

# U.S. Corporate Media Watch

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by [Richard Medhurst and Roberto Sirvent](#), Black Agenda Report

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Richard and Roberto would like to dedicate this feature to Glen Ford, one of the fiercest critics of U.S. corporate media the country has ever known. May we all find creative and courageous ways to honor his memory by speaking out against Wall Street, white supremacy, and the U.S. war machine.

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\*\*\*In this feature, we interview Syrian-born journalist Richard Medhurst about state propaganda, the mainstream media, and U.S. imperialism.

**Roberto Sirvent: *Can you share a little bit about the mainstream media's coverage of Biden's decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan? What are some subtle and not-so-subtle ways that pundits and politicians maintain an imperial and colonial framework in their analysis?***



Medhurst

**Richard Medhurst:** One of the more subtle ways they've tried to keep the war going is printing headlines saying that [women's rights](#) are imperiled by a US withdrawal. The notion that a bunch of imperialists, who have killed scores of women and mothers, and turned countless more into refugees, suddenly care about the rights of their victims and the people they are occupying is preposterous.

The idea of achieving women's emancipation through military occupation is a farce. You cannot have women's rights, human rights or any rights when you live under the military rule of a foreign occupying power. You are subject to their rule.

Even if you want to believe Bush and Blair's excuses to try and justify this war; saying that they were going after Al Qaeda, well this has nothing to do with that. They didn't say they were invading Afghanistan for the sake of women's rights – no matter how just or noble that may sound now. So, to try and use women's rights now to deflect from the horrors they inflicted on Afghanistan, the millions of people they turned into refugees, the scores they killed – many of whom are women– is an attempt to whitewash their crimes and an insult to people's intelligence.

There's something extremely colonial and arrogant about Westerners claiming they must invade foreigners and occupy

them in order to teach them “democracy” and “women’s rights”, to essentially “civilize” them. It’s very reminiscent of the “white savior complex,” and perhaps a more modern manifestation of that.

A less subtle example of how they’ve tried to keep the war going came after the terrorist attack at Kabul airport which left 170 dead people and 200 wounded. Former National Security Advisor under Trump, [General HR McMaster, went on CNN](#) and made the ridiculous assertion that the Taliban and ISIS – two sworn enemies – had somehow collaborated on this attack.

You could also see how visibly upset NBC Correspondent Richard Engel was that the war is over. He angrily tweeted that Afghanistan could potentially become a terror hub (essentially reprinting headlines from 2001) and worried that America’s prestige and image as a superpower have been tarnished by the Taliban expelling them. In so many words, Engel admits in a previous book one of the main reasons these ‘reporters’ carry water for such imperialist projects: [because it helps boost their careers.](#)

I would just caution: how much of a “withdrawal” is it really when Biden [drone strikes a family](#) on the way out? We have no clue what private contractors, the CIA and SAS will do in Afghanistan – and on top of that, Congress added to Biden’s already ballooned military budget, [raising it to \\$740 billion](#)

***You recently [wrote](#) : “We are in 2021 and the propaganda machine still has people believing that we went to war to ‘help’ people.” It reminded me of a recent Millennials are Killing Capitalism [podcast](#) where Joy James calls Harvard University a “think tank for imperialism.” It seems like the “propaganda machine” involves many systems of power, including the U.S. corporate media and our education system – whether they be state schools or Ivy League universities. I know you’ve spent a lot of time in the U.K. as well. What role does***

***elite educational institutions like Harvard and Oxford play in justifying war, empire, and colonialism?***

Every President of the United States since 1990 went to an Ivy League school (even Trump). That alone should tell you something. George Bush Senior and Junior both attended Yale, as did Vice President Dick Cheney. Currently, 51 members of the 117th US Congress also attended Ivy League schools.

If you look at the United Kingdom, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and former PM David Cameron were both educated at Eton College, a famous boy's school in England. Eton College has produced twenty of Britain's Prime Ministers. It's one of the top schools sending pupils to Oxford and Cambridge. Speaking of which, currently around 1/5 of British MPs went to Oxford or Cambridge.

That's not to say that every single person who attends an elite school comes out of there an imperialist. However, there is certainly something to be said about elite formative schools being power centers of imperialism, where such belief systems are reinforced.

It's also worth noting that this ethos extends to the newsrooms of corporate media, where you will find many journalists working in mainstream media who went to \$60,000 a year prep schools.

And when we talk about such institutions reinforcing colonialism and imperialism, a certain Harvard Professor comes to mind: Ruth Wisse, [calling for American Jews to "serve in the army of words"](#) and "make us [Israelis] look good". Or simply put: blindly defend Israel.

[In an interview](#) she says: "I don't know if a single University that has actually divested from [Israel]." This extremely telling remark should give you an idea what kind of position is formally held and incorporated into the beliefs of these elite universities regarding Zionism and colonialism.

***As you know, a lot of schools are now back in session. One thing that's common is having a liberal teacher who tries to encourage students to watch or read "both sides" of political commentary. So, for example, they might have students read the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. And then teachers have students watch both Fox News and MSNBC (with some even assigning CNN as a 'balanced' news station). They do this all in the name of teaching critical thinking. Can you explain why this approach to "media literacy" is so misleading and problematic?***

This approach would be great if you didn't have six corporations who own all the news networks in America. When we talk about the Washington Post (now owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos) or CNN or FOX – these networks don't have a duty to factual, truthful reporting. They have a profit incentive and shareholders to please. This is why we speak of corporate media. These networks make money from advertising overtly, and covertly by manufacturing consent for war and other ills.

You can't really call that "balanced" when you turn on MSNBC or FOX– two networks (supposedly) on opposing ends of the American political spectrum – and yet both are telling you that Israel massacring Palestinians or stealing their homes is "self-defense". Or both lying about Syria using chemical weapons to orchestrate a pretext for bombing. These networks are owned by media conglomerates and corporate advertisers, and their principal function is to sell wars and convince Americans to acquiesce to the lack of healthcare, social safety nets, equitable pay and racial and social justice.

***One of my absolute favorite authors, Keguro Macharia, recently [tweeted](#) about CNN beginning its broadcast in Kenya as soon as the US launched a war there. "Even as a teenager who knew nothing else," he writes, "I knew it was imperial propaganda." Why do you think it's so hard for Americans (especially liberals) to see CNN as an imperialist organization?***

The goal of mainstream media is not to inform the public, it's to keep them ignorant. CNN accomplishes this very well by giving the impression of balanced political coverage, when in fact mainstream American political discourse is limited to a tiny spectrum to begin with.

CNN remains a network beholden to the interests of a media conglomerate and bolstered by corporate advertisers. Not only that, but similar to MSNBC, the New York Times and Washington Post, it acts as a loyal mouthpiece of the American national security state. How many times have CNN newsrooms blindly repeated claims that later turned out to be false from unnamed US intelligence officials, such as stories like Russiagate or the alleged Russian bounties in Afghanistan – all of which have been disproved?

If the State Department or the national security blob says that country X is a “human rights abuser”, CNN will just repeat this as if it were fact, instead of scrutinizing and questioning it.

Nothing encapsulates this dynamic and relationship better than the lead up to the Iraq war in 2003. Any rumor or claim about Saddam that came out of the CIA or White House – no matter how outlandish – was blindly repeated without question. The same about Syria allegedly using chemical weapons.

CNN has also used the pretext of feminism to try and advocate a prolonged NATO occupation of Afghanistan, something that [has been shown](#) to be a CIA ploy in order to weaken opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

This couldn't be more obvious than seeing how CNN employs a slew of former FBI and CIA agents – who by no coincidence spend their time dedicated to the agencies and deep state blob they worked for. NBC and FOX are no different in that regard, showing once again that there is little difference between CNN and others.

One of the more recent, less subtle examples was Chris Cuomo interviewing his own brother and then Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo, about his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was later revealed that the true number of deaths in New York nursing homes had been hidden, causing a scandal. The fact that a CNN news show host is interviewing his own brother, a politician, on how “well” he’s handled a crisis is not only laughable but such an obvious conflict of interest.

*A lot of well-meaning liberals like to say, “We’ve forgotten how to talk to each other. If Democrats and Republicans could just sit down and listen to one another, then we’ll be able to solve a lot of our country’s problems.” As a result, we see a lot of pundits on U.S. corporate media rooting for both parties to work together, to find common ground, to unite, etc. etc. Of course, it doesn’t particularly matter what they unite on—whether it’s imposing economic sanctions on other countries, increasing the military budget, punishing municipalities that want to defund the police, imposing strict austerity measures, expanding the United States’ military presence in Africa, or commemorating mass murderers like George H.W. Bush, John McCain, and Donald Rumsfeld. All that seems to matter is Democrats and Republicans learning to not be so divisive. I’ve even seen local news correspondents celebrate rare moments of bi-partisanship by saying, “Hey, it’s nice to see they’re working together!” Can you explain for our readers how this supposedly noble goal of “working across the aisle” and being “bipartisan” may not be something to root for after all?*

Well first of all I think it’s important to say that America isn’t actually bipartisan. It doesn’t have an actual left-wing party. Certainly not the Democrats, in any case. Democrats and Republicans are essentially two wings of the same party, they are right-wing establishments by anyone’s standards, and would be certainly viewed as such in other countries. So, when we talk about working across the aisle, we’re really just talking

about two wings of the same party; very similar ideologies and policies. Despite what the education system and media would have you believe they are more alike than different.

The most recent example of this comes just a few days ago as Democrats “broke rank” in order to support a Republican amendment adding a further \$24 billion to the military budget – on top of the \$715 billion Biden had already requested. This makes the current US military budget of \$740 billion the largest in recent history. So, in that regard, bipartisanship and “reaching across the aisle” is already alive and well in Washington – just for war and Wall Street, not Americans.

And for all the “bickering” amongst each other (largely just theatre), it’s indeed ironic how in the examples you highlighted above they’re actually in full agreement with each other. You can have a Democrat or a Republican in the White House, and Israel will surely receive its free military aid either way. You can have either a Democrat or a Republican controlled Congress and neither will stop the wars. In all things empire and Wall Street they are in full agreement and naught but two sides of the same party.

I doubt we’d ever see it but if they could actually sit down and work together on stopping wars, abolishing homelessness, poverty and racism – then by all means they should.

Richard Medhurst is an independent journalist born in Damascus, Syria. He is half English, half Syrian and covers US politics, international relations, and the Middle East. He has grown a popular YouTube channel, hosts a television program on Press TV, and contributes regularly to Russia Today. Roberto Sirvent is editor of the Black Agenda Report Book Forum.

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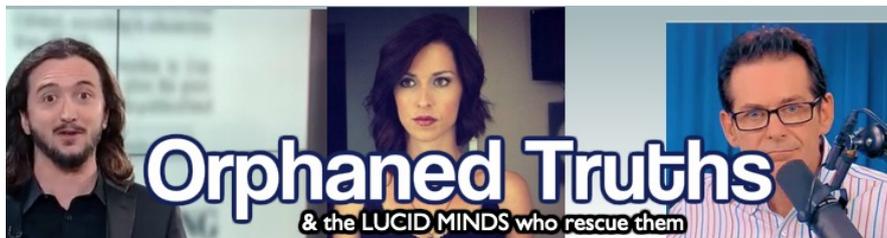
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