[5] The article in fact made no comment on her main points.

Two major claims Bartlett had made – that there were no independent news sources on the ground in Aleppo and that any sources used there should be regarded as compromised – were incontrovertibly true. The factual truth of the first was clearly acknowledged by Channel 4 itself, as we noted. The truth of the second is of a normative kind that would be accepted by any decent journalist under the circumstances prevailing in Aleppo.

What is really at issue, therefore, if we assume agreement about the basic standards of reputable journalism, is whether anyone has an effective reply to her main substantive argument about coverage of the war in Syria, namely, that it involves the promotion of a narrative that lacks a basis in verifiable fact. Bartlett claims that the mainstream media have systematically occluded an entire side of the Syrian story, and they have done so in a way that supports the interests of the NATO and Gulf states that were pressing for 'regime change' in Syria; in doing this, they have supported the visitation of a devastating war upon the Syrian people that has been unnecessary and unjustified. The mainstream media are thereby complicit in an egregious contravention of the laws of war and human morality.

Channel 4's defensiveness on the subject indicates that they saw the charge applied to them as a part of the mainstream consensus. But if they were going to answer it, why did they not play what should have been their strongest card? If Bartlett's claim is that people on the ground contest the mainstream narrative, why not appeal to contrary testimony from the ground that supports it? They have the Alkateab videos, after all, and these repeatedly show people injured or

bereaved by bombings. The thing is, what those videos show is something that is not in dispute: people are being killed by war, and it is difficult to run medical facilities in conditions of war. By contriving to suggest that Bartlett is denying this, which she is obviously not, they evade the real challenge.

In fact, a major evasiveness is at the heart of the series *Inside Aleppo*. If we bear in mind that the films are shot in an area of the town that is being besieged by the Syrian army and the Russian air force, then we realise this is because there is considerable military resistance being put up. Yet in the *Alkateab* films there is an eerie silence about the military forces on the ground around them. Although in the film of the couple and their baby entering Aleppo we catch sight of one of their companions carrying an AK47, the rest of the time we see nobody onscreen bearing any arms. Nor do we hear anything about any of the score or so of armed brigades, dominated by the militias of Al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria) that are controlling the town and holding at bay the combined military might of Syria and Russia. We do not even hear anything explicit about the so-called 'moderate opposition' that the mainstream media refer to.

As it happens, though, Channel 4 did make one film showing the 'moderate opposition' at work. It was billed as giving 'a glimpse into why Syrian and Russian forces have so far been unable to re-take the whole of Aleppo.' [6] *Up Close with the Rebels* (released in October 2016) features an example of so-called 'moderate rebels' in action. In his voiceover, Krishnan Guru-Murthy introduces the action as "one small but famous victory, as rebels fought back against the forces of Bashar Al-Assad". With this vicarious sharing of their glory, the Channel 4 man is in no doubt about who they are: they are "Islamist fighters", he tells us, noting also that "many civilians in West Aleppo are frightened of these rebel fighters", which would not be surprising given that they are

“launching rockets into the western side of the city”. “This group is well equipped”, he adds, “paid for and supplied by Gulf States, mainly Qatar.”

I think we need to pause here. It appears that the film thereby illustrates, point by point, exactly what Bartlett has said about the anti-government forces being foreign-funded terrorists that the ordinary citizens of Syria want to be protected from. Guru-Murthy appears to be corroborating Bartlett’s account as against that promoted by Channel 4.

The manner of the reporting, though, is truly strange. It involves glorifying in the victory of jihadi terrorists while admitting that ordinary civilians in the greater part of Aleppo are in fear of these fighters. I literally cannot imagine what was going through the head of Guru-Murthy as he was saying all this out loud. Nor can I imagine how exactly he thinks the ordinary civilians trapped in the eastern part of Aleppo felt towards these and all the other fighters ruling their lives. After all, he and his colleagues dared not even set foot there.

Still, worse is to come. It relates to a story that shocked the world, in July 2016, when from Aleppo came news – and footage – of a group of Islamists severing the head off a twelve-year old boy with a small knife.[7] That group was Nour Al-Din Al-Zinki, and several of the men directly involved are clearly recognizable in photos that circulated the globe.

One of the men involved in decapitating the twelve-year-old features centre stage in Channel 4’s film.

That, then, is what you find if you actually get up close with the rebels. Channel 4, on being apprised that ordinary observant members of the public apparently knew, or cared, more about the people they were working with than its own news team did, hastily withdrew the video from its website. (I say hastily, as to my knowledge Channel 4 has issued neither

apology nor explanation for sending out a news report and then retracting it after people may have relied on it.) The film remains readily accessible elsewhere on the internet – as does the harrowing footage of the decapitation.

The films by Alkateab remain on Channel 4's catalogue, and it is to be noted that she was not responsible for the Nour Al-Din Al-Zinki footage. But a friend of hers was. Abdul Kader Habak was driving the car that brought Waad and her family into Aleppo. He, like her husband, is interviewed in her film. They presumably all enjoy the same protection.

I make no claim to know which individuals belong to which groups, armed or otherwise, in the 'rebel-held' area, but anyone curious enough to look at their public facebook and twitter feeds will see that Wa'ad and Hamza are passionately committed to the anti-government cause. They even use their own baby as a symbol of their struggle. None of this necessarily means their testimony is untrue. But Channel 4 was surprisingly uncritical in its showcasing of the material.[8]

The truth or otherwise of stories from Channel 4's sources in eastern Aleppo was to be put to the test in the final days of the siege. These saw intense tweeting from the rebels, and retweeting of it by the Channel 4 news team. 'Massacre was imminent', and eastern Aleppo was about to 'fall' to the merciless forces of the Syrian 'regime'. These would probably be the 'last messages' before government forces 'annihilated' them in #holocaustaleppo. Channel 4 bought into this fully, even featuring a filmed 'letter' by Wa'ad which starts "Maybe this will be my last letter to you and the world...".[9]

In the event, those same people would soon be tweeting again from Turkey or other rebel-held parts of Syria. Meanwhile, according to the kinds of observer that regard Eva Bartlett with respect – and according also to the copious footage showing it – the majority of the population of eastern Aleppo, reunited with the western part, celebrated their liberation,

welcoming the Syrian army, and the Russians that followed with their sappers to clear buildings of mines and booby-traps left behind by the 'moderate rebels'.

As the liberated city has started to rebuild and function again, the Western media have gone silent. Channel 4 no longer talks much about Aleppo. But if the news bandwagon may have moved on, real lives have been lost or changed forever as a result of a war that was unjustified and unnecessary. The rest of us must try and learn from such awful chains of events as led to the unspeakable carnage and displacement in Syria.

Most of us know nothing about Syria except what we can glean from the media – either mainstream news outlets or independent investigators on social media. We are not in a position to check facts as such. Yet we can assess the credibility of testimony, even if only by ascertaining whether it is internally consistent rather than self-contradictory. A fully self-consistent story is not guaranteed to correspond to the true facts, of course, but one that is internally inconsistent cannot be the whole or unalloyed truth.

An account of the circumstances in Aleppo, that was internally consistent during the siege, and vindicated by subsequent events, was provided by those few witnesses from the West who were on the ground. The testimony of Eva Bartlett is consistent with that of a number of other independent observers with first hand experience in Syria at this historic moment who show sides to the story closed off by the mainstream media. They include US Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, filmmaker Carla Ortiz, journalist Vanessa Beeley, peace campaigner Jan Oberg, and Virginia State Senator Richard Black.

These individuals, have in varying degrees and ways been vilified, patronised or ignored by mainstream outlets – deploying the low tactics of those who cannot win an argument by means of reason or evidence. But why should news agencies

even be in the business of making an argument? What exactly is the social role and purpose of the press?

I have chosen to focus on Channel 4, of all the news outlets that promoted the orthodox narrative, for several reasons. Channel 4 has a better reputation among much of the public than some other news outlets: it is thought to have high journalistic standards, and since it also has a public service remit, people tend to expect its coverage to exhibit investigative integrity and objectivity. Yet with regard to its coverage of Syria, not merely did Channel 4 disappoint those expectations, it went the extra mile to reinforce a misleading narrative by commissioning a partisan filmmaker to produce its flagship series of programmes on the war in Syria.

In my opinion, the Channel 4 News team owe a collective apology to Eva Bartlett for suggesting she was discredited when the truth was quite otherwise. I also think that Channel 4 owe us, the public, a commitment to do better than this in future. As for what Channel 4 owes to the people of Syria? The harms of this war can never be made good. Harms of future wars may yet be mitigated or even avoided, and I believe the one thing Channel 4 can and should do is join the side of truth with those who are seeking ways to break up the monolithic deceptions that our communications are increasingly being submerged in.

[1] Eva Bartlett speaking to United Nations Press Conference 9 December 2016: [full version](#); [short version](#) featuring the claims discussed here.

[2] “During the summer we made a conscious decision to try and report what was happening in Syria, and particularly in Aleppo, on a daily basis. One person, Wa’ad al Kateab, has made this possible.” Ben de Pear, Channel 4 News, October 2016 <http://insidealeppo.com/> It was never made especially clear in Channel 4 news reports on Aleppo how much they relied on this one source, and references to reports on the ground – while

unattributed – were also often in the plural. Something to note, however, is that there was not necessarily a plurality of viewpoints coming out of the Aleppo Media Centre, which was the one functioning agency on the ground in eastern Aleppo. Other journalists used and referred to by channel four include Abdul Kader Habak (the cameraman on Up Close With The Rebels) and ‘a photographer for Reuters’ who I presume would be Abdalrhman Ismail, both of whom appear to move freely among militants. So while Wa’ad was possibly not the only source, there was still no meaningful corroboration since all sources accessed by Channel 4 should most safely be assumed to have been compromised in similar ways. Quite generally, Chanel 4 have tended to treat anti-government claims as true whereas they always voice scepticism in relation to claims on the other side, even on those rare occasions where they air them (as in Thomson example below) or the occasional interview, as with Jon Snow’s shameful haranguing of the Aleppo parliamentarian Fares Shehabi on 30 November 2016 <https://www.channel4.com/news/aleppo-syrian-mp-fares-shehabi>.

[3] For background and useful sources on this see Vanessa Beeley. ‘Channel 4 Joins CNN in Normalising Terrorism, Then Removes Their Own Video’, 21st Century Wire, 9 October 2016.

[4] Corroboration includes that of the Aleppo Medical Association. For background on the real situation of medical facilities across the whole of Aleppo, which is entirely occluded in the Channel 4 films, see for instance: Tim Anderson, [The ‘Aleppo Hospital’ Smokescreen: Covering up Al Qaeda Massacres in Syria, Once Again](#) Global Research, 9 May 2016; Eva Bartlett, [Western corporate media ‘disappears’ over 1.5 million Syrians and 4,000 doctors](#) SOTT 14 August 2016; Vanessa Beeley, [Journey To Aleppo Part II: The Syria Civil Defense & Aleppo Medical Association Are Real Syrians Helping Real Syrians](#) Mint Press News, 27 September 2016.

[5] All Channel 4 in reality even attempted to debunk was an aside by Bartlett about how the White Helmets, in staging some

of their videos, sometimes used the same actor more than once. Their article goes to great lengths to show there is reasonable doubt about that matter.

Channel 4 were not dishonest about the limited nature of their piece in its title: 'Eva Bartlett's Claims About Syrian Children'. The promotion of it by all the colleagues on the news team, however, presented it as a definitive 'fact check' or 'debunking' of Bartlett. And that is how it went out into the wider world. Representative – and influential – was the tweet of famous Channel 4 anchor Jon Snow on 21 December 2016 linking to an altered title 'FactCheck: Eva Bartlett's Syria Claims', which transforms the narrowly appropriate original one into one that implies a more comprehensive 'debunking'. He tweets: 'Even Syria's children are caught up in lies and propaganda: A remarkable fact check puts the record straight'. All the piece actually does is show there to be reasonable doubt about Bartlett's claim that the White Helmets publicity featured some children on more than one occasion. Doubt on this score does not even affect her claim that some of the videos were staged (since staging can be done with different actors each time, obviously). On this more substantial claim, the Channel 4 piece does not say much, but it does seek to show that at least one of the White Helmets filmed rescues was genuine. While not disputing that some of their rescues will have been genuine, I would just note that the reasons Channel 4 give would not establish the case for the example they look at. They say this: 'The long sequence in which rescuers [are shown] painstakingly clearing rubble away from around the girl suggests that it would have been difficult to fake this footage. Someone would have had to have buried a screaming child up to their chest in rubble and carefully assembled a large amount of heavy wreckage around and on top of her – an extraordinary logistical challenge and an extraordinary collective act of child abuse.'

Certainly, it would be an extraordinary collective act of

child abuse. As for the logistical challenge, however, it is no more difficult to place some rubble around and above the child than it is to then pick it off. Of course, we ordinary people will recoil at the very thought of seeing this as simply a logistical challenge, because it is such an 'extraordinary collective act of child abuse'. But we are not terrorists or obliged to work with them. It cannot be a rebuttal of Bartlett's claims that the White Helmets are embedded with terrorists to show that for her claims to be credible they would have to act in ways that are consistent with terrorist acts. The problem of how children are used, abused and even weaponised by armed groups in the pay of NATO AND Gulf states is a very real one. That the White Helmets are paid from those sources is a matter of public record; that some of them bear arms is illustrated by various videos, including Channel 4's own documentary Up Close With The Rebels, where, at 2:27, one of the jihadis is clearly seen sporting a jersey with white helmets logo.

Among the various dishonest tactics carefully used in connection with the attempt to discredit and isolate Bartlett is the use of this kind of statement: 'Supporters of the Assad regime have variously accused the White Helmets of being puppets of western powers, peddlers of faked footage or even terrorist fighters posing as humanitarian workers, all of which the organisation vigorously denies.' The fact is, anyone who studies the evidence now widely available in the public domain can reasonably infer that the White Helmets are indeed a tool of the western powers, that they have indeed issued faked footage, and that some of them do have demonstrable terrorist affiliations. One can infer these things without have any view at all about Assad. The Channel 4 piece flirts with dishonesty by implying that scepticism about the White Helmets is the preserve of dupes of Assad.

[6] 'Published on 4 Oct 2016, 20:08 'This report, filmed by Syrian cameraman Abdul Kader Habak, gives a glimpse into why

Syrian and Russian forces have so far been unable to re-take the whole of Aleppo.’ <http://newsvideo.su/video/5313805>

[7] [Daily Mail: US backed Nour al Din Al Zenki beheads a boy](#)

[8] I am not the first to criticize Channel 4’s coverage of Aleppo. As well as Vanessa Beeley’s piece cited in n3, see also Daniel Margrain, [Syria: the Western media’s unending propaganda war](#) Scisco Media 5 December 2016.

[9] [Video](#). Channel 4 cites ‘multiple reports of summary executions of civilians’ 13 Dec 2016 ([Channel 4 Inside Aleppo](#)), which presumably come from the same ‘activists on the ground’ that Jon Snow uncritically relays statements from in this [item](#) – <https://www.channel4.com/news/aleppo-have-we-reached-the-endgame>. In the same item, Alex Thomson includes an interview run by Russian TV where civilians leaving the east call the militias in charge there “animals from hell” who had prevented them having food and tried to stop them leaving ([Channel 4 Have we reached the endgame](#)). In response to this, Thomson comments from his studio, ‘blaming the rebels may well be genuine, but it could also save your life.’ What? This gratuitous comment he permits himself is given no substantiation. So an identifiable individual manifestly suffering on the screen in front of him is treated as an object of scepticism and insinuation while unidentified activist sources can come out with any tales they choose and these are treated as tantamount to fact.

There is a certain amount of misdirection in the editing too. While referring to unattributed ‘reports’, Channel 4 would run stock footage (unlabelled as such) showing for instance the White Helmets on the ground – as in this one: <https://www.channel4.com/news/east-aleppo-bombardment-continues-with-dozens-reported-dead> – but they were in reality keeping a very low profile in those days. Misleading interviews, too, as [in this one](#) –

<https://www.channel4.com/news/the-latest-from-aleppo> – with a ‘teacher’ who also featured as one of the ‘last days’ webcam publicists, and who later (in February 2017) is writing on Facebook that ‘it is not easy to leave five years of fighting for freedom ... The Evil has won a battle but I hope we will get the Freedom in the final stage.’

A particularly egregious practice at Channel 4 is to permit themselves to claim to know Syrian government plans and strategies. Channel 4 is prepared to report on the basis of unspecified sources about ‘what appears to be a deliberate strategy by the Russians to block the evacuation of medical staff from what remains of eastern Aleppo’ ([Channel 4 Inside Aleppo](#)).

This echoes earlier claims, as in the report that asserted the Syrian government had a plan to make life too unbearable for civilians to stay in Aleppo ([Inside Aleppo](#)). Such claims are not only preposterous but also implicitly reinforce a disputed claim that it is not the armed militias who are keeping the ordinary population trapped in the area they still hold. This poor journalistic practice seems to be somewhat engrained. We find as recently as 20th January 2017 in the Press Gazette: ‘Channel 4 News editor Ben de Pear told Press Gazette: “Waad and her family really were on the last bus to get out of Aleppo and we know that they and the other doctors and activists and journalists in the city were the number one target of the Assad Regime.”’ [PressGazette](#)

The claim is preposterous in more ways than are worth analysing, but the only question I’d trouble to ask is how de Pear thinks he knows this.

The Liberation of Aleppo: a regional turning point

By Tim Anderson

In late 2016, at the cost of many young lives, Syrian forces took back the eastern part of the city of Aleppo, occupied by NATO and Saudi backed terrorists for more than four years.

The liberation of Aleppo, Syria's second city and an ancient marvel, represents the most serious setback for the 15-year long Washington-led aggression on the entire region. An effective recolonisation of the region has stretched from Afghanistan to Libya, under a range of false pretexts. Invasions and proxy wars have been backed by economic sanctions and wild propaganda.

But this great war of aggression – called the creation of 'New Middle East' by former US President George W. Bush – has hit a rock in Syria. The massive proxy armies bought and equipped by Washington and its regional allies the Saudis, Turkey, Qatar and Israel, have been beaten back by a powerful regional alliance which supports the Syrian nation.

The endgame in Aleppo involves a handful of foreign agents – US, Saudi, Israeli and others – said to remain with the last al Qaeda groups in a tiny part of what was once their stronghold. The US in particular is keen to secure their release, because their presence is further evidence of the foreign command of what was claimed to be a 'civil war'.

After a storm of western government and media misinformation (claims of massacres, mass executions and 'civilians targeted') over the evacuation of around 100,000 civilians and many thousands of terrorists, the UN Security Council authorised some 'independent observers' to monitor the process. However most of that evacuation is now over.

Resettlement and reconstruction is already underway, and army reserves have been called up to defend the city.

Syrian, Iranian, Russian and independent reporters (including Maytham al Ashkar, Shadi Halwi, Asser Khatab, Khaled Alkhateb, Ali Musawi, Lizzie Phelan, Murad Gazdiev, Vanessa Beeley, Eva Bartlett and the late Mohsen Khazaei) have already told us quite a lot. What they said bore little resemblance to the western apocalyptic stories. For example, outgoing UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, a close ally of Washington, claimed in his last press conference that 'Aleppo is now a synonym for hell'. Those claims were based on stories from NATO's desperate jihadists.

Reporters on the ground told a different story. As Syrian forces smashed the al Qaeda lines, the trapped civilians streamed out. They published video of long lines of people leaving east Aleppo and finding relief, food and shelter with the Syrian Arab Army. Tired and relieved, they told their stories to anyone who cared to listen. Russia and Iran gave many tonnes of food, clothing, blanket and shelter aid. By contrast, western countries generally gave nothing and the terror groups rejected all aid from the Syrian alliance.

Civilians were prohibited from leaving the al Qaeda enclave, many were shot dead when they tried to do so. The armed gangs had food reserves but kept it for their fighters. Arms factories including toxic chemicals were found and were being made safe. Some of the armed men were taken into custody, but most were shipped out to Idlib, where Damascus has been concentrating the foreign-backed fighters.

When the hell canons fell silent, and no more home-made gas cylinder mortars landed in the heart of the city, there was elation and dancing in the streets, shown widely on social media. The US State Department spokesman claimed he had not seen this.

Al Qaeda in Aleppo was crushed. All the anti-Syrian government armed groups in Aleppo were either the 'official' al Qaeda in Syria (Jabhat al Nusra aka Jaysh Fateh al Sham) or deeply embedded associates. When the US pretended to suppress Jabhat al Nusra in 2012 and 2016, all the 'Free Syrian Army' groups protested, saying 'we are all Jabhat al Nusra'. One might have thought that the US Government – which once claimed to be engaged in a global war against terrorism, in the name of 3,000 people murdered in New York back in September 2001 – would be as elated as those on the streets of Aleppo. They were not.

Much of the western media, reflecting their governments, solemnly reported on 'the fall of Aleppo'. The Syrian victory over the al Qaeda groups was a great tragedy, they said. On the other hand, the near simultaneous recapture of Syria's ancient city of Palmyra, by the eastern al Qaeda group ISIS, was reported differently. That city was said to have been 'retaken'.

All this underlines what should have been an obvious point, admitted by many US officials, that every single armed group in Syria (whether 'moderate' or 'extremist') has been armed and financed by the US and its allies, in an attempt to overthrow the Syrian Government. All the talk about 'moderate rebels', a 'brutal regime' and a 'civil war' just tries to hide this.

The final evacuations of Aleppo – which included an exchange of civilians besieged for 20 months in the Idlib towns of Faoua and Kafraya for remaining NATO-jihadists in eastern Aleppo – were organised between Russia and Turkey. There was some serious sabotage of these agreements, but the understandings have so far stayed on track. Now Iran is engaged with Russia and Turkey, in three way talks. Practical matters are being discussed.

It is notable that the Obama administration is playing no

direct constructive role in the endgame over Aleppo. Its 'regime change' proxy war on Syria is failing and, in its place, the incoming Washington regime promises a new approach. More importantly, a new regional alliance has formed to reject any new aggression from the colonial powers.

Many things have changed during the war on Syria. The Syrian alliance has beaten back powerful NATO-GCC forces. The Muslim Brotherhood and its patrons in Egypt, Qatar and Turkey have received another beating. Egypt and Iraq now support Syria. The Saudis have joined with Israel against Iran and Syria. Russia has built stronger bonds with Syria and Iran. The Arab League, having backed the destruction of two Arab states, seems all but dead. Will the new, enhanced 'Axis of Resistance' take its place?
