

# The Defense Industry’s Ukraine Pundits. “Goldmine For Defense Contractors”

To explain the crisis, corporate news networks are leaning on hawkish ex-military officials — without disclosing their current defense industry ties.

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*Last week, CNN brought on former U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta for his fourth recent appearance to talk, once again, about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s deadly invasion of Ukraine.*

“I think we need to understand that there is only one thing that Putin understands, and that’s force,” [said](#) Panetta on *Newsroom*.

The former CIA director added:

“I think the United States has to provide whatever weapons are necessary to the Ukrainians, so that they can hit back, and hit back now.”

At no time did Panetta nor CNN mention that he’s a senior counselor at Beacon Global Strategies, a defense industry consulting firm that has [reportedly represented](#) weapons manufacturer Raytheon. The firm doesn’t disclose its clients, but Raytheon and the defense industry generally stand to benefit from the conflict in Ukraine.

The episode is part of a broader pattern and practice: Since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, cable news networks have routinely called on defense officials-turned-consultants to offer analysis and help the American public make sense of the crisis. Often, these analysts have used their TV time to call for greater U.S. involvement and bolder moves that could ratchet up tensions between two nuclear-armed superpowers.

The networks have consistently failed to disclose these analysts’ day jobs, describing them instead by only their former high-ranking military or government roles — leaving viewers in the dark about the analysts’ financial ties to defense contractors that stand to profit from increased or prolonged conflict.

During its Ukraine coverage, MSNBC even failed to include disclosures when the [network invited](#) on former Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, who serves [on the board](#) of directors at Lockheed Martin, the world's [biggest defense contractor](#).

When asked about this matter, Johnson told *The Lever*, "I have no comment."

Corporate media's lack of transparency about these consultants is deeply troubling, said Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist for Public Citizen.

"This type of revolving-door behavior should be prohibited for military officials to serve in a private capacity representing military contractors," Holman told *The Lever*. "If not prohibited, it should be disclosed to everyone so when they're going on television trying to affect Biden's policy on whatever war they have in mind, they ought to be straightforward."

The phenomenon is not new. In an analysis of three weeks of news coverage following last year's U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) [found that](#) 20 of the 22 featured guests from the U.S. on the networks' Sunday shows had ties to the military-industrial-complex. At that point, too, the TV networks regularly [neglected to disclose](#) their guests' ties to the defense industry. But the stakes are now much higher: Military conflict between the U.S. and Russia could make for a world-ending disaster, which is why the Biden administration has been reluctant to take major actions that could be perceived as escalatory.

But the Ukraine crisis and the potential for greater conflict have been a goldmine for defense contractors, sending stocks skyrocketing and prompting sharp increases in defense spending.

"The people who have the most interest in influencing the direction of the coverage are weapons makers," Jim Naureckas, editor at FAIR, told *The Lever*. "They have the most direct financial stake in the way we cover issues of war and peace. Unfortunately, they are interested in more war and less peace."

Since the start of the Ukraine crisis, U.S. defense stocks in leading companies like Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and Lockheed Martin have surged, and they are expected to continue rising in the coming months. And in the wake of Russia's invasion, President Biden signed into law a spending package that directs a record-breaking \$782 billion towards defense — almost \$30 billion above his initial request.

According to [The Hill](#), "The additional Ukraine aid comes on top of more than \$1 billion the U.S. has already spent in the past year to arm Ukrainian soldiers with modern weapons, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, manufactured by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon Technologies, and Raytheon's anti-aircraft Stinger missiles."

## Cashing In On Military Experience

With stories about Russia's invasion dominating the news, networks have had tons of pundit slots to fill. Those spots have largely gone to high-ranking ex-military officials, who [often find lucrative careers](#) in the influence industry working on behalf of defense contractors — and who tend to spout hawkish rhetoric that aligns with how corporate media generally covers conflict. Most of the time, however, the networks have failed to divulge how such martial bombast could aid these former officials' private-sector employers.

For instance, Jeremy Bash, who served as chief of staff at the Pentagon and the CIA under President Barack Obama, has been a recurring guest on MSNBC and NBC during their coverage of the crisis in Ukraine.

Bash, who was [named](#) a national security analyst for NBC and MSNBC in 2017, is also a founder and managing director at Beacon Global Strategies, which [describes](#) itself as “a strategic advisory firm specializing in international policy, defense, cyber, intelligence, and homeland security.” While Beacon Global Strategies does not disclose its clients, the firm has worked for defense giant Raytheon, according to the [New York Times](#).

Days after Putin first launched the invasion of Ukraine, Bash [went on](#) NBC’s *Meet the Press*, eager to weigh in on the whole affair — presenting it as “an opportunity for the United States and the west to actually deliver a very fatal blow to Russia’s ambitions on the global stage.”

“I think swallowing Ukraine, a country the size of Texas, with 40 million people, is unprecedented since World War II,” he said. “And if the United States can train and equip the Ukrainians and, I think, engage in a second *Charlie Wilson’s War*, basically the sequel to the movie and the book, which is arming and training a determined force that will shoot Russian aircraft out of the sky, open up those tanks with can-openers, like the Javelins, and kill Russians, which is what our equipment is doing, I think this is a huge opportunity to hit Putin very hard.”

Javelin anti-tank missiles are [manufactured](#) jointly by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon. At no point did anyone involved in the broadcast mention that Bash’s consulting firm has worked for Raytheon.

Admiral James Stavridis, an advisory board member at Beacon Global Strategies, has also made frequent recent appearances on MSNBC. Stavridis is also the vice chair of global affairs and managing director at private equity giant [Carlyle Group](#), which has a [history of investing](#) in the defense and national security markets.

Stavridis pushed a war-hungry stance on MSNBC’s *The Beat with Ari Melber* shortly after the Russian invasion began.

“In NATO, where I was supreme allied commander, you flood the zone in Eastern Europe,” [said](#) Stavridis. “You bring in troops, tanks, missile systems, warships, all the above, in order to send a signal to Vladimir Putin.”

On *Meet The Press* a couple weeks later, Stavridis [recommended](#) that the U.S. send more anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine to allow the country to create its own no-fly zone:

“What we ought to do is give the Ukrainians the ability to create a no-fly zone,” he said. “More Stingers, more missiles that can go higher than Stingers.”

Stinger missiles are manufactured by [Raytheon](#), Beacon Global Strategies’ reported client. Again, MSNBC failed to disclose information about Stavridis’ firm or its work for Raytheon.

Stavridis also called on the United States to approve an arms transfer proposed by Poland, which [offered](#) to send Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine — via an American air force base in Germany, with the expectation that the U.S. would then supply Poland with replacement planes. “Get those MiG-29s in their hands,” said Stavridis.

The Biden administration shot down that plan on the basis that it could significantly escalate tensions between the U.S. and Russia. A Pentagon spokesperson [said](#) that “we do not believe Poland’s proposal is a tenable one.”

Beacon Global Strategies did not respond to a request for comment.

## “I’d Love To See NATO Move In There”

Bash and Stavridis aren’t the only high-ranking national security officials-turned-pundits working as consultants who have lately been beating the drums of war.

Retired U.S. combat general Barry McCaffrey, for example, has been a mainstay on MSNBC. During an appearance on *The Beat with Ari Melber*, he [lauded](#) NATO and the European Union’s early decision to bring more than 7,000 U.S. troops and armored vehicles from Fort Stewart, Georgia, into Germany.

McCaffrey — who made the [controversial Gulf War decision](#) for his infantry division to fire on Iraqi soldiers, civilians, and children after a ceasefire was already underway — runs a consulting firm called BR McCaffrey Associates LLC. According to the business’ website, McCaffrey’s firm [promises](#) to help clients “build linkages between government and private sector clients; design public relations, media, advertising and legislative strategies; and provide client specific analysis of U.S. and international political and economic issues.”

In the years following 9/11, McCaffrey [pushed for](#) an endless Iraq War, including on NBC, without disclosing his [financial interests](#): McCaffrey’s consulting firm was working behind the scenes to help at least one defense company secure a contract supplying Iraq with armored vehicles.

Former CIA Director and retired army general David Petraeus, meanwhile, has [made multiple appearances on](#) CNN recently, during which he talked about the need to get MiGs “into Ukrainian skies.” Petraeus is a [partner](#) at private equity giant KKR, a firm with significant [defense business](#). He also serves on the board of directors at Optiv, which [provides](#) cybersecurity technology and services across the U.S. government, including the Department of Defense.

Retired army general Wesley Clark has also made a handful of appearances on CNN, voicing his opinion that this “battle is a long way from over, provided we can continue to provide replenishment to the weapons to the Ukrainians.”

Clark has long enjoyed [a lucrative career](#) working with defense companies. He runs a strategic consulting firm, Wesley K. Clark & Associates, which [says](#) it “uses his expertise, relationships, and extensive international reputation and experience in the fields of energy, alternative energy, corporate and national security, logistics, aerospace and defense, and investment banking.”

Last week on CNN, Clark was asked about the idea of sending a NATO task force to patrol waters off the coast of the Ukrainian city of Odessa.

“I’d love to see NATO move in there with a task force,” he said. “I don’t think it’s going to happen in the near term because of NATO’s reluctance to come into direct conflict with Russian forces... But I do think it’s important.”

## “You Can’t Give Away The Game”

Michèle Flournoy, a former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense under Obama, has appeared on CNN at least twice in recent weeks to advocate for greater direct military support to Ukraine. Flournoy is now co-founder and managing partner at WestExec Advisors, whose clients include aerospace and defense companies like [Boeing](#). She also [serves](#) on the board of defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton.

Flournoy didn’t disclose any of that when she [went on](#) *State of the Union* in early March to push for increasing military aid to Ukraine. “We need to be supplying Ukrainians with as much as we possibly can, munitions like anti-tank Javelin missiles, anti-air Stinger missiles,” she [said](#). “And I think we should also be trying to get them some more of the planes that they know how to fly, MiGs from Eastern Europe, that could enable them to be much more effective in protecting the skies.”

On *Amanpour* a few days later, Flournoy [doubled down](#) on the idea of providing more weapons to Ukraine.

“I think we need to bend over backwards to help the Ukrainians as much as possible,” she said. “This is not going to be over anytime soon.”

Flournoy’s appearance on *Amanpour* was one of the rare instances where CNN [actually disclosed](#) her work at WestExec Advisors — but the network didn’t mention the firm’s defense-industry clients. Naureckas, of FAIR, doesn’t simply blame pro-war talking heads for failing to disclose their defense-industry ties. He says it’s also up to the journalists running these cable news shows to help the public understand that these “military experts” have a stake in pushing for war.

“Everyone involved is aware of the transaction that is going on,” said Naureckas. “Journalists know this as well, but you can’t admit it because that would spoil the grift if you said, ‘Here’s a person who’s funded by the weapons industry to tell you about this crisis.’ It should be the reporter’s instinct to explain the agenda of the people they are quoting, but because this is such an integral part of what is done in the journalism system, you can’t give away the game.”

CNN and NBC did not respond to requests for comment.

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