

George Monbiot: NATO's witchfinder

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Guardian columnist George Monbiot this week earned himself a special place in hell.

The war in Ukraine has been accompanied by a McCarthyite smear campaign against anyone who refuses to parrot uncritically the pro-NATO apologetics that fill every edition of the *Guardian* and the rest of the world's media. It is not enough to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, nor even the regime of Russian oligarchs led by President Vladimir Putin.

Anyone who does not explicitly back the NATO powers' use of Ukraine to wage a proxy war against Russia, who warns against this war rapidly becoming an imperialist war for regime change in Moscow and the catastrophic consequences of a clash between nuclear powers, is the target of vicious denunciations and slanders.

In this sordid climate, sections of the educated middle class in the media, liberal politics and academia have lost their heads—uncritically accepting the narrative that the war in Ukraine has simply happened because Putin is pursuing an expansionist policy against his east European neighbours. Such individuals conveniently forget everything they know about the decades-long US-led policy, since the end of the USSR, of NATO encroachment on former Soviet territories, as well as the endless series of bloody wars waged by Washington and its allies—for which it is hoped they will one day be deeply ashamed.

Monbiot is a yet more politically despicable individual. Someone who advances himself as an investigative journalist, he has a very long record of uncritically regurgitating the propaganda of the imperialist powers and denouncing anyone who doesn't do the same. He now offers his services as a witchfinder for British imperialism in identifying its critics and declaring them to be political stooges of Putin.

The March 2 edition of the *Guardian* features his column, "We must confront Russian propaganda—even when it comes from those we respect".

"Yes there is something we can do," he begins, referring to his proposed contribution to NATO's war effort. He urges the circles in which he moves to join him in combating a "propaganda war" he maintains is only being waged by Russia in order "to confuse and misdirect people overseas and bolster support at home."

"In doing so we could, in our very small way, help the resistance in Ukraine."

Monbiot feigns facing a moral dilemma. "This puts me in a difficult place. Among the worst disseminators of Kremlin propaganda in the UK are people with whom I have, in the past, shared platforms and made alliances. The grim truth is that, for years, a segment of the 'anti-imperialist' left has been recycling and amplifying Putin's falsehoods."

What follows is the identification of the first batch of Monbiot's proposed targets, including everyone associated with the Stop the War Coalition, and several named leading figures including former Labour MP Chris Williamson. But the most well-known names cited as disseminators of Putin's propaganda are world renowned journalists John Pilger, Seymour Hersh and the now deceased Robert Fisk.

Monbiot's breast-beating about being in a "difficult place" is necessary camouflage for someone who knows very well that he is identifying those who are already facing an organised campaign of character assassination. He may speak of a duty to "debunk and contest misleading justifications". But the reality is that dissenting voices are already being silenced and careers will be destroyed, while Monbiot and his ilk will be elevated.

He is right to be concerned for his "reputation". He has long railed against Marxism as he flits between various parties, but still claims to be of "the left". However, his column appeared with a graphic, rendered in shades of red, making its political character abundantly clear. It showed a figure with a camera for a head, surrounded by computers with skulls for brand insignias and a tablet, all showing images supplied by the Kremlin. Its anti-communist message was underscored by no less than five hammer and sickle insignias rendered in yellow as the content of the film being broadcast and speech bubbles emanating from other devices.

Monbiot was so embarrassed that he contacted the *Guardian* to have the insignias changed to the Russian coat of arms.

In everything he writes Monbiot accepts what pro-Western sources report as gospel and on this basis alone denounces his opponents. Regarding Ukraine, one of Monbiot's attacks on Pilger is to cite a tweet from December 2021 stating that "it was the US that overthrew the elected govt in Ukraine in 2014, allowing Nato to march right up to Russia's western border". Monbiot makes no attempt to refute this well documented fact, other than to call it a "standard Kremlin talking point."

"Ukraine, of course, is not a Nato member," he adds sagely, as if everyone is blissfully unaware that Kiev's army is funded and supplied with advanced weaponry by the NATO powers who have sent thousands of additional troops to Ukraine's neighbouring states and are waging economic warfare against Russia.

In the same vein, he asserts that "while Putin's sense of threat seems to have been heightened by Nato expansion and mission creep [!]" NATO's growth is in fact a response to Russian aggression by states who all "fear attack". Therefore "it's ridiculous to suggest that Russia is not the aggressor". This is the political equivalent of a bully saying of his victim, "I hit him so he wouldn't hit me first."

The “investigative journalist” Monbiot pointedly fails to record any of Pilger’s tweets since the invasion of Ukraine, such as his comment on February 27 describing it as “lawless” and that on March 1 stating, “I have reported many wars and witnessed their horrors. Whatever the reason for a war, whatever the grievances of its ‘cause’, one truth is constant: a war is impossible to control. The invasion of Ukraine must be stopped now or we all are at grave risk.”

Monbiot’s pretence of being recently convinced of the need to confront the “pro-Putin left” is a fraud, disproved by his links to articles stretching back to the CIA-backed regime change war in Syria. He cites two articles published in 2016 and one written by himself from November 15, 2017, “A lesson from Syria: it’s crucial not to fuel far-right conspiracy theories”.

Monbiot asserts, “Harmful as this propaganda is, leftist support for another of Putin’s projects has even more serious implications,” accusing Pilger, Fisk and Hersh of helping to “airbrush some of the world’s worst atrocities” such as “well-attested reports of [Bashir al] Assad’s use of chemical weapons” and attacks on the “White Helmets”—an opposition “civil defence” group funded by Western governments with hundreds of millions of dollars.

Monbiot’s 2017 article condemns Hersh, Noam Chomsky and others for questioning whether the Assad regime was the author of an alleged April 4 chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun in Syria’s Idlib province, a charge for which the US and its allies provided no substantive evidence and which was used as justification for American warships firing 59 cruise missiles on Syria’s Shayrat air base, killing 15 people, the majority civilians.

The WSWS explained Monbiot and the Guardian’s political role in a prescient comment on his 2017 article:

Aligning himself openly with the political and military-intelligence apparatus in the US and Britain, Monbiot focuses on legitimising the intervention of the imperialist powers in Syria—both direct and using Islamist proxies—aimed at replacing the government of Bashar al-Assad with a client regime. He brands reputable and high-profile journalists and political commentators as the purveyors of fake news...

To portray the entirely valid criticisms of the official line on the Khan Sheikhoun attack as fuelling far-right conspiracy theories is politically criminal. It is a transparent attempt by the *Guardian* to block any challenge to the military operations, overt and covert, carried out by US and British imperialism and their regional allies in the Middle East under cover of “humanitarian” concerns and the ‘responsibility to protect.’”

opinion, its real role is to police public discourse and support the strategic imperatives of imperialism. That is why it has come out and attacked “some of the world’s most famous crusaders against propaganda,” thereby declaring that any criticism of US and British war plans is beyond the pale and cannot be tolerated. The *Guardian*’s role is to help create the necessary political climate to further an agenda of war, censorship and domestic repression.

The evolution of a broad swathe of the formerly liberal petty-bourgeoisie into apologists for imperialist militarism and war has deep social roots. Living generally easy lives and possessing substantial personal wealth, they are for the most part content with their lot, if a little bitter and jealous when confronted with those far richer than themselves.

They are as interested in rising share and property values as are the objects of their envy in the financial oligarchy. They still complain about various social problems—poverty, racism, climate change and the like—but with no intention of biting the hand that feeds them. The police should be more accountable, less misogynist, etc. But they must keep the leafy suburbs safe. NATO may need reforming so that Washington respects its European allies, and we can argue about how much it costs. But it is a generally “good thing” as the guarantor of a social order that provides us with our creature comforts.

Alienated from the broad mass of working people they view with disdain they march behind their ruling class headlong towards disaster.



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The WSWS concluded:

The *Guardian* speaks for the nominally liberal bourgeoisie. While it claims to stand for progressive