

How American Media Serves as a Transmission Belt for Wars of Choice

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“In war-time, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.” (Winston Churchill)

“You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.” (attributed to William Randolph Hearst)

Introduction

The [propaganda of war is almost as old as war itself](#). Both for mobilizing the home front and demoralizing the enemy, packaging war as “our” noble cause against a depraved and deadly “them” has long been a standard, if distasteful, part of the human condition.

But with the advent of modern communications, and especially in the digital age, war propaganda has reached an unprecedented level of sophistication and influence, primarily with regard to the international behavior of the United States. The formal end of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War in 1991 left the U.S. with no serious military or geopolitical opponent just at a time when the role of global media was undergoing a significant shift. Earlier that same year, the First Gulf War had featured the debut of *CNN* as a provider of ubiquitous, real-time, 24-hour conflict coverage, setting a standard for later hostilities. Also that same year, the Internet went public.

The decades following 1991 saw a qualitative evolution in the role of media as not just a reporter of events but as an active participant. No longer simply an accessory to conflict, the art and science of media manipulation has perhaps become the core of modern warfare. Indeed, it may even be possible to assert that the psychological aspect of war has become its most important deliverable, eclipsing traditional objectives such as territory, natural resources, or money. (The analogy can be made to the religious wars of 17th century Europe or the ideological conflicts of the mid-20th century, but the technological aspects of information production and dissemination in those eras were insufficient to produce what we see today.)

Below we will examine the unique – and uniquely dangerous – role belligerent media, especially American media, play in contemporary warfare; survey the extent, origins, and evolution of the state apparatus lying behind this phenomenon; and suggest the possibility of remedial action.

Belligerence of the Post-Cold War America Media

The First Gulf War of 1991 marked a watershed both for America's propensity for military action and for the media's role in it. Claims of legality and righteousness from the administration of President George H. W. Bush regarding its decision to expel the Iraqi forces of erstwhile American client Saddam Hussein from Kuwait met with little dissent, least of all from major American news organizations. A similar media chorus of approval if not outright encouragement characterized Bill Clinton's interventions in Somalia (1993), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995), and Kosovo (1999), as well as those of George W. Bush in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) after the 9/11 attacks. Even President Barack Obama's regime change operation in Libya (2011) benefitted from the same pattern. Only with Obama's intended attack on Syria in September 2013 over a supposed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government did the established symbiosis between media advocating "humanitarian" or "preemptive" action and the application of American military force misfire.

In each of these episodes the media's uncritical repetition of government-issued "information" and opinions was a key factor in setting the stage for war. Given that in *none* of these enterprises was the territorial integrity or independence of the United States at stake, each can be regarded as a "[war of choice](#)" requiring the creation and selling of a rationale not directly based on American national defense. In that context it is important to note the presence in each of some common features that are seldom commented upon – certainly not by American media themselves – that characterized the media's role as the government's transmission belt for implanting pro-war justifications into the public consciousness.

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Deficiency of knowledge as the American norm

- ✦ **Americans are poorly informed about events in the outside world, and younger Americans appear to be even more ignorant than their elders. This means that when policymakers cite the need for action in a given country and news feeds shift to "crisis" coverage, few people have a contextual reservoir of knowledge that may run counter to the official**

narrative. This largely nullifies the target audience's capacity for critical evaluation.

As the imperative for intervention in a given country arises, both government and media can be sure that they are depicting their rationale on a nearly blank canvas and that the consumers will have little or no context within which they are being told that America “must do something.” [Americans know, and in general care, little about the outside world.](#) (In fairness to Americans, while we rank particularly low on geographic literacy, [knowledge in the rest of the world in many cases is only marginally better.](#) Ignorance in the U.S. matters more because we are more likely to be the initiator of military action than other countries are.) Perhaps the most stunning recent example of how lack of knowledge dovetails with bellicosity was an April 2014 survey at the height of the Ukrainian crisis, where [only one-sixth of Americans polled could find Ukraine on a map](#), but the less they knew about where the conflict was the more they favored forceful American action.

This knowledge deficit is reflected in and reinforced by a paucity of international coverage by American media. Despite the growth of Internet-based alternatives, the [majority of the American public still gets most of its news from television](#), specifically from the networks (*ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, plus *FoxNews*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*) and their local affiliates. Moreover, these are their [most trusted news sources](#), as opposed to web- and social media-based information. (It is true that dependence on TV news falls off dramatically for Millennials, [who prefer social and interactive media sources](#). However, this largely means that Millennials are simply [uninterested and uninformed regarding](#) anything they consider as not having immediate personal relevance, [consume news only accidentally on a pick-and-choose basis, and in fact are even “dumber” than their elders.](#))

One feature of American TV news programming that is strikingly different from that found outside the United States (for example, on *BBC1*, *TF1*, *ARD*, *ZDF*, *RaiUno*, *NHK*, etc., and their international counterparts like *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*, *France 24*, *NHK World*, etc.) is a notable scarcity of substantive international news stories. It is not uncommon that an entire half-hour evening network news program will not feature a single event outside the United States. A typical program will begin with inclement weather somewhere in the country, a transportation accident, or a lurid crime story (preferably a murder with sensational features, such as a youthful victim or with a racial aspect, or a mass shooting prompting renewal of the perennial American debate about gun control). A significant portion will

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be devoted to celebrity gossip, consumer features (such as tips on how to save on your utilities or credit card bill, or turn clutter into cash), and health (new findings on weight loss, recovering from cancer, etc.) In an election season, which because of the length of U.S. campaigns consumes about half the calendar, there may be political news, but much of that will center on the colorful aspects of scandals, personality clashes and “gaffes,” with little attention paid to the substance of war and peace or foreign affairs.

Reliance on government sources, “ventriloquism,” and information incest

- ♦ **The official media are less a watchdog over government than themselves part of the governing structure, a bulletin board for government propaganda.**

Any small attention to “news” from, say, Ukraine or Syria-Iraq, largely consists of “journalists” reporting what they were told by their government contacts. It is understood on both sides that uncritical reporting of the contact’s message is the price of continued access. Unsurprisingly, the prevailing bias in such reports is for sanctions, military action, the surveillance state, and the rest of the all-too-familiar script. Hard questions about goals, costs, or legality are seldom asked. This means that when a “crisis” atmosphere is generated about the “need” for U.S. military engagement, virtually the only views presented to the public are those generated by government officials or those friendly to the government’s position in the think tank and nongovernmental organization community.

A vivid illustration of how government influence takes the form of a kind of “ventriloquism,” with poorly informed, mostly young Washington-based journalists playing the role of puppet was given in a candid interview of Ben Rhodes, Obama’s White House “Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications and Speechwriting.” At once cynical and evidently proud of his success, [Rhodes described to David Samuels of the New York Times Magazine how even the journalists being used](#) only dimly perceive their function as conveyors of official “content” with self-



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generating “force multipliers.” As this analyst has commented, Rhodes has [“actually cut a window into the belly of the beast and allowed us to see what is going on.”](#) Writes Samuels:

“It is hard for many to absorb the true magnitude of the change in the news business – 40 percent of newspaper-industry professionals have lost their jobs over the past decade – in part because readers can absorb all the news they want from social-media platforms like Facebook, which are valued in the tens and hundreds of billions of dollars and pay nothing for the ‘content’ they provide to their readers. . . . Rhodes singled out a key example to me one day, laced with the brutal contempt that is a hallmark of his private utterances. ‘All these newspapers used to have foreign bureaus,’ he said. ‘Now they

Rhodes: “All these newspapers used to have foreign bureaus. . . . Now they don’t. They call us to explain to them what’s happening in Moscow and Cairo. Most of the outlets are reporting on world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That’s a sea change. They literally know nothing.”

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140-character idea or quote will almost always carry the day, and it is very difficult for even good reporters to necessarily know where the spin is coming from or why. . . . Price turns to his computer and begins tapping away at the administration’s well-cultivated network of officials, talking heads, columnists and newspaper reporters, web jockeys and outside advocates who can tweet at critics and tweak their stories backed up by quotations from ‘senior White House officials’ and ‘spokespeople.’ . . . The narratives [Rhodes] frames, the voices of senior officials, the columnists and reporters whose work he skillfully shapes and ventriloquizes, and even the president’s own speeches and talking points, are the only dots of color in a much larger vision about who Americans are

and where we are going that Rhodes and the president have been formulating together over the past seven years.” [from “[The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign-Policy Guru](#),” May 2016]

Buttressing government/media ventriloquism, content of information used in the formulation of American global policy is dominated by a few hundred certified “experts” sharing a remarkable uniformity of opinion regardless of party affiliation. These experts, who inhabit a closed loop of Executive Branch departments and agencies, Congress, media, think tanks, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are responsible for the generation of policy initiatives and their implementation. It should also be noted that many of the most prominent NGOs themselves receive significant funding from government agencies or contractors and could more properly be termed “quasi-nongovernmental,” or QuaNGOs. In addition, as with private industry, particularly in the military and financial sectors, there is a brisk rotation of personnel between government and think tanks and other nonprofits in what is called the “[revolving door](#).” The presence of past, future, and returning personnel of [Goldman Sachs](#) (also, known as the “great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money”) in government agencies tasked with regulating the financial industry is especially notorious.

In short, the people who play key roles in the government and nongovernmental sectors not only think alike, in many cases they are in fact the very same people who have simply switched positions within what could best be understood as a single, hybrid public-private entity (which we will examine in greater detail below at “Behind Media Belligerence: the American Deep State”). These sources of expert views also overwhelmingly dominate the content of news and information (for example, serving as media “talking heads” or publishing commentaries), ensuring that what the public sees, hears, and reads is in accord with the analytical papers issued by think tanks, Congressional reports, and official press releases. The result is a closed loop that is almost completely impervious to views regarded as “outside the mainstream” because they do not originate in or accord with the incestuous “consensus” that exists inside the loop.

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Centralized corporate ownership

- ✦ **Corporate consolidation feeds the tendency toward ratings-based sensationalism, not critical public-interest programming.**

The servility of privately owned U.S. media in conveying government views superficially may seem a paradox. It is seldom commented upon that compared to the large majority of other countries, the most prominent and accessible media outlets in the United States are not publicly owned or operated. Whereas outside the U.S. the principal media giants are wholly or majority government-owned entities (*BBC* in the United Kingdom, *CBC* in Canada, *RAI* in Italy, *ABC* in Australia, *ARD* and *ZDF* in Germany, *Channel One* in Russia, *NHK* in Japan, *CCTV* in China, *RTS* in Serbia, etc.), the American public broadcasters *PBS* and *NPR* are dwarves alongside their

privately owned competitors. News and information becomes less a question of professional journalistic integrity than maximizing advertising dollars for corporate ownership, [a fact that can impact coverage](#).

While in the past U.S. regulators were keen to ensure diversity of private ownership as a condition of using “public airwaves” (a condition that has never applied to print media, though some limits remain on corporate “cross-ownership” of broadcast and print by the same company), recent decades have seen increasing consolidation. As of 2015, the large majority of American media were [owned by six conglomerates](#): [Comcast](#), [News Corporation](#), [Disney](#), [Viacom](#), [Time Warner](#), and [CBS](#). That’s [down from 50 companies that controlled that same share as recently as 1983](#). This also [applies to online media](#): “In raw numbers, 80 percent of the top

20 online news sites are owned by the 100 largest media companies. Time Warner owns two of the most visited sites: *CNN.com* and *AOL News*, while Gannett, which is the twelfth largest media company, owns *USAToday.com* along with many local online newspapers.” The average viewer ingests [some 10 hours of programming daily from a seeming variety of outlets](#) that the consumer may not realize have the same corporate owners.

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 News Corporation

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VIACOM

 CBS

“Para-journalism,” “infotainment,” and “atrocities porn” as a war trigger

- ✦ **The major media’s function as a conduit for government-generated content dovetails with chasing advertising dollars. Consumers are less informed than entertained with prurient images and messages that serve both Caesar and Mammon.**

News has always been a money loser for privately owned American broadcast networks. Until the 1970s, networks allocated resources to their unprofitable news operations as a public obligation, in effect subsidizing news – which networks were required to provide as a percentage of their airtime – from entertainment programming that attracted advertising dollars. But with the push for deregulation in recent decades, news has been under intense pressure to generate its own ratings that justify its existence by [in effect becoming entertainment programming itself](#) –

“... in the form of ‘low end’ in a proliferation of shows that practice what might be called ‘para-journalism.’ The most important new form is the ‘tabloid’ news magazine, . . . They are not news shows that borrow conventions from entertainment television, but the other way around: entertainment programs that borrow the aura of news. The forms and the ‘look’ are news – the opening sequences frequently feature typewriter keys and newsroom-like sets with monitors in the background. The content, however, has little of the substance of journalism; above all, little about public affairs.”

The tabloid format in turn impacts what little coverage of foreign matters that does appear in hard news programming, as viewers brought up on “Sesame Street” have come to expect to be entertained more than informed. The result is “infotainment,” [a market-driven product](#) that “critics say . . . is based increasingly on what will interest an audience rather than on what the audience needs to know. Former FCC chairman Newton Minow says that much of today’s news is ‘pretty close to tabloid.’ Former *PBS* anchor Robert MacNeil says that the trends ‘are toward the sensational, the hype, the hyperactive, the tabloid values to drive out the serious.’” The ultimate expression of sensationalized, entertainment content in the context of global conflict is known as “[atrocities porn](#),” which titillates the audience through horror and incitement to hatred of the presumed perpetrators (as described by [William Norman Grigg](#)):

“Atrocities porn plays a critical role in the process of mobilizing mass hatred on the part of the state’s designs. Like its sexual equivalent, atrocities porn

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(especially, and obviously, in the case of stories describing rape and other sexual abuse) appeals to prurient interests to manipulate base impulses. . . . Authors of atrocity porn also cynically exploit the predictable reactions it will provoke from decent people.”

Atrocity porn has been essential for selling military action: incubator babies (Kuwait/Iraq); the Racak massacre (Kosovo); the Markale marketplace bombings, Omarska “living skeletons,” and the Srebrenica massacre (Bosnia); rape as calculated instrument of war (Bosnia, Libya); and poison gas in Ghouta and “[Aleppo Boy](#)” (Syria). Moreover, as [blogger Julia Gorin has noted](#), the recycling of victim memes has begun, including prodding from governments:

“Columnist David P. Goldman (a.k.a. Spengler) had an [article](#) in *Asia Times* this month (‘To be kind is to be cruel, to be cruel is to be kind,’ Apr. 14), citing a recent migrant incident in Europe, first reported by UK [Daily Mail](#):

‘The 240ft Monica had been spotted in international waters during the night. When Italian coastguard boats drew alongside, the crews were shocked to see men and women on board begin dangling the infants over the side. The refugees – mostly Kurds and many said to be heading for Britain – calmed down only when they were assured they would not be turned away from Italy. . . . When in world history has one side in negotiations threaten[ed] to kill its own people in order to gain leverage?’

“Here I started getting antsy, yelling at the computer screen, ‘When in world history? *When?* Try the ’90s!’ That is, when Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic followed through on Bill Clinton’s suggestion that he needed to [cough up](#) at least [5,000](#) dead [bodies](#) if he wanted a NATO intervention on his side of a turf war against Serbs.”

Gorin’s insightful observation that prompting from politicians for media coverage to “justify” an attack already decided upon was further borne out in Kosovo. As noted by this analyst in a U.S. Senate report during the buildup to the March 1999 NATO assault on Serbia, lying in plain sight since mid-1998 was what amounted to an invitation from the Clinton Administration: give us a suitable atrocity, and we’ll give you a war:

“As of this writing, planning for a U.S.-led NATO intervention in Kosovo is now largely in place, while the Clinton Administration’s apparent willingness to intervene has ebbed and flowed on an almost weekly basis. The only missing element appears to be an event – with suitably vivid media coverage – that would make intervention politically salable, even imperative, in the same way that a dithering Administration finally decided on intervention in Bosnia in 1995 after a series of ‘Serb mortar attacks’ took the lives of dozens of civilians – attacks, which, upon closer examination, may in fact have been the work of the Muslim regime in Sarajevo, the main beneficiary of the intervention. [For details, primarily reports from European media, see RPC’s ‘[Clinton-Approved Iranian](#)

[Arms Transfers Help Turn Bosnia into Militant Islamic Base,](#) 1/16/97] That the Administration is waiting for a similar ‘trigger’ in Kosovo is increasingly obvious: ‘A senior U.S. Defense Department official who briefed reporters on July 15 noted that “we’re not anywhere near making a decision for any kind of armed intervention in Kosovo right now.” He listed only one thing that might trigger a policy change: “I think if some levels of atrocities were reached that would be intolerable, that would probably be a trigger”’ [Washington Post, 8/4/98]. The recent conflicting reports regarding a purported mass grave containing (depending on the report) hundreds of murdered Albanian civilians or dozens of KLA fighters killed in battle should be seen in this light.”

[from ‘[Bosnia II: The Clinton Administration Sets Course for NATO Intervention in Kosovo,](#)’ August 1998]



The Clinton Administration made it clear: give us a “trigger” in the form of a suitable atrocity, we’ll give you a war. In due course, the “Racak Massacre” took place in Kosovo.

In due course, the January 1999 “Racak Massacre” – the details of which still have not been adequately explained, 17 years later – provided the required “trigger.” It’s hard to escape the notion that politics and media had melded into a kind of reality show (from the same Senate report):

“The foregoing review of the Clinton Administration's prevarications on Kosovo would not be complete without a brief look at one other possible factor in the deepening morass.

“Consider the following fictional situation: A president embroiled in a sex scandal that threatens to bring down his administration. He sees the only way out in distracting the nation and the world with a foreign military adventure. So, he orders his spin-doctors and media wizards to get to work. They survey the options, push a few buttons, and decide upon a suitable locale: Albania.

“The foregoing, the premise of the recent film Wag the Dog, might once have seemed farfetched. Yet it can hardly escape comment that on the very day, August 17 [1998], that President Bill Clinton is scheduled to testify before a federal grand jury to explain his possibly criminal behavior, Commander-in-Chief Bill Clinton has ordered U.S. Marines and air crews to commence several days of ground and air exercises in, yes, Albania as a warning of possible NATO intervention in next-door Kosovo. Perhaps life does imitate art, and here the coincidence tends toward the surreal. Certainly there is one clear difference between the movie and the Kosovo crisis, in that the former was a media fraud

with simulated violence while there is indeed a real shooting war in Kosovo (though not without some degree of media slant that would do justice to Stanley Motss, the fictional Hollywood producer played by Dustin Hoffman).

“Not too many years ago, it would not have entered the mind of even the worst of cynics to speculate whether any American president, whatever his political difficulties, would even consider sending U.S. military personnel into harm's way to serve his own, personal needs. But in an era when pundits openly weigh the question of whether President Clinton will (or should) tell the truth under oath not because he has a simple obligation to do so but because of the possible impact on his political ‘viability’ – is it self-evident that military decisions are not affected by similar considerations? Under the circumstances, it is fair to ask to what extent the Clinton Administration has forfeited the benefit of the doubt as to the motives behind its actions.”

Demonization “Hitler” memes

- ✦ **Demonizing the intended target neutralizes objections to his removal.
How can any decent person oppose getting rid of Hitler?**

Post-Cold War conflict can never be a clash of legitimate subjective interests. Rather, each of America’s adventures must be spelled out in terms of black-and-white, good-versus-evil Manichaeian contests. The side targeted for destruction or replacement has absolutely no redeeming qualities and represents an existential threat not only to the United States but to the entire world, most of all to the people of the country in question. This entails first of all absolute [demonization of the evil leader](#) in what is called [reductio ad Hitlerum](#), a concept attributed to philosopher Leo Strauss in 1951. Russia’s Vladimir Putin has been characterized by name as another Hitler by Hillary Clinton and others. Among the prominent “Hitlers” since 1991 have been Saddam Hussein (Iraq), Slobodan Milosevic (Yugoslavia/Serbia), Radovan Karadzic (Republika Srpska), Moammar Qaddafi (Libya), and Bashar al-Assad (Syria), with less imposing *Führer* figures to be found among Mohamed Farrah Aidid (Somalia), Manuel Noriega (Panama), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Iran), and Omar al-Bashir (Sudan). (Paradoxically, successive rulers of the despotic Kim clan ruling North Korea have not been singled out for the same treatment. This perhaps reflects that country’s almost total blockage of outside news access required to supply enough raw material

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for the Hitler meme, or the reluctance of policymakers to stoke a need to “do something” about a target that actually *does* have weapons of mass destruction and might consider using them if attacked.)

In due course, the targeted “Hitler” will be accused of “killing his own people” to invoke the doctrine of “responsibility to protect” (R2P) as a trump to state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Inflated death tolls of selected conflicts are all attributed to the demonized leader, none to the “moderate, democratic, pro-western, pro-American” opposition, who in many cases are terrorists, jihadists, or criminals of various stripes. Indictment of the targeted leader by international tribunals authorized, funded, and controlled by the U.S. and western countries (for example, Milosevic and Karadzic by the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC), and repeated calls by R2P advocates for the ICC to indict al-Assad) effectively removes the figure in question from the realm of politics – and the potential for negotiation and compromise – to an imperative that the “accused” be “brought to justice” as determined by the powers controlling the tribunal.

“Weaponization” of media

- ♦ **In weaponized media, information does not exist to provide insight into objective reality. Rather it is a tool that has meaning only with reference to its subjective purpose.**

Demonization of targeted countries and leaders fits into a broader narrative of conflict that builds upon the American penchant for understanding all conflicts as pitting the “good guys” in white hats vs. “bad guys” in black hats. While this attitude may have its roots in Americans’ frontier heritage and our somewhat naïve sense of idealism, it lends itself to cynical manipulation by political operations whose ideological principles are most strongly shaped by 20th century ideologies, [notably Trotskyism](#). Having determined that the current “[Hitler of the month](#)” has no

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redeeming qualities, events in a current or planned conflict zone are useful only insofar as they can be used pedagogically for their predetermined purpose.

In addition, similar events can have a totally different moral character depending whether they are caused by the good side or bad side. Thus, U.S. airstrikes are “humanitarian,” our “collateral damage” is excusable (bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, by the U.S. is a regrettable [error](#) by low-level personnel – oops!), while others’ strikes are criminal (Syrian “barrel bombs,” Russians [hitting](#)

[hospitals and a school in Syria](#)). Weaponization of news especially applies to selective finger-pointing of war crimes, especially genocide, which as an accusation that completely delegitimizes the enemy can be considered the nuclear bomb of propaganda memes.

America and the “international community,” the “Free World,” and “American exceptionalism” and “leadership”

- ✦ **America, like any country, has its own distinctive history, culture, and traditions. Additionally, America’s unique founding principles – consent of the governed, due process, division of powers, constitutional limited government – justly have been an inspiration to much of the world for over two centuries and are a valid point of American pride. However, neither of these venerable “exceptional” qualities has much connection to the much-used and abused bastard term (usually capitalized as “American Exceptionalism”) that describes contemporary U.S. global behavior, by which policymakers in Washington assert both an exclusive “leadership” privilege and unsupportable obligation to undertake open-ended, international missions in the name of the “Free World” and the “international community.”**

A further notable feature of global discourse is the ritual application of a family of terms characterizing America’s role in the world. All are routinely used by U.S. officials and repeated by media. The term “international community” is a favorite of American presidents when invoking their claimed authority for the use of military force: Bush the Elder in Kuwait, Clinton in Bosnia and Kosovo, Bush the Younger in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Obama in Libya and Syria. (Indeed the term is cited far more than either the imperative of American national security or legality based on constitutional authority.) As noted by British journalist and academic [Martin Jacques](#) “We all know what is meant by the term ‘international community,’ don’t we? It’s the west, of course, nothing more, nothing less. Using the term ‘international community’ is a way of dignifying the west, of globalising it, of making it sound more respectable, more neutral and high-faluting.” Indeed, more precisely than simply “the west,” the “international community” means the geopolitical bloc of countries led (or less charitably, controlled) by Washington.

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Closely linked is the concept of the “Free World,” a rhetorical relic of the Cold War that originally was juxtaposed to the communist camp headed by the USSR but which now has become almost synonymous with “international community.” In any given instance, despite talismanic usage by western officials (especially the U.S. president, routinely tagged as the “[Leader of the Free World](#)” as though Stalin and Mao were still extant), either expression might represent at any given time a distinct minority of the world’s population consisting of the U.S. and our satellites. (Even the word “ally” no longer has the meaning of a mutual, treaty-based defense obligation. As [Christopher Preble](#) of the CATO Institute has suggested: “Essentially any country that buys into Washington’s hegemonic program, any country willing to go along with the proposition that the United States is and should be the world’s policeman, is an ally.”)



You are either with us or against us: our actions are absolutely good by definition, not relatively good in comparison to the actions of other powers, which on some level are at best only conditionally legitimate to the extent the U.S. President regards them as such.

Finally, the expression “American Exceptionalism” has become a litmus test both domestically in the United States (for example, in the accusation that Obama is a bad president because he “[doesn’t believe in American Exceptionalism](#),” at least not sufficiently) and abroad as an accusation against the U.S. for claiming an extraordinary privilege and unique exemption from the rules of international behavior binding on other states. It is the latter understanding of the expression that has become most current, despite a minority view that American Exceptionalism construed as a special license for empire is [ahistorical, un-American, and un-Christian](#), as well as [inconsistent with older and better American traditions](#).

Taken together with some degree of interchangeability, these three expressions depict an America (and the incumbent White House resident) invested with practically unlimited legal and moral authority to act as a progressive global force,

including the use of military power. You are either with us or against us: our actions are absolutely good by definition, not relatively good in comparison to the actions of other powers, which on some level are at best only conditionally legitimate to the extent the U.S. President regards them as such. The result is an approximation of the old Soviet concepts of the “vanguard of all progressive humanity” and the dichotomy of *kto/kogo* (“who/whom”) in a predetermined, inevitable historical progression. When we act, “history” is on our side. In such a moral universe, compromise is equated to unacceptable weakness (the charge against Obama of “leading from behind”) and contrary to objective social forces and global processes, which

depend on “American leadership.” The questions of “leading” to what ends, or how those ends benefit the American people are seldom asked.

Disregarding “alternative” media, American *samizdat*

- ✦ **As we will see at the end of this analysis, “alternative” media may be part of the eventual breakdown of the system we are describing. But currently the major media operating in concert with their government and corporate sponsors still are in a position to validate what appears in alternative sources by repeating it or to relegate it to a politically powerless realm by ignoring it.**

While proliferation of first cable channels and then online publications means the major American networks (*ABC, CBS, NBC*) and newspapers (*New York Times* (a/k/a, the “[newspaper of record](#)”), *Wall Street Journal, Washington Post*) have far smaller market share than in the past, they still have a near-monopoly on the legitimacy and public significance of information. This means that while “alternative media” – itself a dismissive term relating to the presumed unreliability of contents – might report and document information contrary to the official line emanating from prestige media operating in symbiosis with their government sources, they can be ignored.

In the past, notably in the totalitarian societies of the 20th century, maintaining the credibility of official media required the physical repression of alternatives.

Today, such an approach is unnecessary and almost technologically unfeasible, even for such undemocratic countries as China, Iran, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia (though North Korea may be successful through the sheer unavailability of modern communications technology to most of the population). Instead of suppressing dissent, is it sufficient to maintain major media’s role as gatekeeper and certifier of reliability. Information originating in alternative circles becomes reliable and publicly actionable only when picked up and disseminated by the “mainstream media” (MSM), thus validating the information and its ostensibly “alternative” source. Unless and until that happens, alternative information and opinion, especially that which runs counter to the MSM/government/corporate narrative, is ignored and relegated to “conspiracy theory,” “internet chatter,” or even subjected to the dread label of “denier” of some established, obligatory truth. Non-validated information and views thus become a kind of American *samizdat*

Alternative information becomes reliable only when picked up and disseminated by the MSM, thus validating the information and its ostensibly “alternative” source. Unless and until that happens, alternative information and opinion is ignored and relegated to “conspiracy theory,” “internet chatter,” or even the dread label of “denier” of some established, obligatory truth.

(the Russian term for Soviet-era illegal “self-publishing”), which is tolerated but has no impact on public affairs. For example, with respect to the Balkan conflicts (Markale, Srebrenica, Racak, organ-trafficking by leaders of the “Kosovo Liberation Army”), information debunking the official versions of the same events has long been available but has no ability to dislodge the established accounts, even in retrospect.

“We never make mistakes,” “stay the course,” and “MoveOn-ism”

- ✦ **American policy evidently has no rear-view mirror, no lessons are ever learned. Being right bestows no credit, giving birth to catastrophes incurs no costs.**



President Obama, in answer to the question of what was his biggest mistake as president, replied “not having done enough” in Libya after overthrowing Qaddafi. That “regime change” might have been a bad idea in the first place was not even a point of consideration.

[Like the Stalin-era NKVD](#) political police, the United States never makes mistakes. To be fair, the U.S. government and media are hardly unique in their rare willingness to admit errors. This is especially true in the case of U.S. use of military force, where the decision for war remains the “responsible” path as opposed to the unknowable “what if we hadn’t gone in?” Thus, President Obama, in answer to the question of what was his biggest mistake as president, replied “not having done enough” in Libya after overthrowing Qaddafi. That “regime change” might have been a bad idea in the first place was not even a point of consideration. At most, mistakes concerning details of execution can be admitted (and then immediately discounted in terms of importance), for example the decision to disband the Iraqi army and Baath party after the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. But the invasion itself and the reasons for it are off limits, at least for those who had built their reputations and lined their nests on the basis of the decision for war.

Even in the midst of an action abroad, it is difficult for American policymakers to readjust to mistaken assumptions. Instead, the preferred course is simply to redouble our efforts ([William Astore, citing Professor Andrew Bacevich](#)):

“Whether [under] a Clinton or a Bush or an Obama matters little. The U.S. can’t help but meddle, using its powerful military as a more or less blunt instrument, at incredible

expense to our country, and at a staggering cost in foreign lives lost or damaged by incessant warfare. And no matter how catastrophic the results, that national security state can't help but find reasons, no matter how discredited by events, to 'stay the course.'”

Similarly, the consequences of policy decisions are never relevant as future lessons. Instead, they are treated with what [Dmitry Babich of RT has called “MoveOn-ism”](#):

“Take the example of the torture carried out by Americans during the War on Terror. Nobody apart from whistleblowers has been jailed. Why? According to President Obama, because ‘we need to look forward, not back’. Likewise, consider the invasion of Iraq. ‘I know a large part of the public wants to move on’, said former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, ‘I share that point of view.’ And so on. Nobody is ever held to account – and, it should be added, no lessons are learned for ‘next time.’”

MoveOn-ism also means not only that authors of past disasters are not held to account, they are not even discredited. Supposed experts who made the crucial [bad decisions on Iraq had no compunction about sharing their wisdom on Libya](#). Those who wrecked Libya then [called for the same in Syria](#). In ancient Israel [false prophets were put to death](#), but in contemporary America they are awarded cushy sinecures at prestigious [think tanks](#) and lucrative [lobby shops](#). Conversely, those who correctly predicted the consequences of earlier follies and said “[toldja so](#)” are given no credit, their warnings still unheeded.

Behind Media Belligerence: the American Deep State

The American media's role in war cannot be understood without a brief examination of the governing apparatus in whose service the media operates. But first it is important to dismiss a myth persistently peddled with regard to the media's role in unleashing wars of choice. This is the so-called “[CNN Effect](#),” the idea that because of the emotive power of media coverage, and especially graphic TV images of human suffering (as we have seen, “atrocities porn”), reluctant governments are compelled to intervene in conflicts of which they would otherwise choose to stay out:

“It is over 20 years since debate over the relationship between TV news coverage of war, and resulting decisions to intervene for what appeared to be humanitarian purposes, occupied a good deal of scholarly and political attention. Back then, it was the *newly emerging global media players such as CNN* that were seen by many to be *the driving force* between purportedly humanitarian interventions during crises in countries such as Somalia (1992-1993) and Bosnia (1995). The term the CNN effect came to be understood as shorthand for the notion that mainstream news media in general, not just CNN, were having an increased effect upon foreign policy formulation.” [emphasis added]

There are at least three things wrong with the notion that media are the active “driving force” forcing passive governments to act. First, as shown in the section above (“‘Para-journalism,’ ‘infotainment,’ and ‘atrocities porn’ as a war trigger”), government sometimes invites the coverage that then “forces” them to set off on a course upon which they’d already decided and were only awaiting a “justification” that is duly served up by compliant media. Second, as we have seen in the preceding section, media are themselves largely submissive and uncritical conduits for government information. That is, when media dutifully convey to the public shocking stories, with appropriately graphic footage, of real or concocted atrocities attributable to the designated Hitler figure, government sources (and their satellites in the think tanks, NGOs, etc.) conveniently have already made that identification for them. Third, just as media know which topics and themes for coverage fit into the approved narrative, they also know what is not acceptable for reporting. (For example, from [this analyst’s personal experience](#), early in the Bosnian war of 1992-95 American media refused first-hand accounts of atrocities committed against Serbs by neo-Ustaša Croatian militias. Why? Because they already “knew” from their government-connected network that “the story” was atrocities committed by Serbs against Croats (and Muslims), not the other way around. Likewise today the MSM’s almost total blackout on civilian casualties caused by the U.S.-supported Saudi bombing campaign in Yemen.)

This should not be seen as a simple question of government officials giving specific instructions to journalists as to what they should or should not cover. Self-interested journalists instinctively know that stories that promote the official narrative lead to fame, fortune, and professional awards, and stories that run counter to it lead to career suicide. As [described by Robert Parry](#):

“The reason for this conformity among journalists is simple: If you repeat the conventional wisdom, you might find yourself with a lucrative gig as a big-shot foreign correspondent, a regular TV talking head, or a ‘visiting scholar’ at a major think tank. However, if you don’t say what’s expected, your career prospects aren’t very bright.

“If you somehow were to find yourself in a mainstream setting and even mildly challenged the ‘group think,’ you should expect to be denounced as a fill-in-the-blank ‘apologist’ or ‘stooge.’ A well-paid avatar of the conventional wisdom might even accuse you of being on the payroll of the despised leader. And, you wouldn’t likely get invited back.”

In sum, both journalists and government officials belong to what can be seen as a single, interlocking network in which war, largely for “humanitarian purposes” unrelated to any direct or even indirect American national interest, is a necessary “deliverable.” At all levels and in all functions, this network operates as an efficient distributor of vast amounts of money.

Media as an expression of the American Deep State

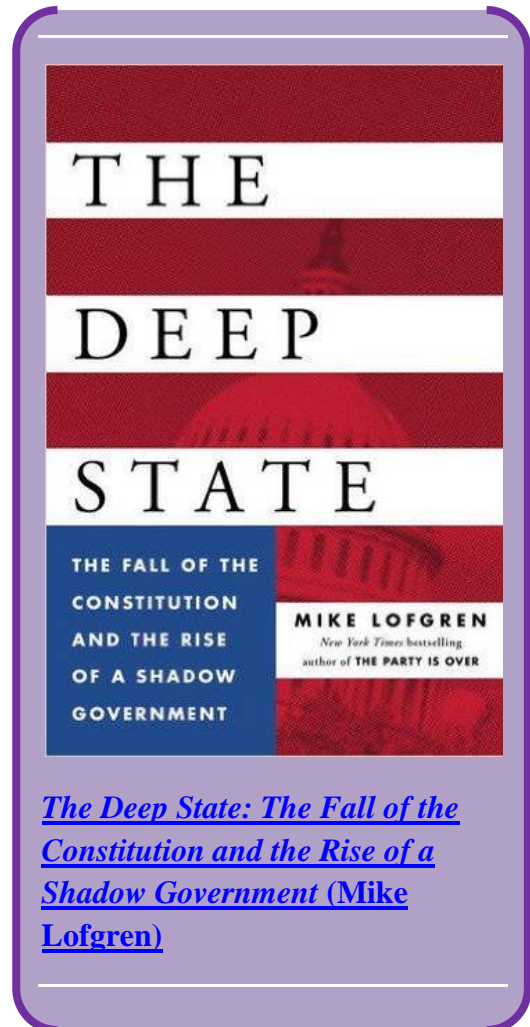
When we think of the relationship between the government and media, it would be a mistake to think of the former simply as the official apparatus of the state carrying out its constitutionally mandated duties. Rather, it is necessary to understand it as multifaceted, hybrid entity encompassing an astonishing range and depth in both the public and private sectors. To a large extent, the contours of what former Congressional staffer Mike Lofgren has called the Deep State are those of the “expert” community that dominates media thinking but extend beyond it to include elements of all three branches of the U.S.

government, private business (especially the financial industry, government contractors, information technology), think tanks, NGOs and QuaNGOs, higher education (especially the recipients of massive research grants from the Department of Defense), the political parties and their campaign operatives, and lobbyists and PR flacks for any of the foregoing.

As [Lofgren explains](#), the core of the Deep State resides in Washington, with secondary concentrations on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley:

“There is the visible government situated around the Mall in Washington, and then there is another, more shadowy, more indefinable government that is not explained in Civics 101 or observable to tourists at the White House or the Capitol. The former is traditional Washington partisan politics: the tip of the iceberg that a public watching C-SPAN sees daily and which is theoretically controllable via elections. The subsurface part of the iceberg I shall call the Deep State, which operates according to its own compass heading regardless of who is formally in power. [. . .]

“The Deep State does not consist of the entire government. It is a hybrid of national security and law enforcement agencies: the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Justice Department. I also include the Department of the Treasury because of its jurisdiction over financial flows, its enforcement of international sanctions and its organic



[*The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government \(Mike Lofgren\)*](#)

symbiosis with Wall Street. All these agencies are coordinated by the Executive Office of the President via the National Security Council. Certain key areas of the judiciary belong to the Deep State, such as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, whose actions are mysterious even to most members of Congress. Also included are a handful of vital federal trial courts, such as the Eastern District of Virginia and the Southern District of Manhattan, where sensitive proceedings in national security cases are conducted. The final government component (and possibly last in precedence among the formal branches of government established by the Constitution) is a kind of rump Congress consisting of the congressional leadership and some (but not all) of the members of the defense and intelligence committees. The rest of Congress, normally so fractious and partisan, is mostly only intermittently aware of the Deep State and when required usually submits to a few well-chosen words from the State's emissaries. [. . .]

“[T]he Deep State does not consist only of government agencies. What is euphemistically called “private enterprise” is an integral part of its operations. In a special series in *The*

The Deep State does not consist only of government agencies. What is euphemistically called “private enterprise” is an integral part of its operations.

Washington Post called ‘[Top Secret America](#),’ Dana Priest and William K. Arkin described the scope of the privatized Deep State and the degree to which it has metastasized after the September 11 attacks. There are now 854,000 contract personnel with top-secret clearances — a number greater than that of top-secret-cleared civilian employees of the government. While they work throughout the country and the world, their heavy concentration in and around the Washington suburbs is unmistakable: Since 9/11, 33 facilities for top-secret intelligence have been built or are under

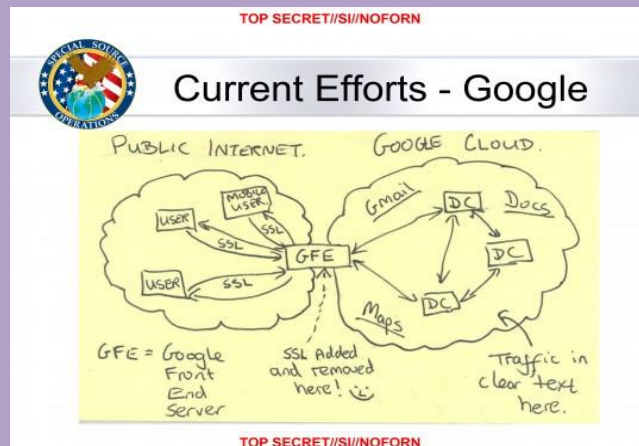
construction. Combined, they occupy the floor space of almost three Pentagons — about 17 million square feet. Seventy percent of the intelligence community’s budget goes to paying contracts. And the membrane between government and industry is highly permeable: The Director of National Intelligence, [James R. Clapper](#), is a former executive of Booz Allen Hamilton, one of the government’s largest intelligence contractors. His predecessor as director, [Admiral Mike McConnell](#), is the current vice chairman of the same company; Booz Allen is 99 percent dependent on government business. These contractors now set the political and social tone of Washington, just as they are increasingly setting the direction of the country, but they are doing it quietly, their doings unrecorded in the *Congressional Record* or the *Federal Register*, and are rarely subject to congressional hearings. [. . .]

“Washington is the most important node of the Deep State that has taken over America, but it is not the only one. Invisible threads of money and ambition connect the town to

other nodes. One is Wall Street, which supplies the cash that keeps the political machine quiescent and operating as a diversionary marionette theater. Should the politicians forget their lines and threaten the status quo, Wall Street floods the town with cash and lawyers to help the hired hands remember their own best interests. . . . It is not too much to say that Wall Street may be the ultimate owner of the Deep State and its strategies, if for no other reason than that it has the money to reward government operatives with a second career that is lucrative beyond the dreams of avarice — certainly beyond the dreams of a salaried government employee. [. . .]

“After Edward Snowden’s revelations about the extent and depth of surveillance by the National Security Agency, it has become publicly evident that Silicon Valley is a vital node of the Deep State as well. Unlike military and intelligence contractors, Silicon Valley overwhelmingly sells to the private market, but its business is so important to the government that a strange relationship has emerged. While the government could simply dragoon the high technology companies to do the NSA’s bidding, it would prefer cooperation with so important an engine of the nation’s economy, perhaps with an implied *quid pro quo*. Perhaps this explains the extraordinary indulgence the government

shows the Valley in intellectual property matters. If an American ‘jailbreaks’ his smartphone (i.e., modifies it so that it can use a service provider other than the one dictated by the manufacturer), he could receive [a fine of up to \\$500,000 and several years in prison](#); so much for a citizen’s vaunted property rights to what he purchases. The libertarian pose of the Silicon Valley moguls, so carefully cultivated in their public relations, has always been a sham. Silicon Valley has long been tracking for commercial



“After Edward Snowden’s revelations about the extent and depth of surveillance by the National Security Agency, it has become publicly evident that Silicon Valley is a vital node of the Deep State as well. (Above: Slide from an NSA presentation on “Google Cloud Exploitation”; the sketch shows where the “Public Internet” meets the internal “Google Cloud” where user data resides.)

purposes the activities of every person who uses an electronic device, so it is hardly surprising that the Deep State should emulate the Valley and do the same for its own purposes. Nor is it surprising that it should conscript the Valley's assistance.

“Still, despite the essential roles of lower Manhattan and Silicon Valley, the center of gravity of the Deep State is firmly situated in and around the Beltway. The Deep State's physical expansion and consolidation around the Beltway would seem to make a mockery of the frequent pronouncement that governance in Washington is dysfunctional and broken. That the secret and unaccountable Deep State floats freely above the gridlock between both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue is the paradox of American government in the 21st century: drone strikes, data mining, secret prisons and [Panopticon-like control](#) on the one hand; and on the other, the ordinary, visible parliamentary institutions of self-government declining to the status of a banana republic amid the gradual collapse of public infrastructure. [. . .]

“The Deep State is the big story of our time. It is the red thread that runs through the war on terrorism, the financialization and deindustrialization of the American economy, the rise of a plutocratic social structure and political dysfunction. Washington is the headquarters of the Deep State, and its time in the sun as a rival to Rome, Constantinople or London may be term-limited by its overweening sense of self-importance and its habit, as Winwood Reade said of Rome, to ‘live upon its principal till ruin stared it in the face.’ ‘Living upon its principal,’ in this case, means that the Deep State has been extracting value from the American people in vampire-like fashion.” [from “[Anatomy of the Deep State](#),” February 2014; now expanded into a book, [The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government](#)]

The Deep State is not synonymous with the “Military-Industrial Complex” (MIC) against which [President Dwight Eisenhower warned in 1960](#) upon his impending departure from the White House, though Ike's MIC is entirely included within the Deep State and historically provided its core. Ironically, compared to today's structure, the MIC of the 1950s and 1960s was relatively less likely to embark upon foreign military escapades. The existence of a world-class nuclear-armed foe in the form of the USSR moderated tendencies toward adventurism. The most serious “combat” the classic MIC preferred to engage in was inter-service battles for budgetary boodle. Reportedly, once General Curtis LeMay, head of the Air Force's Strategic Air Command, was briefed by a junior officer who repeatedly referred to the USSR as “the enemy.” LeMay supposedly interrupted to correct him: “Young man, the Soviet Union is our adversary. Our enemy is the Navy.”

Even in Eisenhower's day, the MIC was more than a simple duplex consisting of the Pentagon and military contractors but also included an essential third leg: the Congressional committees

that provide the money constituting the MIC's lifeblood. (Reportedly, an earlier draft of the speech used the term "[military-industrial-Congressional](#)" complex, a fuller description of what has come to be called the "[Iron Triangle](#)." Asked about the omission from the final text, [Eisenhower is said to have answered](#): "It was more than enough to take on the military and private industry. I couldn't take on the Congress as well.")

Not only did the Iron Triangle continue to expand during the Cold War, when production of military hardware established itself as the money-making nucleus of the MIC, it swelled to even greater proportions after the designated enemy, the USSR, went out of business in 1991. While for one brief shining moment there was naïve discussion of a "Peace Dividend" that would provide relief for American taxpayers from whose shoulders the burden of a "long twilight struggle" against communism (in John Kennedy's phrase) had been lifted, that notion faded



[Eisenhower is said to have answered](#): "It was more than enough to take on the military and private industry. I couldn't take on the Congress as well." (Shown with Nikita Khrushchev and their wives, 1959)

quickly. Instead, not only did the "hard" side of the MIC maintain itself – first in Iraq to fight "[naked aggression](#)" by Saddam Hussein in Kuwait, then in the Balkans in the 1990s as part of NATO's determination to go "[out of area or out of business](#)" – it then branched out into "soft" areas of control including the financial and IT aspects Lofgren describes. As with the older hardware-based deliverables, the new "soft power" feeds a [New Class](#) of privilege mainly centered in the Washington, DC, suburbs, [symbolized by extravagant and tasteless "McMansions"](#) that "resemble the architecture of the Loire Valley, Elizabethan England, or Renaissance Tuscany as imagined by Walt Disney, or perhaps Liberace." The media themselves are no less a part of this new

pseudo-aristocracy than are government agencies and "Beltway Bandits."

In describing the soft power structure of the Deep State, it is important to note also the following, all of which interface closely with the media.

Lobbyists and PR shops

One could argue that the old, Eisenhower-era MIC at least claimed defense of the American homeland as its justification – after all, the heavily armed Soviet bloc really did exist – and that arms manufacturers were essentially the World War II-era "arsenal of democracy" that defeated Nazism, fascism, and Japanese militarism updated to face communism. As part of the

justification for a substantial chunk of the federal budget, Pentagon contractors developed and still maintain an army of lobbyists and media [spinmeisters](#) to secure their positions on Capitol Hill and in the bureaucracy.

But increasingly the same influence community is dominated by interests whose claim to “defend America” is slim to none, and whose client interests often are those of transnational corporations or foreign states. As Justin Raimondo of *Antiwar.com* recently observed, it’s possible to see the lobbying and PR industries as a veritable “Fifth Estate” within the governing structure, an estate whose very purpose is to skew the loyalty of a huge portion of the Washington establishment toward corporate or foreign interests that are not necessarily compatible with those of the majority of the American people (here, with particular reference to Saudi Arabia, a conspicuous consumer of PR and lobbying services):

“The Constitution provides for three branches of government: the executive, Congress, and the judiciary – but there have been a few additions lately. With the rise of mass communications, common parlance has designated the media as the ‘Fourth Estate,’ because – in theory – it is supposed to act as a ‘watchdog’ on the activities of the other three. (Although in practice, as we have seen, it often doesn’t work out that way.) And as America entered the age of empire, stepping out on the world stage and exerting its power, a development the Founders foresaw – and [greatly feared](#) – became a reality: the rise of foreign lobbyists, i.e. the Fifth Estate, as a power in our domestic politics.

“This was inevitable as we took the road to empire. Our foreign clients, protectorates, and sock puppets have a material interest in maintaining the status quo: their life blood depends on the smooth workings of the political machinery that keeps the gravy train flowing from Washington to every point on the globe. ‘Foreign aid,’ arms deals, overseas bases that boost their economies, the deployment of ‘soft power,’ and the architecture of entangling alliances that have enmeshed us all over the world – all of this is defended and relentlessly extended by foreign lobbyists who work day and night to protect and expand their very profitable turf.

“The latest newsworthy example is the Saudi lobby, which is working overtime these days to

“Our foreign clients, protectorates, and sock puppets have a material interest in maintaining the status quo: their life blood depends on the smooth workings of the political machinery that keeps the gravy train flowing from Washington to every point on the globe. All of this is defended and relentlessly extended by foreign lobbyists who work day and night to protect and expand their very profitable turf.”

burnish the Kingdom's badly tarnished image. The [recent agitation](#) for the release of the censored 28 pages of the joint congressional report on the 9/11 terrorist attacks – and news reports of their horrific [war crimes](#) in Yemen – has them on the defensive. [. .]

“Drinkers at the American trough ‘are worried about what it means for them: for their arms deals, for their trade deals, for international funding and alliances that they depend on.’ They are, in short, worried about the possible loss of all that free stuff they’re getting . . . This is the price we pay for empire: interventionism is a two-way street. We send the

Marines to foreign lands – and they send their lobbyists to Washington. Our overseas client-states have every interest in maintaining the level of financial and military support that flows out to them, and it’s no surprise that they’re fighting to retain it. The question is: are the American people finally beginning to realize that their overseas empire is a burden rather than a boon?” [from “[The Fifth Estate: Foreign Lobbyists](#),” April 2016]



The Clinton Foundation's "biggest donors include some truly wonderful people and countries. There are, to name a few, the torture-happy, terror-exporting government of Saudi Arabia; a foundation controlled by Victor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch accused of bribery and corruption; and Frank Giustra, a penny-stock artist who became filthy rich with the generous assistance of Bill Clinton.

In the same category can be placed non-profit foundations that ostensibly serve altruistic functions but which often serve as conduits for peddling influence and, not incidentally, sometimes for enriching prominent political figures. Such figures can even include a possible future President of the United States, with a prime example of corruption provided by the Clinton Foundation, which is as well documented (here by investigative journalist Ken Silverstein) as it is ignored by major media and even by the token “opposition” on the Republican side of the aisle:

“One money-laundering expert and former intelligence officer based in the Middle East who had

access to the foundation's confidential banking information told me that members of royal families in Middle Eastern countries, including Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, have donated money to the CGEP [Clinton Giustra Enterprise Partnership, a Canadian organization run by one of Bill Clinton's close friends, Frank Giustra] that has then been sluiced through to the Clinton Foundation. He added that the CGEP has also received money from corrupt officials in South Africa during the regime of Jacob Zuma and from senior officials in Equatorial Guinea, one of the most brutal and crooked

dictatorships in the world. ‘Equatorial Guinea doesn’t give to the Clinton Foundation in New York because it’s too embarrassing,’ he said. ‘They give the money anonymously in Canada and that buys them political protection in the United States. The Clinton Foundation is a professionally structured money-laundering operation.’ [. . .]

“Its biggest donors include some truly wonderful people and countries. There are, to name a few, the torture-happy, terror-exporting government of Saudi Arabia; a foundation controlled by Victor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch accused of bribery and corruption; and Frank Giustra, a penny-stock artist who became filthy rich with the generous assistance of Bill Clinton. In 2008, a former Kazakh official told reporters that Giustra, who established the CGEP with Clinton, donated millions to the foundation after Clinton [helped him purchase uranium deposits in Kazakhstan](#). (At the time, Giustra denied this claim, pointing out that he had been engaged in mining deals in Kazakhstan since the 1990s.)” [from “[Shaky Foundations](#),” November 2015]

The various governmental, quasi-governmental, and nongovernmental components of “democracy promotion” network are sometimes called the “Demintern” in analogy to the Comintern, an organization comparable in global ambition if differing in ideology and methods.



**National Endowment
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OF DEMOCRACIES**



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**

“Democracy promotion”

In the preceding section, we touched upon the role of think tanks, NGOs, and QuaNGOs as an integral part of the information and analysis that fills media with views supportive of wars of choice. The same entities can be considered less as servants of the Deep State than themselves part of it. As the Cold War was winding down in the 1980s, the U.S. ramped up what was billed as “democracy promotion” activities through a variety of entities, most notably through the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. But as with the hard military side of the Deep State’s activities, notably NATO, far from fading away along with the Soviet threat it ostensibly was tasked with opposing, the new apparatus of “democracy promotion” vastly expanded its mandate. NED, along with its Democratic and Republican sub-organizations, can be considered the flagship of a community of ostensibly private but

government-funded or subsidized organizations that provides the soft compliment to American hard military power.

The various governmental, quasi-governmental, and nongovernmental components of this network – sometimes called the “[Demintern](#)” in analogy to the [Comintern](#), an organization comparable in global ambition if differing in ideology and methods – are also [coordinated internationally at the official level](#) through the less-well-known “[Community of Democracies](#).” It

“Various quasi-NGOs funded by American taxpayers and funneled through organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy, Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute, not to mention George Soros’s [Open Society Foundations](#) (partly funded by U.S. and other Western governments), have been actively engaged in dozens of ‘regime-change’ operations for a decade and a half. Their work is conducted in disregard of international law and in violation of the sovereignty and integrity of the people whose governments are thus targeted.”

is often [difficult to know](#) where the “official” entities (CIA, NATO, the State Department, Pentagon, USAID) separate from ostensibly nongovernmental but tax dollar-supported groups (NED, Freedom House, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) and privately funded organizations that cooperate towards common goals (especially the Open Society organizations funded by billionaire George Soros). As described by commentator and author Srdja Trifkovic, among the specialties of this network are “[color revolutions](#)” targeting leaders and governments disfavored by Washington for regime change, a soft power analogue to wars of choice:

“Even a seasoned cynic sometimes gasps in disbelief. ‘[President Putin misinterprets](#) much of what the U.S. is doing or trying to do,’ U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told a press conference in Geneva on March 2. ‘We are not involved in “numerous color revolutions” as he asserts. In the case of Ukraine, such assumptions are also wrong. The United States support international law with respect to the sovereignty and integrity of other people.’

“This is akin to Count Dracula asserting his strict adherence to a vegan diet and his principled respect

for the integrity of blood banks worldwide. Various quasi-NGOs funded by American taxpayers and funneled through organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy, Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute, not to mention George Soros’s [Open Society Foundations](#) (partly funded by U.S. and other Western governments), have been actively engaged in dozens of ‘regime-change’ operations for a decade and a half. Their work is conducted in disregard of international law and in

violation of the sovereignty and integrity of the people whose governments are thus targeted.

“The overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade (October 2000) provided the blueprint, in strict accordance with [Gene Sharp’s manual](#). Widespread popular discontent was manipulated by the U.S./Soros funded and trained [Otpor!](#) network to bring to power a government subservient to Western political and economic interests. . . . [Georgia’s 2003 ‘Rose Revolution’](#) was carried out by the *Kmara* (“Enough”) network, a carbon copy of Serbia’s “Otpor,” [including the clenched fist logo](#). Its activists were trained and advised by the U.S.-affiliated [Liberty Institute](#) and funded by the [Open Society Institute](#). . . . The march of history continued with the 2004 ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine – that grand rehearsal for the Maidan coup a decade later – and the 2005 “Cedar Revolution” in Lebanon, which was given its name by then-U.S. [Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula J. Dobriansky](#). Also in 2005 the ‘Tulip Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan had as its chief foreign advisor [Givi Targamadze](#), an official of Georgia’s aforementioned Liberty Institute, who at the time chaired Saakashvili’s parliamentary committee on defense and security.” [from “[Lies, Kerry’s Lies, and Color Revolution Statistics](#),” March 2015]

U.S. financial power and “lawfare”

Washington holds tremendous leverage over the financial stability of almost every other government because of the status of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency and the fact that virtually all international financial transactions – most of which are conducted in dollars, especially in the energy sector (in which the “petrodollar” is the standard unit) – at some point pass through an American intermediary institution, thus triggering unconvincing U.S. claims of “jurisdiction.” Even the [SWIFT](#) system, formally based in Europe, is under [heavy U.S. influence if not control](#). This allows American officials to threaten other countries, even our closest allies, with crippling financial sanctions of dubious legality if they don’t accede to Washington’s demands.



A prime example of “lawfare” is [FATCA](#), which requires foreign financial institutions to hand over to the IRS a treasure trove of private information (which [under U.S. law can, and undoubtedly will, be passed to intelligence agencies such as the CIA and NSA](#)) and subject other countries’ financial sectors to regulatory administration by the U.S. Treasury Department.

A prime example of this is the so-called [Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act \(FATCA\)](#), which requires foreign financial institutions to hand over to the IRS a treasure trove of private information (which [under U.S. law can, and undoubtedly will, be passed to intelligence agencies such as the CIA and NSA](#)) and subject other countries' financial sectors to regulatory administration by the U.S. Treasury Department. (Paradoxically, the same Department doesn't control America's own central bank, the [Federal Reserve, which is essentially a private entity](#).) FATCA was built upon earlier "successes" such as the [U.S. Justice Department's imposing penalties on an extraterritorial basis against Swiss banks for violating American tax laws](#) and a \$9 billion-dollar shakedown of [France's BNP Paribas for violating U.S. sanctions laws](#) with respect to Sudan, Cuba, and Iran. Media coverage of the practice of using a combination of financial power and U.S. law against entities not under American jurisdiction – sometimes referred to as "lawfare" – is almost entirely generated from U.S. government sources, with journalists uniformly cheering yet another victory over the forces of corruption, tax evasion, money-laundering (in which [Dodd-Frank provides another lever](#)), and terrorism.

Rarely are concerns raised about what gives the United States such sweeping and exceptional authority in violation of other countries' sovereignty. In addition to finance-related issues (in which the latest episode is the "Panama Papers," which some believe to have originated in U.S. agencies, with Russia's President Putin the primary intended target), the lawfare concept has also branched into sports: [FIFA corruption charges](#) (which is mainly driven by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), despite only incidental U.S. connections) and the allegations of [doping by Russian athletes](#) (also [now involving DOJ](#)), including [Maria Sharapova](#).

Simply put, the United States government considers the entire globe under the jurisdiction of American law, in effect whenever, wherever, and on whatever issues officials in Washington may choose. However, the line between legal and political objectives often is far from clear.

Political Parties and superficial partisan clashes

One of the hypocritical quirks of America's "democracy promotion" activities is criticism of other countries for electoral practices that are even more prevalent in the United States. For example, in 2010 NED's Republican and Democratic QuANGOs, respectively the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), [faulted Ukraine's \(then\) new electoral law as a "retreat" from democracy](#), asserting that it favored incumbents over challengers, allowed plurality winners without a runoff, and gave an edge to established national parties over startups.

Of course all three of the IRI-DNI points of criticism of Ukraine virtually define the American party system. Congressional districts are drawn to eliminate serious challenge to incumbents of

either party (nobody has yet figured out how to gerrymander a Senate race, though), and runoffs, with the exception of Louisiana's "jungle primary," are unknown. But the critical abuse – and the factor that makes the two established parties an integral part of the ruling structure no less than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was in its day – is the Republican-Democrat "duopoly" that has effectively divided the U.S. political "marketplace" ever since

1860 when the Republican Party first won the presidency under Abraham Lincoln.



Huey Long, a populist Democratic senator and governor of Louisiana, once compared American politics to a restaurant: "They've got a set of Republican waiters on one side and a set of Democratic waiters on the other side, but no matter which set of waiters brings you the dish, the legislative grub is all prepared in the same Wall Street kitchen."

For over a century various "third parties" – Libertarian, Green, Socialist, Constitution, American Independent, Reform, etc. – have sought to replicate the Republicans' displacement of the Whigs. But our legal and electoral systems place severe roadblocks in the path of potential third parties; in most American states, the "two major parties" automatically qualify for a place on the ballot, while other parties and independents often must undergo an expensive and cumbersome petition process. If two commercial firms were to carve up the marketplace between them the way the Republicans and Democrats (also known as [the Stupid Party and the Evil Party](#)) do access to the ballot, they would be prosecuted for violation of antitrust laws and their executives put in jail.

Especially in hard economic times, the perception of hand-in-glove collusion of the two established American parties feeds the cynical public belief that there is no real difference between them. Huey Long, a populist Democratic senator and governor of Louisiana, once compared American politics to a restaurant: "They've got a set of Republican waiters on one side and a set of Democratic waiters on the other side, but no matter which set of waiters brings you the dish, the legislative grub is all prepared in the same Wall Street kitchen." (Long was gunned down in 1935 while running for president.)

This doesn't mean, however, that public feelings are not highly polarized on a partisan basis. Traditionally, for most of the 20th century, the Democrats could count on about 40-45% of the electorate, the Republicans about 35-40%, with a slim group in the middle up for grabs. (In spite

of the Democrats' greater percentage, the GOP benefits from its more reliable turnout.) Because of increasing skepticism about the established parties, those numbers are now about one-third solid Republican, about one-third solid Democratic, and about one-third "independents" who constitute the majority of the flip-flop in sequential "referendum" elections, where the only alternative to the Republicans is the Democrats, and vice versa.

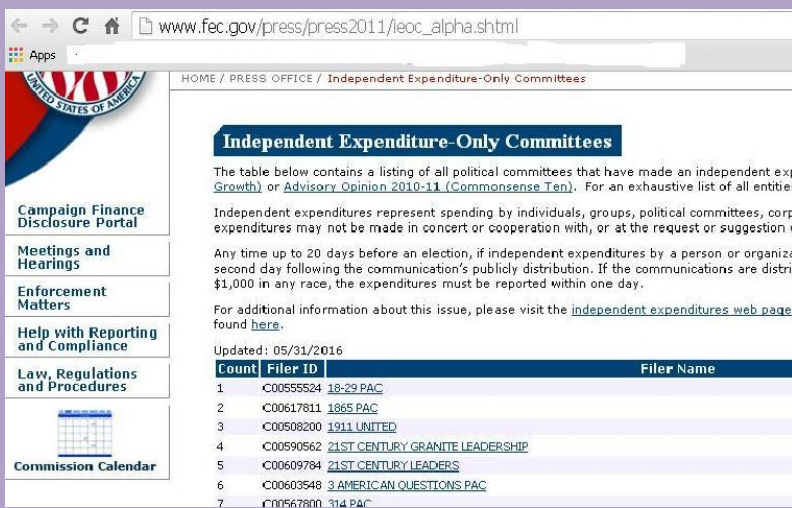
At the same time, we have an increasingly polarized political media culture, reflecting not only the multiplicity of cable and satellite channels but the internet and social media. Back in the infancy of the TV age, from about the 1950s until the 1990s, there was a common national media culture that reflected the established, generally liberal, Democratic tilt of the American *intelligentsiya* that was almost uniform among the (then only) three networks and a handful of major newspapers and magazines. That has now changed superficially into a sharp partisan divide, where about one-third of Americans get their talking points from, say, Michael Moore, and Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews on *MSNBC*, with their related internet echoes, while another third gets theirs from Rush Limbaugh, and Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly on *Fox News*, and their internet echo chamber. Increasingly, there is nothing like a national dialogue on anything, but rather two entirely separate, diametrically opposed ideological cultures, each demonizing "them." This is why when after Barack Obama's election the Tea Party appeared, the GOP fell over itself trying to co-opt them, while the Democrats denounced them as a mob of racists and subversives. When later "Occupy Wall Street" broke out on the Left, the Democrats tried to figure out how to channel it while top Republicans denounced it as gang of commie anarchists and losers.

In U.S. international policy there are two dominant camps – both of which agree on the basics regarding the American role in the world and the advisability of wars of choice and replacing uncooperative governments via "color revolutions." They also maintain a pro forma division that reflects the partisan duopoly. These fall generally into the camps of Democrat "liberal interventionists" and on the Republican side, "neoconservatives."

The same partisan division of labor is found with regard to international policy, where there are also two dominant camps – both of them pro-war. As already noted, American foreign policy is dominated by a narrow clique of supposed "experts." While almost of them agree on the basics regarding the American role in the world and the advisability of wars of choice and replacing uncooperative governments via "color revolutions," they also maintain a pro forma division that reflects the partisan duopoly. These fall generally into the camps of the "liberal interventionists" (Democrats like Hillary Clinton, U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power, and former Secretary of

State Madeleine Albright) or, on the Republican side, “neoconservatives” (like the late U.N. Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and architects of the Iraq war such as Paul Wolfowitz). Between these camps there is virtually no difference when it comes to getting rid of the next “Hitler of the Month” but perhaps mainly for appearance’s sake they engage in noisy but meaningless shadow-boxing with their partisan opposite numbers

over details. Thus, under Obama Democrat-leaning media accuse the Republicans of “undermining our President,” just as GOP-friendly media did when George W. Bush held the office. Republicans howl that Obama has weakened America through “leading from behind,” not from the front – whatever that means. But underlying the acrimony is a deep consensus on ends and means: For example, in the summer of 2013 the pro-Republican and pro-Democrat media vied with one another in screaming for U.S. bombing of Syria over what even then seemed false charges of chemical weapons use,



The multitude of campaign consultants, pollsters, spin doctors, media wizards, lawyers, and other functionaries in the party mechanisms (and non-party fellow-travelers, like operators of “independent expenditure committees” whose titles run the alphabet with the exception of “Q” and “Z”) are themselves members in good standing of the political establishment, with the cash flow to prove it.

while accusing their political opponents of being simultaneously weak and dangerous. A similar bipartisan accord has demanded so-called “lethal aid” to Ukraine.

Finally, it should be noted that the multitude of campaign consultants, pollsters, spin doctors, media wizards, lawyers, and other functionaries in the party mechanisms (and non-party fellow-travelers, like operators of “independent expenditure committees” whose titles run the alphabet with the exception of “Q” and “Z”) are themselves members in good standing of the political establishment, with the cash flow to prove it. Unsurprisingly, a good percentage of the McMansions in the Washington suburbs belong to people in this category, a numerous class on the payroll of an astonishingly small set of ultra-wealthy funders. As *One America News*

producer [April LaFever sums up the parties as money machines](#): “Turns out a small core group of uber rich people control all the money in politics, about 50 people to be exact. Donors on both sides of the aisle are expected to shell out even more money this [i.e., 2016] cycle and surpass the \$828 million groups paid for the 2012 election.”

In sum, the U.S. political system is dominated by a formal bifurcation that more resembles a one-party state with two factions than an open competition among a multiplicity of truly diverging principles. The well-remunerated participants, both inside and outside of the formal organs of government – and including media – are effectively part of the governing structure and almost uniformly hew to a consensus line.

A note on the role of ideology

While a full examination of the ideological issues related to the American media’s pro-war tilt is beyond the scope of this analysis, the reader should not have the impression that the U.S. Deep State is solely a moneymaking enterprise, though money generates the power that makes all the wheels turn. But just as members of the old Soviet *nomenklatura* depended on Marxism-Leninism both as a working methodology and as a justification for their prerogatives and privileges, denizens of the entrenched duopoly of Democrat liberal interventionists and Republican neoconservatives rely upon an ideological imperative for global empire and endless wars. Perhaps the fullest

expression of this was from a 1996 article by [neoconservative ideologists](#) William Kristol and Robert Kagan, misleadingly titled “[Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy](#),” in which they called for the U.S. to establish and maintain indefinitely “benevolent global hegemony” – American world domination. As scrutinized [by this analyst](#) the following year, Kristol and Kagan laid down virtually all of the elements that have guided U.S. foreign policy and its media aspect during the ensuing years. It is no accident that these same GOP neoconservatives were enthusiastic supporters of [Bill Clinton’s Balkan interventions of 1990s](#), under the guidance of people like then-Secretary of State [Madeleine Albright](#), who once opined regarding the sanctions-related deaths of a half million Iraqi children that “the price is worth it.” In the U.S. Deep State, there is little dissent on either side of the partisan aisle with Albright’s sincere conviction that a militant United States has a special wisdom: “If we have to use force, it is

Just as members of the old Soviet *nomenklatura* depended on Marxism-Leninism both as a working methodology and as a justification for their prerogatives and privileges, denizens of the entrenched duopoly of Democrat liberal interventionists and Republican neoconservatives rely upon an ideological imperative for global empire and endless wars.

because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future . . .”

And if some country doesn’t agree with the “indispensable” opinion of officials in Washington, they should prepare at least to get sanctioned, if not bombed, occupied, targeted by terrorists, or set up for a “people power” regime change, with the MSM cheering it on.

Is a Remedy Possible?

When this analyst served at the U.S. Department of State in the (then) Office of Soviet Union Affairs, starting in early 1981, it was possible to count on one hand the number of other people at the entire Department who admitted to even the possibility that the status of Marxism-Leninism as the ruling ideology in Russia was not permanent. The overwhelming, self-evident assumption was that the Soviet system as it then existed and had perpetuated itself for three generations was here to stay. The destabilization of that system – and particularly the adverse impact on the USSR’s agreed-on “narrative” of Gorbachev’s *glasnost*’ – was unforeseen by American policymakers. What had been a powerful mutual reinforcement of the Soviet political structure and its propaganda operations instead turned into a downward spiral as the regime and the carefully articulated narrative that had justified its existence for so many years broke down.

Like the still-formidable and dominant MSM, the U.S. Deep State and its machinery for advocating wars of choice, regime change operations, color revolutions, and sanctions may seem a dauntingly solid enterprise. That appearance has been fed by a combination of American geopolitical hegemony internationally and submissive media hegemony domestically. The very perception of overwhelming power and the pointlessness of opposition has itself been a factor in perpetuating this structure. Channeling [The Borg](#), the message is (here with reference to [Montenegro, which recently acceded to NATO membership](#)):

[WE ARE THE UNITED STATES. RESISTANCE IS FUTILE. YOU WILL BE ASSIMILATED.](#)

Nonetheless, there are indications that all is not well for the hegemonic enterprise. At the interlocking political/geopolitical, economic/financial, and information levels, there are warning signs. As was the case with the late USSR, it is likely that the decline and ultimate dissolution of the structure we have been describing will involve all three sectors.

Political/geopolitical and economic/financial

For the first time in decades, a significant challenge is being mounted domestically against the policy consensus of the Republican-Democrat duopoly. Because of the lock the two established parties have on the U.S. electoral system, that can’t happen via a third party in the manner the

European Union establishment ([itself essentially a satellite of the U.S.](#)) is being challenged from both the Right and the Left by groups like UKIP (Britain), the National Front (France), PEGIDA, Alternative für Deutschland (Germany), Movimento Cinque Stelle (Italy), Partij voor de Vrijheid (Netherlands), SYRIZA (Greece), Podemos (Spain), and others. While myriad “third parties” exist in the United States, they have no chance of taking power, even at the local level, and serve primarily as vehicles for “protest” votes, the equivalent of voting “none of the above” or “a pox on both your houses!” The combination of corporate interests with fixing of the political marketplace between the GOP and the Democrats leaves little opportunity for positive development.

Thus, the only path for even marginal change is an insurgency within one of the two established parties. As it happens, in 2016 there was rebellion in both parties. This is not coincidental. The failures of the two-party consensus are evident in voter fury directed against Republicans and

In 2016 voter fury is directed at the failures of the two-party consensus:

- ✦ **Shrinking Middle Class**
- ✦ **Flat or falling income levels (loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs)**
- ✦ **Crippling debt levels (“nearly half of Americans would have trouble finding \$400 to pay for an emergency”)**
- ✦ **Rising mortality rate (notably among the white working class, dubbed “the White Death” from suicide, substance abuse (with about five percent of the world's population, the U.S. consumes 80 percent of the world's opioid prescriptions), and a diet of processed foods and GMOs, in a pattern reminiscent of collapsing life expectancy of Russian males as the USSR imploded)**
- ✦ **Record low labor participation rate.**

Democrats alike in light of a [shrinking Middle Class](#), flat or falling income levels (reflecting in large part [loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs](#)), crippling debt levels (“[nearly half of Americans would have trouble finding \\$400 to pay for an emergency](#)”), a rising mortality rate (notably among the white working class, dubbed “[the White Death](#)” from [suicide](#), substance abuse (with about five percent of the world's population, the U.S. consumes [80 percent of the world's opioid prescriptions](#)), and a [diet of processed foods and GMOs](#), in a [pattern reminiscent of collapsing life expectancy of Russian males as the USSR imploded](#)), and a [record low labor participation rate](#). There is a widespread sense of foreboding that the future will be even worse, with prospects of a new financial crisis that would dwarf the mortgage-based securities collapse of 2008. Despite an ostensible “recovery” – mostly in the form of record profits on Wall Street generated by the Fed’s throwing free money at the investor class, [while the](#)

[real economy remains flat-line](#) – public unease is palpable, along with most Americans’ expectation of a lower standard of living for their children and grandchildren. Somebody is making a lot of money out of “benevolent global hegemony,” but it sure isn’t the ordinary folk in what the elite of both parties concentrated on the coasts disdain as “[Flyover Country](#).”

While very different in their proposed remedies, the candidacies of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Party and of [Donald Trump in the GOP](#) have tapped into this rising tide of resentment. Sanders was beaten back by Hillary Clinton, the [corrupt *Picture of Dorian Gray* face](#) of the Democratic side of an establishment that even [deemed her above the law with respect to criminal compromise of classified data](#). But Trump [definitively seized the high ground](#) in the Republican race. In his challenge to what Trump-supporter Senator [Jeff Sessions \(R-Alabama\)](#) [calls the “oligarchy”](#) (comparable to Lofgren’s Deep State), it is significant that Trump has defied Republican (i.e., neoconservative) orthodoxy on the Iraq war and the Ukraine crisis, as well as on Libya and Syria, and questioned the [cost](#) of ties with many supposed “[allies](#),” for which reason [some panicked neoconservatives have openly defected to Clinton](#). Trump’s critics desperately wish to hide the fact that [his supposedly isolationist “America First” views are closer to those of our Founding Fathers than are the interventionists](#). Unsurprisingly, the relationship between the pro-war media and Trump is one of open mutual loathing – but he still gets saturation news coverage because of his impact on ratings.

The domestic political challenge occurs at a time when U.S. hegemony is not going well internationally. As noted above, for the first time the media-interventionist bandwagon failed in its attempt to unleash American air attacks on Syria in 2013. That failure was followed in September 2015 by launch of the successful Russian intervention in that country and the general recognition that the al-Assad government will not be overthrown. The Ukraine crisis has settled into a sullen standoff, with Ukraine sliding down toward failed state status and thus completely lacking in usefulness as a NATO/EU salient against Russia. Return of Crimea to Ukraine is off the table, and sanctions by Europe – which [even Obama admits are maintained under U.S. pressure](#) – are more of a problem for the governments imposing them than for Moscow. The European Union’s woes have been compounded by Dutch voters’ rejection of an Association Agreement with Ukraine, the failure of the European Central Bank’s negative interest rate policies, the migrant crisis, and most of all the historic Brexit vote, throwing the very existence of the EU into doubt.



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In the South China Sea and Korean Peninsula, Washington's [imperial overreach](#) risks war with Beijing over what a growing number of observers see as issues of limited importance to the United States. As governments (notably Russia and China) [stockpile gold](#), there is increasingly, though perhaps premature, talk of a [BRICS-based alternative](#) to the U.S. and dollar-dominated global financial system and [breaking away from the dollar in energy pricing](#).

To sum up, on the substantive side, the media narrative that the establishment – the oligarchy, the Deep State, the Republican-Democratic duopoly – depends on is looking almost as threadbare as the “radiant future of communism” did in 1985, the year Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. As characterized by [Ralph Nader](#): “Our political system is decaying. It’s on the way to gangrene.” The rot no longer can be hidden.

“Trust in the news media is being eroded by perceptions of inaccuracy and bias, fueled in part by Americans’ skepticism about what they read on social media. Just 6 percent of people say they have a lot of confidence in the media, putting the news industry about equal to Congress and well below the public’s view of other institutions.”

Skepticism of the official media narrative and alternatives

At some point the false picture of pseudo-reality (as [Alain Besançon called it in the late Soviet propaganda context](#)) diverges so far from real reality that the official media narrative becomes useless and even counterproductive. While a majority of Americans probably are still glued to the partisan outlets of “their” side of the political divide, there is a growing sense across the spectrum that not only the MSM but even partisan media like *Fox News* and *MSNBC* are untrustworthy. The decline of the credibility of established media is of major proportions (*Associated Press*, via alternative site [ActivistPost.com](#)):

“Trust in the news media is being eroded by perceptions of inaccuracy and bias, fueled in part by Americans’ skepticism about what they read on social media.

“Just 6 percent of people say they have a lot of confidence in the media, putting the news industry about equal to Congress and well below the public’s view of other institutions. In this presidential campaign year, Democrats were more likely to trust the news media than Republicans or independents. [. . .]

“Nearly 90 percent of Americans say it’s extremely or very important that the media get their facts correct, according to the study. About 4 in 10 say they can remember a specific incident that eroded their confidence in the media, most often one that dealt with accuracy or a perception that it was one-sided.

“The news media have been hit by a series of blunders on high-profile stories ranging from the Supreme Court’s 2012 ruling on President Barack Obama’s health care law to the Boston Marathon bombing that have helped feed negative perceptions of the media.

“In 2014, Rolling Stone had to retract a vivid report about an alleged gang rape at a fraternity party at the University of Virginia. The Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, asked by Rolling Stone to investigate after questions were raised about the veracity of the story, called it an avoidable journalistic failure and ‘another shock to journalism’s credibility amid head-swiveling change in the media industry.’” [from “New Poll Shows Only 6% Of People Trust The Mainstream Media,” April 2016]

American conservative [hatred of the MSM](#) has a long history, in large part due to the conviction that the prestige media tilted toward the liberal side. But the failure of the major parties also negatively impacts the credibility of their media mouthpieces, helping the proliferation of alternatives like [Antiwar.com](#), [OpEdNews](#), [RonPaulInstitute.org](#), [zerohedge.com](#), [TheSaker](#), [LewRockwell.com](#), [Infowars.com](#), [Counterpunch.com](#), [Unz](#), [Vdare](#), [Takimag](#), [Consortiumnews](#), and many others, including upstart conservative network [One America News](#). Some other publications are open to alternative views and serve as conduits to more mainstream opinion, such as [Chronicles magazine](#) and [The American Conservative](#) on the Right, [The Nation](#) on the Left, the libertarian [Reason](#), and the foreign policy realist publication [The National Interest](#).

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As would be expected, the emergence of alternative media is messy and chaotic, with controversies over [what does and what does not qualify as “alternative,”](#) and even that alternatives are themselves getting [sucked into the MSM ambit](#). At the same time, “mainstream” media increasingly must take note of “alternative” information in an attempt to preserve some of its diminishing credibility. The most obvious success in this regard is [DrudgeReport.com](#), especially in its Trump-friendly coverage of the presidential race, with [Breitbart](#) also worth mentioning. As summarized by Mike Adams of [NaturalNews](#) (as picked up by [Infowars.com](#), a major alternative source):

“The bottom line is that the mainstream media thinks you are incredibly stupid and will buy anything they say, no matter how illogical or irrational it might be. What the alternative media has now proven is that the mainstream media is largely irrelevant. It matters nothing what they print or broadcast. The people who are informed know it’s all

lies, and the mind-numbed propaganda victims who still watch shows like CNN and MSNBC are irrelevant to the march of history anyway.

“Real history is being shaped, investigated and reported by the alternative media. We are the ones who have no big corporate sponsors and no million-dollar budgets, but we have the hearts and minds and passion for truth and justice that drives our work to levels of authenticity that the mainstream media can never hope to attain... regardless of production budgets. [. . .]

“For once-grand institutions of news reporting like the New York Times and the Washington Post, the era of honest journalism conducted in the public interest is a long-faded shadow. Today, mainstream media exists solely to catapult corporate propaganda and fill the minds of the American people with useless drivel as a distraction from the real history being shaped around them.

“In fact, internet-savvy viewers and readers of today automatically distrust any news reporter who is obviously reading a teleprompter. If there’s a teleprompter involved, it’s obviously scripted news. And if it’s scripted news, it’s probably pure bunk.

“Real journalism isn’t scripted. Today’s viewers would rather see an honest person with a rag-tag wardrobe reporting the news on the side of the road than from a person with a million-dollar smile and a thousand-dollar suit reporting from a flash-and-dazzle studio by reading a teleprompter. Everybody knows the teleprompter news is fake. Everybody knows the ‘news barbie’ who was hired for her good looks has no real clue what she’s even reading or saying. Everybody knows the mainstream media is far more interested in BLOCKING important stories than reporting them. [from “[ALTERNATIVE MEDIA UPSTAGES LAMESTREAM MEDIA IN WORLD-CLASS COVERAGE OF HISTORIC BUNDY RANCH SHOWDOWN](#),” April 2014]

It should also be noted that domestic alternative media sometimes interact with foreign media (such as *RT*, *Al-Jazeera*, *CCTV*, *PressTV*) to break through the information firewall but arguably then being influenced by the agenda of the sponsoring foreign governments. In any case, a growing segment of the American public is discovering a skill once well-honed by the citizens of the former communist countries: reading between the lines of the official media (which is assumed to be full of lies) and making informed comparisons to *samizdat* alternative media, foreign sources, and the rumor-mill to guess what the truth might be.

The U.S. government’s denunciation of *RT* in particular as a “[propaganda bullhorn](#),” in [Secretary of State John Kerry’s description](#), is well known. There is now evidence of enough official U.S. concern about the influence of Russian (and Chinese) media that measures may be soon taken to

try to blunt their impact, particularly in Europe. In a step that was not even taken during the Cold War, some in Congress are seeking to create a dedicated service at the State Department, a “[Center for Information Analysis and Response](#)” – characterized by some as a budding “[Ministry of Truth](#)” – to “expose and counter foreign information operations directed against United States national security interests and proactively advance fact-based narratives that support United States allies and interests.” The bill authorizing the Center, called the “[Countering Information Warfare Act of 2016](#),” would apply “a whole-of-government approach leveraging all elements of national power,” including participation of the [Director of National Intelligence](#), to “provide grants or contracts of financial support to civil society groups, journalists, nongovernmental organizations, federally funded research and development centers, private companies, or

The possibility exists for a transition internationally to a more multi-polar order, with foci of authority not ultimately answerable to the U.S., which itself would have major repercussions within the United States, including further erosion of media’s efficacy as a bellicose transmission belt. Conversely, as is often the case when an entrenched oligarchy is facing a loss of power and privilege, it doesn’t give up without a fight. At any time, with little notice, the duopoly could resort to adventurism, a roll of the dice to preserve the existing order.

academic institutions.” This effort, if approved, would coordinate with organizations such as the [NATO Center of Excellence on Strategic Communications](#), the [European Endowment for Democracy](#), and the [European External Action Service Task Force on Strategic Communications](#). The likely success of this bureaucratic boondoggle is another matter.

Conclusion

Developments in the coming few years could rival the consolidation of political, economic, military, and information power that occurred in the early 1990s and in which we are still living today. As both the American political establishment and Washington’s global hegemony enter a period of growing uncertainty, the media establishment that

supports them is suffering a related loss of influence and credibility. Possibilities include a transition internationally to a more multi-polar order, with foci of authority not ultimately answerable to the U.S., which itself would have major repercussions within the United States, including further erosion of media’s efficacy as a bellicose transmission belt. Far from hurting the U.S., in this analyst’s opinion, we might finally be able to realize the Peace Dividend that eluded us a quarter of a century ago, rechanneling our energies and resources towards our domestic economy, our infrastructure, and our festering social problems.

But such a development would take some time, probably about five years. Conversely, as is often the case when an entrenched oligarchy is facing a loss of power and privilege, it doesn’t give up

without a fight. At any time, with little notice, the duopoly could resort to adventurism, a roll of the dice to preserve the existing order. The notion that some U.S. policymakers might decide upon, or at least risk, a major conflict in order to prevent the emergence of new arrangements has been suggested by alternative writers, such as [Paul Craig Roberts](#), [Philip Giraldi](#), [Joe Lauria](#) and [Robert Parry of ConsortiumNews.com](#), [Daniel McAdams of the Ron Paul Institute](#), [Gilbert Doctorow](#), [Alex Jones's Infowars.com](#), [Justin Raimondo of Antiwar.com](#), [Patrick Martin](#) and [Timothy Gatto of Rob Kall's OpEdNews.com](#), [Joachim Hagopian](#), [Michael Snyder](#), and others.

Most people may be inclined to dismiss the idea of “[kickstarting World War III](#)” as alarmism, if not conspiracy-mongering. Maybe that is the case. On the other hand, such speculation isn't entirely baseless in light of the willingness of some American politicians, including some who aspire to the Oval Office (and one who might actually get there) to impose a no-fly zone or “safe area” in Syria, and threaten to shoot down Russian aircraft to do it; give lethal aid to Ukrainian forces, along with putting American and other NATO advisers' and trainers' “boots on the ground”; or directly challenge Beijing's claim of sovereignty over rocks in the South China Sea through U.S. and allied air and naval transit despite Chinese warnings of a military response. If such a confrontation were to get out of control, either by design or accident, the resulting conflict could assume unexpectedly catastrophic proportions. Instead of saving the Deep State, a world war (one that is [presumed to go nuclear](#)) could hasten its extinction, [along with that of much else besides](#).



"Looks like the end of civilization as they know it."

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But if the worst were to occur in the near future, there's one thing we could be sure of, however briefly: the official U.S. and western media would tell Americans that it wasn't “our” fault, it was “theirs.” And most people would believe them, even if they have only the vaguest idea who “they” are.



[James George Jatras](#) is a media and government relations specialist with extensive experience in international relations, government affairs, and legislative politics. Before entering the private sector he served for many years (1985-2002) as a policy adviser and analyst for the Republican leadership in the U.S. Senate; before that (1979-1985), he was a U.S. Foreign Service Officer with the US Department of State, with service in Mexico and in Soviet affairs and public diplomacy. Since entering the private sector in 2002, Jatras's work has spanned a range of legislative and political issues and international

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