

Media and the Permanent War State: Top National Security Reporters Linked to US Government

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Watch Behind The Headlines correspondent Dan Cohen explain how top foreign policy reporters are linked to the U.S. government, weapons industry and oil corporations – the very forces they are supposed to hold accountable.

Imagine a country where there’s no separation between the government, the military, and the media. A lot of Americans would think of China, Russia or North Korea, but it’s a perfect description of the United States today. And here in Washington, the think tank inside this nondescript building – Center For A New American Security (CNAS) – is the clearest example of just that.

CNAS is a premier militarist think tank in the nation’s capital, especially for Democratic Party administrations. It is funded by the State Department and Pentagon and has taken more money from weapons companies over the last several years than any other think tank. On top of that, it’s funded by oil companies, big banks, and right wing governments – basically the most destructive forces on the planet.

For President Joe Biden, CNAS serves as a [farm](#), from which key positions in his administration are cultivated. In fact, at least 16 CNAS alumni are now in key positions in the Biden Pentagon and State Department.

But what’s most shocking is that several national security and foreign policy reporters from elite U.S. media outlets are affiliated with CNAS – and therefore indirectly affiliated with, and likely paid by, the U.S. government and corporations – the very forces that they should be holding accountable.

For more than twenty years, *New York Times* Washington correspondent David Sanger has relentlessly pushed deceptions to con the public into supporting U.S. aggression and war.

From the George W. Bush administration’s [lies](#) about [WMDs](#) in Iraq to [lies](#) about Iran attempting to create nuclear weapons and evidence-free claims from intelligence agencies about Russian cyberattacks – these incendiary allegations were taken at face value with a

clear goal to pressure then-President Donald Trump to ramp up aggression against Moscow while conveniently filling the pockets of Sanger's weapons-industry benefactors.

Sanger's neocon cyberwar fantasy was even turned into a [movie](#) by HBO. Today, David Sanger is onto the COVID-19 lab leak [theory](#). He's been at the forefront of every propaganda campaign that not only provides justification for aggression and war but also helps generate huge profits for CNAS funders.

Sanger is just one of several *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy* reporters who have [residencies at CNAS](#). Presumably, that comes with a sizable financial component. I emailed CNAS to ask whether it pays these reporters but they didn't respond.

Sanger's colleague Eric Schmitt, senior correspondent covering national security for *The New York Times*, is also in residence at CNAS.

Back in 2020, Schmitt was promoting the [obviously false Russian bounties story](#), which was later retracted after it had served its political purpose to force Trump to take a harder anti-Russia stance.

Of course, Schmitt was a reliable [promoter](#) of intelligence claims about Russian hacking - never displaying a scintilla of skepticism.

And he dutifully [portrayed](#) the Trump administration's aggression against Iran as defensive.

The Washington Post, at one point, found this kind of blatant media corruption at least questionable. In 2011, *Time* magazine launched a series in collaboration with CNAS to promote war propaganda; the *Post* published an [article](#) questioning the ethics of that partnership.

Fast-forward to 2013: billionaire Jeff Bezos buys the *Post*, and its correspondent, David Finkel, becomes a writer in residence at CNAS. During that time, Finkel wrote two books on the U.S. war in Iraq: "The Good Soldiers" and "Thank You For Your Service." Just the kind of whitewash of the war that CNAS's funders would want the public to consume.

Michael Gordon is another. He spent three decades at the *Times*. Among his greatest accomplishments was, alongside Judith Miller, promoting the Bush administration's Iraqi WMD deception. Gordon [wrote](#) that "Iraq has stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and has embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb" - citing anonymous U.S. officials.

Now at *The Wall Street Journal*, Gordon has spent months [pumping](#) out [Wuhan lab-leakpropaganda](#) - once again promoting claims of intelligence officials without any skepticism.

Greg Jaffe is a *Washington Post* national security reporter and another writer in residence at CNAS. His [article](#) on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan quotes Eliot Cohen - a former Bush administration official who is now a fellow at CNAS. Jaffe and Cohen's shared affiliation is never disclosed in the article - an obvious breach of the most basic journalistic ethics.

Thom Shanker used to be part of the CNAS writer-in-residence program when he was at the *Times* writing on U.S. wars. In 2012, Shanker wrote [this blog post](#) promoting a CNAS study

without revealing his affiliation. Once again, a major conflict of interest and ethics out the window.

There's also Rajiv Chandrasekaran, who spent two decades doing public relations for U.S. wars at the *Post* and is now doing [PR](#) for Starbucks.

And Thomas Ricks, whose career has spanned posts at *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy* magazine. Ricks is a cold-warrior who has publicly stated that Putin is [attacking](#) the United States just like Osama Bin Laden did and that Americans defending Putin are [no different](#) from those defending Bin Laden.

Some of this information isn't new. It was [reported](#) in *The Nation* more than a decade ago, but the issue has only gotten worse as U.S. politics have shifted right, spy agencies have gained more power in the media, and the new cold war has accelerated.

There's no real separation between the myriad of revolving doors and cash flow between the weapons manufacturers, think tanks, the U.S. government and media. It's an incestuous, bloviating blob capable of producing one thing and one thing only: war.

So when you think of the military industrial complex and the permanent war state, don't forget about what might be the most important component of all: the media.

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