

# Holding Pattern

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## Doppelgangers

Hillary Clinton's apparent fainting spell during the 9/11 commemoration in September led to an explosion of theorising. The right-wing, who had been on her case over an alleged 'secret illness' for some time, went absolutely bananas.<sup>1</sup> This cloud of conspiracy conjecture followed her into the car that rushed her away from the commemoration, across town, up the elevator to the apartment of her daughter Chelsea (where Mrs Clinton went to get herself recomposed) and back out into the street when she re-emerged an hour or two later.

The big thing (for about five minutes) was the claim that Mrs Clinton had been replaced by a body-double during her brief reappearance on the sidewalk, as she appeared to be behaving in a totally normal way. The traditional arsenal of amateur photoanalysis was unleashed, with before-and-after comparisons of Mrs Clinton's fingers, gait, hair, weight and ears all being relied upon to support this theory of a stand-in.<sup>2</sup>

The online hordes even thought they had identified the Clinton 'clone', in the form of professional lookalike Theresa Barnwell.<sup>3</sup> Ms Barnwell formerly worked in banking before quitting to exploit her natural good fortune as a full-time job, which gives some idea of what a lucrative profession this can be. (Ms Barnwell is said to earn upward of \$10,000 a month

<sup>1</sup> I suspect this originated with a *National Enquirer* story in January that claimed she only had six months to live.

<sup>2</sup> There's a decent round-up of this supernova of speculation at <http://heavy.com/news/2016/09/hillary-clinton-body-double-conspiracy-theory-health-death-teresa-barnwell-impersonator-twitter/>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://hillaryclintonimpersonator.com>

for appearances.) Ms Barnwell herself joined in with the furious online debating, by tweeting a picture of herself taken outside Chelsea Clinton's apartment some months previously, and then retracting it when most people didn't see the funny side.<sup>4</sup>

Since coverage of the US presidential election campaign is currently on a fast spin-cycle at 90 degrees celsius, the body-double story is already receding rapidly into the distance. But before it vanishes over the horizon altogether, the episode has some curious aspects – not more than that – that are worth looking at.

The first is that Mrs Clinton herself had appeared to stoke such rumours way back at the start of the primaries in 2015, when she entered into a light-hearted discussion about her physical inability to sweat and asserted that she was in fact a humanoid robot.<sup>5</sup> Ridiculous, of course. But no more ridiculous than the widespread notion that she is a shape-changing space-lizard. She must have known that this yarn would end up in circulation among the more *outré* elements of the conspiracy world. In fact, she can't *not* have known.

And in fact, the Clinton campaign has form for appealing to the conspiratorial fringe. Several times during her campaign, and noticeably whenever there has been some unwelcome news in the media, Mrs Clinton's campaign has made (or has prompted) announcements about those old disinformational stand-bys, Area 51 and flying saucers. This first happened in a light-hearted way in January 2016,<sup>6</sup> then again in March,<sup>7</sup> and then the Obama White House discussed the subject with reporters in May.<sup>8</sup> Mrs Clinton might personally believe all this stuff, for all I know, but the repeated attempts to inject the topic into news coverage strongly suggest that this is a

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4 <[https://twitter.com/teresa\\_barnwell/status/775226918228660224](https://twitter.com/teresa_barnwell/status/775226918228660224)>

5 <<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/10/hillary-clinton-robot-sweat>>

6 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/04/politics/hillary-clinton-area-51-aliens/>>

7 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-aliens.html>>

8 <<http://www.idigitaltimes.com/ufo-news-2016-obama-white-house-responds-hillary-clintons-promise-disclose-area-51-535113>>

distraction strategy.

And then just days after the body-double issue arose, Mrs Clinton appeared to disappear for a single video-frame while giving a stump speech, with the backdrop totally unaffected.<sup>9</sup> This instantly resurrected the whole subject of impersonation, only this time it was conjectured that the Clinton seen making the speech was a computer-generated simulacrum. This is, alarmingly, not an impossibility. The technology to use video footage as a glove-puppet, making people in prerecorded images move and talk in real time, under the direction of an actor, has existed for years. The level of detail extends to the ability to recreate details of the inside of the 'puppet's' mouth, glimpsed during normal speech, so that the illusion is seamless. I'm not entirely sure how one could detect such replication.<sup>10</sup>

The official line on this bizarre event is that it was a case of the upper-most display lines in the relayed video-feed image becoming 'jammed' and cascading down the screen, overwriting Mrs Clinton's image for a fraction of a second. The background, fortuitously consisting only of wide vertical stripes in red and white only, would have seemed uninterrupted by such a glitch.

So we have a candidate with a known body-double, who has joked about being a humanoid robot, who has also disappeared and re-appeared in a manner consistent with known face-faking technology. It might be crediting Mrs Clinton's team with far more sophistication than they actually have, but if so this is a striking sequence of coincidences. The obvious question is: why would they do this? For a possible answer to this, we have to look at events on the other side of the planet.

Vladimir Putin – who is not under the same protective veil of respect in the eyes of Western media – has apparently

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9 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vM-fUdXcfW4>>

10 A demonstration of this frightening technology, conducted by Stanford University researchers, can be seen on Youtube. I'm not sure whether or not the example of George W Bush, famous for his verbal ineptitude, was chosen for this video as a deliberate joke. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohmajJTcpNk>>.

been using exactly such psychological techniques for some time. This extends to issuing impossible itineraries and deliberately staging photographs in such a way as to cast doubt upon their authenticity.<sup>11</sup> A false story that Putin had been murdered and replaced with a 'twin' did the rounds of Western media before anyone noticed that the source was a website supposedly run by the Ukrainian military.<sup>12</sup> Curiously enough, that website has now disappeared. Putin has been reported dead, injured, and ill several times, sometimes vanishing from view for days, only to re-emerge healthy and well. These reports have sometimes originated from Russian state media, which makes them more credible than simple speculation by anonymous YouTubers.<sup>13</sup> In 2010 he underwent the plastic surgery that gave him his current, slightly doll-like, face. Around this time, plenty of people noticed that some other aspects of his physical appearance had also changed too, and some of these changes were not immediately explicable.<sup>14</sup> If Mr Putin has a double (or more) the impersonation program could conceivably have begun during his time with the KGB during the Cold War. A Putin lookalike was photographed among a Soviet delegation to New Zealand in 1986. The Kremlin claims Putin was elsewhere at the time.<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not Putin really has a double is almost beside the point. The Russian government has created a media environment in which everything is suspect, nothing is finally trustworthy and in which sense and nonsense are frequently interchangeable. Putin's new chief of staff, for

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11 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/09/02/a-japanese-reporter-uncovered-something-strange-about-vladimir-putins-schedule/>>

12 <<http://www.eastonline.eu/en/opinions/riding-the-russian-rollercoaster/putin-s-death>>

13 <<http://www.vox.com/2015/3/12/8205193/putin-death-rumors>>

14 These stories have a weird way of disappearing from the internet. A video round-up (proposing that Mr Putin is a clone, no less) which shows some of the now-vanished stories can be seen at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVHhF5aeUQE&feature=youtu.be>>.

15 This story appeared in the now-defunct tabloid newspaper *New Zealand Truth* in 2007. The only complete reproduction is on the regrettable whale.to website <<http://www.whale.to/b/putin9.html>>.

example, has to his name a string of incomprehensible publications laying claim to mysterious 'nooscope scanners' and an impenetrable redefinition of the space-time continuum.<sup>16</sup> All this is deliberate. It is a post-modern system of undermining consensus reality, targeted at domestic observers as well as foreign ones. It was pioneered by Vladislav Surkov over a decade ago, and continues to this day.<sup>17</sup> To quote one commentator: 'This aura of mystery is not happenstance, but a guiding principle. We have a system that believes it can do anything without any explanation.'<sup>18</sup>

And the thing is: it works. Churchill's famous description of Russia's strategies as 'a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma' has never looked so true. And since it works for Putin, it wouldn't be entirely surprising if such tactics were soon taken up by strategists in the USA. The question raised by the frequent smudging and undermining of Hillary Clinton's physical identity is: has this in fact already happened?

## **The FBI's cook book**

**A**s I write, yet another bombing suspect has been apprehended after explosions were caused in the hearts of urban areas in the US. Ahmad Khan Rahami is in custody, charged with murder for having planted the explosive devices in Manhattan and New Jersey (as well as apparently abandoning some more bombs in a New Jersey train). Depressingly, it turns out that Rahami's father contacted the FBI in 2014 with his concerns about his increasingly erratic and radicalised son. The FBI supposedly decided that Rahami Jr posed no threat – despite the fact that he had attended certain training camps in Pakistan in 2011 and disappeared for

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16 <<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-very-strange-writings-of-putins-new-chief-of-staff>>

17 <<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21577421-what-departure-vladislav-surkov-means-government-ideologues-exit>>

18 <<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21705361-desk-shuffles-kremlin-signal-something-no-one-knows-what-dancing-dark?cid1=cust/ednew/n/bl/n/20160818n/owned/n/n/nwl/n/n/UK/n>>

an unexplained break in Afghanistan in 2013.<sup>19</sup> This should be ringing some bells among readers. The clincher on the whole deal is that Rahami used pressure-cookers to construct his bombs.

It's not yet a proven fact, but every single bit of evidence known at the time of writing indicates that this was yet another FBI entrapment project. In fact, it would be surprising were this not the case. In the last decade or so, the FBI has been involved over and over again in spotting radicalised Muslims who are potential bombers, letting them carry on unmolested, telling them how to make bombs, and setting in motion bombing plans that the FBI can then thwart. In some cases, the FBI even helps the bomber make their bombs – or actually makes them for him. This isn't some fringe theory, it's pretty much an accepted fact of life in the US.<sup>20</sup> The only controversy left to debate is how many of these projects result in real bombings and whether or not the explosions were deliberately allowed to happen.

There are indications – no, actually considerably more than mere indications – that some of the most infamous terrorist attacks of recent years were guided by a hidden hand with a degree of technical know-how beyond that of the bombers themselves. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the Boston Marathon bomber, wasn't actually capable of making the bombs that were used; and nor, apparently, was his brother (whose mouth was sealed for good when he was shot dead in still unclear circumstances). Again, this isn't controversial. It was established early on, then conveniently forgotten.<sup>21</sup>

Yes, there might be some sinister terrorist network of specialist bombmakers behind all this. But the only such network that has ever been detected is headquartered at 935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW in Washington, D.C. And it appears that no-one cares, since they are still at it today.

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19 <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/23/ahmad-khan-rahami-pakistan-taliban-new-york-bombing-terrorism>>

20 <<https://theintercept.com/2015/02/26/fbi-manufacture-plots-terrorism-isis-grave-threats/>>

21 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/05/us/boston-marathon-bombing-trial-help/>>

## **The 28 missing pages**

**D**umped quietly into the public domain late on the evening of Friday 15 July, the long-fabled withheld pages of the 9/11 report are now available. The same media that had been clamouring for over a decade for the release of those pages then fumbled this unexpected story, dropping it like a hot brick, and it was immediately steamrollered by coverage of the Republican Convention that commenced on Monday 18 July. 'A good day to bury bad news', as someone once said during 9/11 itself. Which is a shame, because the contents of those pages (more than 28, as it turned out) are astonishing.<sup>22</sup> The long and the short of it is that Deep Throat's (fictional) advice about following the money reaps handsome dividends, even if it means following a slightly twisty road to get to the pay-off. The US media, tellingly, have not taken this route, instead choosing to pretend that there isn't the equivalent of a signed confession to wrap things up nicely.

Saudi Prince Bandar bin-Sultan al-Saud, then serving as his Kingdom's ambassador to the USA, paid thousands of dollars to a pair of US-based employees of the Saudi Ministry of Defence. Those employees then paid large sums to two of the eventual hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi. The inescapable (but not documented) conclusion is that the pair then distributed money among the actual men on the ground, the entire hijacking team. This paid for accommodation, flying lessons and – in Mohammed Atta's case, at least – a lengthy period boozing it up with a regular supply of cocaine, disobedience to strict Islamic commandments that Atta knew he would soon purge in his own martyrdom.

The payments to the hijackers began after they settled in San Diego in 2000 and were made by a former Saudi defence employee called Omar al-Bayoumi, who had arrived in

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<sup>22</sup> <<http://web.archive.org/web/20160715222638/http://intelligence.house.gov/sites/intelligence.house.gov/files/documents/declasspart4.pdf>>

the US in 1994. Even before 9/11 the FBI had al-Bayoumi down as a Saudi intelligence officer, noting his 'extensive ties to the Saudi Government' and his extravagant personal spending despite being officially unemployed.

Al-Bayoumi had a close personal friend (another Saudi citizen with no visible means of support) who lived near the two hijackers. This was Osama Bassnan, whose wife received money directly from Prince Bandar's wife. Moreover the money flowed in directions that suggest these US operatives got greedy and were trying to siphon off covert payments for themselves. In doing so they proved their personal connections: al-Bayoumi's wife attempted to deposit three of Mrs Bassnan's aforementioned cheques into her own bank account. Perhaps they figured that when the hijackers were all dead, this wouldn't be traceable. A few of the early payments, dating back to the late 1990s, actually came from Bandar himself, presumably before the 9/11 plot was hatched: 'According to the FBI, on May 14, 1998, Bassnan cashed a check from Bandar in the amount of \$15,000. Bassnan's wife also received at least one [\$10,000] check directly from Bandar.'<sup>23</sup>

This is interesting enough, but the tightest connection of all comes when we read about Abu Zubaydah. According to the US, who captured him in 2002, Zubaydah was bin Laden's senior lieutenant and al-Qaeda's counterintelligence chief. Zubaydah's telephone records revealed numerous calls to the US-shored business that manages the Colorado residence of Prince Bandar himself.

Yet despite all this, the US news media's coverage of the release of the withheld pages has been to smother the story by downplaying the proven money routes and pretending the whole thing is inconclusive. A popular catchphrase in media framing of the information was 'There is no smoking gun'.<sup>24</sup> White House press secretary Josh Earnest adopted a line of sophistry that would stun a Jesuit when he told reporters that

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<sup>23</sup> <<https://28pages.org/the-declassified-28-pages/>>

<sup>24</sup> See for example <<http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Saudi-Secret-Pages-New-York-City-911-Sept-11-Attacks-Officials-386991701.html>>

the newly-released pages 'don't shed any new light or change any of the conclusions about responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. This information does not change the assessment of the US government that there's no evidence that the Saudi government or senior Saudi individuals funded al-Qaida.' This was soon followed by the Obama White House's apparently incomprehensible decision to exercise the Presidential veto and prevent families bereaved in the 2001 attacks from suing Saudi Arabia.<sup>25</sup>

Rather tellingly, no sooner had Mr Obama vetoed the law than Republicans in Congress overturned his veto – and then immediately said that they wanted to re-write the new law to guard against unspecified 'unintended consequences'.<sup>26</sup> But no sooner had the original law been passed than the first lawsuit against Saudi Arabia was filed, which has the potential to wreak all kinds of legal mischief if the suit proceeds normally but the law is revised.<sup>27</sup>

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that what is deliberately being kept out of the spotlight is George W Bush's close personal friendship with Prince Bandar, so close that the President would refer to him as 'Bandar Bush'. Bandar has been a friend of the Bush family ever since working with George HW Bush during the Reagan administration, when Bandar ended up as the middle-man in paying the Nicaraguan contras. Prince Bandar has in fact been in and out of the shadows around various 'deep events' ever since, and his covert CV is a lengthy one.<sup>28</sup> The fact that the newly-released pages do not shed any light on the glaring Jeb Bush/Florida connection (discussed in this column in *Lobster* 69 <sup>29</sup>) overwhelmingly suggests that there was a conscious effort by

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25 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/23/politics/september-11-bill-saudi-arabia-veto/>>

26 <<http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-09-29/congress-signals-regret-after-overriding-veto-of-saudi-9-11-bill>>

27 <[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2016/10/01/911-widow-first-to-sue-Saudi-Arabia-under-new-bill/7251475330901/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2016/10/01/911-widow-first-to-sue-Saudi-Arabia-under-new-bill/7251475330901/)>

28 <[https://web.archive.org/web/20060614095551/http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?030324fa\\_fact2](https://web.archive.org/web/20060614095551/http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?030324fa_fact2)>

29 <<http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster69/lob69-holding-pattern.pdf>>

the 9/11 Commission to keep the Bush family completely out of the frame.

So to recap: we now know that a top bin Laden henchman was in touch with the US company of a Saudi prince resident in the US and that money went from that prince and his wife to two 'cut-outs' in the US (whose wives attempted to embezzle some of it) and that money then went from there to two of the hijackers, where the financial trail dissolves into a long blur of high times and fast living, and ultimately rains down upon an ash-shrouded Manhattan. The question that is now being staved off, smothered, and studiously ignored by the US establishment is how much of all this was known to Prince Bandar's good friend in the Oval Office, and when.

## **Smith's myths**

The campaign to elect Owen Smith MP as Labour Party leader has been making claims that do not accord with verifiable facts, but the media are reporting them unquestioningly. Chief among these is the claim that Mr Smith attended an iconic event at the end of the miners' strike in 1985, a claim to which Mr Smith himself has referred.<sup>30</sup> Mr Smith's claim to have been at the march has served as a key symbol of his deep personal links to traditional Labour Party values. According to the Library of Wales, a photograph of the young Mr Smith,<sup>31</sup> said to have been taken at that 1985 event, and circulated by his campaign, was in fact taken the day before the event took place.

The young Owen Smith supposedly took part in the historic march back to work of the steadfast miners of Maerdy, South Wales, on 5 March 1985. Maerdy was the only community that had totally resisted calls to return to work

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<sup>30</sup> <<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/owen-smith-call-miners-strike-11616822>> < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-36834096>>

<sup>31</sup> A copy of which can be seen at <<http://i3.mirror.co.uk/incoming/article8479189.ece/ALTERNATES/s615/b/SUNDAYMIRROR-PROD-Owen-Smith-on-march.jpg>>. *Mirror* journalist Nigel Nelson has confirmed that this photo was supplied by Mr Smith.

throughout the dispute. The Maerdy community formed a procession, led by a brass band, and marched from around 6.30am until dispersing at 11am. Mr Smith – a frequent attender of local demonstrations, along with his family – would have been 14 years old at the time. Tuesday 5 March 1985 was a normal day at Mr Smith's school, some 20 miles from Maerdy.

Barbara Williams, now 74, was leader and founder of the Womens Support Group for the striking miners of Maerdy. She said: 'I never saw Owen Smith at that march and he's not in any of the photographs. I know everyone in those pictures.'

Mrs Williams's brother Alun Ivor was at the head of Maerdy's parade that day. He can be seen with his clenched first raised in the air in many photographs. He said: 'I don't remember seeing Owen Smith there and I was deeply involved in organising the whole thing. I've never seen him in any photographs and don't recall him being there at all. This is the first I've heard of it.'

Approached for comment about Mr Smith's attendance at the Maerdy march, a campaign spokeswoman said in an e-mail: 'Owen's parents took him and his brothers, Aled and Daniel, from their house in Pontypridd to the march back to Maerdy. It was, as you say, first thing in the morning. They were all "truanting". Attached is a photograph of Owen on the march, which is taken from the official ITV Wales footage of the day.'

The attached photograph in question was the image that has appeared widely online. Archival holdings of ITV Wales are now in a collection at the Library of Wales. Librarian Owain Meredith confirmed that the collection's records state that the footage from which the picture is taken was recorded on 4 March 1985 – the day before the Maerdy march.

When asked to explain the discrepancy between the date on which the image was recorded and the claims subsequently attached to it, Mr Smith's campaign press office refused to comment.

Mr Smith's father, Welsh historian Professor Dai Smith, was approached for comment about the Maerdy march but did

not respond to two e-mails. Kim Howells – Owen Smith’s predecessor as Pontypridd MP and a close friend of the Smith family – did not respond to e-mails either. Mr Howells was definitely present at the Maerdy march and played in the brass band at the head of the parade.<sup>32</sup>

The mystery of the Maerdy march is not the only dubious claim connected to Mr Smith’s campaign. On 30 July 2016, Mr Smith’s campaign announced a speaking event at the Camp and Furnace venue as part of his scheduled visit to Liverpool.<sup>33</sup> On the day of the event, Mr Smith instead spoke on a patch of grass on nearby Bridgewater Street, where a small crowd gathered to hear him.<sup>34</sup> Someone in the audience was asked to speak and claimed that the booking at the Camp and Furnace had been cancelled due to ‘pressure on social media’, asking Mr Smith to explain how he would stamp out ‘that sort of thing’. Mr Smith denied knowledge of the change of venue, saying ‘No-one tells me anything’ but did not challenge the claims of ‘social media pressure’ which clearly related to recent allegations of Labour bullying.<sup>35</sup> No trace of any such pressure can be found on leading social media sites Twitter or Facebook. The Camp and Furnace venue – which has two halls, each capable of seating around 500 people – was contacted about this allegation and declined to comment.

A week before the Liverpool engagement, Mr Smith had to retract a claim that he had been a director and board member of US pharmaceutical giant Amgen, a U-turn that was relegated to the middle of an unrelated story in *The Guardian* and received no other coverage. Similar professional embellishment by Andrea Leadsom MP had previously led to headlines that destroyed her Tory leadership bid.<sup>36</sup>

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32 <<http://subsaga.com/bbc/documentaries/history/2014/the-miners-strike-a-personal-memoir-by-kim-howells.html>>

33 <[http://www.owen2016.com/owen\\_in\\_liverpool](http://www.owen2016.com/owen_in_liverpool)>

34 <<http://indy100.independent.co.uk/article/people-are-laughing-at-how-small-the-crowd-was-for-an-owen-smith-rally-in-liverpool--Z1c7moC5IZ>>

35 <<http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/owen-smith-liverpool-labour-leadership-11683873>>

36 <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/22/owen-smith-pledge-equal-representation-of-women-in-labour>>

In my opinion, there is no grand conspiracy of silence about Mr Smith's background. The simplest explanation is that the media, having already thoroughly 'delegitimized' Jeremy Corbyn (in the words of the recent LSE report<sup>37</sup>) are allowing their preconceptions to constantly steer their narratives toward Mr Corbyn's shortcomings and are therefore neglecting to scrutinise his opponent.

## **Notes on an untied kingdom**

**I**n the chaos wreaked by the result of the EU Referendum, the *Guardian* has jumped enthusiastically into the saddle of the wrong horse once again. They have done this by championing the scheme proposed by the Constitution Reform Group (CRG), that of replacing the current Union with a federation between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Perhaps the *Guardian* editorial team figured that with everyone panicking about what to do with regard to Europe, they could slip this one into the mix, too.

In a June editorial,<sup>38</sup> the leader-writer boldly stated: 'The Guardian has championed these issues for long years. Now their time has come.' This extravagant claim doesn't appear to be supported by the contents of the category 'constitutional reform' on the *Guardian's* website, which indicate that the idea of federalism only wafted to the editor's attention last May. The *Guardian's* list of institutions that might be up for sweeping reform reveals where the paper's priorities lie by commencing thus: 'The shared purposes might include, subject to agreement, the constitutional monarch as head of state [...].' This core tenet isn't something mentioned in the CRG report itself. The same editorial states excitedly:

'An all-party group of present and former members of the House of Lords and others have recently been working on a different approach. [...T]his group, which includes

37 <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/pdf/JeremyCorbyn/Cobyn-Report-FINAL.pdf>>

38 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/10/the-guardian-view-on-the-act-of-union-time-to-reimagine-the-united-kingdom>>

crossbench as well as political peers, has drawn up a new draft Act of Union, in the form of a parliamentary bill, which will be published this week.'

The *Guardian* are here using a very elastic concept of 'recently' as the CRG report was issued in September 2015.<sup>39</sup> As for the new Bill's prospects in Parliament, it might be instructive to look at what a far more recent and legitimate Lords Committee (May 2016) had to say about the idea of a British federation.<sup>40</sup> The whole section is worth reading, and explains why a federation could not possibly satisfy any nation except the re-emergent England, but the key line is the last one:

**'Federalism does not, therefore, provide a solution to the tensions in the UK's territorial constitution.'** (emphasis in the original) This is not so much a line in the sand as a Grand Canyon.

So it appears that the *Guardian* has hitched its republican wagon to the cause of constitutional reform and is now trundling blithely down a Parliamentary cul-de-sac, waving to its adoring readership as it passes by. Her Majesty can therefore sleep easy. The famous words of Lincolnshire's legendarily reactionary MP Colonel Charles Sibthorp (1783-1855) can still be heard echoing around the Palace of Westminster:

'On no account would I sanction any attempts to subvert that glorious fabric, our matchless Constitution, which has reached its present perfection by the experience of ages by any new-fangled schemes which interested or deluded parties might bring forward, and those who expect any advantages from such notions will find their visions go like a vapour and vanish into nothing.'<sup>41</sup>

## **Royal revelation riddle**

To mark the occasion of Her Majesty's 90th birthday, *The*

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39 <<http://www.constitutionreformgroup.co.uk/publications/>>

40 <[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldconst/149/14909.htm#\\_idTextAnchor108](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldconst/149/14909.htm#_idTextAnchor108)>

41 <<http://www.roguesgalleryonline.com/sibthorp/>>

*Times* ran a story concerning a proposal advanced by Sir Maurice Gwyer at the time of the Abdication crisis of 1936.<sup>42</sup> In this, we learned, the Baldwin Cabinet was asked to consider the possibility of Queen Mary (mother of the resigning Edward VIII) as Queen Regent, keeping the throne warm until the fuss had died down and the Duke of Kent could step up and become King.<sup>43</sup> This was a possible work-around to bypass the Duke of Kent's older brother Albert, who was rightfully next in line, but who was thought to be temperamentally unsuited to be King and had only daughters to succeed him. This plan was never executed and Albert became King George VI, with the results that we all know.

The intriguing aspect of this story, however, is the source. The information is attributed to a document held by the National Archives. Wondering why it hadn't come to light before now, I searched the National Archives online catalogue. No such record is listed. I contacted the National Archives press office. The relevant archivists were unable to locate the document. Since it appears unlikely that *The Times* has outright invented such an important document, the indication is that it came from somewhere other than the National Archives and *The Times* has obfuscated its true origin for reasons unknown.

## **Cameron, Johnson and SIS**

**I**'ve never quite known what to make of David Cameron's claim that he was 'groomed' by the KGB during the mid-1980s. When he was vetted to become special adviser to Norman Lamont in the Treasury in 1990, Cameron supposedly told MI5 about the incident.<sup>44</sup> Speaking to students at the University of Moscow in 2011, Mr Cameron said:

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42 Sir Maurice was a Parliamentary Counsel, one of those exalted lawyers who actually drafts laws, so he was no rookie.

43 *The Times'* original is paywalled, but see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/21/why-queen-might-never-have-taken-the-throne-in-whitehall-plot/>.

44 If MI5 was on the look-out for someone who might have undermined the economy, they should have looked closer to home.

'I first came to Russia as a student on my gap year between school and university in 1985. I took the Trans-Siberian railway from Nakhodka to Moscow and went on to the Black Sea coast. There, two Russians, speaking perfect English, turned up on a beach mostly used by foreigners. They took me out to lunch and dinner and asked me about life in England and what I thought about England.'<sup>45</sup>

There were some amused comments in Russia, but the Kremlin soon poured water on Mr Cameron's favourite anecdote, saying that no documentary evidence existed to support his tale, suggesting instead that he had actually been the unwitting target of a gay pick-up. Then came the claim that at the time of the encounter, young master Cameron was suspected of being a trainee MI6 officer.<sup>46</sup> Given Russia's current stance on homosexuality, the insinuation that young Dave was being eyed up by a pair of men looks like something meant to discredit him to Russian audiences. The MI6 allegation might be meant to undermine him at home. The odd thing about Russia's rebuttal is that it obviously implies the two men who supposedly courted the young Cameron were under KGB watch at the time.<sup>47</sup>

And this links to Mr Cameron's friend Alexander 'Boris' Johnson. Given the role Johnson had played in selling what was, to put it politely, a pile of steaming bullshit to the British electorate during the referendum campaign, jaws hit floors around the nation and indeed in other nations when Theresa

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45 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8757576/David-Cameron-tells-Russian-hosts-KGB-tried-to-recruit-me-but-I-failed-the-test.html>>

46 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8757576/David-Cameron-tells-Russian-hosts-KGB-tried-to-recruit-me-but-I-failed-the-test.html>>

47 Another little mystery might be explained by an MI6 link. Fresh out of Oxford University, young Dave's entrance to Conservative Central Office was smoothed by a phone call from someone at Buckingham Palace, who told the startled recipient: 'I understand you are to see David Cameron. I am ringing to tell you that you are about to meet a truly remarkable young man.' See <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-462313/Dave-Cameron-says-hes-touch-reality--wealth-blue-blood-wonder.html>>.

May installed him as her first Foreign Secretary. How on earth could such a person be trusted with Britain's reputation abroad, let alone with oversight of GCHQ and MI6?

Johnson's father, Stanley, was an MI6 officer of long standing<sup>48</sup> and we know that MI6 tends to recruit along tried and trusted family lines (since families, particularly among the upper classes, form a sort of pre-vetting system in and of themselves). Johnson is descended from King George II, and Cameron from King William IV, which would presumably help things along.

I'm not saying that Boris Johnson is an MI6 officer – would MI6 really be so reckless as to employ him in the first place?<sup>49</sup> – but the connection is intriguing. It raises the possibility of an MI6-inspired plan for Johnson Jnr (as a leader of the official 'Leave' campaign) to take a dive and deliver a referendum 'Remain' result. (If Nigel Farage had been killed in that near-miss in October last year, as discussed in *Lobster* 71) that would have helped).

And there can be no doubt that Johnson had no intention whatsoever of procuring a 'Leave' victory. If this wasn't sufficiently illustrated by his ridiculous claims during the campaign, and his utter stage-fright after it, then the photographs of his stunned and ashen face on the morning after the ballot speak several thousand words each. Such an attempt to steer the referendum might also explain why David Cameron's campaigning for 'Remain' was so low-key and understated, giving Johnson centre stage to perform his upper-crust electoral slapstick and discourage the 'Leave' vote.

This idea, however, founders on the rock-solid fact that Messrs Cameron and Johnson couldn't run a sausage-shop between them and, obviously, MI6 would never be so stupid as to make plans of international magnitude that relied on

48 <<http://westernindependent.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/cockerells-life-of-johnson.html>>

49 If MI6 were never interested in Johnson for his own sake, they would certainly have been interested in his rather pally relationship with a known Russian spy. See <<https://tompride.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/shhh-dont-tell-mi5-but-heres-a-russian-spy-with-his-good-friend-boris-johnson/>>

either man.

## **Chilcot**

There is so much to be said about Sir John Chilcot's Inquiry into the Iraq War. It ironically delivered a political Weapon of Mass Destruction that no-one was expecting and it was a shame that press coverage of the report was lost almost immediately amid the numerous recent upheavals and outrages. It would be unfortunate if the mainstream media got a quick 'hit' from the report and then quickly rushed after the next story, leaving meat still on the carcass, as they did with the Panama Papers.

For example, it's worth looking at Blair frontman Alastair Campbell's response to the report's findings concerning the infamous 'Dodgy Dossier' of September 2002. On the day Sir John's report was published, Mr Campbell hit the ground spinning and clattered out several hundred self-exculpatory and passive-aggressive words on his blog, best encapsulated in the following sentences.

'That is four inquiries now which have cleared me of wrongdoing with regard to the WMD dossier presented to Parliament in 2002, and I hope that the allegations we have faced for years – of lying and deceit to persuade a reluctant Parliament and country to go to war, or of having an underhand strategy regarding the respected weapons expert David Kelly – are laid to rest.

The truth was – and remains, confirmed today – that the so called sexing up of intelligence never happened.'<sup>50</sup>

Mr Campbell, of course, has never been the subject of an Inquiry himself, so claiming to have been cleared by any of them is a bit over-ambitious; and they were not even prosecutorial proceedings in the first place. The problem all along was that Tony Blair's unelected PR manager was

<sup>50</sup> <<http://www.alastaircampbell.org/blog/2016/07/06/many-mistakes-yes-but-no-lies-no-deceit-no-secret-deals-no-sexing-up-and-ultimately-a-matter-of-leadership-and-judgement/>>

involved in the creation of what was effectively military propaganda, while the Cabinet was kept in the dark. And what Sir John said about the WMD scare-story was that such claims 'were presented with a certainty that was not justified', a strong statement indeed from such an eminent mandarin.

Mr Campbell still maintains that there was 'no sexing up' of the September Dossier. While it is true that Sir John did not directly address this long-standing grievance, his report contains an excruciating first-hand account of the Dodgy Dossier's creation. This comes from Carne Ross, a British diplomat at the UN, who had overview of the Middle East at the time of the 2003 war and for years beforehand. His Chilcot testimony is a painful read, studded with shocking illustrations of deceit, as thickly as a fruitcake is full of raisins, and is explicitly intended as an exoneration of his friend, Dr David Kelly. Mr Ross's conclusion is no less devastating for the measured tones in which it is delivered:

'This process of exaggeration was gradual, and proceeded by accretion and editing from document to document, in a way that allowed those participating to convince themselves that they were not engaged in blatant dishonesty. But this process led to highly misleading statements about the UK assessment of the Iraqi threat that were, in their totality, lies.'<sup>51</sup>

If this process sounds like it deserves the description 'sexing up' that is because that is exactly what it is.

## **Bataclan barbarism?**

**I**n the immediate aftermath of the truck attack in Nice on 14 July 2016, former Tory MP turned investigative journalist (sic) Louise Mensch published a startling story on her Heat Street website. This claimed that the French authorities had suppressed reports of victims being tortured by terrorists during the siege at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, during the attacks of November 2015. The details make for very grim

<sup>51</sup> <<http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/96098/2010-07-12-Statement-Ross.pdf>>

reading, even in Heat Street's obviously computer-derived translation.<sup>52</sup>

Within 24 hours, Heat Street had been denounced, first by the hoax-slayers at Snopes.com, then by would-be Mensch gadfly, blogger Tim Fenton (of 'Zelo Street'). Citing Snopes, Mr Fenton concludes: 'Louise Mensch was not only wrong, she was misleading in a malicious and dishonest manner in order to whip up hatred over acts that did not take place.'

The Snopes author says: 'Nothing [...] occurred between the March 2016 inquiry and the July 2016 spate of claims to warrant republication of unvetted rumor in a time of international grief and worry.' This gives the impression that Ms Mensch had malign motives, but the basis for that suggestion is simply not correct. The report of the French Assemblée National's Committee of Inquiry – analogous to a House of Commons Select Committee in the UK – on which all these stories hinge,<sup>53</sup> was only published on 5 July, so coverage earlier than that date is more or less ruled out; and the only coverage (until Heat Street picked it up) was patchy, to say the least, and in French-language publications only.<sup>54</sup>

Snopes goes on to state:

'Contemporaneous reports estimated that 1,000 people were in attendance at the Bataclan on 13 November 2015 with 700 of them were physically unharmed. Had the French government opted to cover up acts of torture and emasculation at the venue, there was nothing stopping the vast majority of surviving witnesses from sharing their stories. None did.'

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<sup>52</sup> <<http://heatst.com/uk/exclusive-france-suppressed-news-of-gruesome-torture-at-bataclan-massacre/>> My own French is not even up to the most rudimentary conversational level, and I am myself relying upon Google's page translation service for the quotes that appear in this section. The cited passages have not been polished or otherwise altered from the Google translations, available to anyone.

<sup>53</sup> Full text at <<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-enq/r3922-t2.asp>>.

<sup>54</sup> See for example the following, published just a day or two before Ms Mensch's story <<http://www.leparisien.fr/attentats-terroristes-paris/attentats-de-paris-le-procureur-dement-les-rumeurs-de-tortures-au-bataclan-12-07-2016-5962675.php>>.

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and as the text of the report makes very clear, there were relevant eyewitnesses, none of whom was called to testify. Both Snopes and Zelo Street cite the following exchange between a police officer acting as witness, a Monsieur 'TP' (French practice is to anonymise witnesses wherever possible) and inquiry committee members:

**Mr President Fenech:** For the information of the inquiry can you tell us how you learned that there had been acts of barbarism within the Bataclan: beheadings, evisceration , enucleations ....?

**MTP:** After the assault, we were with colleagues at the passage Saint-Pierre Amelot when I saw tears out an investigator who went to vomit. He told us what he had seen. I did not know this colleague, but he was so shocked that it came out naturally.

**Alain Marsaud:** Acts of torture happened on the second floor?

**MTP:** I think, as I entered at the ground floor where there was no such thing, only people hit by bullets.

Snopes and Zelo Street interpret this last line as a statement that 'there was no such thing' (i.e., there was no evidence of torture seen by MTP). But that's not what it says at all. It says that when MTP entered on the ground floor, there was no visible evidence of the torture *that was allegedly happening on the second floor*. Well, there wouldn't be, would there? Note also that MTP specifies a colleague claiming to have witnessed evidence of torture and mutilation at first-hand, seconds after seeing it, with no chance of the colleague's memory fading or blurring. This witness goes unidentified in the report and was never called before the Inquiry; and Snopes and Zelo Street deal with this inconvenient fact by ignoring it.

Another section of MTP's testimony, explicitly claiming that the bereaved have been kept in the dark, reads as follows:

'Bodies have not been presented to the families because there were people beheaded, slaughtered people,

people who have been eviscerated. There are women who have taken stabs at the genitals.'

This didn't seem to get the attention it warranted and a few minutes later, MTP repeated:

'There was decapitated people slaughtered, gutted. There were expressions of sexual acts on women and stabbing at the genitals. If I'm not mistaken, the eyes of some people have been uprooted.'

The panel didn't explore the matter, turning immediately to another witness on a separate question instead, and it appears that MTP – having got his remarks on the record – threw in the towel at that point.

One bereaved family member – again not called by the Inquiry – provided a copy of a letter he had sent to the investigating magistrate, which included the following:

'On the causes of the death of my son A., the forensic institute in Paris, I was told, and with reserves given the shock it was for me at that moment, they had cut off his testicles, it's him had put in his mouth, and he was disembowelled. When I saw it behind glass, lying on a table, a white shroud covering it up to the neck, a psychologist with me. The latter said: "The only presentable part of your son's left profile." I found that he had more right eye. I made the remark; I was informed that they had punctured him the eye and down the right side of his face, where very large hematoma that we could all see.'

This account – stark and unambiguous, and furthermore offering a pathologist as a potentially corroborative witness – correlates in many details with the claims presented by MTP, but was simply not explored by the Inquiry. The detail about only one side of the young man's face being presentable also tends to support the claim that unpresentable bodies were not displayed to some families – who, thus, could hardly be in a position to speak about torture either way.

The key testimony on which Zelo Street and Snopes.com rely is that of the chief prosecutor of Paris, also the

investigating magistrate in the November attacks, François Molins.<sup>55</sup> M. Molins simply denounces all the accounts of torture as a 'rumour', based on confused witness accounts of bodies mutilated by explosions and gunfire. If this sounds weak to you, given the above, you are not alone. And even M. Molins cites an eyewitness who claimed he had seen castration taking place (predictably, this witness wasn't called).<sup>56</sup> Add to this the fact that French police, unlike Britain's, are a state entity under the direct command of the Minister of the Interior and the sweeping dismissal of mere 'rumours' suddenly looks decidedly iffy.

Is raking over all this gruesome stuff really worthwhile? My answer would be: not for its own sake, but it is unavoidable if you want to get anywhere near the truth behind the media's claims and counter-claims. There appears to be a genuine scandal here, and one over-excited blogger hurling abuse at another equally over-excited blogger, like some macabre Punch and Judy show, is not the way to get to the bottom of it.

## **He dares call it conspiracy**

The *Guardian's* columnist Stephen Thrasher was recently contacted by an editor asking for a piece on 'Baton Rouge, Black Lives Matter, and the police shootings'. Mr Thrasher declined, citing his mental health as a concern, because he was embarking on a vacation. When he got back a fortnight later, the same editor repeated the request, and this time Mr Thrasher felt up to the challenge. This episode shines a light

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<sup>55</sup> Readers unfamiliar with the French legal system should know that unlike Britain's adversarial system of trial, France operates under the Napoleonic code in which criminal investigations are undertaken by a Judge with the police in a supporting role – not unlike the role of a British Coroner.

<sup>56</sup> M. Molins is a somewhat controversial appointee to the French judiciary, and his political connections and inclinations were being subjected to serious public questioning even at the commencement of his investigation into the Bataclan siege. See <[http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/12/10/francois-molins-un-procureur-a-reputation-variable\\_1419883](http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/12/10/francois-molins-un-procureur-a-reputation-variable_1419883)>.

on how the *Guardian* thinks about the pieces it publishes.

In between Mr Thrasher going away on holiday and coming back, the situation in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had developed somewhat. What had been a case of yet another young black man's death at police hands had become a situation in which a trio of police officers had been shot dead by a young black man, Gavin Long, who had declared a private war on the police and called for others to join him.<sup>57</sup> So far, so depressing. What Mr Thrasher then turned in was a column demanding that President Obama condemn police shootings of black civilians.<sup>58</sup> Fair enough, journalistic talk is cheap; but you're on a hiding to nothing if you're expecting the President to denounce the police in any circumstances, let alone on such a potentially incendiary issue. Regardless, Mr Thrasher went on to state:

'If we are to end this cycle of violence, we must cease this fiction that somehow the feelings of the oppressed or their protest tactics are the real problem and not that which they are protesting: the systematic killing of black people made manifest by police violence.'

'Systematic' of course means 'according to a plan', and this choice of word was not accidental. Mr Thrasher concluded his column with the following statement: '[I]f we don't start urgently asking new, bigger questions, we are going to be stuck with the same stories of violence – happening within the same cities – until too few of us are even left alive to read or write about them.'

Is it really the case, as it appears from these extraordinary remarks, that Mr Thrasher believes the police forces of the US have embarked on a deliberate program of extermination against black Americans? The answer is: 'Yes, yes it is.'

In an April 2015 column, Mr Thrasher referred openly to the infamous cellphone footage of the death-under-restraint of young Eric Harris as 'the pornography of our genocide'.

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57 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/18/us/who-is-gavin-long/>>

58 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/18/barack-obama-condemns-baton-rouge-police-black-violence>>

There is no reading of this phrase that will allow the word 'genocide' to have anything other than its literal meaning.<sup>59</sup>

So we're left in a position in which the *Guardian*, which is intellectually allergic to the mere word 'conspiracy', is prompting a columnist to turn out unchallenged and ludicrous assertions that the USA's police are carrying out a conscious program of eradicating the black population, and that President Obama is tacitly condoning the slaughter of 13 per cent of his fellow countrymen by his acquiescence.

It is difficult to comprehend the editorial thought processes that allowed this sort of paranoid mega-construction to reach publication. It puts Mr Thrasher in a more extreme position than Louis Farrakhan, who claims merely that the New Orleans levees were allowed to collapse in order to flood black neighbourhoods during Hurricane Katrina. Given the context of a gunman who urged black people to declare war on the police, giving Mr Thrasher's inflammatory nonsense the perceived status of a valued contribution seems at best unhelpful and at worst a form of incitement. Perhaps we can look forward to Alex Jones joining the team next.

## **Jo Cox MP**

The assassination of Labour's MP for Batley and Spen in June had some odd aspects, but with a suspect currently awaiting trial it's best not to talk about them in too much detail. The oddest factor of all is that Ms Cox's assailant was alleged to have shouted 'Britain first!' during the attack.<sup>60</sup> Britain First is the name of a minor far-right party formed by breakaway members of the BNP in 2011, and as it happens Clarke Rothwell, the chief eyewitness who claimed the killer shouted

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59 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/13/white-supremacy-takes-the-breath-away-from-black-americans>>

60 <<http://news.nationalpost.com/news/british-labour-lawmaker-injured-in-shooting-near-leeds-reports-say>>

'Britain first!',<sup>61</sup> has been named as a member of the BNP.<sup>62</sup>

There is one other bystander who claims to have heard the words 'Britain first'. We'll call that person 'B'. 'B' claims to have witnessed the murder, the arrival of police, and the suspect's arrest – all in the same location, despite the fact that the suspect fled the scene and was arrested a mile away nearly half-an-hour later. Could the shock and panic immediately following the murder have confused 'B's memory, mixing up things seen personally with things 'B' only heard about?

By contrast, only one other witness, 'C', has claimed to have any memory of the sounds of the event and 'C' has stated definitively and in writing that no-one shouted 'Britain first' or anything else.

The foregoing suggests that a single allegation implicating a political party, given during the first flurry of media reports of the murder, led to that supposed connection receiving substantial national coverage that it might not have deserved. This curious set of circumstances has far wider implications, but the Contempt of Court Act means it would be unwise to spell those out right now.

## **Doppelgangers**

Further evidence of the availability of political impersonators came to light in the run-up to this summer's Democratic Party Convention in Philadelphia. Until recently the Republican Party counted as a member a startlingly good Bernie Sanders lookalike. And he even comes pre-packaged with a political story. Jeff Jones was a Republican Party member until quitting in despair over the rise of Donald Trump and becoming a registered Democrat in order to vote for his 'face-sake'. NBC Los Angeles had a good deal of fun following Mr Jones around on the streets for a day and filming the excited reactions. If

61 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3646408/Gas-fitter-insists-Jo-Cox-killer-DID-shout-Britain-shot-MP-Testimony-closest-witness-murder-provides-compelling-account-death.html>>

62 <[https://wikileaks.org/wiki/British\\_National\\_Party\\_membership\\_and\\_contacts\\_list,\\_reference](https://wikileaks.org/wiki/British_National_Party_membership_and_contacts_list,_reference)>

either political party's campaign team had spotted Mr Jones' resemblance, rather than a TV station, any amount of mischief and sabotage would have been instantly within reach.

NBC's video is a truly odd viewing experience, as the 'fake' Sanders gradually replaces the real Sanders in the mind's eye, until by the end the 'switch' is complete and it takes some readjustment to snap out of it.<sup>63</sup>

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63 <<http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Bernie-Sanders-Lookalike-Doppelganger-Election-California-Primary-382217101.html>>