

Britain's Guardian cynically poses as opponent of war in Syria

Chris Marsden
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The *Guardian* newspaper has spent several days arguing with sections of its own readership against welcoming US President Donald Trump's April 6 missile strike on Syria's Shayrat airbase near Homs.

Amid the enthusiasm expressed by various "liberal interventionists"—who have long demanded all-out war to topple Bashar al-Assad—editorial staff found themselves urging caution and insisting on maintaining hostility to Trump even though supportive of what he has done.

For the *Guardian*, Trump has still not done enough to prove that his confrontational position towards Russia represents a decisive shift away from his previous search for an accommodation with Moscow.

Jonathan Freedland wrote on April 7, "Sometimes the right thing can be done by the wrong person. Donald Trump's bombing of a Syrian airfield seems to belong in that category. ... But that cannot alter the fact that, even as you welcome the act, its author remains wholly untrustworthy."

Freedland made apparent just how "untrustworthy" he believes the US president is when he declared, "How convenient that Trump, under fire for being [Russian President] Vladimir Putin's poodle, now stands up to him in Syria. How neatly this blows away all those allegations of secret links and election hacking."

For good measure, Freedland adds a complaint that "The US appears to have given Russia sufficient warning to ensure their men weren't hit, and Russia used none of its ample capacity to hit back. It all worked out very nicely."

An editorial that day warned against the dangers of "a world defined by Trump's impulses...a volatile narcissist without a coherent worldview, moral compass or significant attention span. ..."

Among Trump's "crimes" cited in the editorial was that he had "loudly urged Barack Obama not to take action after Mr Assad's forces used sarin to kill more than 1,000

people at Ghouta in 2013," and was therefore not to be relied on to take the Cruise missile strike to the next level.

In a historic first, Owen Jones found himself in the position of a supposedly "left critic" of the "liberals now cheerleading a warmongering Trump. ..."

On April 9, he asked why many of those who, just three months ago, vowed to oppose a man who was "a threat to US democracy and world peace are now eating out of his hands."

It is a measure of the *Guardian's* political problems that responses to Jones's article included comments such as: "Bad article, clearly Trump is incoherent but when he takes action that is just, fair people will say so," "I wish it wasn't Trump to be the one to act but unfortunately Obama was weak," and "The knee-jerk anti-Trump reaction to the man's every breath-regardless of the circumstances is becoming an embarrassment to this once great newspaper."

On April 11, David Klion was called on to underscore how Trump cannot be trusted because, whereas he is not a "puppet" of Putin, he is still a "dupe."

The most obvious motivation for the *Guardian's* newly minted pose as an opponent of military intervention in Syria is, therefore, that Trump cannot be trusted to oppose Russia.

The *Guardian* was, until now, among the foremost advocates of US military intervention in Syria. It even opposed the US signing a ceasefire agreement with Russia and Assad.

One year ago, the day before then-Secretary of State John Kerry signed the Munich agreement, the *Guardian* declared "the battle for Aleppo"—the taking of the last significant population centre under "rebel control" by government forces—to be "a rebuke to America and the world." Attempts to secure a ceasefire were "raising increasingly profound doubts about the coherence of US and western strategy" and represented a "stain on the

record of the US administration” for its readiness to ignore “red lines.”

The close parallel with Trump’s own critique of Obama’s Syria policy is all too obvious.

Moreover, not one of the *Guardian*’s “opinion formers” bothered to note that the defeated Democrat presidential candidate they all champion, Hillary Clinton, speaking to the *New York Times* prior to the April 6 bombing, stated, “And I really believe that we should have and still should take out his airfields and prevent him from being able to use them to bomb innocent people and drop Sarin gas on them.”

There is no doubt that if Clinton had won and had taken the action she now recommends, the *Guardian* would be cheering her on from the proverbial rooftops.

What drives the *Guardian* columnists is not opposition to imperialist military intervention in Syria. They want to prevent any political shift by the petty-bourgeois social layer for which they speak that cuts across building an alliance between Britain and the European powers—for which anti-Trump rhetoric now provides the main justification.

The *Guardian*’s April 11 editorial criticised Conservative Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson for aligning himself too closely with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at the G7 summit in Italy regarding Syria and proposed sanctions on Moscow, insisting, “Trump’s unpredictability demands European steadiness.”

“No one can blame other countries for seeking to keep their distance from this administration,” it argued. “Nor can one regard the UK’s keenness to walk hand-in-hand with this administration—the result not only of the longstanding British insistence on the special relationship, but also of a certain desperation in the face of Brexit—without unease.”

It was left to Paul Mason on April 10 to state the position of Trump’s “liberal critics” most forthrightly. He makes clear that, having argued for an anti-Russian, pro-war line to be adopted by the White House, he now fears Trump’s unilateral decision to shift to this position will in fact prove detrimental to the interests of British imperialism.

Mason asks, “Could Britain ever fight a just war in Syria alongside Trump?”

His answer is no, but only from the standpoint that such an alliance would end in the marginalisation of the UK internationally as a result of Trump’s “America First” unilateralist and protectionist agenda.

Mason praises Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn for

withholding support for Trump’s missile strike, complaining that it only killed civilians because “The Pentagon gave Russia 90 minutes warning” and “The Russians then warned the Syrian airforce.”

But he cautions against Labour’s “isolationism” and “scepticism,” declaring of the “Large numbers of Labour members and supporters” who would never back unilateral “action to prevent chemical attacks” in Syria, “They are wrong.”

As a supporter of “humanitarian action in Syria,” he realises that Britain could not “fight a just war in Syria alongside Trump,” who “has no strategy,” whose “campaign team and administration is riddled with people under investigation for links to the Kremlin” and who may even have attacked Syria as part of a “pas-de-deux choreographed from Moscow.”

Further military action against Assad “would involve the calculated risk of war with Russia,” he concludes.

However, “If you remove Trump, the risks get easier to calculate and consent for humanitarian action becomes easier to secure. The clearer US allies make that point to Congress, the military, the US electorate—and to Syria’s rebels and refugees—the better.”

The *Guardian* is a mouthpiece for political reaction. It is arguing for continued pressure to be placed on Trump to ensure a favourable quid pro quo from Washington in return for British and European support for the US war drive in Syria—and ultimately against Russia.

Today, the newspaper shrouds its efforts to push the pro-European line of the Remain faction of the British bourgeoisie—“in the face of Brexit” and Prime Minister Theresa May’s alliance with Trump—behind an insistence on “The need for non-military responses” in Syria, and for “other western nations” to seek “ways of working with” an unpredictable US. Tomorrow, should the need arise, it will just as happily explain to its readers the “moral imperative” for supporting the bombing of Damascus.



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