

# Wars and propaganda machines

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Global Research, October 09, 2006

Online Journal 9 October 2006

“The biggest lesson I learned from Vietnam is not to trust [our own] government statements — I had no idea until then that you could not rely on [them].” –James W. Fulbright (1905-1995), former US senator

Third sorrow: “The replacement of truth by propaganda, disinformation, and the glorification of war, power, and the military legions.” –Chalmers Johnson, (Sorrows of Empire)

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.” –Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda

[Propaganda machines](#) are dangerous, even more so in a democracy than in a totalitarian regime, because their goal is to confuse, disinform, lie, raise fear and manipulate the opinions of the people.

Indeed, those few hands that control the media have the power to turn lies into truth and truth into lies, without being contradicted, because they also have the power to silence any competing voices. This is the worse monopoly one can find, much worse than any economic monopoly. Indeed, when a small elite in power start using propaganda intensively, it makes a mockery of the democratic principle of self-government by the people. In fact, people begin to distrust the government because it has become a source of half-truths, lies and disinformation. Discouragement and apathy follow because people know that their views do not count and that the oligarchy in power will do whatever it wants, no matter what the supposedly ‘sovereign’ people thinks. It is only when the media are free and independent that people can hope to be honestly informed and be free from government manipulation.

We have a clue about how powerful [political propaganda](#) can be when we consider that, more than a year after the Iraq invasion, just before the 2004 presidential elections, a [Harris Poll](#) reported that 62 percent of all American voters, and 84 percent of those planning to vote for Bush II, still were of the opinion that Saddam Hussein and Iraq had “strong links” to al Qaeda, and 41 percent of all voters, and 52 percent of Bush backers, believed that Saddam had “*helped plan and support the hijackers*” who attacked the USA, on 9/11. What’s more, as an amazing tribute to the force of political propaganda and the tactics of [big lies](#), a whopping 85 percent of the American soldiers themselves still believed, in 2006,

three years after the invasion, the falsehood that they were fighting in Iraq “to retaliate for Saddam’s role in the 9-11 attacks,” while 77 percent thought that a major reason for the war was “to stop Saddam from protecting al Qaeda in Iraq.”

Today, a solid majority of Americans think that the Iraq war was a mistake and many are lucid enough to know they have been misled. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of Americans, an overwhelming majority, are now [opposed to the war](#). But, it is too late. The damage has been done, and the U.S. is now solidly bogged down in Iraq. In fact, what is the Bush-Cheney administration’s answer to popular rejection? Its response: “Stay the course,” “Full speed ahead!” Indeed, notwithstanding the tremendous pro-war propaganda originating from the partisan American media, 61 percent of Americans now oppose the [war in Iraq](#). What is even more damning, a vast majority of Iraqis are turning against the invaders and occupiers. Seventy-one percent of Iraqis see the U.S.-led coalition not as “liberators” but as “occupiers,” and 78 percent consider the U.S. military presence in Iraq to have a destabilizing influence. And, not surprisingly, a solid majority of them support an immediate military [pullout of foreign troops](#) from their country.

In their [grandiose plan](#), the neocon Bush team intends to have American troops occupy the country of Iraq illegally for as long as one can foresee. They built 14 permanent military bases there and they are constructing a military fortress disguised as an embassy to host the equivalent of a medium-size American town. That way, the United States is sure to be at war in the Middle East for decades to come.

Before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the neocon propaganda machine in the media, led by Rupert Murdoch-owned Fox News (News Corp), assisted by ABC (Disney), NBC (GE), CBS (Viacom), TBS (Time Warner), CNN (Time Warner), MTV (Viacom), plus the Weekly Standard (News Corp), the National Review, the New Republic, the Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones), the New York Post (News Corp), the New York Sun, the Washington Times (Sun Myung Moon), etc., initiated an all-out propaganda campaign to persuade the American people that Saddam Hussein was really the villain behind the 9/11 attacks, not the Taliban of Afghanistan or bin Laden’s alleged al Qaeda terrorist network. They succeeded so well in this endeavor that many Americans believed the fabricated fable and swallowed the bait — hook, line, and sinker.

Then the neocons persuaded born-again George W. Bush that he had a mission from ‘God’ to fight the evil of Islamist terrorism. They whispered in his ear that the ‘Devil’ was in Iraq, not in Afghanistan. Thus, [Bush II](#) could enthusiastically proclaim that “Across the world, and across the years, we will fight these evil ones, and we will win.” Canadian neocon [David Frum](#) introduced in a Bush speech the idea of targeting three countries — Iran, Iraq, and North Korea — as the [evils](#) he had to fight, without even mentioning Osama bin Laden or al Qaeda. And, just as with the monkey on the elephant’s back, the neocons led the American elephant into the Iraqi quagmire. Even today, most Americans ignore what really happened and why they have soldiers in Iraq to kill and to be killed.

As a rule, professional news media in a democracy should be independent, objective and, as much as possible, factual and neutral in reporting news and events. This means that they should not have a systematic bias and should not be under government control or under the total control of special interest groups. Indeed, to be informed is a prerequisite for the citizenry to be able to exercise its democratic rights. If the media systematically slant the news or remain content to serve as conveyor belt for state propaganda, this results into a

direct attack on [democracy](#) itself.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, American corporate media have developed the lazy tendency of being “embedded” with the government and of presenting uncritically the government spin on things and events, as if this was always the truth. Some have gone so far in that direction that they seem to be reproducing the relationship that existed in the former Soviet Union between the government and the media, the latter being a simple extension of the former. A case in point: they have no qualms about accepting selective invitations to secret [meetings in the Oval Office](#) to be ‘briefed’ and cheered up in their public support of the Bush-Cheney administration.

The results of this government-inspired disinformation is all there to be seen:

1. Three years after this was officially disproved, half of Americans still believe Iraq had [weapons of mass destruction \(WMD\)](#) before Bush II decided on his own to launch his war of aggression;
2. Close to one-quarter of Americans still cling to the idea that the government of Iraq was behind the attacks of 9/11. Since no such misinformation exists in other countries, this could only mean that public government officials, assisted by the neocon media and government propagandists, have consciously spread and perpetuated the disinformation and are, therefore, mainly responsible for the abysmal and dangerous ignorance found in a large and probably decisive segment of the American electorate.

There is no area where general information is as profoundly at odds with what is known in the United States compared to what is known in the rest of the world as with questions dealing with the state of Israel and the Middle East. Thanks to the powerful [pro-Israel Lobby](#) and its propaganda (Hasbara) machine, Americans seem to live on a different planet than the rest of the world. — Americans, for example, are far more likely than Europeans to [side with Israel](#) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A Pew Global Attitudes survey taken between March and May (2006) found that 48 percent of Americans said that their sympathies lay with the Israelis; only 13 percent were sympathetic towards the Palestinians. By contrast, in Spain for example, 9 percent sympathized with the Israelis and 32 percent with the Palestinians. The main reason for this cleavage is the fact that Americans do not receive the same news as the rest of the world. In the U.S., news directly or indirectly involving Israel is filtered, slanted and adjusted by spin organizations in order to present Israel as the innocent victim, even when it does the killing and the destruction, as its indiscriminate bombings of civilian areas in [Lebanon](#), during the summer of 2006, amply demonstrated.

For this purpose, for example, the Lobby has its own propaganda coordinating organization, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America ([CAMERA](#)). Its mission is to see that American media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) toe the line on Israel and on American policies toward Israel, not hesitating in the process to smear journalists or authors who dare criticizing the actions of the Israeli government or who offer more balanced viewpoints. It also takes the necessary political steps to make sure that the [Federal Communications Commission](#) [FCC] does not impede the move toward concentration of media ownership in the U.S.

What are the conclusions to be drawn from all this?

First, there is the need for free societies to be aware when they are subjected to incessant and systematic campaigns of indoctrination and disinformation, the more so if it is to wage wars of aggression abroad. Second, the threat of excessive concentration of media ownership should always be a paramount preoccupation in a democracy, if freedom of information is to be preserved.

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