

“Media Influence and U.S. Foreign Policy”

Researcher:

Nourh Zaid Al Ruwaydhan
CPOL 505

Introduction:

In the United States the media is tasked with many things. It is meant to be the free and unbiased source of information that reports on facts and stories as they take place. While in some parts of the world there is a desire to, and acceptance of, the media being used as an active member to craft and participate in end results on narratives and debates on issues, the U.S. has more frequently been shown to believe that this is beyond their scope and authority.¹ However, this does not point to a US media that is unbiased or actually refrains from such actions. In fact, it can be stated that the media is used in a symbiotic manner to actually sanction and further narratives in many areas. One such area that the media has been used to do this is that of US foreign policy related to wars.

The media has over the last century been used to craft, dissect and push forward information that is created and formed in a way that allows the US government (USG) the room it needs to manufacture consent for war using the media as its official spokesperson and even at times, enthusiastic cheerleader.² The history in this goes back long before the events of the most recent Iraq war, or US intervention in nations like Syria. Starting from WWI there has been a concerted effort to create a direct line between the wishes of the USG's foreign policy mandates and the military and the media. This relationship itself is often referred to as the Golden Triangle that connects the media and government to corporations and the military industrial complex itself. What this notion helps to clarify is how things like the Iraq and Syria conflicts were created and sanctioned through the US media's cooperation towards framing stories through the singular lens of creating manufactured consent, which they did in fact accomplish. The Media therefore helps to build narratives that support US Foreign Policy and in the last two decades has helped forge a narrative of support for wars and interventions that have not worked out well.

To understand this complex issue, it is vital to first understand the many players who are invested in this situation. The US Congress, media, military, corporations and public are all stakeholders in the process that sees the media used as a formal and informal arm of government propaganda. The ability to do this in a nation where press freedom is heralded should seem hard, but in actuality is not, and never has been. A few terms alone can weaken the media in the face of crisis and panic to create a clear 'us versus them', 'with us or against us' narrative that allows the media to shut out all debate and alternative viewpoints so that the one that is wanted is allowed the floor to itself. This was seen very clearly in 2003 when the Bush administration officials would categorically state that "you're either with us or with the enemy", thereby creating the 'us vs. them' narrative that created in turn an atmosphere "where people, including many journalists and elected officials – were reluctant to challenge the administration's arguments for war, for fear of being seen as unpatriotic".³

This is not an isolated event, as the background on this issue will show that from WWI, to WWII, to Vietnam and all other military conflicts, there was a narrative pushed that shut out any peace journalism, and only promoted war journalism, often times tying media owners to lobbying efforts that would profit from the wars they were so keen on promoting. Added to this is the fact that many of these same media heads also have close contacts with elected leaders and lobby them as well, shows a situation in which the media is no longer an independent and unbiased voice, but the voice of the government and corporations helping to sanction wars and create consent for USG foreign policy initiatives.

Background:

The media has a long history of being used in the US to support and create a distinct narrative for wars. In the case of WWI for example the US created an official pro-war propaganda named the Committee on Public Information (CPI)

¹ Seo, H. (2011). Media and foreign policy: A comparative study of journalists' perceptions of press--government relations during the six-party talks.

² Auerbach, Y., & Bloch-Elkon, Y. (2005). Media framing and foreign policy: The elite press vis-à-vis us policy in Bosnia, 1992-95. *Journal of Peace Research*, 42(1), 83-99.

³ Gilboa, E. (2005). Global television news and foreign policy: Debating the CNN effect. *International Studies Perspectives*, 6(3), 325-341.

which was tasked for ensuring that public support for the war efforts would remain high.⁴ This organization was in fact headed by a journalist and believed in using any methods needed, from posters, to, newspaper articles, to billboards and more, to push forward the official government stance on the war and to help control public information in a way that would allow the USG to continue its efforts without having to worry very much about public opinion and sentiment.⁵ This group was disbanded after 1919, but the methods and the ideals behind the CPI lived on in the many wars that came after WWI.

More recent studies have found that while things like the SPI were supposedly killed off decades ago, the core principles of manipulating the media and public opinion still happens, with the media itself doing the manipulation. The most glaring reality for this came in the aftermath of the second US war on Iraq. A 2005 study found that there was a CNN Effect in which there was “policy forcing” on behalf of the organization and illustrated, “the dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policymaking, with the news having the upper hand in terms of influence”⁶ This research went on to note that media influence would be highest when there was uncertainty about a story, and when the media coverage was, “critically framed and empathized with suffering people”.⁷ This gave the perfect scenario in which wars could be sanctioned through the media. So long as there was a framing of stories as somehow being aligned with war as helpful and the right answer, then there would be no reason to not be able to push the desired narrative of the government and help foment support for wars and foreign policy in general. This ties into how wars are even framed and named, with names like “Enduring Freedom” “Iraqi Freedom” being pushed as a way to make the media task of forcing policy far easier.

What this does is create the situation in which wars are now linked to humanitarian crisis with the media no longer acting as objective relayers of facts and information, but individuals who sell stories, narratives and frameworks that hide behind them policy that is aligned perfectly with this framing as well. Iraq part one and two, as well as the current Syrian conflict is framed like this with the narrative focusing on the conflicts as being good, helpful, democratic, humanitarian, while simultaneously trying to suppress and hold back any and all information and images that would show the destruction, massive civilian loss of life, or even war crimes committed by US forces, or US-aligned forces. So pervasive is this action, and in fact so transparent, that when looking back on the events of the Iraq war it was found quickly that in a study of the two weeks leading up to the US war in Iraq, it was found that not only was media coverage nothing more than, “megaphones for official views in which 26 per cent of all sources were current or former officials, leaving little room for independent and grass-roots views”, but that, “Once the war started, the official source pool of ‘experts’ was drawn almost entirely from the establishment and the military intelligence community, without any regard to self-interest that may be at play.”⁸

US Media

What the US media should be, and what it actually is, are two different things entirely. Mainstream media as it is called, is generally corporate-owned media that is in the hands of large multinational groups that in addition to having vested interests in the media, also have interests in other industries as well. This can be agriculture, defense, pharmaceuticals, etc. This begs the question of who the media actually works for itself. The media can in fact be used by the government with the cooperation of the media itself, creating a blurry line of where that influence ends, and what limits there are on the media being used by the government and by corporate interests as well. One direct manner in which this happens is that of the communications between nations, and foreign policy. It can actually be said directly that, “One of the areas in which the

⁴ Hadyniak, K. (2015). How Journalism Influenced American Public Opinion During the Vietnam War: A Case Study of the Battle of Ap Bac, The Gulf of Tonkin Incident, The Tet Offensive, and the My Lai Massacre. University of Maine Digital Commons.

⁵ Hadyniak, K. (2015). How Journalism Influenced American Public Opinion During the Vietnam War

⁶ Gilboa, E. (2005). Global television news and foreign policy: Debating the CNN effect. *International Studies Perspectives*, 6(3), 325-341.

⁷ Gilboa, E. (2005). Global television news and foreign policy: Debating the CNN effect.

⁸ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars. *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 8(1), 15-34.

media are most likely to influence foreign policy is international negotiations”, particularly when there are no “direct channels of communication between the parties involved.”⁹

This is an informal manner for governments to use their media as a tool to reach out to, and also test the waters on how the other side might feel about proposals with each other. This is itself referred to as media diplomacy, in which the media is an informal but official tool in the repository of the government. A former US State Department official, Nicholas Burns, verified this as a reality and stated directly that, “We use the briefings to send messages to foreign governments about our foreign policy” and then went on to note that the participating governments in meetings often use, “the media to indicate their positions and intentions to the other parties and even to fly a ‘trial balloon.’”¹⁰

While this may on the surface seem innocuous, what it shows is a pattern in which the relationship between the media and the government is one that is far more symbiotic than just independent and crossing paths with each other out of necessity. There is a deep relationship that exists between the government and the media that shows that there are interactions that are deeply engrained and deeply embedded in common goals and common efforts. The media is not as independent as may appear, and do not always disclose the depths of their cooperation with the USG. This notion of using the media as a way to reach out to and speak to other governments is only the top of the iceberg when looking at the deeply complex relationship between the government and the media. This is a relationship that has only over time gotten more complicated because of media organizations coming under larger and larger umbrellas that lead to consistent messages being put forward regarding the role and direction that foreign policy, particularly war policy, is going into.

The question then becomes, who owns the media and what links do these media moguls have to and with government officials as well as to other corporations, which creates a conflict of interest for many news stories and new organizations as well. Nothing gets by this connection in the 21st century without also having to understand and consider the role that lobbying and super PACs play in the equation as well. Lobbying is the single greatest influence in the US system and can create policy all its own and help to both promote and even suppress suggested laws and policies in the US. Like many large corporate powers, the media has its own lobbying and goals behind said lobbying. This is the situation that leads the media to not only parrot information rather than give out unbiased rounded information, but also simultaneously suppress some information because it would conflict with their interests in other areas outside of just their media interests.

Many examples of this existed in the Iraq War period between 2002-2005 which say journalists and anti-war voices shut out coldly. The media itself helped to shut these voices down. The reason for this was the fact that they were tied into the military themselves through defense lobbying and defense holdings. US Navy Veteran and former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura was fought over by media heads to sign a contract for a show to discuss current events and news. MSNBC won this contract and handed Ventura a contract for three years to have a show that he would craft. This all changed the moment that MSNBC found out that despite being a veteran of the military, Ventura was actually anti-war and had no intention of parroting the talking points that the Bush administration was pushing and was quickly dispatched from this show. The contract was paid out for the full three years and Ventura never had a chance to make his opinions on the war known to the public.¹¹ MSNBC, what should have been an unbiased leader in disseminating news to the public did not want this balanced coverage of the war because the same people who owned MSNBC owned General Electric, which was at the time in the running to make billions from defense contracts in the war with Iraq¹².

More than Ventura faced sanctions for daring to actually discuss the news in a balanced manner. Well-known broadcaster Phil Donahue stated that NBC eliminated his voice because it wasn't good for business and that, “NBC didn't want to lose ratings by being associated with “unpatriotic” elements when the other networks were waving the flag in support of the Iraq war”.¹³ This brings up again and again the notion that to state narratives contrary to the official USG stance on war and foreign policy, is to be unpatriotic, with this having changed little since the First World War. The news therefore is

⁹ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars

¹⁰ Seo, H. (2011). Media and foreign policy: A comparative study of journalists' perceptions of press--government relations during the six-party talks. *Journalism*, 12(4), 467-481.

¹¹ Astor, W. (2014). Silencing War Criticism in the USA. *Huffington Post*.

¹² Astor, W. (2014). Silencing War Criticism in the USA. *Huffington Post*.

¹³ Astor, W. (2014). Silencing War Criticism in the USA. *Huffington Post*.

not independent and is also in many ways biased through its actions of angling narratives so that they lean in specific directions, and through omission of counterarguments and sides, helps to craft opinions in the public that reinforce the lobbying, political leanings, and preferred outcomes that those in charge of the media like to see take place.

A lot of news today is being funded and supported by special interests that present themselves as news but in reality, are focused on biased agendas. This creates situations in which self-censorship is rampant in the media, as noted in the Ventura and Donahue examples. A Pew Research Center study found that this situation runs deep and affects many sectors of the media:

one-quarter of the local and national journalists say they have purposely avoided newsworthy stories, while nearly as many acknowledge they have softened the tone of stories to benefit the interests of their news organizations. Fully four-in-ten (41%) admit they have engaged in either or both of these practices.¹⁴

This kind of research was duplicated in 2003 when it was found that 35% of reporters and news executives admitted directly that journalists “avoid newsworthy stories if [“the story would be embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of a news organization’s owners or parent company.”](#)¹⁵ The media is therefore framing stories in a way that tells half-truths, only explaining some angles and leaving out other points of views overall, which creates stories that fit in with what they want to put forward as the best version of truth. Often times, it happens that by coincidence, this allows the media to be the supporter of US foreign policy without questioning its merits or accuracy at all.

The possibility that any negative could come even leads to potentially good stories to be ignored as well. For example, President Obama consistently used drones to kill members of ISIS, but these attacks were not advertised by the media and were also not criticized, as if the media wanted simply to avoid the debate and conversation over drone usage overall; which on many occasions did in fact kill the wrong people.¹⁶ The information that the US media chooses, or doesn’t choose to put forward also in turn affected, and continues to affect the manner in which many other nations discuss the same conflicts, as they are relying on each other’s’ information.¹⁷ This issue of the US media being used to silence war critics and push narratives to support USG foreign policy is not relegated to only the US or US news. Part of this is the fact that in the US and the world overall, there are connections between nations through the internet and multinational corporations.

These connections mean that the ability to create positive news, or negative news is not down to only US-owned stations like NBC, CNN or Fox. Foreign-owned ones can also have an impact. For those seeking the unbiased news to come from outside the US would therefore be disappointed to find that single men like Rupert Murdoch for example, owned nearly 200 newspapers worldwide and used them all as a way to “espouse editorially his personal support for the invasion of Iraq”, based on his own personal opinions and preferences, turning the news yet again into nothing more than manufactured consent and narrative building by a few people.¹⁸ The US and the UK were also said to have “naturalized certain frameworks of interpretation of great relevance to the official US/UK position on events” which coupled with the fact that coverage in the

¹⁴ Pew Research Center (2000). Self-Censorship: How Often and Why Journalists Avoiding the News. Columbia Journalism Review.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center (2000). Self-Censorship: How Often and Why Journalists Avoiding the News. Columbia Journalism Review.

¹⁶ Lasher, K., & Sixta Rinehart, C. (2016). The shadow-boxer: The Obama administration and foreign policy grand strategy . *Politics & Policy*, 44(5), 850-888.

¹⁷ Radziszewski, E. (2013). Interpersonal discussions and attitude formation on foreign policy: The case of polish involvement in the Iraq war. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 9(1), 103-123.

¹⁸ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars. *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 8(1), 15-34.

US had been “Foxified”, led to voices from all sides to be silenced because there was a manufactured fear that the media had been leaning left/ anti-war, which made it even easier to repress their side.¹⁹

Research notes that media does in fact help to set agendas for the government in the US, however, if the government is influencing the media by feeding it talking points and narratives, then this would roundabout mean that in effect the media is only helping to push the very narratives and decisions that the government initially had planned on carrying out regardless.²⁰ This means that in many ways, the media is, when it is convenient for the government, nothing more than an informal mouthpiece that does not question policy decisions, actions, or rationales, and simply attempts to create an atmosphere in which there is too much fear, panic and concern by people who do not want to be branded unpatriotic.

The media instead of acting as the neutral voice allows only one side to have a voice. It is a lie of omission on their part to only peddle out in succession individual after individual who is tied personally into interests and people who stand to either profit from foreign policy, or simply get their personal wishes in policy pushed to the forefront as the only rationale decision to make. The real influence is therefore coming not from the truth of unbiased reporting, but forces in the government. It must be said forces because the US government is not some monolithic entity that moves in unison led by one singular power or force. This leads to the connection between the US military and the media, as well as the US Congress and the media.

US Military

In his farewell address from office, then President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned the American people of the dangers that a powerful military could have on American society.²¹ Today this is referred to as the military industrial complex, and it is a multi-billion, if not trillion dollar industry that has connections to policy, both domestic and foreign, and wields immeasurable power in the US. What Eisenhower was warning about was the militarization of the United States that could come to consume the “economic, political and spiritual influence of the military-industrial complex” and cautioned strongly against the “unwarranted influence” that the military could have, which would mean that the US would at a minimum need a “knowledgeable citizenry” to counteract this.²² Unfortunately, the US thoroughly ignored president Eisenhower’s words, and has become very militarized, and the “military-industrial complex in the USA acquired and continues to acquire ‘unwarranted influence’ and the citizenry is no longer knowledgeable”.²³ The media would be one of the only manners in which the citizenry could be knowledgeable, and they are denied knowledge in this route because the media appears to have been securely placed under the umbrella of this ever-growing military and defense orbit in the US.

Even when some voices in the media attempted to counter the misinformation coming out of the US during the Iraq War period, they were mocked, specifically, “French and German positions against the American invasion of Iraq were ridiculed and/or downplayed in most mainstream coverage”.²⁴ So bad was the mocking that it turned into national pride for Americans to make enemies out of their allies for simply daring to question the narratives coming out of the US media, with French Fries being oddly renamed “Freedom Fries” highlighting the dangerous levels of nationalism and “patriotism” that was being assigned to being pro-war and supporting the US narrative on this policy overall. The USG is so heavily involved in the militarizing of the nation, that the Department of Defense can in fact be found to have penetrated almost all institutions and facets of the USs governance and infrastructure:

Infrastructure has been built up around the DoD, which includes a variety of institutions, think tanks, and university departments devoted to military and security studies. Furthermore, because the DoD has an effective public relations

¹⁹ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future war.

²⁰ Auerbach, Y., & Bloch-Elkon, Y. (2005). Media framing and foreign policy: The elite press vis-à-vis us policy in Bosnia, 1992-95. *Journal of Peace Research*, 42(1), 83-99.

²¹ De, F. (2014). Peace journalism case study: Us media coverage of the Iraq war.

²² De, F. (2014). Peace journalism case study: Us media coverage of the Iraq war.

²³ Ibid (2014).

²⁴ Ibid. (2014).

strategy and feedback loop, it can easily promote these views to the media for mass transmission to American society.²⁵

US Congress

The United States Congress has a hand in ensuring that the media is used to put out information that supports it. This is done in many manners. One main manner and reason that this occurs overall is the fact that there is a great deal of lobbying which occurs between media heads and the Congress, often because these same moguls and CEOs are heads of more than one industry or organization at a time, often meaning that they have connections to media as well as foreign policy related industries like the defense industry. They therefore can and do lobby congress, in ways that can manufacture consent for conflicts, that also help to meet their ulterior motives.

With the war in Afghanistan ongoing with no end in sight in the mid-2000s, NBC had on its show retired general Barry McCaffrey, who told the audience as an NBC Military Analyst that the ongoing war would need 3-10 more years as well as what he said was simply, "a lot of money". What the audience would not see or hear about was how this same NBC analyst was paid nearly \$200,000.00 in 2009 alone by the same corporation that had been granted a five-year contract worth nearly \$6 Billion dollars to aid US forces in Afghanistan.²⁶ The problem of course was that only the first year was locked in at \$644 million dollars, the additional four years in the contract were, "subject to renewal, contingent on military needs and political realities", which conveniently for this NBC analyst and NBC as a news program, could be argued so clearly through the media which only helped to legitimize the desire to drag out a never ending conflict which the US has no hopes of actually ever ending, assuming it ever wanted to end it in the first place.²⁷

This connection with the Congress and the government runs far deeper than military heads and financially vested officials pushing for wars to appease their biggest campaign donors and lobbyists. There is the fact that there are also many risks associated with being attached to or being dependent on federal dollars for revenue, which means you can lose funding if you run afoul of the people who were funding you. An expose by Glenn Greenwald found that many media organizations cannot risk running afoul of the people who fund them, which are people in the government, which means that they are not willing to risk rocking the boat with stories that would offend any members of congress. The message was clear according to Greenwald, **"It was understood that if you fell out of grace [with the Education Department], your business might go away,"** said Tom Might, who as chief executive of Cable One, a cable service provider that is owned by The Post Company.²⁸

One needed favorable treatment and opinions from those in Congress, and the newspapers have shown that they are willing to accommodate the opinions of those in Congress in order to get those favorable opinions and treatment. The reality appears to be that those who own and work for at top levels, these media organizations identify with the people that are in political power and have more in common with them than in decades past. The owners are not willing to allow the very people that they are aligned with, friends with, and identify with to become the targets of their news programs. Or as Greenwald puts it:

Large corporations which own media outlets need desperately to maintain good relations with the political class. How could you possibly be a journalist at The Washington Post -- knowing that for your corporate employer "if you

²⁵ De, F. (2014). Peace journalism case study: Us media coverage of the Iraq war.

²⁶ Ibid (2014).

²⁷ Jones, S. (2010). The Media-Lobbying Complex: The talking heads of cable news are leading double lives as paid lobbyists for corporations. The Nation. Retrieved from: <https://www.thenation.com/article/media-lobbying-complex/>

²⁸ Greenwald, G. (2011). The Washington Post's dependence on the government it covers. Salon. Retrieved from: https://www.salon.com/2011/04/10/journalism_13/

fell out of grace [with the Education Department], your business might go away" and that your boss is spending huge amounts of his time and money currying favor with federal officials -- and not have it affect what you write?²⁹

The answer to this appears to be that you simply cannot, and the media coverage of many laws, events, movements and policies seem to be working overtime to suppress voices, change narratives, and ensure that people are more inclined to agree with the points of views that the political class and leaders have in the first place. There is a very integrated and complicated relationship and connection between the people, the government, the military, special interest, the media, and owners of the media who are elites in society with connections that loop them back to the military and the government. Under these circumstances it becomes increasingly obvious why there is little to no ability to control how the media reacts to foreign policy desires of the media and the government. There is a clear desire to ensure that the narratives that support intervention and war, are as palatable as possible, and one of the only manners in which this is possible, is to use the media to support and promote the policies in question. WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the first Persian Gulf War are only the start of the problems. The Second War in Iraq as well as the war in Afghanistan all created an environment in which patriotism and humanitarianism, and any other means needed were, and are being used to promote US foreign policy adventures in other parts of the world, with the media continuing to parrot each other and official government positions to create consent for policy, making the media an arm of the government propaganda machine like it was in the CPI era³⁰.

Iraq War

No conflict other than Vietnam is spoken about as negatively as the Iraq War. This was a war that not only caused the death of over a million Iraqi civilians, but destroyed the lives of many US servicemen and women. The war was heavily protested from the very start by both domestic and foreign voices. Many were against the very notion of entering into the war based on what seemed to be obviously fictitious and unverified information.³¹ It can be said that then president Bush and his allies tried to "give importance on threat of Iraq and tried to make it understandable that Saddam Hussein could havoc" which resulted in "confusion among the American" people, which is one of the needed variables to help create support for war amongst the public.³² This was a confusion that was "enhanced by the US [mass media](#) giving intentionally pro war news with some news sites like USA Today supporting the war outright and wholeheartedly from the start helping to create a pro-American angle in which the war was about a great battle between good and bad with the media supporting the war before it started and helping to pain Iraq as a dangerous holder of WMDs.³³

The media had started to create the grounds for consent for war with Iraq and hypothetically, any number of nations post-9/11. The media and journalism in general created some base ideological assumptions. These included that those:

Who did not rally around the flag, and those who questioned the role the United States played in the Middle East, were apologists to the enemy, and that despite rhetoric of tolerance towards Muslims, the demonization of the Muslim world in which the American press indulged over recent decades had been vindicated.³⁴

According to Michael Schudson, in times of conflict, "not only are the mainstream media not in fact as objective as they claim to be, but also they tend to internalize the official line" with three conditions under which all objectivity are suspended,

²⁹ Greenwald, G. (2011). The Washington Post's dependence on the government it covers. Salon. Retrieved from: https://www.salon.com/2011/04/10/journalism_13/

³⁰ Thomas, B. (2006). Framing rationale for the Iraq war: The interaction of public support with mass media and public policy agendas. *International Communication Gazette*, 68(5-6), 519-532.

³¹ Mazaar, M. (2007). The Iraq war and agenda setting. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 3(1), 1-23.

³² Rahman, S. & Marjan, S.M.H. (2013). Role of Mass Media in Setting Agenda and Manufacturing Consent: A Study on Wars to Rise of Radical Group (Hefajat-e-Islam) in Bangladesh. *Mass Communication Journalism* 4:171. doi:10.4172/2165-7912.1000171

³³ Rahman, S. & Marjan, S.M.H. (2013). Role of Mass Media in Setting Agenda and Manufacturing Consent

³⁴ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars. *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 8(1), 15-34. doi:10.1386/jcis.8.1.15_1

“Tragedy, danger, and a threat to national security”, all of which the Bush administration used after 9/11 “to smuggle its pre-existing anti-Saddam Hussein agenda to the fore”.³⁵ From that point on the media simply parroted the official speeches of the UK and US politicians who had been the primary defenders in the entire buildup to conflict with Iraq.³⁶

Syria

The Iraq war is now considered by many, even its architects, to have been a mistake of unprecedented proportions. Not only for the death imposed on the people of that nation, and the trillions wasted, as well as the chain of events that has seen massive destabilization of realignment of power in the region, but because it so badly damaged the US in terms of credibility, with the USG and the US media now often seen as problematic and untrustworthy. The fears and feelings that many have towards these two entities are not misplaced but they seem to have made little difference. Fast forwarding a few years later to the Obama administration with Hillary Clinton at the State Department, the US saw yet another fabricated crisis that was parroted by the media blindly. This was Libya, a nation that had little to do with the US but was destabilized under the same confusion and calls for humanitarianism that allowed the media in Iraq to help promote the official lines of the pro-war foreign policy crafters.

Libya would only be a footnote in the narrative of the US, as the nation slips into a fully broken and destabilized and failed state, the next opportunity for confusion and appeals to emotion came in the form of Syria, another nation in the sights of the US foreign policy machine since the days before 9/11. Much like the Bush administration had pulled its “pre-existing” conflict with Iraq into relevancy with 9/11, the Obama administration pulled the USs pre-existing conflicts with Syria into its supposed push for democracy and humanitarianism towards protestors in Syria. While the media was paid off to not cover the brutality shown towards protestors in many other nations in the MENA, from Bahrain, to Palestine, to Egypt, for some reason, Syria stood out as the one for the media to focus on, and they did so blindly with little debate on why this was the nation to focus on.³⁷

Again, the media latched onto the confusion and put forward stories that helped push the USs foreign policy desires of taking troops, or at a minimum weapons and training as well as funding for “freedom fighters” into yet another nation. The media showed images of children killed by Assad, Russia, and Iran, but never of its own death and destruction imposed on Syria either directly or through “freedom fighters” who had transformed into armed Islamist militias running rampant across the country. The media showed chemical attacks that were supposedly committed by the official Syrian government, which had unceremoniously been labeled a regime- a term the US media and USG reserve for those nations it has earmarked for special focus/ attention and coverage. The media did not bother commenting at all on supposed chemical attacks committed by western-backed “rebels”.

Support has been harder to manufacture and retain, but nonetheless, the US is committed to this, its defense industry is committed to this, and as is needed, the media obliges them both and brings forward experts, officials and journalists who support, condone and legitimize the actions of the USG in this latest nation to get put on the other end of the US foreign policy machine. The media has in the case of Syria been what it has been for all previous wars the US has fought or been involved in, a cheerleader, a promoter and an entity that dares not seriously question the decisions being made, for fear of not promoting patriotism and humanitarianism.

Conclusion

³⁵ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars.

³⁶ Najjar, O. (2014). The American media and the Iraq war at its tenth anniversary: Lessons for the coverage of future wars.

³⁷ Stern, E. (2003). Crisis studies and foreign policy analysis: Insights, synergies, and challenges. *International Studies Review*, 5(2), 155-202.

In 2004, looking back, the New York Times admitted that they wished they, “had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged—or failed to emerge.”³⁸ The aftermath of the Iraq War mess was that the internet savvy younger generation began to see the mainstream news as untrustworthy and no longer objective as they had claimed to be. In fact, many younger people came to blame the media as much as they blamed the government, feeling that the media was in large ways responsible for the war itself and were for a while unmotivated and disillusioned with the media overall.³⁹ These individuals felt that “the press had failed by allowing the principle of objectivity to make us passive recipients of news, rather than aggressive analyzers and explainers of it.”⁴⁰

The media has for many decades been doing the work of the USG in terms of helping to sell their wars and foreign policy adventures as unavoidable and the right thing to do. They have helped to give a voice to the very beneficiaries and architects of the policies in question, while shaming and shutting out the voices of any and all that would dare stand up to these narratives. This has allowed and made the media nothing short of a mouthpiece that helps to forge narratives of support for USG foreign policy that manufactures consent for interventions and wars, no matter how disastrous they are for the US and the nation it targets.

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³⁸ Zelizer, J.E. (2018). The Press Doesn't Cause Wars—Presidents Do. *The Atlantic*.

³⁹ Cushion, S. (2009). Discouraging citizenship? young people's reactions to news media coverage of anti-Iraq war protesting in the UK. *Young*, 17(2), 123-143.

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