The Military-Industrial-Media Complex: The Decline of the “Alert and Knowledgeable Citizenry”

Helen Johnson
Vassar College

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The Military-Industrial-Media Complex: 
The Decline of the “Alert and Knowledgeable Citizenry”

Helen Johnson

Vassar College Department of Political Science
Senior Thesis
Thesis Advisor: Professor Katherine Hite

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Introduction

_The courage we need is not the fortitude to be obedient in the service of an unjust war, to help conceal lies, to do our job for a boss who has usurped power and is acting as an outlaw government. It is the courage at last to face honestly the truth and reality of what we are doing in the world and act responsibly to change it._

—Daniel Ellsberg

On Wednesday, April 14, 2021, President Joe Biden announced that all U.S. forces would withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, finally putting an end to “America’s longest war.”¹ The withdrawal date—if it is adhered to—will mark the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks which prompted President George W. Bush to order the invasion into Afghanistan. The invasion commenced not only the twenty-year-long conflict in Afghanistan, but also a seemingly endless “War on Terror.”

The Costs of War Project estimates that since invading Afghanistan in 2001, the United States has spent an astounding $2.26 trillion on the conflict.² This estimate does not include future interest payments on the money borrowed to fund the war, nor does it account for future costs of veterans’ care. The Costs of War Project also estimates that 241,000 people have died as a direct result of the war, including 2,442 American troops, 78,314 Afghan and Pakistani military and police, 84,191 opposition fighters, and at least 71,344 civilians.³ However, these numbers do not include deaths caused by indirect consequences of the conflict, including disease, failed infrastructure, or loss of access to food and water. The United Nations Assistance Mission in

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³ Ibid.
Afghanistan has counted nearly 111,000 civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan just since 2009.\(^4\) Over 20,000 U.S. troops have been wounded.\(^5\)

The initial invasion of Afghanistan—ordered because al Qaeda was being sheltered by the Taliban there—was largely successful in forcing Qaeda and Taliban leaders to flee into Pakistan by late 2001 and early 2002. However, the war quickly expanded from a counterterrorism mission to a long-term occupation: one which was entirely unsuccessful at creating a stable government and establishing effective local security forces.\(^6\) Even the small successes, such as driving the Taliban out of certain areas, were unsustainable, but U.S. forces stayed—for twenty, long years. Not only that, but the post-9/11 wars extended to Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and elsewhere, amounting to trillions of more dollars in military spending and hundreds of thousands—possibly millions—more dead.\(^7\) The post-9/11 wars have forcibly displaced at least 37 million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria.\(^8\)

United States troops have been in Afghanistan almost as long as I have been alive. Why did it take 20 years to decide to leave? And why, when there was no evidence that the perpetrators of 9/11 were being sheltered anywhere other than in Afghanistan, did the United States invade Iraq in 2003, leading to yet another bloody and costly war? These are questions without simple answers, but in this thesis, I attempt to offer one: the military-industrial-media complex (MIMC). The intersection of power between the military, government, defense

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\(^7\) Brown University, “U.S. Costs,” Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

contractors, the oil industry, and the corporate media has produced a press which is no longer free and functioning in the public interest. This has led to a citizenry which is ill-informed in matters regarding military involvement, and a democracy in increasing danger of being corrupted by the profiteers of war.

Throughout this thesis, I will be referring to President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1961 farewell address in which he famously coined the term “military-industrial complex” (MIC). Eisenhower’s warning—particularly the attention he called to the necessity of an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry”—will serve as an entry point for my discussion of the MIMC. However, an important collection of seminal texts precedes Eisenhower’s speech, which help to provide the theoretical framework for the MIC. I will begin with a literary review of these texts.

From the beginning of the 20th century, several progressive thinkers and their works discussed the concepts that informed Eisenhower’s speech in 1961. In Chapter I, I discuss the various theories put forth in these texts, including Merchants of Death by Helmuth Carol Engelbrecht and Frank Cleary Hanighen; “The Garrison State,” by Harold D. Lasswell; and The Power Elite by C. Wright Mills. I also use James Ledbetter’s Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military-industrial Complex to examine the war economy thesis and the “fear of the technocratic elite,” two other theories in circulation during the early-to-mid 20th century. It is important to revisit these founding texts and their theoretical assertions in order to understand the context of Eisenhower’s address. These works also underlie the contemporary dangers of the MIC, which have become compounded over time with the consolidation of the media industry.

In Chapter 2, I will trace the intricacies of the modern day MIC, which has grown into a monster of vast proportions beyond what even Eisenhower would have envisioned. Not only
does today’s MIC involve the military, weapons makers, and the Congress, but it also includes countless government officials, the oil industry, service companies and contractors, surveillance and technology companies, and think tanks that have managed to imbue their imperialist agendas into White House administrations. An understanding of the enormous breadth and reach of today’s MIC is essential for appreciating the countless ways in which it intersects with the modern-day corporate media.

In Chapter 3, I will explore the consolidation of power within the media that has taken place over the last several decades. In 1983 there were fifty dominant media corporations, while today only five conglomerates own about 90% of United States media. Merger after merger has consolidated the media industry into giant corporations that each have the power to reach millions and even billions of people in the U.S. and around the world. These media giants have unprecedented monetary and political power, which, compounded with the fact that they control the vast majority of news and political messaging we receive, gives them the ability to lobby and influence government to slash regulations, grant antitrust approvals, and promote policies that benefit their corporate interests. And, because they intersect with other million- and billion-dollar industries, they have the power to manufacture favorable opinion for the mutual benefit of themselves and the industries with which they are connected.

In Chapter 4, I will draw the connections between the big players in the MIC as we know it and the corporate media powers. Through outright ownership, interlocking directorates, revolving doors, embedded journalism, and over-reliance on “official” (i.e. military, government, and Pentagon) sources, the corporate media is undeniably linked in complex but powerful ways to the MIC. Beginning with the collaboration between Hollywood and the military made possible by the Committee on Public Information, founded by President Woodrow Wilson in 1917, the
links between the media and the MIC have only become stronger, more frequent, and more financially lucrative over time. This has resulted in a mainstream media that not only fails to provide a check on government use of military power, but actually influences our perception of war and manufactures support for the military apparatus that is the MIC.

In Chapter 5, I will provide proof of the claim I make in Chapter 4. The corporate media manufactures pro-military opinion among the public, contributes to climates of mass hysteria in the periods leading up to military involvement, suppresses information relevant to the use of military power, provides a sanitized coverage of war, fails to investigate, criticize, or thoroughly debate issues of military involvement, too easily bends to pressure from government and military officials, and even sometimes spreads outright lies and false information regarding matters of war. This has resulted in an American citizenry that is ill-informed, uneducated, and misled in matters regarding military involvement, rendering it incapable of holding its government to account when it comes to military spending, policy, and war.

Throughout this thesis, I will rely on a series of progressive secondary literatures which offer extensive analyses of the modern-day MIC and the corporate media. William D. Hartung’s *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex*; Norman Solomon’s *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*; Christopher Doran’s *Making the World Safe for Capitalism: How Iraq Threatened the US Economic Empire and Had to Be Destroyed*; Ben Bagdikian’s *The New Media Monopoly*; Douglas Kellner’s *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War and Election Battles*; and Martin A. Lee’s and Norman Solomon’s *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media* are some of the texts from which I draw most heavily. I will also rely on
white papers, both official and non-governmental watchdog studies, and progressive investigative journalism to stake my claims.

I will conclude with an example of the disastrous consequences of the military-industrial-media complex: the Iraq war. Even more so than “America’s longest war” (Afghanistan), the war in Iraq represents one of the most egregious failures of the mainstream, corporate media to thoroughly and accurately inform the American public about matters of military involvement. The case of Iraq illuminates just how far we have strayed from Eisenhower’s “alert and knowledgeable citizenry,” and the appalling costs—in both human and monetary terms—of the consolidation of power within the corporate media and its interlocking with the MIC. And, although the current state of affairs is grim indeed, I end by briefly discussing policy options that could help to mitigate the effects of the MIMC.

The free press is a pillar of our democracy. Without it, there is no ‘government by consent of the governed.’ I hope the reader of this thesis will glean an understanding of the threat posed by the MIMC and the importance of reclaiming the power of the citizenry to hold the government to account in matters regarding war and the apparatus of war-making.
1) Conceptual Origins of the Military-Industrial Complex

*War and preparation for war is not a matter of national honor and national defense, but a matter of profit for the few.*
—Senator Gerald P. Nye

On January 17, 1961, the 34th President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, delivered the final public speech of his presidency. At that time, only five other presidents had delivered farewell addresses upon leaving office. Emblematic of the many contradictions that characterized his life and presidency, Eisenhower was the only general to be elected president during the 20th century—he served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War II—and he left a legacy warning the nation about the implications of the increasing power of the very establishment in which he served:

“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Although the term “military-industrial complex” was almost certainly invented by one of his speechwriters, Eisenhower is credited with its coining. The MIC has become a phrase used to describe the complex web of connections tying together the military, the Pentagon, politicians, defense contractors, other corporations that profit from, have stakes in, or contribute to war, or any combination thereof, depending on the author. As James Ledbetter notes, “There is no military-industrial complex, but many military-industrial complexes—all of them defined by

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9 The White House, “Text of the Address by President Eisenhower, Broadcast and Televised from His Office in the White House, Tuesday Evening, January 17, 1961, 8:30 to 9:00 P.M., EST,” news release.
someone other than Dwight D. Eisenhower.”\textsuperscript{11} However, most usages include the overlap between private military contractors and the federal government, and highlight colossal military budgets, the influence the defense industry exerts over public policy, and the massive profits (for some) to be reaped from war-waging. Importantly, “[I]t is a mistake to speak of the MIC in the past tense.”\textsuperscript{12}

The idea that there is an intersection between commercial activity and the military, which can lead to profiteering from death and a dangerous rise in the political and economic power of armament makers or of the military itself, dates back to well before Eisenhower’s address. The intellectual origins of the MIC can be traced to several theses that circulated among the anti-war left in the 1930s, the most well-known of which is the merchants of death thesis.

The term “merchants of death” originated in 1932 in the title of an article about an arms dealer: “Zaharoff, Merchant of Death.”\textsuperscript{13} It then became the title of the book Merchants of Death, published in 1943, a striking exposé of how “[t]he story of the rise and development of the arms merchants reveals them as a growing menace to world peace.”\textsuperscript{14} The book’s co-author, F.C. Hanighen, was the founding editor of Human Events, the conservative American weekly, and the book provides a meticulous and comprehensive account of armament makers’ efforts to market their products. Harry Elmer Barnes wrote the forward to the book, saying:

“Not less impressive than the comprehensiveness of the work is the sane and reasonable tone which pervades the whole study. Most accounts of the armament industry have been written by men and women who possess all the fervor of the valiant crusader against war... Dr. Engelbrecht and Mr. Hanighen do not fall victim to this temptation. They thoroughly expose all the evils of the armament industry, but they remain at all times conscious that broader forces, such as patriotism, imperialism, nationalistic education, and

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{13} Xavier de Hauteclocque, “ZAHAROFF Merchant of Death: Translated from Le Crapouillot Paris Topical Monthly,” The Living Age (1897-1941), May 1932, 204.
\textsuperscript{14} Helmuth Carol Engelbrecht and Frank Cleary Hanighen, Merchants of Death (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, 1927), 257.
and capitalistic competition, play a larger part than the armament industry in keeping alive the war system.”

Because of the even-handedness of the critique, *Merchants of Death* had a powerful effect and became one of the most well-respected cases made against the war machine. Engelbrecht and Hanighen argue, through eighteen chapters of well-documented evidence, that arms manufacturers lobbied against disarmament after WWI and heightened fear of military threats in order to secure more favorable markets for their products: “[T]he arms maker has risen and grown powerful, until today he is one of the most dangerous factors in world affairs—a hindrance to peace, a promoter of war.” They are careful to be fair, noting that “No scholar would undertake to prove that the armament makers alone brought about the World War, nor is it possible to say that these magnates dictate orders to the government…But that there is an intimate relationship between governments and the arms merchants is indisputable.”

They also point out the range of industries that are counted among the “merchants of death,” drawing special attention to steel. The authors cite how the Navy League raised heavy objections to the treaty signed between the United States, Great Britain and Japan in 1930 that agreed on a joint policy of naval limitation; further investigation showed that the one corporate founder of the Navy League was Middle Steel Company, which had sold over $20,000,000 of armor plate to the US government. Among the 18 individual founders were Charles M. Schwab, president of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, J.P. Morgan, of the United States Steel Corporation, Colonel R. M. Thompson, of the international Nickel Company, and B.F. Tracy, former Secretary of the Navy, who became attorney for the Carnegie Steel Company—all of

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17 Ibid, 108.
whom would profit from large naval orders.\textsuperscript{18} Harry Elmer Barnes again offers valuable insight: “Armament makers and bankers alike are the victims of human cupidity. The only way in which the armament makers are at all unique is that they are engaged in an industry where the death of human beings is the logical end and objective of their activity.”\textsuperscript{19}

In addition to Merchants of Death, two other books were published in 1934—Iron, Blood and Profits by George Seldes and a new edition of War for Profits by Otto Lehmann-Russbueldt (translated from German). It is not a coincidence that the publications of these three books, at the pinnacle of disarmament and isolationist activism in the United States, coincided with “the most sustained and critical American legislative interrogation of the arms industry, which became known as the ‘munitions inquiry,’” led by Republican Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota.\textsuperscript{20} The investigation began on September 4, 1934 and lasted for 18 months.

The Nye Committee held 93 hearings and questioned over 200 witnesses, including J.P. Morgan, Jr. and Pierre du Pont. The investigation ended abruptly in 1936, when committee funding was cut off due to Chairman Nye suggesting that the late Democratic president Woodrow Wilson had purposely withheld information from Congress leading up to the United States entering into World War I.\textsuperscript{21} Although the investigation was unsuccessful in achieving Nye’s goal of nationalizing the arms industry, popular skepticism of the arms manufacturers and the reasons behind U.S. involvement in the War persevered. “There is certainty that the profits of preparation for war and the profits of war itself constitute the most serious challenge to the peace

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Barnes, foreword, vii.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ledbetter, Unwarranted Influence, 23-24.
\item \textsuperscript{21} “Merchants of Death,” United States Senate, accessed March 13, 2021.
\end{itemize}
of the world. . .The removal of the element of profit from war would materially remove the
danger of more war,” Nye declared.22

In addition to the merchants of death theory (to which *Iron, Blood and Profits* and *War for Profits* also contributed), two other theories circulated in the first half of the 20th century that considered the dangers of the intersection between military power and economic or political interests: the war economy thesis and the garrison state thesis. As Ledbetter explains, “The war economy thesis is a close corollary of the merchants of death thesis; both involve the intersection of commercial activity and the military. But the war economy thesis reaches further: it holds that modern industrial states are so intertwined with the manufacturers of military equipment that they are mutually dependent.”23 Rather than being limited to the idea that arms manufacturers encourage war, dramatize war threats, or object to disarmament for the sake of profits, in a war economy, disarmament isn’t even possible without the potential for economic collapse. The rise and fall of military expenditures does not fluctuate depending on whether the nation is in wartime or peacetime; the state is dependent upon a permanent war economy.

The garrison state thesis became popular in the 1940s and 50s and referred to “a society in which individual liberties are severely constricted and automatically subservient to state and military imperatives.”24 Those who subscribed to this theory feared that national security would eventually overtake freedom, replacing true democracy with a “garrison state.” The fleshed-out concept originated with sociologist Harold D. Lasswell; in his 1941 essay “The Garrison State,” he writes:

“[I]nstrumental democracy will be in abeyance, although the symbols of mystic ‘democracy’ will doubtless continue. Instrumental democracy is found wherever authority and control are widely dispersed among the members of a state. Mystic

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23 Ibid, 27.
24 Ibid, 37.
‘democracy’ is not, strictly speaking, democracy at all, because it may be found where authority and control are highly concentrated yet where part of the established practice is to speak in the name of the people as a whole. It is clear that the friend of democracy views the emergence of the garrison state with repugnance and apprehension. He will do whatever is within his power to defer it.”

According to Lasswell, characteristics of the garrison state would include the supremacy of the soldier and specialists on violence; erasure of the distinction between civilian and military functions; the use of coercion, manipulation and propaganda; abolition of free communication and monopolies on public opinion; and a permanent war economy.

In addition to these theories about what the rise of military power might mean for democratic economies and societies, around the same time there was brewing what Ledbetter calls a “fear of the technocratic elite.” This fear revolved around the possibilities for the misuse of scientific and technological knowledge, due in part to the dramatic leaps being made in these fields at the time. “The fear was that even the institutions that we love and admire could conspire to progressively rob us of our individuality and our values.” This was due in part to the fact that the development of the atomic and hydrogen bombs rested at the intersection of scientific progress and military developments. Thus, it is no surprise that the fear of the technocratic elite factored into Eisenhower’s farewell speech:

“Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research…a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity…The prospect of domination of the nation’s scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present—and is gravely to be regarded. Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.”

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26 Ledbetter, Unwarranted Influence, 42.
27 The White House, “Text of the Address.”
In addition to the merchants of death, war economy, garrison state, and technocratic elite theses, there is one more book that warrants attention: that is, *The Power Elite* by C. Wright Mills, published in 1956. Mills contends that “Within American society, major national power now resides in the economic, the political, and the military domains.” According to his theory, the traditional centers of power in a pre-industrialized, pre-militarized society—religious, educational, and family institutions—have given way to corporations, politicians, and the military. In addition, “[w]ithin each of the big three, the typical institutional unit has become enlarged, has become administrative, and, in the power of its decisions, has become centralized.” Thus, the individuals heading these institutions hold a much more concentrated power than ever before. Finally, Mills argues that the big three do not operate independently, but that the decisions of each bear heavily upon the other two, such that there is an overlap in power and decision making: “As each of these domains has coincided with the others, as decisions tend to become total in their consequence, the leading men in each of the three domains of power—the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate—tend to come together, to form the power elite of America.”

Scholarly responses to *The Power Elite* were varied. Many critics pointed to the fact that although Mills posed a shocking argument, he didn’t have the evidence to prove it. Others complained that it was impossible to take Mills’ central theory seriously because of his attacks on his fellow academics (the latter portion of the book focuses heavily on what he calls “the conservative mood” and the failings of scholars to address what he sees as major problems), and on the public in general (he contends that the citizenry of the United States has been transformed

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29 Ibid, 7.
in a “mass society” that is easily manipulated by the power elite). In a review published in the
Louisiana Law Review, Calvin Woodard ascertains that “The practical danger of Mr. Mills' pessimistic interpretation of the current situation is that his readers will concentrate on answering his prejudicial assertions rather than ponder the results of his really formidable research. This would be unfortunate for The Power Elite is too good a book and contains too much original data to come and go the way of an ordinary polemic.”

However, the book has been regarded more favorably over time. While the merchants of death and war economy theses posited a dangerous relationship between the military and economic forces, and the garrison state thesis implied the military would take over a central role in government, The Power Elite drew connections among all three—economic, political, and military powers. This is essentially the main idea synthesized by the famous term coined five years later: the military-industrial complex.

These are the threads of intellectual thought that, woven together, produced Eisenhower’s farewell address to the nation in 1961. The attention given to a possible “military-industrial complex” rose and fell throughout the latter half of the 20th century, declining from the late 1980s through the beginning of the 2000s. However, the War on Terror sparked by the 9/11 attacks and the prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have renewed interest in the MIC. New factors—such as the importance of oil for national security and surveillance technology—have dramatically altered the landscape and scope of what may be considered part of the MIC since Eisenhower’s speech.

32 Ledbetter, Unwarranted Influence, 188-189.
A thorough re-examination of the MIC in light of all of these factors is a massive endeavor and is not the goal of this thesis. Rather, I seek to investigate a limb, extending from the MIC and connecting it with another institution. There are many iterations of the MIC that take into account linkages with other systems; in fact, in the drafts of Eisenhower’s speech, both the terms “military-industrial-congressional complex” and “military-industrial-scientific complex” were considered. What interests me here is neither of these, but a connection with one of the institutions that we, as a democratic society, hold most dear, and which President Eisenhower himself identified as the one most critical to “security and liberty prospering together”: the free media.

Aside from the fact that the various theories that circulated in the first half of the twentieth century and The Power Elite all foreshadowed the ominous warning delivered by Eisenhower in 1961, there is another striking similarity between them. They all mention that the various players of what would come to be known as the MIC might turn to the press, the media, or control of the means of communication as a way to legitimize their control or bring public opinion to their side. In The Merchants of Death, Engelbrecht and Hanighen write:

“The press is too powerful and important to be neglected by the arms makers. Hence none of the great arms merchants are without their connections. Sometimes a newspaper is bought outright; sometimes a controlling interest is sufficient; sometimes influential newspapermen or owners are put on the payrolls or on the directorates of the armament makers… In practice the control and use of the press works out in various ways. Newspapers live from advertising. Now armaments makers seldom advertise their military wares, although this has happened. It is much better to advertise their ordinary industrial products, such as railroad tracks, machines, construction materials, etc… The press is also useful in suppressing news or in refusing paid advertisements against the arms makers.”

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33 Ibid, 107.
34 Engelbrecht and Hanighen, Merchants of Death, 145-146.
In “The Garrison State,” Lasswell writes: “From the earliest years youth will be trained to subdue—to disavow, to struggle against—any specific opposition to the ruling code of collective exactions… The ruling group will exercise a monopoly of opinion in public, thus abolishing the free communication of fact and interpretation.” Writing about the fear of the technocratic elite, Ledbetter explains that “A related fear existed of the perhaps-too-persuasive powers of television and advertising. Intellectuals worried that public opinion research could be refined to the point where individuals could be monitored and even manipulated.” Malcom Moos, Eisenhower’s chief speechwriter, shared these concerns. In 1956 he wrote: “Increasingly public-relations and advertising men have figured in political campaigns. And this is a circumstance that provokes many misgivings. The importance of the advertising or public-relations man to the party cannot be underestimated, for these professionals have become expert in the use of mass media.”

Last but most certainly not least, Mills spends quite a bit of time on the dangers of media and messaging when intersected with or controlled by the power elite. He explains that “[the] eighteenth-century idea of the public of public opinion parallels the economic idea of the market of the free economy. Here is the market composed of freely competing entrepreneurs; there is the public composed of discussion circles of opinion peers… The autonomy of these discussions is an important element in the idea of public opinion as a democratic legitimation.” However, Mills was deeply concerned about what was happening to the free circulation of thought, and the implications for democracy:

“What is happening might again be stated in terms of the historical parallel between the economic market and the public of public opinion. In brief, there is a movement from widely scattered little powers to concentrated powers and the attempt at monopoly

36 Ledbetter, Unwarranted Influence, 42.
37 Ibid, 42-43.
38 Mills, The Power Elite, 298-299.
control from powerful centers, which, being partially hidden, are centers of manipulation as well as of authority.”

This concentration of power in the media world, he argues, negates the power of public opinion and debate to influence democratic decision-making: “For the decisions that are made must take into account those who are important—other elites—but they must be sold to the mass memberships.” This leads, he contends, to a ‘folklore’ democracy, where “the public of public opinion has become the object of intensive efforts to control, manage, manipulate, and increasingly intimidate.”

The potentiality for those who hold power within the military-industrial complex—whether you call them merchants of death, the power elite, or simply businessmen, politicians, Pentagon officials and generals—to use the media, either intentionally or indirectly, to influence public opinion on all aspects of the MIC, is what I wish to investigate here. Importantly, I do not wish to paint a conspiracy of top officials and CEOs plotting a complex propaganda scheme. I also do not want to imply that reporters are directed behind closed doors to paint the MIC in a certain light. Rather, I hope to illuminate how the concentration of power within the corporate media and the MIC, along with the intersections of these industries, can influence the messaging we receive on a daily basis. And, as the several authors I highlight here have pointed out, this has striking implications for democracy.

In the United States, we consider the free press to be a hallmark of our liberty. However, the massive concentration of media power from hundreds of media firms to the Big Five today means that just a handful of people have the power to influence the messaging that affects millions of people throughout the nation. Not only have the media conglomerates consolidated,
but they are linked in direct and indirect ways to the various arms of the MIC. Thus, they have ceased to be the unbiased news outlets we believe them to be in matters regarding war. Eisenhower’s hope that “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry” would be able to check the growing power of the military-industrial complex has not only not been realized, but is in greater danger than ever before.
2) The Disastrous Rise of Misplaced Power

War is a racket. The few profit, the many pay.
—Noam Chomsky

Today’s military-industrial complex is an overwhelming web of inter-tangled connections, a multi-layer tapestry of overlapping industries, and a maze of powerful people and companies with invisible influence and iniquitous interests. To examine in-depth the full extent of the modern-day MIC would be a never-ending task and would require delving into almost every corner of American life and industry. Here, I wish to give a fundamental synopsis of some of the key players in today’s MIC, as well as a basic analysis of how it operates and the conditions it produces. Importantly, the MIC includes not only the military and the industry of arms manufacturers, but Congress (as Eisenhower recognized before scratching ‘congressional’ from his final speech), officials in various governmental posts and White House administrations, Big Oil, providers of services and equipment to oil companies and defense contractors, surveillance and technology companies, service sector companies that contract with the military, and think tanks—to name a few.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), founded in 1966, is an independent international institute dedicated to research about conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.42 SPIRI compiles annual lists of the top arms-producing and military services companies in the world. In 2019, the top United States arms companies were (numbers preceding names are international ranking): 1. Lockheed Martin Corp; 2. Boeing; 3. Northrop Grumman Corp; 4. Raytheon; 5. General Dynamics Corp; 10. L3Harris Technologies; 11. United Technologies Corp; 16. Huntington Ingalls Industries; 18. Honeywell International; 19. Leidos;

20. Booz Allen Hamilton; and 21. General Electric. SPIRI notes that, “Taken together, the arms sales of the 43 companies based in the USA listed in the Top 100 were $246 billion in 2018—an increase of 7.2 per cent on 2017. The USA’s share of total Top 100 arms sales was 59 per cent in 2018.”

Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and General Dynamics compete over spots three, four and five in the ranking, oftentimes trading places depending on the year or the data used. Boeing, however, consistently sits at a comfortable second place, and Lockheed Martin is the largest arms producer in the world by far. It has occupied first place in SIPRI’s top 100 every year since 2009, and in 2018 its share of the total Top 100 arms sales was a stunning 11 percent.

William D. Hartung’s Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex provides a meticulously researched and shocking exposé of the colossal company and the enormous breadth of its reach and influence. Hartung notes that in 2008 alone, Lockheed Martin had $36 billion in total federal contracts, $29 billion of which came from Pentagon contracts, making it not only the nation’s leading weapons contractor but the top overall government contractor as well. The astronomical amounts spent on contracts with Lockheed Martin came out to approximately $260 per taxpaying household, appropriately called “the Lockheed Martin tax.”

At the time Hartung’s book was written, Lockheed Martin was also the top contractor not only for the Pentagon but also for the Department of Energy and the Department of Transportation. It came in second in contracts for the Department of State, third for the National

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Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and fourth for the Departments of Justice and Housing and Urban Development. Hartung writes, “Lockheed Martin has more power and money to defend its turf than any other Pentagon contractor. It spent $15 million on lobbying and campaign contributions in 2009 alone. Add to that its 140,000 employees and its claim to have a presence in forty-six states, and the scale of its potential influence starts to become clear.”

That influence is exerted first and foremost on members of Congress. Congress controls the purse, and the massive budgets for defense spending need votes to pass. Hartung explains in depth the gigantic effort on the part of Lockheed Martin to preserve their F-22 Raptor fighter plane, which, at $350 million per plane, was one of their most profitable weapons and the second most expensive combat aircraft ever built. The need for the F-22 was debated throughout the 2000s until the program was ultimately ended in 2009. Hartung explains, “At the heart of the lobbying campaign was the mantra of ‘jobs, jobs, jobs’—jobs in forty-four states, or so the company claimed. Lockheed Martin’s PR barely bothered to mention that the F-22 is needed to defend the country; that argument was there in the background, but it wasn’t the driving force.”

The jobs argument is extremely effective in swaying members of Congress, who need to stay popular in their home state and for whom any potential smears claiming they forfeited jobs is a political nightmare. In the 2006 documentary Why We Fight, Joseph Cirincione of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace makes this point: “The military-industrial complex is not two links, it’s three. It’s the military and the industry and the Congress. For a Congressman, defense spending means jobs.”

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid, 29.
50 Hartung, Prophets of War, 2.
51 Why We Fight, directed by Eugene Jarecki, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006.
This tactic is the oldest in the book and has been employed over and over again by every weapons contractor. In the fight for the F-22 Raptor, Democrats John Kerry and the late Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts voted for the plane because Raytheon, based in Massachusetts, was responsible for the electronic systems on the plane. The majority of the work was done in California, “But even these fairly modest connections were enough to swing the votes of Kerry and Kennedy, perhaps out of the habit of voting for all things Raytheon.”\(^\text{52}\) Chalmers Johnson, a political scientist with a fifty-year career in foreign policy and who worked with the CIA from 1967-1973, notes of Northrop Grumman’s B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber: “The B-2 bomber has a piece of it made in every single state, to make sure that if you ever tried to phase that project out, you will get howls from among the most liberal members of Congress.”\(^\text{53}\)

This means that massive defense spending is extremely bi-partisan, and it is almost impossible to make cuts no matter which party controls Congress or the White House. Hartung points out that Democratic Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii was “legendary for bringing home the bacon in the form of earmarks for unrequested defense projects…In return, Inouye had received over $117,000 in campaign contributions since January 2007 from companies that benefited from his earmarks, with over half coming from Lockheed Martin.”\(^\text{54}\) And even though President Obama’s proposed cuts to defense spending included the elimination or reduction of eight separate programs, his military budget still increased from the last year of the Bush administration.\(^\text{55}\) The bi-partisan nature of defense spending is epitomized by this quote from during Obama’s presidency by Loren Thompson of the Lexington Institute, who did contracting work for Lockheed Martin: “The defense industry is pleased but bemused. It’s been telling itself

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\(^{52}\) Hartung, Prophets of War, 11.  
\(^{53}\) Why We Fight.  
\(^{54}\) Hartung, Prophets of War, 16.  
\(^{55}\) Ibid, 10.
for years that when the Democrats get control it would be bad news for weapons programs. But the spending keeps going on.”

In addition to the jobs argument, defense contractors employ numerous other lobbying tactics to sway members of Congress to vote for their programs. One of these methods is sending ex-members of Congress to win over their former colleagues. When funding for the F-22 was withheld back in 1999 due to the program’s huge cost overruns, “Lockheed Martin pulled out all the stops, deploying Republican ex-Senator Matt Mattingly of Georgia and former House members like Democrats ‘Buddy’ Darden of Georgia and G.V. ‘Sonny’ Montgomery of Mississippi as paid lobbyists.” Former members have access to things like the House gymnasium and sauna, where Sonny Montgomery confronted Representative James Moran of Virginia to talk about the F-22. In Why We Fight, Karen Kwiatkowski—a retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel of the Pentagon who also worked for the National Security Agency—says of the circumstances leading up to the Iraq war: “We have a Congress that failed in every way to ask the right questions, to hold the President to account. Congress failed us miserably, and that’s because many in Congress are beholden to the military-industrial complex.”

Congress is only one way the profiteers of the MIC exert their influence. The notorious revolving door creates an exchange of top officials back and forth between the government, the Pentagon, and the companies that do business with each. Although ethics laws exist to try to deter this kind of conflict of interest, they are weak, unenforced, and not specific enough to stop the flow through the revolving door. The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) documents instances of the revolving door and has created a database to track the movement of former

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56 Ibid, 23.
57 Ibid, 4.
58 Why We Fight.
government officials who join the defense industry as executives, lobbyists, or other positions. They explain,

“The revolving door between the government and the corporations it does business with often creates the appearance that government officials are improperly favoring a company in awarding or managing federal programs and contracts. Without transparency and more effective protections of the public interest the revolving door between senior Pentagon officials and officers and defense contractors may be costing American taxpayers billions.”

POGO’s 2018 report includes a comprehensive analysis of the revolving door and the various ways it manifests, including the hiring by defense contractors of senior officials involved in major weapon systems policy, development, or acquisition, officials who oversaw logistics regarding defense contracting, and officials involved in former military sales—all of which slip through the loopholes in the existing ethics laws. The key findings of the report include:

“There were 645 instances of the top 20 defense contractors in fiscal year 2016 hiring former senior government officials, military officers, Members of Congress, and senior legislative staff as lobbyists, board members, or senior executives in 2018…Since some lobbyists work for multiple defense contractors, there are more instances than officials.

Of those instances, nearly 90 percent became registered lobbyists, where the operational skill is influence-peddling.

At least 380 high-ranking Department of Defense officials and military officers shifted into the private sector to become lobbyists, board members, executives, or consultants for defense contractors.

Of the Department of Defense officials POGO tracked through the revolving door, a quarter of them (95) went to work at the Department of Defense’s top 5 contractors (Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman).

Military officers going through the revolving door included 25 Generals, 9 Admirals, 43 Lieutenant Generals, and 23 Vice Admirals.”

60 Fiscal year 2016 refers to the year in which the companies analyzed were the top 20 defense contractors. The report is for 2018.
61 Ibid, 9.
These statistics speak for themselves. It is also important to note that POGO’s report only documents one direction of the revolving door; it does not address instances of the “reverse revolving door,” which is when officials from the defense industry join the government.

POGO notes that the actual number of revolving door instances they documented is most definitely higher than their findings because they compiled information relying on publicly available sources and self-reporting by companies and individuals. A 2006 Government Accountability Office survey of Contractors and Internal Revenue data found that 52 contractors employed 2,435 former Department of Defense officials in various positions.62 In the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress required that the DoD create a database to track instances of senior officials and officers seeking employment with contractors, called the After Government Employment Advice Repository (AGEAR). However, AGEAR has never been made public. It is also incomplete, according to DoD Inspector General reports.63

Not only is the revolving door extensive, pervasive, and virtually unchecked, but it is even encouraged: “Today, industry programs like ‘From Battlefield to Board Room,’ match up retired and soon-to-be retired military officers with private companies—including large federal contractors—looking to hire new leadership.”64 Major General Mike Boera, who served as the Air Force’s director of programs and director of requirements and developed programs and

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62 Ibid, 10.
63 Ibid, 7.
64 Ibid, 4.
business plans for weapon systems, went through the Board Room program and became the Executive of Intelligence, Information and Services at Raytheon. Raytheon had received $2.9 billion in Air Force contracts the year Boera assumed this position.

The revolving door is nothing new. Hartung notes that “A 1969 report released by William Proxmire’s office found that over 2,000 military officers had gone to work for major defense contractors as of that year, a threefold increase over a decade earlier. The biggest practitioner of revolving-door hiring was Lockheed, with 210 former military officers on its payroll.”65 Proxmire, a Democratic Senator from Wisconsin from 1957 to 1989, was one of the most vocal critics of wasteful government spending and the military-industrial complex in Congress. In 1969, he declared of the revolving door: “The easy movement of high ranking military officers into jobs with major defense contractors and the reverse movement of top executives in major defense contractors into high ranking Pentagon jobs is solid evidence of the military-industrial complex in operation. It is a real threat to the public interest because it increases the chances of abuse.”66

The reverse revolving door is also prevalent today. Officials from the defense industry regularly assume positions in the government, and are over-represented in Department leadership, according to POGO.67 Hartung notes that “[m]ore than half a dozen important policy

65 Harting, Prophets of War, 102.
66 Ibid.
posts in the Bush administration were filled by Lockheed Martin executives, lobbyists, or lawyers,” the list of which takes up a whole page in his book.\(^6\) President Obama attempted to curb the flow of lobbyists from the defense industry into the government, but didn’t appear to take his own initiative too seriously: “At the beginning of his Administration, President Obama issued an ethics executive order banning lobbyists from working in agencies they lobbied during the previous two years, only to issue the first waiver shortly thereafter to his first Deputy Secretary of Defense, William Lynn, who was previously a Raytheon lobbyist.”\(^6\) Lynn’s successor, Ashton Carter, was a consultant for Raytheon. James Mattis, a former board member of General Dynamics, was President Trump’s Secretary of Defense. Patrick Shanahan served as Trump’s Deputy Secretary of Defense from 2017 to 2019 and Acting Secretary of Defense from Jan. 1, 2019, to June 23, 2019. Shanahan entered the Trump administration after a 30-year long career at Boeing.\(^7\)

The revolving door epitomizes exactly what Eisenhower was worried about when he warned us that the military-industrial complex could “endanger our liberties or democratic processes.” Government officials who go on to lobby for or serve on the executive boards of giant defense contractors—the very companies they used to oversee, and which hold contracts sometimes worth billions—produce an undeniable conflict of interest, as do officials from these

\(^6\) Hartung, Prophets of War, 192.
\(^6\) Project On Government Oversight, Brass Parachutes, 5.
companies going on to serve in the government. As POGO states, “[the revolving door] often confuses what is in the best financial interests of defense contractors—excessively large Pentagon budgets, endless wars, and overpriced weapon systems—with what is in the best interest of military effectiveness and protecting citizens.”

This conflict of interest has striking effects. Charles Lewis of the Center for Public Integrity notes that “We have a snapshot in time, after September 11th, where at least 71 companies that we were able to identify are starting to get contracts to go in in Afghanistan and Iraq. All of the top 10 companies had former U.S. officials who had worked in the Pentagon or other parts of the U.S. government on their boards of directors or as their top executives.” Not only do the numbers themselves raise eyebrows, but there are several revolving door instances that resulted in prosecution. One of the most egregious examples is Darleen Druyun, who was the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force and oversaw the management of the Air Force's weapons acquisition program from 1993 to 2002. Druyun was negotiating jobs at Boeing for her son-in-law and herself while simultaneously winning the company billions of dollars in contracts. She pled guilty to a conspiracy charge in 2004 and was sentenced to nine months in prison. According to POGO, “The Congressional Budget Office found that an aerial refueling

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71 Project On Government Oversight, Brass Parachutes, 2.
72 Why We Fight.
aircraft deal Druyun was negotiating with Boeing while seeking employment with the company would have overcharged taxpayers nearly $5.7 billion.”

It would be a mistake to assume that the only instances of personnel exchange between the MIC and the government that result in a conflict of interest are with arms contractors. Today’s MIC is so expansive that there are countless industries and companies involved in “national defense” and war-waging, many of which, at first glance, may not appear to have direct ties to the military. Big Oil is unquestionably implicated in the MIC, as are companies such as Halliburton, an oil services and engineering company, and its subsidiary Kellogg Brown & Root, a contractor that does service work for the military. Dick Cheney was the chairman and CEO of Halliburton from 1995 to 2000 before being elected Vice President.

David Rosenbaum reported in the New York Times that in 2000, Halliburton was only the 22nd-largest military contractor, but rose to 7th-largest by 2003. Additionally, “Mr. Cheney's financial disclosure statements from 2001, 2002 and 2003 show that since becoming vice president-elect, he has received $1,997,525 from the company: $1,451,398 in a bonus deferred from 1999, the rest in deferred salary. He also holds options to buy Halliburton stock.” Halliburton won a large contract in 2001—worth at least $5 billion—to provide food, housing, fuel, and other support for troops in the Middle East. In 2003, Kellogg Brown & Root “received

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73 Project On Government Oversight, Brass Parachutes, 4.
from the Pentagon what is called a sole-source contract, meaning it was awarded without bidding, to restore and operate Iraqi oil wells. The contract, which was classified when it was awarded just before the invasion of Iraq, could be worth as much as $7 billion.” 75 Although Cheney denied any ongoing relationship with Halliburton while he was Vice President, he clearly still had major financial ties to the company. Additionally, there need not be an ongoing communication for officials in the Pentagon to be aware that the Vice President is a former contractor CEO, nor for his influence to be felt in other ways.

Examining Cheney’s career in the White House also illuminates the connections between Big Oil and the MIC. Chalmers Johnson notes that in the practical sense, “Oil is what drives the military machine of every country. That is, it provides the fuel for the aircrafts, for the ships, for the tanks, for the trucks. Control of oil is indispensable. When you run out of it, your army stops.” 76 But the linkages are more complex and, in many ways, more alarming, than that. A slew of Western oil companies—including ExxonMobil and Chevron (American) as well as BP and Shell (British and Dutch)—and American oil service companies like Halliburton have been profiting off of Iraqi oil since the U.S. invasion. 77 In fact, before the 2003 invasion, Iraq’s oil was

75 Ibid.
76 Why We Fight.
nationalized and closed to Western oil companies. By a decade into the war, it was mostly privatized and dominated by foreign firms.\textsuperscript{78}

In \textit{Making the World Safe for Capitalism: How Iraq Threatened the US Economic Empire and had to be Destroyed}, Christopher Doran examines how neoliberal economic systems, corporate interests, and Middle Eastern oil revenues were the driving forces behind the war in Iraq. He explains, “An independent Iraq, free to develop its own oil resources unimpeded, would have had the potential to challenge Saudi Arabia’s petrodollar financing of the US economy, and directly challenge the Saudi state’s capacity to serve American interests via its dominant oil producer status.”\textsuperscript{79} It was not only the potential for the United States to control Iraqi oil that drove the war, although that was a factor. It was also the fact that Iraq’s potential to produce oil would directly rival Saudi Arabia, and that had Saddam Hussein remained in power, he might have honored European companies’ access to Iraqi oil at the expense of American ones. This would also have resulted in Iraq selling its oil in euros instead of dollars, which was a huge threat to US global dominance.\textsuperscript{80} Thus, “Direct control of Iraq via ‘regime change’ meant not only removing these impediments to American global economic dominance, it also meant

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 9.
potential control of Iraq’s oil production as a complement to, or even potential direct
replacement of, Saudi Arabia.”

President Bush and Vice President Cheney had their eyes on Iraq from the moment they
entered the White House: “In the February 2004 issue of The New Yorker, journalist Jane Mayer
revealed documentation that Cheney had begun urging that the US militarily seize Iraq’s oil
within the first two weeks of taking office, several months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.”

Additionally, there is evidence that a meeting took place between Mr. Cheney’s staff and
executives from the oil industry, including representatives from ExxonMobil Corp,
ChevronTexaco Corp, ConocoPhillips, and Halliburton, although the parties involved denied this
ever happened. What they can’t deny, however, is that in 2000, Big Oil—including ExxonMobil,
Chevron, BP, and Shell—spent more money on the Bush-Cheney campaign than they had spent
on any previous election. In 2007, General John Abizaid, former head of U.S. Central
Command and Military Operations in Iraq, said of the war: “Of course it’s about oil; we can’t
really deny that.”

While oil and economic dominance were clearly a driving force for the invasion of Iraq,
the Bush administration waged a full-on propaganda war to cover up this fact. They ascertained
that Saddam Hussein had ties to Al Qaeda, and that Iraq had or was planning to make weapons

81 Ibid, 6-7.
82 Ibid, 129.
83 Juhasz, “Why the War in Iraq Was Fought for Big Oil,” CNN.
84 Ibid.
of mass destruction. Both of these claims were false, and the intelligence showed this even before the invasion. However, the propaganda war had already been won, and a 2003 poll in the Washington Post showed that 69 percent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was likely involved in 9/11. Meanwhile behind the scenes, “Grant Aldonas, US Under Secretary for Commerce, said to a business forum in October 2002 that ‘[War] would open up the spigot on Iraq’s oil, which certainly would have a profound effect in terms of the performance of the world economy for those countries that are manufacturers and oil consumers.’” Thus, Big Oil renewed and reinforced its membership in the MIC.

In addition to weapons manufactures, Big Oil, and service contractors like Kellogg Brown & Root, think tanks constitute another arm of the MIC. Contrary to popular belief, much of public policy isn’t actually written in Congress, but by outside groups eager to promote their agendas and who have close ties to those working in government. Think tanks can influence policy from all corners of the political spectrum, not always negatively—but some have played a central role in foreign policy and war-making. One such think tank was the Project for a New American Century (PNAC).

PNAC was a neoconservative think tank based in Washington, D.C. and founded in 1997. Its stated goal was “to promote American global leadership,” and its statement of principles

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argued the need to “increase defense spending significantly” and for a “Reaganite policy of military strength.” The founders of PNAC, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, were advocating for a regime change in Iraq as early as 1998, and PNAC initiated an open letter to President Bill Clinton on January 26, 1998 calling for the removal of Saddam Hussein. Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, President Bush’s Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense, were core members of PNAC and among the signatories of this letter.

The membership of PNAC was essentially “a who’s who of people who would go on to fill high-level national security jobs in the George W. Bush administration, from Paul Wolfowitz to Donald Rumsfeld to Dick Cheney. Conservative former Congressman Vin Weber—who later became a lobbyist for Lockheed Martin—also signed PNAC’s founding Statement. George W. Bush himself was not a signatory, but his brother Jeb was.” From Wolfowitz to Rumsfeld to Cheney, Hartung notes that “All were early advocates of the Iraq war, and all played a role in misleading the American public to justify U.S. intervention.” In Why We Fight, William Kristol boasts that “[i]n some respects, we argued for, I suppose you might say, elements of the Bush Doctrine before the Bush Doctrine existed or before George W. Bush became president.” PNAC’s implications in the MIC are clear.

89 Hartung, Prophets of War, 191.
90 Ibid, 208.
91 Why We Fight.
Another important person in PNAC was Bruce Jackson, former vice president of Lockheed Martin and chairman of the Republican Party Platform’s subcommittee for National Security and Foreign Policy in 2000 when George W. Bush ran for president. Jackson was consistently involved in calling for U.S. intervention in Iraq and was “so wired that his extensive connections with hawkish think tanks led one prominent neoconservative to describe him as ‘the nexus between the defense industry and the neoconservatives. He translates them to us, and us to them.’” 92 Jackson helped to found the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq (CLI), a network dedicating to ‘freeing’ Iraq from Saddam Hussein.

The MIC players I have included thus far include arms manufacturers, the military and the Pentagon, Congress and government administrations, Big Oil, service contractors like Kellogg Brown & Root, and think tanks and non-governmental organizations. There are many more, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover every industry and company implicated in the MIC. However, it is worth noting that that the most obvious MIC players also reach into areas well beyond the scope of their primary business. Take Lockheed Martin, for example:

“While contracts for supplying weapons for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are a significant part of Lockheed Martin’s business, the new company that has taken form since the merger boom in the 1990s has a far wider reach. These activities include everything from involvement in interrogation and police training to profiting from the new post-9/11 wave of domestic surveillance activities.” 93

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93 Ibid, 215.
Lockheed Martin has been involved in supplying interrogators for U.S. military prisons at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, providing a wide range of personnel and technology—including satellites—for the War in Iraq, designing and running the U.S. census, scanning our mail, processing taxes for the IRS, and monitoring air traffic.\(^a\) The company has also staffed a human rights monitoring mission in Darfur, trained police in Haiti, and provided state-of-the-art “biometric identification” devices to the FBI.\(^b\)

The company has been a part of multiple surveillance actives, including the Total Information Awareness program (TIA) which drew heavy criticism from privacy advocates, and the Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA), a Pentagon data collection effort. CIFA feeds most of its information into the database Threat and Local Observation Notice (TALON), which was revealed in 2005 to be collecting data on U.S. citizens that were believed to be involved in terrorism, drug trafficking, or espionage. However, “Many of these allegedly threatening citizens were members of antiwar groups…Lockheed Martin’s role in the CIFA project included analyzing the data generated by the program, monitoring ongoing intelligence, and ‘estimating future threats.’”\(^c\) Meaning, Lockheed Martin, the government’s largest weapons manufacturer, was tasked with determining which U.S. citizens constituted a threat—and many of those chosen turned out to be antiwar.

This is not a complete list. Recounting the agencies in the government with which Lockheed Martin has contracts takes up a whole page of Hartung’s book, and that’s just the names of agencies, let alone a description of the contracts themselves. “Suffice it to say that they are involved at one level or another in nearly everything the federal government does, from

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\(^b\) Hartung, Prophets of War.

\(^c\) Ibid, 220.
providing instruments of death and destruction to collecting taxes and recruiting spies.”

Lockheed Martin is the government’s largest contractor and so not every sector of the MIC permeates as widely and deeply into the corners and crevices of American life and the world. However, it is not uncommon for weapons makers to be commercial manufacturers on the side, or vice versa. The range of these companies is immense.

The current state of the military-industrial complex led Joseph Cirincione to declare, “I would think Eisenhower must be rolling over in his grave.” Charles Lewis says:

“I think the history of the United States, as a work in progress, and our attempt at democracy here, is a constant struggle between capitalism and democracy. And there have been ebbs and flows where democracy looks like it’s winning, you reign in those powerful forces, but the fundamental reality is that most of the government’s decisions today are substantially dictated by powerful corporate interests. Clearly, capitalism is winning.”

This sentiment is echoed by Christopher Doran: “The Iraq invasion, among unfortunately countless other examples, has displayed for all to see that the United States is at best a feeble democracy in which corporations are utterly dominant over human citizens.” This corporate dominance is exactly what Eisenhower was talking about when he warned against the “acquisition of unwarranted influence.” In the next chapter, I will illuminate another setting in which corporations have become dominant and are drowning out the individuality of human citizens and threatening our democracy: the media.

97 Ibid, 247.
98 Why We Fight.
99 Ibid.
100 Doran, Making the World Safe for Capitalism, 95.
3) An Alert and Knowledgeable Citizenry

*Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.*
—Walter Cronkite

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower coined the term “military-industrial complex” in his Farewell Address to the nation on January 17, 1961, he did more than warn against the “acquisition of unwarranted influence” and the “disastrous rise of misplaced power.” In fact, he alluded to how we might avoid such a dangerous threat: “Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”\(^{101}\) Eisenhower was right to emphasize the importance of an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry.” Without this key aspect of democracy, the people are unable to hold their government accountable or influence its decision-making—including, and perhaps especially, decision-making regarding war. In the United States, our free press is entrusted with keeping us alert and knowledgeable. The freedom of the press is a pillar of our democracy.

The First Amendment is meant to serve as a check against government control over the marketplace of ideas and dissemination of information.\(^{102}\) The American press prides itself on being independent and unbiased, which is meant to ensure that the public gets fairly neutral reporting and a truthful account of the news regardless of who may be involved.\(^{103}\) Justice Brennan summarizes this notion in the majority opinion of *New York Times Company v.* *Sullivan*: “[D]ebate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and [this] may

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\(^{101}\) The White House, “Text of the Address by President Eisenhower, Broadcast and Televised from His Office in the White House, Tuesday Evening, January 17, 1961, 8:30 to 9:00 P.M., EST.,” news release.


well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials.”¹⁰⁴ The concept of free media is intrinsically tied to democracy; as Ben Bagdikian states, “From its birth, the United States’ most sacred principle has been government by consent of the governed.”¹⁰⁵ A free press that keeps the citizenry informed of the happenings in government is what allows the ‘governed’ to make informed decisions regarding who and how they are represented.

For debate on public issues to be uninhibited and the marketplace of political ideas to be free, the logical conclusion is the more the better—more newspapers, more television stations, more editors, more writers, and more independent, local media owners. This ensures that as many people’s voices as possible are heard, and that those in charge of media outlets are more likely to be locally based and familiar with their area and community.¹⁰⁶ However, the consolidation of media conglomerates over recent history paints a strikingly different picture. As Robert Miller states, “Many [media outlets] were founded in a proprietorial era as separate independent companies. However, today's managerial era of unfettered mergers and acquisitions has concentrated the influence and power of these various media under the control and leadership of the fictitious but legal personhood of a few conglomerated corporations.”¹⁰⁷

In 1983 there were fifty dominant media corporations. Today there are five. These five conglomerates own about 90% of the media in the United States, including newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations. As of 2004, when Bagdikian published The New Media Monopoly, the Big Five were Time Warner,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 2-3.
The Walt Disney Company, Viacom, Murdoch’s News Corps, and Bertelsmann of Germany.\textsuperscript{108} There have been several mergers and splits since then.

In 2013, News Corporation was split into two companies. The publishing arm, which includes the Wall Street Journal and the New York Post, retained the name News Corp, while the entertainment arm continued under the new name 21st Century Fox.\textsuperscript{109} Most of the 21st Century Fox properties are now owned by Disney, through a $71.3 billion acquisition in 2019.\textsuperscript{110} In 2016, AT&T bought control over Time Warner Incorporated. The antitrust division of the Justice Department sued in November of 2017 to block the acquisition, but federal Judge Richard Leon ruled in favor of AT&T and the $85 billion deal was closed in 2018.\textsuperscript{111} In 2019, Viacom and CBS Corporation—long-lost corporate siblings which had split in 2006—merged back together.\textsuperscript{112} General Electric used to own NBC, but sold 51% to Comcast in 2011 and the last of its stake in 2013, also to Comcast, for $16.7 billion.\textsuperscript{113} As of 2020, the five media giants are AT&T (Time Warner, CNN, HBO), Comcast (NBC Universal, Telemundo, Universal Pictures), Disney (ABC, ESPN, Pixar, Marvel Studios), News Corp (Fox News, \textit{Wall Street Journal}, \textit{New York Post}), and ViacomCBS (CBS, Paramount Pictures).

Many of these mergers happened after winning antitrust approval from the Justice Department. As Bagdikian states, “Diversity among the tens of thousands of United States media outlets is no longer a government goal.”\textsuperscript{114} Michael Powell, then chairman of the Federal

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 16.
\textsuperscript{114} Bagdikian, \textit{The New Media Monopoly}, 16.
Communications Commission (FCC), even expressed in 2002 that he would not be opposed to one media conglomerate owning every station in an entire metropolitan area. With this lack of regulation, the media giants have managed to secure major holdings in all forms of media, including newspapers, radio and television stations, and movie studios. “This gives each of the five corporations and their leaders more communications power than was exercised by any despot or dictatorship in history.”\footnote{115} The benefits of consolidation for company owners and shareholders are clear: the fewer the owners, the larger each one’s share of the billion-dollar media industry. Additionally, the larger the media giants grow, the more impossible it is for smaller, independent outlets to stay afloat.

The consolidation of media power extends beyond mergers and monopolies. The big media giants oftentimes have interlocking directorates—when the same people serve on the board of directors of more than one company. According to a study by Aaron Moore in the \textit{Columbia Journalism Review} in 2003, News Corporation, Disney, Viacom, and Time Warner had forty-five interlocking directors. The dominant five media conglomerates in 2004 had a total of 141 joint ventures, which indicates a business relationship of partnership, rather than competition.\footnote{116}

No analysis of the concentration of media power and the corporations that control today’s messaging would be complete without a close look at big tech and the internet. The huge tech companies of today have produced another form of power concentration and broadened the reach of major media conglomerates: “New technology has expanded the commercial mass media’s unprecedented power over the knowledge and values of the country.”\footnote{117} Because of the internet,

\footnote{115} Ibid, 3.  
\footnote{116} Ibid, 9.  
\footnote{117} Ibid.
today’s news media reaches more Americans than ever before, while being controlled by the smallest number of owners in history.

The rise of the internet has also led to the tech giants having an obscene amount of power over which media we consume. Unlike the conglomerates like AT&T, Comcast, Disney, etc. (and the news outlets they control), tech companies don’t produce the content we see—they control which content we view: “What is truly unprecedented about the market power of these platform monopolies [Google and Facebook] is not the extent of dominance within their own core markets (search and social networking), but the immense influence they wield over others.”118 Facebook and Google combined account for over 70% of users directed to the websites of major news publishers. On its own this seems trivial, but the rise of fake news, intense polarization, and increased acceptance of conspiracy theories implies otherwise.119 “There is little evidence to suggest that mainstream media brands have offered a meaningful corrective to fake news stories and considerable evidence to suggest that they have served to amplify them.”120

The implications of the extreme consolidation of media power are extensive. First, the largest source of political money comes from corporations, and the media conglomerates are some of the largest corporations in the world. In the Forbes 2020 ranking of the world’s largest public companies, AT&T came in 11th, Comcast 27th, and Disney 36th.121 ViacomCBS and News Corps trailed the top three, at 472nd and 1737th, respectively. However, restricted to just the United States, AT&T comes in 5th, Comcast 15th, and Disney 17th. The tech companies are

119 The documentary *The Social Dilemma* (2020) provides further information on this topic.
also at the top of the list. Alphabet (Google’s parent company) comes in 13th in the world and Facebook sits at a comfortable 39th. In the United States, Alphabet is 6th and Facebook is 19th. The market values of AT&T, Alphabet, Facebook, Comcast, Disney, ViacomCBS, and News Corps are, respectively: $218.6B, $919.3B, $583.7B, $171.7B, $195.3B, $10.6B, and $5.8B. The assets of each are $545.4B, $273.4B, $138.4B, $262.4B, $200.9B, $49.5B, and $16.3B.

These billions upon billions equal more influence in political discourse and elections. As Bagdikian states, “In American politics, beyond any other single force, money has determined which issues and candidates will dominate the national discourse that, in turn, selects the issues and choices available to voters on Election Day.” The larger the corporation, the stronger the influence; but no other industry is as directly linked to voting patterns as the media industry. Their product is the messaging that dictates the issues and candidates that dominate the national arena. Not only do the media giants contribute money to campaigns, but they cover them. They report, record, narrate, document, and broadcast them. The media conglomerates are not the only corporations that have become monopolistic in the American economy, “But media products are unique in one vital respect. They do not manufacture nuts and bolts: they manufacture a social and political world.” Consequently, the political power of media conglomerates grows exponentially with their size and wealth; the larger the corporation, the greater its political influence through both monetary power and messaging. The greater the political power of the

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122 Ibid.
123 The Forbes Global 2000 ranking is based on a combination of sales, profits, assets, and market value, which is why, for example, Alphabet’s market value is greater than AT&T’s, but AT&T is ranked before Alphabet.
124 Bagdikian, The New Media Monopoly, 17.
125 Bagdikian, The New Media Monopoly, 9.
media giants, the more easily they lobby and influence government to slash regulations, grant antitrust approvals, and pass laws that increase their corporate domination.

One such law is the 1996 Telecommunications Act. The Telecommunications Act amended the Communications Act of 1934 and was the first major overhaul of telecommunications law in over sixty years. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the goal of the law was to “Let anyone enter any communications business - to let any communications business compete in any market against any other.”\(^{126}\) In effect, the legislation deregulated the broadcasting and telecommunications markets:

“Instead of unleashing new competition, however, the Telecom Act produced a wave of mergers in the media and telecommunications industries, as the major players in the industry took advantage of the de-regulatory environment to preempt new competitors. Ironically, rather than a more competitive communications environment, the Telecommunications Act helped to strengthen the major media companies, cementing the oligopolistic structure of the media industry.”\(^{127}\)

FAIR reports that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was “essentially bought and paid for by corporate media lobbies” and that it “opened the floodgates on mergers.”\(^{128}\) By 2003—just seven years after the passage of the Act—over 4,000 radio stations had been bought out, and minority ownership of TV stations had dropped to its lowest point since 1990 (when the government began tracking such data).\(^{129}\) That’s because the Act eliminated all national limits on radio station ownership, and limits on TV station ownership were raised so that large networks like ABC and NBC could buy twice as many stations.\(^{130}\)


\(^{129}\) Ibid.

The Center for Responsive Politics documented political action committee (PAC) contributions from the telecommunications industry to Congress in the first half 1995. Over that six-month period, the industry contributed over $2 million, and “[a] full $640,000 went to the 45 representatives and senators on the joint conference committee that hammered out the final version of the bill in the late fall of 1995.” These figures do not include contributions from individual industry executives or investors.

Because the media giants benefited immensely from the Telecommunications Act and lobbied extensively for its passage, “perhaps it is not surprising that the major news outlets did so little to facilitate public conversation about legislation of such significance,” as Hoynes notes. According to the Tyndall Report—which tracks the amount of time TV networks dedicate to various issues—“neither the passage nor the signing of the most sweeping telecommunications legislation in 60 years made the top 10 stories in their respective weeks.” This is just one prime example of where the so-called facilitators of free speech and democracy failed to thoroughly inform the public on a major issue because they stood to benefit from it. Nearly every major newspaper group owned a stake in broadcast media, cable, or both, so even the print media did little to cover the passage of the new act. Thus, also “[i]n the history of the United States and in its Constitution, citizens are presumed to have the sole right to determine the shape of their democracy,” concentrated media power has severely diminished the influence of voters on which issues take the spotlight.

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131 Ibid.
133 Naureckas, "Info Bandits," FAIR.
134 Ibid.
135 Bagdikian, The New Media Monopoly, 10.
This applies not only to legislation and individual issues in the political arena, but to politicians and candidates as well. Political parties and elected officials are keenly aware of the almost-absolute control of media giants concerning the coverage and depiction of politicians in the news. Big money in other industries already holds gross power over elected officials due to campaign financing and the fear of losing big bucks from oil, coal, defense, and numerous other industries. Add to that the fear of unfavorable news coverage, and it is no surprise that bills like the Telecommunications Act get easily passed.

The consequences of concentrated political influence among the media conglomerates is more far-reaching still. Media giants have the power not only to shape public debate, ensure the passage of favorable legislation, and bend elected officials to their will, but also to bolster entire ideologies. One must look no further than Fox News. The American cable news television channel was spawned by Australian-American Rupert Murdoch, i.e. media mogul and creator of the empire that includes News Corp and Fox Corporation. “Brazen or not, two impulses seem to drive Murdoch’s business life—the accumulation of as much media power as possible and the use of that power to promote his deep-seated conservative politics.”

Fox News was launched on October 7, 1996, as a conservative news network and is now the dominant cable news network in the United States. At the end of 2019, it averaged 2.5 million nightly viewers and was the top-rated network in all of cable for the fourth year in a row. According to a study published in The Quarterly Journal of Economics, there was a significant effect of the introduction of Fox News on the vote share in Presidential elections

136 Bagdikian, The New Media Monopoly, 38.
between 1996 and 2000: “Republicans gained 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points in the towns that broadcast Fox News. Fox News also affected voter turnout and the Republican vote share in the Senate. Our estimates imply that Fox News convinced 3 to 28 percent of its viewers to vote Republican, depending on the audience measure.”

During the Trump presidency, many scholars have argued that the channel has come to resemble a form of state TV, serving as a mouthpiece for the Trump administration. Fox News exemplifies the dramatic effect the news media has on the electorate and what happens when one media mogul with a political agenda builds an empire that becomes one of the largest media corporations in the world.

With the consolidation of media power, the pool of people that control the vast majority of the industry is ever shrinking. The smaller the pool that controls the news media, the narrower the information reported. “One result of this constricted competition is that the thousands of media outlets carry highly duplicative content. Another result is that an innovative newcomer can hope to become a significant participant in the industry only as one of the many subsidiaries of the billion-dollar established giants.” Not only is the news oftentimes duplicative and always bound to the outlet’s parent corporation, but the media giants’ cartel-like relationships mean that the differences in reporting between each conglomerate are minor as well.

These narrowed choices will themselves be biased by corporate interests. As noted, the political power held by the dominant media firms is readily used to make conditions more favorable for their growth and profits; likewise, they use their messaging power to enhance the social and economic values that are favorable to the corporate world. There is also a

disproportion in what is chosen for print or broadcast: “The imbalance between issues important to corporate hierarchies and those most urgent to the population at large is obscured by the neutralist tone of modern news.” Bagdikian notes that for many decades, big media has so frequently glossed over the major needs of most people that voters have become resigned and hopeless towards the possibility of change.

Additionally, media giants are not only global corporations themselves, but are invested in other million- and billion-dollar industries. They are not stand-alone companies with isolated interests. Media conglomerates make money from advertising, which holds influence over reporting and broadcasting: “The immense power of advertisers bends the content as well as the form of print media.” When the news media wields such power over our political landscape and their sponsors influence the news, the advertisers in major news outlets in turn influence the discourse surrounding issues that can be of major political importance.

As Lee and Solomon note, “The automobile industry is a major advertiser in the Times, and consequently Times coverage of auto safety and pollution has been skewed.” This is just one, relatively minor example of how advertising affects news reporting. The interests of sponsors and advertisers also contribute to the social and economic values constructed by the news media. Procter & Gamble, which spent over a billion dollars a year on advertising, included in a memo on broadcast policy: “There will be no material that will give offense, either directly or indirectly to any commercial organization of any sort.” Meaning, portray Big Business in a flattering light, or else.

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142 Ibid, 25.
143 Lee and Solomon, Unreliable Sources, xiii-xiv.
144 Ibid, 64.
145 Ibid.
146 At the time of source publishing.
147 Lee and Solomon, Unreliable Sources, 61.
As stated early on, the number of media firms needed to comprise a “controlling interest” in the industry has shrunk dramatically. These major media conglomerates are always shifting, always buying and selling properties, always merging and splitting—but always steering the wheel of the nation’s supposedly free press. They hold immeasurable power in politics and government, which allows them to influence legislation and (de)regulations that in turn increase their power even further. Big tech only amplifies this equation, allowing the news media to reach even more people and adding their own influence to the information being received by the population through controlling the redirection of users to publishers. The consolidation of power in the media industry means that the information being reported has become narrower and narrower, while that news itself is biased by corporate interests. Those corporate interests include those of the media conglomerates themselves, as well as their sponsors and advertisers.

Beyond even this, however, the media giants have physical and financial ties to other industries. Interlocking directorates, revolving doors of personnel, and financial stakes and holdings connect the corporate media to the state, the Pentagon, defense and arms manufacturers, and the oil industry. Our free press, which assures “government by consent of the governed,” is in bed with the captains of industry and profiteers of war.
4) An (Im)Proper Meshing

Freedom of the press—or, to be more precise, the benefit of freedom of the press—belongs to everyone: to the citizen as well as the publisher...The crux is not the publisher’s ‘freedom to print’; it is, rather, the citizen’s ‘right to know.’
—Arthur Hays Sulzberger

I have shown how the military-industrial complex today has expanded into a monster of vast proportions, beyond what Eisenhower could have ever imagined when he delivered his farewell address. I have also illustrated how the corporate media industry has, over the last several decades, been dramatically consolidated, so that the number of dominant media corporations has shrunk from fifty in 1983 to just five today—leaving the power to control the majority of messaging and information in the hands of a very few. However, examining these two phenomena alone is not enough. Not only does the MIC have more power and reach than ever before; not only has media power been drastically consolidated, thus jeopardizing the nation’s supposedly free press and biasing news towards corporate interests. There has also grown an undeniably entanglement between these two webs of influence, so that, in the words of Norman Solomon, “One way or another, a military-industrial complex now extends to much of corporate media.”148 This has produced a military-industrial-media complex, in which the corporate media does not provide a check on government use of military power, but rather influences our perception of war and manufactures support for the military apparatus that drains our nation’s resources, perpetuates endless war and violence, and profits off of death and destruction.

The concept that the media can be used to generate support for war is not new. Throughout history, the state has relied on the media to “rally the troops” at home during

wartime and even in the periods leading up to military involvement. As Solomon explains, “Looking toward military action overseas, the president initiates a siege of public opinion on the home front—a battleground where media spin is the main weapon, and support for war is the victory.” Support for the troops on the home front is undeniably necessary to maintain morale oversees, and building up a kind of war fever through propaganda and other messaging has oftentimes been a job handed over to, and readily accepted by, the media. However, there is a difference between a truly independent and free media that expresses supportive sentiments for troops during times of declared war, and a hugely consolidated media industry with corporate, financial, and social ties to the MIC that manufactures pro-military opinion even outside of wartime, suppresses information, provides a sanitized coverage of war, fails to investigate, criticize, or thoroughly debate issues of military involvement, spreads false information, bends to pressure from government officials, and generally aids and abets the massive destruction and profit-generating enterprise that is war. The latter ordeal is the focus of this chapter.

In order to examine the collaboration of the media with the war-making apparatus we now call the MIC, one must go all the way back to 1917, the year in which President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (CPI) by executive order. The CPI, also known as the Creel Committee, because it was headed by George Creel, was an independent agency of the federal government that Wilson created exclusively to influence public opinion of World War I. It lasted until 1919 and, as Lee Grieveson points out in Cinema’s Military Industrial Complex, the effect was that “The state’s agenda was sutured into cinema.” Public speakers known as Four Minute Men were sent to movie theaters to give short talks between

149 Ibid, 1.
151 Ibid, 264.
movies about the reasons for the United States entering the First World War and the necessity of supporting the war. Soon after, the CPI began to produce and distribute propaganda films, working closely with commercial film producers to learn from the expertise of Hollywood.\textsuperscript{152} Grieveson explains that “Executives in Hollywood grasped the opportunity to ally with the federal government as a concrete way of ensuring business during wartime and to uplift the cultural status of the hitherto rather beleaguered industry…Creel’s innovation was simultaneously beneficial to the commercial interests of the film industry and the ideological interests of the state.” This is one of the first examples of the media industry aligning itself with military interests for the sake of its own profits.

The collaboration between Hollywood and war-makers has continued and grown since its birth in WWI. Kappeler and Potter explain that in Hollywood today, “The military assists with advice on military equipment and the realism of action scenes. The price for this cooperation is that the military be presented in a positive light, with portrayals of wartime heroism and the power of modern weaponry highlighted in the films.”\textsuperscript{153} Although I will mostly focus on the news media and its connection to the MIC throughout this chapter, the symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and the military is one of the first instances of the enmeshing of media and state and exemplifies just how long-lasting and profitable this relationship can be. Additionally, Grieveson argues that the CPI and the production of war films in WWI led directly to an expansion of military-media power and cooperation: “[T]he state utilized media during the exigencies of wartime to help establish forms of governmental rationality that exceeded the immediate requirements of combat, and expanded thereafter… Quite clearly the use and

deployment of media became integral to expansive political and economic objectives in a process that began most concretely during wartime but then expanded.”

Today—in a situation dramatically more susceptible to influence and corruption around the matter at hand—the corporate media is consolidated into a handful of media giants with unprecedented power to reach billions of people with their messaging and reporting. As elaborated upon in Chapter 3, these giants have incredible wealth and political influence, which compounds with their messaging power to give them the ability to impact legislation, shape political debate, and bolster ideologies favorable to their own corporate interests. The media conglomerates are also affected by the advertisers and sponsors that pay big bucks for access to their huge audiences. And, like every million- and billion-dollar industry, media corporations are linked to other sectors of the economy through ownership, mergers, interlocking directorates, and revolving doors. Given the size and scope of the MIC, it should not come as a shock that big media is linked in various ways to the companies that profit from war.

Outright ownership of media companies is one of the most egregious examples of the relationship between the media and the MIC. General Electric and NBC are one example. As noted in Chapter 2, General Electric is a large weapons manufacturer that consistently lands in the rankings of top arms-producing and military service companies. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2019, General Electric ranked twelfth in the United States and twenty-first in the world out of these companies. In 2002, GE was twelfth in the United States and sixteenth in the world. When the Pentagon released its list of top military contractors in 2004, General Electric came in eighth, with contracts amounting to $2.8 billion.

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GE is a major manufacturer of aircraft parts and missiles that were used extensively in the Gulf War and in Iraq—including the patriot and Tomahawk Cruise missiles, the Stealth bomber, the B052 bomber, the AWACS plane, and the NAVSTAR spy satellite system. Until 2013, GE either directly owned or had shares in the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).

NBC was founded in 1926 by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), whose parent company was GE. GE sold RCA and NBC in 1932 as a result of antitrust charges, but regained control of NBC in 1986 when it purchased RCA for $6.3 billion. An article in the New York Times about the merger notes: “General Electric has been rumored to be interested in going seriously into broadcasting...some company officials said they felt the combined companies would emerge as a powerhouse in technology and marketing.” What many may not realize today is that RCA was actually also a major military contractor, which may have been a compelling reason for GE to make the acquisition. However, shortly after the purchase, GE began to liquidate RCA—but kept NBC intact.

NBC morphed into NBC Universal in 2003 when the French media company Vivendi merged with GE, and Comcast purchased 51% of the broadcasting network in 2011. Comcast acquired full ownership until 2013, but until that point General Electric owned all or a very large portion of one of the nation’s largest broadcasting television networks. As Martin Lee and Norman Solomon point out, “In other words, when correspondents and paid consultants on NBC television praised the performance of U.S. weapons, they were extolling equipment made by GE, the corporation that pays their salaries.” They also note that GE is “a leading military

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157 Ibid.  
A contractor that reaps huge profits from producing nuclear bombs and conducting Star Wars research; yet NBC News never discloses these financial interests when reporting on Star Wars and nuclear weapons issues.\(^\text{161}\) The case of GE and NBC showcases the unabashed relationship between a major weapons contractor and a dominant broadcasting company, which only ended with the acquisition of NBC by Comcast—today one of the Big Five media conglomerates. It can hardly be considered a good thing when the only reason a major television network is no longer beholden to a military contractor is because it was swallowed up by one of the gigantic corporations that controls almost a fifth of our media.

Although GE’s ownership of NBC is the most blatant example of the links between the media and the MIC, interlocking directorates—the linkages among corporations created when individuals sit on two or more corporate boards—are another way the media monopolies have meshed with the corporations that profit from war. The significance of interlocking directorates has been debated, but many scholars and observers agree that interlocking directorates allow for a level of coordination among the corporate class and can affect the independence of board decisions. John Scott notes that “At the very least, interlocking directorships constitute channels of communication between enterprises…At their strongest, however, interlocking directorships may be relations of power. If information flows predominantly one way, or if there is a capital or commercial relation between the companies, then the interlocking directorship may become a means through which one enterprise is able to dominate the affairs of another.”\(^\text{162}\) If interlocking directorates allow for domination of one company by another, then the interlocking of media corporations with key players in the MIC is alarming at the very least.

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\(^{161}\) Ibid, xiv.

But one must also keep in mind that as the governing bodies of corporations, board members are the ultimate decision makers of corporate policy and the choosers of corporate leadership. Most corporate board meetings are private, so not only do those that sit on these boards have immense power, but it is a power which is virtually hidden from the majority of the population. Board members are privy to the most sensitive, secret, and confidential information of a company, information to which the general public and policymakers do not have access. However, any individual that sits on more than one corporate board allows the interlocking companies access to each other’s affairs. Michael Soref and Maurice Zeitlin argue that “it is not a process of autonomous self-selection…that underlies the pattern of interlocking and the selection of the interlocking directors themselves, but rather a process of intraclass integration, coordination, and control.”

It would be naive to think that interlocking directors do not use their knowledge for mutual benefit of the corporations they serve. Interlocking directorates allow not only for the potential influence, control, and manipulation of one corporation by another, but also for coordination within the corporate class.

Some of the world’s largest arms manufacturers have had interlocking directorates with big media companies. According to a FAIR study published in 2012, ABC/Disney interlocked with Boeing, and Knight-Ridder (a major newspaper and Internet publishing company until it was bought by The McClatchy Company in 2006) had interlocked with General Electric (which owned NBC) and Raytheon. According to a book published in 2011 by Joyce Chediac, Raytheon had also interlocked with the New York Times, and Lockheed Martin interlocked with

the *Washington Post* and Gannett/USA Today.\footnote{Joyce Chediac, *Gaza: Symbol of Resistance* (World View Forum, 2011).} Caterpillar, the world’s largest manufacturer of construction equipment which made the D9 military bulldozer used in the Israel-Palestine conflict, interlocked with the Tribune Company, owner of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the arms manufacturers are not the only major industry implicated in the MIC. Big Oil also profits from military involvement, especially in the Middle East, and Chediac points out that “[t]here is an incestuous relationship between Big Oil, the weapons makers and the media.”\footnote{Ibid.} According to the FAIR study mentioned earlier, GE/NBC interlocked with Texaco, a subsidiary of Chevron Corporation; CNN/Time Warner interlocked with Chevron; New York Times Co. with Texaco; Washington Post/Newsweek with Ashland Oil; and the Wall Street Journal/Dow Jones with Shell Oil and Texaco.\footnote{Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, “Interlocking Directorates,” FAIR.} Chediac notes that as of 2010, GE/NBC also interlocked with Mobil, and Knight Ridder interlocked with Phillips Petroleum. She succinctly explains the motivations behind these interlocking directorates: “Oil companies want a strong military presence in the Middle East to protect them from the people whose resources they exploit. In addition, the military machine that protects oil company interests is itself the largest consumer of oil in the world. And because the media monopolies interlock with both, they are in on the take when both make profits.”\footnote{Chediac, *Gaza: Symbol of Resistance*.}

Interlocking directorates are not the only way the corporate media is implicated in the MIC and the affairs of Washington—there is also a significant revolving door between the MIC, media corporations, and, of course, (especially military and security-related) government. As Solomon notes, “Often, media magnates and people on the boards of large media-related
corporations enjoy close links—financial and social—with the military industry and Washington’s foreign-policy establishment.”¹⁶⁹ An incestuous relationship has arisen between the government and cable news, one of the media industries with the most revolving door instances. As an article from Reason notes in 2019, “[t]he flow of faces and names between government and ‘news’ media has turned what was supposed to be a watchdog over the destructive power of the state into little more than a forum for political marketing and an extended battleground for factional fighting.”¹⁷⁰ Andrew McCabe, former FBI deputy director, joined CNN as a contributor in August of 2019.¹⁷¹ Josh Campbell and James Gagliano, two of McCabe’s former colleagues at the FBI, also work for CNN. John Brennan, former CIA director, joined NBC as a senior national security and intelligence analyst in 2018. Brennan’s predecessor at the CIA, Michael Hayden, is a national security analyst at CNN, and so is James Clapper, former director of national intelligence.¹⁷²

The media revolving door doesn’t stop at FBI and CIA officials. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, former White House press secretary, joined Fox News as a contributor in 2019. Hope Hicks is now at Fox News as well. The so-called ‘reverse’ revolving door is also prevalent: Ben Carson and John Bolton left Fox News to become Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and National Security Adviser under Trump (respectively).¹⁷³ And although not a direct instance of the revolving door, relationships in which family members or partners each hold a role in either the government or the media are all too common—such as New York governor Andrew Cuomo and his brother, CNN anchor Chris Cuomo.

¹⁶⁹ Solomon, War Made Easy,, 113.
¹⁷³ Ibid.
The implications of such a cozy relationship between the corporate media and the government are similar to those of the revolving door between defense contractors and the Pentagon. There is an undeniable conflict of interest, but in this case, that conflict of interest doesn't just mean preferential treatment for contractors, lucrative lobbying positions for former Pentagon officials, or excessive taxpayer money being spent on military budgets. It means that the information we hear reported may be very, very biased. As Jack Shafer notes in *Politico*, “[T]he downside of outsourcing national security coverage to the TV spies is obvious. They aren’t in the business of breaking news or uncovering secrets. Their first loyalty—and this is no slam—is to the agency from which they hail. Imagine a TV network covering the auto industry through the eyes of dozens of paid former auto executives and you begin to appreciate the current peculiarities.”

As mentioned in Chapter 2, big tech companies also play a large role in the consumption of media today. Due to the rise of the internet, platforms like Google and Facebook have a huge influence over the news we see or don’t see. Today, many Americans get redirected to news sites from search engines like Google or click on headlines that appear on social media platforms like Facebook. Because of their large influence, I include these platforms in my analysis of the media’s connection with the government and the MIC. Unfortunately, the revolving door is just as prevalent with tech companies and the government as with cable news.

First up on the list of those going through the revolving door is Michelle Weslander Quaid. After 9/11, she began working for the U.S. government in the world of intelligence and served in executive positions at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (sister agency to the NSA), National Reconnaissance Office and at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

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She even toured combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{175} Then, from 2011 to 2015, she was the Chief Technology Officer of Public Sector at Google, where she continued working closely with the federal government: “Weslander Quaid told Entrepreneur Mag that a big part of her job at Google entails meeting with intelligence agency directors to discuss technology they want and/or need.”\textsuperscript{176} While people like Quaid operate behind the scenes and may not have as much name recognition as media stars, they still hold immense influence; Quaid was voted most powerful woman by \textit{Entrepreneur Magazine} in 2014. “At Google, she self-styled her job as that of a ‘bridge-builder’ between big tech and big government, especially the worlds of military and intelligence.”\textsuperscript{177}

Shannon Sullivan is another top official easily gliding through the revolving door between government, military, and big tech. Sullivan graduated from the US Air Force Air University’s School of Air and Space Studies. He served in various positions in the US Air Force, including as a Senior Military Advisor from 2001 to 2004.\textsuperscript{178} Then, he became Defense Director for BAE Systems, one of the world’s largest arms manufacturers, from 2004 to 2008. He became the head of Google Federal in 2011, and Director of Federal, Google Cloud in 2019.

The list goes on. Jim Young, Google’s DoD Sales Manager, used to work as a CIA analyst at the Directorate of Science and Technology. Loisa Terrell worked first as legal counsel to Obama, then joined Facebook as Head of Public Policy in 2011; she was then appointed Advisor to the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2013. Kevin Martin was formerly the FCC Chairman before being hired by Facebook in 2015 to direct its

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Levine, “The Revolving Door,” Pando.
mobile and global access policy. As Schlosberg notes, “The regular exchange of senior staff between the top branches of government and the boards of big tech companies has produced not so much a revolving as a spinning door between Big Tech and the White House.”179 Since the huge influence that tech companies have over the news media we consume is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of the United States and how we get our information, the consequences of such a close relationship between big tech and the government may not be fully realized. However, we should not discount that the conflict of interest prevalent in other revolving doors is an issue with big tech as well.

Corporate ownership, interlocking directorates, and the revolving door are the most tangible ways in which the corporate media intersects with the MIC. However, an analysis of the military-industrial-media complex should not stop here. Many other common practices—although not direct corporate or financial links—exemplify the fact that the mainstream media may not be truly independent when it comes to reporting on issues regarding war and military involvement. One such practice is that of embedded journalism.

Embedded journalism began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq and refers to the practice of news reporters being attached to military units out in the field during armed conflict. Up through the war with Vietnam, independent reporters had access to the field during war—however, during the 1991 Gulf War and the invasion of Afghanistan, this was no longer the case. In response to pressure from the news media, the U.S. military began allowing reporters to live and travel with the troops during the Iraq war, and at the start of the war, as many as 775 reporters and photographers were traveling as embedded journalists with U.S. forces.180

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The practice of embedded journalism is controversial. The military claims it is the only way to allow reporters access to the field while preserving their safety. Indeed, although it was safer to be a journalist than a soldier on the battlefield throughout many of the armed conflicts in twentieth century, al-Qaeda and the Taliban began targeting reporters and journalists as potential hostages during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.\textsuperscript{181} Thus, there is some degree of truth to the argument that embedding reporters may be the only way to get first-hand coverage of armed conflict while keeping journalists safe.

However, there are also serious concerns that embedded journalism leads to skewed, biased, and limited coverage of war. According to a content analysis by the Project for Excellence in Journalism of the embedded reports on television during three of the first six days of the Iraq war, “The embedded coverage, the research found, is largely anecdotal. It’s both exciting and dull, combat focused, and mostly live and unedited. Much of it lacks context but it is usually rich in detail.”\textsuperscript{182} Patrick Cockburn explains that embedding puts limitations on location and movement, makes reporters liable to miss or misinterpret crucial stages in the conflict, and leads reporters to see the conflict in primarily military terms—thus potentially downplaying or missing entirely important developments that are political or otherwise don’t involve the troops with which the journalist is embedded. He also explains, “Journalists cannot help reflecting to some degree the viewpoint of the soldiers they are accompanying. The very fact of being with an occupying army means that the journalist is confined to a small and atypical segment of the political-military battlefield.”\textsuperscript{183} To give credit where credit is due, Cockburn

\textsuperscript{183} Cockburn, “Embedded Journalism,” \textit{Independent}. 
points out that most journalists are smart enough to avoid simply regurgitating military propaganda; however, embedding inevitably leads to at least some degree of bias.

He also explains that one of the most troubling consequences of embedded journalism is that it produces a sanitized coverage of war: “[P]erhaps the most damaging effect of ‘embedding’ is to soften the brutality of any military occupation and underplay hostile local response to it.”184 This is also reflected in the analysis by the Project for Excellence in Journalism: “While dramatic, the coverage is not graphic. Not a single story examined showed pictures of people being hit by fired weapons.”185 The sanitized coverage of armed conflict—which I will examine more in-depth later—is a massive and reoccurring problem in the way the U.S. media portrays war, and embedding could be considered a master stroke by the MIC in appropriating the media for its narrative and purposes.

At the end of the day, embedded reporting produces a pro-troops and pro-U.S. military bias that simply cannot be avoided. Todd Gitlin noted at a Media at War Conference at UC Berkeley that “Embeddedness has a built-in swerve toward propaganda…because an embedded reporter is on the team.”186 He likened television war coverage to that of sporting events, and said it resembles entertainment more than journalism. At the same conference, Barbie Zelizer explained that the photographs used in print journalism during the Iraq war served patriotic, not journalistic, purposes, because they were meant to “dazzle” and ended up “masking the darkness of death.”187

184 Ibid.
187 Ibid. (quotations words of Kahn, not Zelizer.)
Not only does embedded journalism oftentimes lead to biased, limited, and sanitized coverage of war, but embedded journalists must also sign contracts restricting what they can and can’t report—they must not publish any information that could compromise the U.S. military’s position or anything about future missions or classified weapons. Douglas Kellner explains the overall dilemma of embedded reporting:

“\[A\] great debate emerged about the embedded reporters and about whether journalists who depended on the protection of the U.S. and British military, lived with the troops, and signed papers agreeing to a rigorous set of restrictions on their reporting could be objective and critical of their protectors. From the beginning, it was clear that the embedded reporters were indeed ‘in bed with’ their military escorts, and as the United States and Britain stormed into Iraq, the reporters presented exultant and triumphant accounts that trumped any paid propagandist. The embedded U.S. reporters were largely cheerleaders and spinners for the U.S. and UK military and lost any veneer of objectivity.”\(^{188}\)

While there may not be an immediate alternative to embedded journalism due to the safety threats for reporters on the battlefield, the consequences of embedding should be acknowledged and taken into account when evaluating the media’s coverage of war and military activities.

Another way in which the mainstream media's coverage of war becomes skewed is through its excessive reliance on the military, the government, and the Pentagon for information. As Solomon notes, “By the time of the Gulf War, retired colonels, generals, and admirals had become mainstays in network TV studios during wartime.”\(^{189}\) Kellner explains that during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, “[T]he U.S. broadcast networks were on the whole more embedded in the Pentagon and Bush administration than the reporters and print journalists were in the field. The military commentators on the major U.S. television networks constantly


\(^{189}\) Solomon, *War Made Easy*, 118.
provided the Pentagon spin of the moment and often repeated gross lies and propaganda.”\textsuperscript{190} The mainstream media relies on government and military personnel for “official” information, but these “experts” clearly do not qualify as independent analysts.

Additionally, opponents of war are chronically underrepresented in the media compared to the pro-military viewpoint, and the major TV networks have even been known to clear on-air talent with the Department of Defense.\textsuperscript{191} Solomon notes: “Frequent long briefings from Washington combine with similar news conferences from overseas: with so many high-ranking medaled men in uniform behind podiums and in front of TV studio cameras, distinctions between military officers and reporters blur.”\textsuperscript{192} This overreliance on government and military officials for information inevitably leads to biased coverage of war and military activity, and gives the Pentagon streamlined access to instill its messaging into the minds of millions of American citizens.

Unfortunately, the links between the media and the military-industrial complex are not limited to what I have outlined here. Although beyond the scope of this paper, almost all forms of entertainment media—film, television, radio, video games, magazines, and, especially relevant today, all forms of social media—are also in many ways connected to the MIC and perpetuate militarism and pro-war ideologies. Here, however, I have attempted to focus upon how the news media’s relationship to the MIC affects our understanding and perception of war and military involvement—and how this has affected the ability of, in the words of Eisenhower, an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry” to “compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and

\textsuperscript{190} Kellner, \textit{Media Spectacle}, 65.  
\textsuperscript{191} Solomon, \textit{War Made Easy}, 122.  
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid, 125.
military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”
5) Security and Liberty

In the absence of governmental checks and balances present in other areas of our national life, the only effective restraint upon executive policy and power in the areas of national defense and international affairs may lie in an enlightened citizenry—in an informed and critical public opinion which alone can here protect the values of democratic government.
—Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart on the Pentagon Papers case

I have now examined the military-industrial complex and the corporate media each individually. I have explained how the MIC has expanded to include not only the arms makers, Congress, and the military, but also oil companies, service and equipment providers, surveillance and technology companies, and think tanks. I have examined how the consolidation of corporate power within the media industry has resulted in a handful of companies controlling 90% of our media, and how these huge corporations hold incredible political power, not just to influence politicians and legislation directly, but also to shape entire ideologies. The information reported and broadcast by Big Media is influenced by advertisers and sponsors as well as Big Media’s own corporate interests. Lastly, I illustrated how the corporate media is linked in many ways to the MIC, including through outright ownership, interlocking directorates, revolving doors, and overreliance on the government and the military for information and access to the battlefield during war.

But do these connections have any real influence? Does the military-industrial-media complex actually affect the information we receive and our perception of war? In this chapter I argue that yes: Because of the enormous reach of the corporate media, the extreme consolidation of its power, and its entanglement with the gigantic machine that is the MIC, the media today has failed to properly inform the American citizenry when it comes to matters surrounding war. The MIMC manufactures pro-military opinion among the public, suppresses information relevant to military activities, provides a sanitized coverage of war, fails to investigate, criticize, or
thoroughly debate issues of military involvement, too easily bends to pressure from government and military officials, and even sometimes spreads outright lies and false information regarding matters of war. This has resulted in an American citizenry that, in general terms, is ill-informed, uneducated, and misled in matters regarding military involvement, as well as being overly militaristic and pro-war. Americans are thus unable to hold their government accountable for unnecessary or inappropriate use of military force, and are complicit in the perpetuation of American imperialism, colossal defense budgets that strip the country of severely lacking social programs, and never-ending war that kills and destroys while a handful of corporations reap immense profits from violence.

Here, the reader may be wondering: when has the American public—and the U.S. media—not been pro-war? Throughout history, the American news media has always been intertwined with government, and, as a general rule, has tended to support the current administration in times of war. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, the idea that the media is used to “rally the troops” during wartime is not new. However, there are important moments in U.S. history when the media has served its watchdog purpose—something that it has failed to do entirely in the 21st century. Here I point the reader to the Vietnam War.

Daniel C. Hallin writes in The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam:

“[I]t has come to be widely accepted across the political spectrum that the relation between the media and the government during Vietnam was in fact one of conflict: the media contradicted the more positive view of the war officials sought to project, and for better or for worse it was the journalists’ view that prevailed with the public, whose disenchantment forced an end to American involvement.”

Hallin notes how Vietnam was the first war in which the media had almost unlimited freedom to report on the conflict without direct government control and censorship. It was also

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194 Ibid, 6.
the first televised war, which of course contributed to the ability of the media to broadcast the reality of the violence to the public back home. Even so, at the beginning, the media was generally supportive of the war and of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In the early 1960s, the Cold War consensus that dominated the discourse surrounding U.S. involvement in Vietnam assured supportive press coverage of U.S. policy. However, some reporters were raising questions about involvement in Vietnam even from the beginning. This laid the groundwork for the massive shift in media coverage of the war after the Tet offensive.

As Michael X. Delli Carpini writes in *Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, the Tet offensive marked the turning point in the war for U.S. public opinion. While critics have long debated whether or not the press deserves the blame—or credit—for this shift in public opinion, media coverage of the war certainly took a dramatic turn during this period. After Tet, “Anchors and correspondents no longer portrayed the war as a national endeavor and seldom referred to ‘our war.’ They no longer invoked the memory of World War II, in effect disconnecting Vietnam from American tradition. Gone too was the macho sports image of the pre-Tet stories…Finally, the themes of military victory, of ‘halting communist aggression’ and ‘preserving democracy’ simply disappeared.” The publishing of the *Pentagon Papers* in 1971 also represents a significant decision on the part of the news media to openly defy the government in the name of the truth about the Vietnam war.

Scholars have argued to what extent the structure of relations between the media and government actually changed during the latter years of the war in Vietnam. It is certainly true that, even then, the state had significant power to “manage” the news, and the media still relied

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196 Ibid, 130.
197 Ibid, 146-147.
heavily on “official” sources. However, as Hallin acknowledges, “[O]ver the years the volume of ‘negative’ coverage increased so dramatically that there seems little doubt that news coverage did indeed contribute to the public war-weariness that eventually made Vietnam a political albatross and forced first Johnson and then Nixon to abandon the effort to win a military victory.”

The media’s willingness to question U.S. policy, broadcast the gruesome violence of the war into American living rooms, and call out the government for its blatant lies to the American public via printing the *Pentagon Papers* all contributed to ending the Vietnam War. This is exactly what the media has failed miserably to do in the 21st century, especially during and before the war in Iraq, as I will demonstrate.

As Norman Solomon notes, “In a democratic society, persistent agenda-building is necessary to gain and retain public support for war.”

Thus, “Whatever the pace of agenda-building—whether the rationales for a war suddenly burst into news media or gradually percolate into daily coverage—the executive branch policy players, their congressional supporters, and varied media enablers come to insist that military action is necessary to prevent all manner of calamities, such as the killing of American citizens, the further triumph of tyrants, or the development of weapons of mass destruction in the wrong hands.” This is done with—and could not be achieved without—the support of a complicit and compliant corporate media industry. Ayesha Ilyas contends, “In various instances from recent history, media has been used to manipulate the masses and cheer for wars that…corporations and politicians have reaped benefits from, whether it was the Gulf war, war on Dominican Republic, Vietnam, US’s siege on

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200 Ibid, 8.
Iraq, or the NATO forces ’78-day war on Yugoslavia.”201 The corporate media is a key player in convincing the American public that these wars are necessary and obscuring the real motives behind instances of military involvement.

In this chapter, I will provide examples of how the media has been used to “manipulate the masses and cheer for war.” However, citing every instance of biased or skewed war reporting could take a whole book. Here, I hope to provide a compelling collection of evidence that, when extrapolated across time, will convince the reader that the way the corporate media treats issues of war and military involvement is a serious problem for our nation and democracy.

In order to convince a country to go to war, the people must believe it is necessary. The media has been a major player in ‘hyping up’ the sense of danger and need for military action in many situations. Douglas Kellner explains in-depth in his book Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War and Election Battles how 9/11 was a prime example of the media spreading hysteria and fear among an already panicked and traumatized nation. He states:

“The media become ‘weapons of mass hysteria’ by playing the 9/11 Twin Tower attacks over and over, focusing on the devastation at ‘Ground Zero,’ a term first used to describe the epicenter of the Hiroshima atomic bomb that was appropriated to signify the devastation and enormity of the 9/11 attacks… Day after day, terrorist ‘experts’ described bin Laden and Al Qaeda and repeatedly disseminated everything that was known about the terrorists, creating a culture of hysteria, as the Bush administration trotted out John Ashcroft and Dick Cheney to frighten the public with further warnings of impending terror attacks.”202

He notes how the media obsessively focused on terrorism, possible threats, and retaliation in the weeks and months after 9/11.203 It also handed a megaphone to extremism and did little to weed out the potentially dangerous or incorrect information being spread on its platforms:

203 Ibid, 35.
“[B]roadcast media allowed dangerous zealots to circulate the most aggressive, fanatic, and sometimes lunatic views, creating a consensus around the need for immediate military action and all-out war.”\textsuperscript{204} Spreading hysteria and panic throughout the population served two purposes: First, it made Americans heavily reliant on the government for protection and made any disagreement with or questioning of the Bush administration seem “unpatriotic and even treasonous.”\textsuperscript{205} Second, it was extremely profitable for the media companies themselves; with millions of eyes glued to the TV, newspapers, and other media platforms, media consumption spiked and profits went up. Thus, “From September 11 to the beginning of the U.S. bombing acts on Afghanistan in October, the U.S. corporate media intensified war fever, and there was an orgy of patriotism such as the country had not seen since World War II.”\textsuperscript{206} The corporate media and the military-industrial complex both benefited from this collaboration.

Unfortunately, post-9/11 is not the only time the media has contributed to a culture of hysteria surrounding potential military conflict. FAIR reported in 2019 that “Media outlets are creating a climate for a US military attack on Iran by hyping the idea that Iran is an imminent threat to peace, by failing to offer evidence that calls the US’s accusations against Iran into question, by amplifying warmongers’ voices and by naturalizing America’s supposed right to spy on every country on earth.”\textsuperscript{207} The U.S. never massively invaded Iran, but had the Trump administration decided to do so, the media was already priming the American public for such an invasion. Media outlets repeatedly presented Iran as a “threat” or as posing a potential “nuclear crisis,” even though the International Atomic Energy Agency said that Iran did not have a

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid, 36.
\textsuperscript{207} Gregory Shupak, “Creating a Climate for War with Iran,” FAIR, last modified July 2, 2019, accessed March 16, 2021.
nuclear weapons program and there is reason to believe it had never been close to having one. FAIR reports that the mainstream media was creating a “climate for war” and that “[h]eadlines are breathlessly suggesting to readers that Iranians are going to kill Americans if Americans don’t kill Iranians first.”

An important note here is that this type of behavior is by no means limited to right-wing or conservative news outlets. In its analysis, FAIR cited the New York Times, the Hill, the Associated Press, and the Washington Post—in addition to Fox—as all contributing to this culture of hysteria. A separate FAIR article’s headline directs a pointed accusation at CNN: “CNN’s Iran Fearmongering Would Make More Sense Coming Directly From Pentagon.” The article cites a report by CNN Defense Department reporter Barbara Starr published in 2018 right after President Trump pulled out of the Iran deal. The report touted unspecified “concerns” from unnamed sources at the DoD and provided no evidence of a possible military strike, yet was “designed solely to scare the reader and justify Trump’s escalation of hostilities toward Iran.”

No mainstream media outlet is innocent of pro-war fear mongering.

The media has also suppressed or downplayed information relevant to military activity on multiple occasions. For example, although the media did everything in their power to vilify Iraq and Saddam Hussein in the lead-up to and during the Iraq war, “In corporate medialand, history could be supremely relevant when it focused on Hussein’s torture and genocide, but the historic assistance he got from the U.S. government and American firms was apt to be off the subject and beside the point.” The United States played an integral role in Hussein’s rise to power and

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208 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Solomon, War Made Easy, 115.
actively supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, due to the Reagan administration’s fears that an
Iranian victory over Iraq might result in Iran reaching the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. However,
this seemed to be irrelevant once Bush Jr. had made up his mind to invade Iraq:

“Given the extent of shared sensibilities and financial synergies within what amounts to a
huge military-industrial-media complex, it shouldn’t be surprising that—whether in the
prelude to the Gulf War of 1991 or the Iraq invasion of 2003—the USA’s biggest media
institutions did little to illuminate how Washington and business interests had combined
to strengthen and arm Saddam Hussein during many of his worst crimes.”

The U.S. military had actually conveyed the location of Iranian troops to Iraq in 1988,
knowing full well that Hussein’s army would attack with chemical weapons. The Bush Jr.
administration touted Hussein's connection to 9/11 and terrorism and his potential possession of
weapons of mass destruction (both lies) in the prelude to the Iraq war, and the media readily
accepted this theory as justification for 2003 invasion—but didn’t seem to care that the United
States had actively supported Hussein and his use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war.

Another instance of the U.S. media suppressing or failing to report information was
during the middle of the Iraq war in 2004. On June 28, 2004, the United States transferred
sovereignty to Iraq in a secret ceremony after which Paul Bremer—who had been seen by Iraqis
as a dictator—left the country. Bremer had heavily controlled Iraqi politics and privatized a
huge portion of the economy, including handing out contracts to American firms like
Halliburton. When he left, “after 18 months of de facto U.S. rule, Iraq was still in a state of chaos
without adequate security, medical care, electricity, or sewer control.”

212 Ibid, 114.
213 Shane Harris and Matthew M. Aid, “Exclusive: CIA Files Prove America Helped Saddam as He Gassed Iran,”
214 Kellner, Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy, 83.
215 Ibid, 84.
However, Bremer’s replacement wasn’t much better. The U.S. chose Ayad Allawi, who had ties to the CIA, to serve as interim prime minister until elections could be held—and the U.S. handpicked the rest of the Iraqi council as well. The two months following the transfer of power “exhibited sharply increased violence, with an escalation of kidnappings and some dramatic beheadings, continued daily assaults on U.S. troops, bombs killing scores of Iraqis, and daily horrors in the Pandora’s box of Iraq that the Bush administration had so unwisely opened.”216

But to watch the news in the United States, you would think “we had turned a corner,” as President Bush repeated over and over again. As Kellner states, “[B]oth the press and television systematically downplayed the Iraq fiasco during this period, even as violence escalated and more and more critics began to see the situation as impossible, at least as long as George W. Bush remained president.”217 If the media had payed attention to, and thoroughly reported on, the situation in Iraq, it could have led to a nationwide understanding that the war was doing more harm than good and serving the interests of huge corporations at the expense of American and Iraqi lives. A truly informed citizenry could have put public pressure on the Bush administration to end the war, or an electorate dissatisfied with the situation could have voted him out of office. Instead, it would be seven more years before the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

Suppressing or downplaying information isn’t the only way the mainstream media—in complicity with the MIC—has warped our understanding of war. The media also produces an extremely sanitized coverage of war: it avoids printing and broadcasting images of death and destruction; sidesteps discussions of American casualties and almost entirely refuses to mention casualties on the other side (which are usually much higher); and uses euphemisms like

216 Ibid.
217 Ibid, 86.
“collateral damage” and “air campaign” that hold very different connotations from what these phrases actually mean—i.e. innocent civilian death and continuous bombing.

Kellner notes that during the Iraq war, “Entire networks like Fox and the NBC cable networks provided little but propaganda and one-sided patriotism, as did for the most part CNN. All of the cable networks, as well as the big three U.S. broadcasting networks, tended to provide highly sanitized views of the war, rarely showing Iraqi casualties, thus producing a view of the war significantly different than that shown in other parts of the world.”\textsuperscript{218} He explains how the bombing of Iraqi military forces and images of dead Iraqis were essentially erased from the mainstream media. Compared to non-U.S. broadcasting networks like the British and Canadian Broadcasting Corporations, it was as if the U.S. media was covering a different war entirely. Solomon states, “Mostly, the American television coverage of the Iraq invasion was akin to scripted ‘reality TV.’”\textsuperscript{219}

This phenomenon is not unique to the Iraq war. During the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia, “American TV networks didn’t hesitate to show footage of U.S. bombers and missiles in flight—but rarely showed what really happened to people at the receiving end.”\textsuperscript{220} A \textit{New York Times} front page article during the airstrike in Yugoslavia in 1999 stated that “NATO began its second month of bombing against Yugoslavia today with new strikes against military targets that disrupted civilian electrical and water supplies.” The “disruption” of electrical and water supplies would inevitably lead to disease and death of civilians, but the reporting made it sound as if only the “military targets” would suffer the consequences of the bombing.\textsuperscript{221} While the nuance may seem negligible, this style of reporting over time leads to a distorted understanding of the death

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid, 65.
\textsuperscript{219} Solomon, \textit{War Made Easy}, 122.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid, 121.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
and destruction caused by war. As Solomon explains, “In the spring of 1999, as usual, selected images and skewed facts on television made it easier for Americans to accept—or even applaud—the exploding bombs funded by their tax dollars and dropped in their names…On American television, the warfare appeared to be wondrous and fairly bloodless.”

Sometimes a slant in news reporting is unintentional and to be expected, due to the inherent bias of the reporter which will inevitably present itself, even if only subtly, no matter how hard they try to be objective. However, in matters regarding war and the military, the skewed and sanitized coverage is oftentimes much more intentional: “During the war in Afghanistan, top executives of CNN circulated a memo telling reporters that if they showed news unfavorable to the United States, such as civilian casualties from U.S. bombing there, they should remind viewers that thousands of Americans died in the 9/11 attacks.” Not only do reporters and news anchors oftentimes receive direct instructions from higher-ups on what and what not to say, but there is also careful screening of experts and guests brought on to the TV networks during wartime. And, as noted in chapter 4, many of these “experts” are former generals and Pentagon officials, who have been carefully scripted and trained on how to speak about matters of war in order to paint the U.S. military and government in the best possible light.

The U.S. corporate media has also chronically failed to properly investigate, criticize, and debate issues of war and military involvement. It tends to take the current administration’s account of the situation as fact, and during times of war or military tension, it is branded unpatriotic to criticize the government. Although there are many examples of the media’s failure to investigate and report the truth when it comes to war, the most egregious case was in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq.

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222 Ibid.
George W. Bush and Dick Cheney had planned from day one of their administration to invade Iraq. As explained in chapter 2, Bush and Cheney—as well as Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, and others in and around the Bush administration—were either directly a part of or tangentially related to the neoconservative think tank PNAC, which was advocating for a regime change in Iraq as early as 1998 and even sent an open letter to President Clinton calling for the removal of Saddam Hussein. The fact that Bush planned to invade Iraq from the get-go has been confirmed by multiple officials close to the administration: “Former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill also confirmed that invading Iraq was at the top of the administration’s agenda from day one. ‘Go find me a way of doing this,’ Bush said at the very first National Security Council meeting in January 2001. Based on interviews with O’Neill and several other officials, former Wall Street Journal writer Ron Suskind revealed in The Price of Loyalty that the early planning was very much focused on Iraq’s oil wealth.”224 The fact that 9/11 happened, providing an opening for the Bush administration to demonize Saddam Hussein and convince the American public to go to war, was a stroke of luck for such plans.

From the immediate aftermath of 9/11 up until the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration waged a propaganda war to convince the nation that Saddam Hussein was linked to Al Qaeda and that he possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). President Bush “sent former CIA chief James Woolsey to London to gather evidence linking Saddam Hussein to 9/11. These included allegations that Iraqi agents met with Mohammed Atta, ringleader of the 9/11 attacks; that Al Qaeda had travelled to Iraq to celebrate Saddam Hussein’s birthday; that Iraq had trained Al Qaeda operatives, and that Iraq was linked to anthrax that had been mailed to US

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senators in October 2001.” These claims turned out to be false. Not only did Saddam Hussein have nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, but Iraq was not in possession of WMD nor were they in the process of making any. Even so, these allegations were widely circulated in the mainstream media. The nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity documented a total of 935 false statements made by top administration officials regarding the threat from Iraq before the war, and the majority of these assertions “were broadcast widely by U.S. media with little or no investigation of their credibility, and few rebuttals from war skeptics or dissenters.”

Not only did the media outlets completely fail to properly investigate these claims before broadcasting them to the nation—even the Washington Post and the New York Times admitted that they had uncritically published information fed to them by the Bush administration—but they continued to circulate the misinformation long after it had been disproven. Even after ABC, NBC, and the Washington Post reported that the claims were false, Fox Television and other U.S. cable networks continued to play the stories about Iraq’s alleged connection with Al Qaeda and supposedly threatening weapons program. The Bush administration had accomplished its goal: to convince enough of the American population, still reeling and traumatized from 9/11, that Saddam Hussein was dangerous—so that they could have their war.

After having pointed out the mainstream media’s failures in the lead-up to and during the Iraq war, I would like to take a moment here to mention that there was a very significant anti-war movement in the United States before and during the invasion into Iraq. Anti-war protests drew more and more people throughout 2002 as the Bush administration made its intentions to invade

225 Ibid, 129-130.
226 Why We Fight, directed by Eugene Jarecki, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006.
228 Kellner, Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy, 56.
Iraq clear, and these protests culminated in massive demonstrations on February 15, 2003. The anti-war movement continued after the invasion throughout the remainder of Bush’s presidency. On February 14, 2003, the United Nations Security Council was called into session to hear the final reports of the UN weapons inspectors for Iraq. The United States, Britain, and Spain had been pushing for a resolution from the Security Council to approve an Iraq invasion, and, as Phyllis Bennis explains, “Many had anticipated that [the UN] reports would somehow wiggle around the truth, that they would say something Bush and Blair would grab to try to legitimize their spurious claims of Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction…But they refused to bend the truth, stating unequivocally that no such weapons had been found.” Of course, the United States would go on to invade Iraq anyway. But the protests on the following day—February 15, 2003—drew between 12 and 14 million people from almost 800 cities across the globe, making it the largest global protest in the history of the world. Because of the Security Council session, the site of the United Nations became the epicenter of the February 15 protests in New York City. Somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000 people turned out in NYC in freezing temperatures—18 degrees, to be exact.

As University of Michigan political science professor Michael Heaney pointed out, “The anti-war movement was pretty well sustained from 2003 through about 2006…During that time there were multiple large demonstrations. There was also coordinated activity and lobbying. There were numerous active coalitions. Lots of grassroots mobilization in numerous cities. It was

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231 Ibid.  
a pretty big movement.” The most prominent organizers of the anti-war movement in the United States were Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER), Not in Our Name (NION), and United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ). Labor unions, environmental groups and progressive organizations like MoveOn.org were also a part of the movement.

However, even though a strong anti-war movement was present in the United States from before the Iraq invasion through the end of Bush’s presidency, the mainstream media did very little to cover the protests. Norman Solomon reported in FAIR that after large demonstrations against the war in Iraq took place in several major U.S. cities in 2005, most daily papers across the country delegated the coverage of the protests to “perfunctory back-page articles.” Television networks barely mentioned the demonstrations. Thus, although the anti-war movement in the 2000s is an important part in the history of U.S. peace movements—and was certainly instrumental in President Barak Obama’s victory in 2008—the mainstream media probably did more to suppress the movement than to support it.

The failure on the part of the corporate media to investigate and criticize the Bush administration’s claims, and the continued circulation of these claims even after they were proven false, would lead to a disastrous eight-year long conflict resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths. Kellner illustrates the consequences of these failures:

“The lack of debate in the U.S. corporate media over the proper response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Bush administration’s largely unilateral military response points to an intensifying crisis of democracy in the United States. The media in a democracy are supposed to provide facts and a wide range of opinions for an informed citizenry, debate issues of national importance, reject spin and lies, and hold leaders accountable for mistakes and wrong policies. The Bush administration was not held accountable by the corporate media for allowing 9/11 to happen on its watch by ignoring clear warnings of

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234 Blumenthal, “The Largest Protest Ever Was 15 Years Ago.,” Huffpost.
235 Ibid.
237 Blumenthal, “The Largest Protest Ever Was 15 Years Ago.,” Huffpost.
coming attacks, for their flawed response in attacking Afghanistan, or for their disastrous invasion of Iraq.\textsuperscript{238}

The lead-up to the Iraq war is not the only time the mainstream media has failed to properly investigate, criticize, or debate pro-war claims and information. The news media has regularly parroted “official” claims that turned out to be false, and it has been complicit in spreading outright lies. FAIR reported that in 2019, the mainstream media—particularly CNN—led the way in spreading the falsehood that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro’s forces were burning trucks that were trying to bring food and medicine into the country.\textsuperscript{239} The \textit{New York Times} eventually debunked the lie, reporting that anti-Maduro protesters, not Maduro’s forces, had set the trucks on fire. The lie was born with Mike Pence, Marco Rubio, and Mike Pompeo’s accusations against the Venezuelan government, and “this false story arrived embedded within another false story: that the Venezuelan government is blocking needed humanitarian aid to the country. The Venezuelan government has and does allow aid into their country—from countries that are not actively and vituperatively threatening to overthrow the elected president with an external coup.”\textsuperscript{240} The author is referring here, of course, to the United States.

The news media parroted the U.S. government’s ‘pro-war propaganda’ against Venezuela, failing to investigate the claims made by U.S. government officials and spreading falsehoods that would lead to an incorrect understanding of the situation in Venezuela. What’s more, as FAIR points out, is that exposure of pro-war lies doesn’t end up making the media more skeptical of pro-war claims or the sources that fed them misinformation: “Those official sources will still be central and those asking questions will still be marginal.”\textsuperscript{241} It seems that the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid, 38.
  \item \textsuperscript{239} Janine Jackson, “Exposure of Another Pro-War Lie Doesn't Make Media More Skeptical of Pro-War Claims,” FAIR, last modified March 17, 2019, accessed March 16, 2021.
  \item \textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
mainstream, corporate media is either incapable of learning from its past mistakes, or it just refuses to do so.

There are many, many more instances of skewed reporting when it comes to war and military involvement. Not all of these instances involve outright lying to the American public or regurgitating government pro-war propaganda; many of the ways in which the corporate media influences our perception of war are small and relatively unnoticeable. For example, FAIR reports how in December 2019, the mainstream media barely covered the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorized $738 billion in Pentagon spending (an increase in $22 billion from the previous year). Across the most influential news outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, *USA Today*, NPR, CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, and Fox News, the NDAA was covered in only 27 articles. In comparison, an ad campaign by Peloton was mentioned 57 times over a similar time period. It’s no surprise that the American public seems to have almost no issue with allocating billions upon billions of dollars to funding the world’s largest war machine, as opposed to using their taxpayer money to fund healthcare, education, or other social program—the establishment media has failed miserably at informing them about massive defense spending.

Another example of how the corporate media has let information regarding the military slip under the radar is in regard to the U.S. military’s massive contribution to carbon emissions. In June 2019, a study by Neta Crawford for Brown University’s Costs of War Project confirmed previous findings that “the US military is ‘the single-largest producer of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world,’ and that the Pentagon is responsible for between ‘77% and 80% of all US

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government energy consumption’ since 2001.” Surprised? That’s because the study received virtually no coverage in U.S. mainstream media, including in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, NPR, PBS, ABC, MSNBC, CBS, and CNN. As FAIR notes, “Given corporate media’s propagandizing for starting and staying in wars (FAIR.org, 10/23/17, 9/11/19) and for neverending arms races (FAIR.org, 5/17/19, 7/12/19), one should expect corporate media to bury evidence that the US military is a threat to itself and its citizens with its massive carbon output.”

These smaller instances of media failures—oftentimes omitting or burying information, such as that regarding defense spending or the military’s carbon footprint—are less obvious and harder to track down. However, they are just as influential to the way the American public thinks about the military and war. Every missed opportunity to debate and discuss massive war spending in the mainstream media; every time an important study like the Costs of War Project is ignored; every instance of altered language or wording that minimizes or obscures the incredible resources devoured by war and the massive amounts of death and devastation it causes—each of these instances shapes the citizenry’s understanding of war and military involvement. Taken together, they combine to create a narrative in the corporate, mainstream media that manufactures support for war and renders the American citizenry incapable of holding their government to account when it comes to the military and war.

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244 Ibid.
Conclusion

If wars can be started by lies, peace can be started by truth.
—Julian Assange

The precise death toll from the war in Iraq is impossible to calculate. Brown University’s Costs of War project estimates a total of 268,000–295,000 direct deaths in major war zones in Iraq from March 2003 to October 2018, including U.S. troops, U.S. contractors, Iraqi National Military and Police, civilians, opposition fighters, and other groups such as journalists and NGO workers.\(^ {245}\) Their estimate for civilian deaths—182,272-204,575—is fairly comparable to that of Iraq Body Count (IBC), which has tallied violent deaths in Iraq since the beginning of the war. IBC has documented 185,593-208,667 civilian deaths from violence, with 288,000 total deaths including combatants.\(^ {246}\)

These numbers are low, however, compared with a 2013 analysis by researchers from the United States, Iraq, and Canada. This research estimated direct and indirect deaths attributable to the war between 2003 and 2011 and found that the total death toll was about 405,000; 240,000 as a result of violence, and 160,000 from indirect war-related causes.\(^ {247}\) The study also estimates an additional 55,000 deaths that were not counted due to their families fleeing the country during the war. That would amount to 460,000 deaths by just 2011. IBC has estimated 82,000 deaths—only counting civilians—in the years 2011-2018. That would total 542,000 deaths. Thus, it is likely that at least half a million people have died as a result of the Iraq war. Other estimates put the number at over 1 million lives lost as a result of the invasion, due to displacement, the loss of


professionals such as teachers, doctors and engineers, and birth defects and cancers caused by the depleted uranium and other toxins used by U.S. forces.\textsuperscript{248}

The human cost of the war is abhorrent enough, but it’s not the only cost. The Iraq war billed American taxpayers nearly $2 trillion, which amounts to about $8,000 per taxpayer.\textsuperscript{249} The total amount as of 2020 was $1,922 billion, including Pentagon spending explicitly for the war, State Department spending, veterans’ benefits, and interest on the debt incurred to fund the war. As the Costs of War project states, “Since 2001 these interest payments have been growing, resulting in more and more taxpayer dollars being wasted on interest payments rather than being channeled to more productive uses.”\textsuperscript{250} For the combined “Global War on Terror” (including the war in Afghanistan as well as Iraq, and other military interventions), even if war spending ceased completely in 2020, “interest payments on the $2 trillion of existing war debt would rise to over $2 trillion by 2030 and to $6.5 trillion by 2050.”\textsuperscript{251}

But numbers do not tell the whole story. As Doran notes, “The extraordinary financial outlay for the Iraq War must also be placed in the context of the tremendous devastation and suffering of the Iraqi people.”\textsuperscript{252} Not only did over 200,000 (at the very least) Iraqi civilians die as a result of the U.S. invasion, but the war ravaged their social, economic, and political systems. The neoliberal system imposed by Paul Bremer—the U.S.-instated ruler—eliminated tariffs, stripped protections of the Iraqi economy, and handed out huge contracts to American firms. “Through either outright fraud, sensational incompetence, or, most likely, theft, over $12 billion

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Doran, \textit{Making the World Safe for Capitalism}, 13.
of Iraqi money for which the US was responsible for overseeing is simply unaccounted for.”\textsuperscript{253}

The United States also framed political parties in terms of Iraq’s ethnic and religious identities, sowing division and even training militias and death squads. These practices led to sectarian and insurgent violence which still plagues the country today. This was not accidental but rather a calculated tactic to maintain power:

“This divide-and-rule strategy created a system of repression and terror with the intent to suppress any and all resistance, and to ensure Iraqis fought each other rather than unite against the US occupation….The intent is clear: to create a level of sheer terror that the population has no recourse but to accept the US imposed neoliberal, free trade system where corporate investors and the predatory right to profit take all precedence.”\textsuperscript{254}

The civil war in Iraq from 2013-2017 between the Iraqi government and the Islamic State (ISIS) caused further death, destruction, displacement, and social and economic devastation. Most historians of ISIS agree that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 led directly to the group’s emergence out of Al-Qaeda,\textsuperscript{255} which means the United States is in many ways responsible for the continued violence years after the official withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011 (although the U.S. did participate in the Iraqi civil war as well). Ravaged by decades of war, the Iraqi people are still suffering from poverty, food insecurity, displacement, and violence. The official poverty rate in Iraq before the COVID-19 pandemic was about 20 percent (it was likely much higher in reality) and it shot up to 30 percent or more during 2020.\textsuperscript{256}

We oftentimes think of war in the abstract. Especially in the United States, where we insert ourselves and our military in countless places around the globe but almost never experience war on the home front, it is easy to talk about war in terms of foreign policy or budget

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid, 14.
deficits and ignore the massive cost in human death and suffering. I use Iraq here as an example because the lead up to and time period involving the Iraq invasion is one of the most egregious failures on the part of the media to investigate, report, and educate the American citizenry on the reasons behind the invasion, the actual state of things in Iraq during the years of the war, and the horrible consequences of the conflict.

As I explained in Chapter 5, the U.S. mainstream media contributed to a climate of hysteria after 9/11, completely failed to debunk the Bush administration’s claim that Saddam Hussein had links to Al-Qaeda and was in possession of weapons and mass destruction, continued to circulate these claims even after they were proven to be false, paid little to no attention to the situation in Iraq in 2004 after the transfer of sovereignty, and provided a sanitized coverage of the war that erased images of Iraqi casualties and painted a one-sided, patriotic picture of the war. As Kellner states, “[A]lthough the media in a democracy should critically debate urgent questions facing the nation, such as whether to declare war, in this crisis the mainstream U.S. corporate media, especially the television networks, promoted only military solutions to the problem of global terrorism and provided a propaganda machine for Bush administration militarism.”257

The case of Iraq is a glaring example of where the media failed to do its job almost every step of the way, but as I have illustrated, this phenomenon is not unique to Iraq and has been repeated over and over again across many distinct instances of U.S. military involvement. Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that the failures of the mainstream media to educate the citizenry in matters regarding war and military involvement are not accidental, but rather a

257 Dougles Kellner, Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War and Election Battles (Routledge, 2005), 29.
direct result of the military-industrial-media complex, an intricate intersection of the extremely consolidated media powers with the MIC.

In Chapter 2, I explained how the MIC has grown into a structure that encompasses countless industries, corporations, and sectors of government and how it has an enormous influence on the government’s decision-making regarding defense budgets, military contracts, and matters of military activity and war. The corporate influences of the MIC—including, but not limited to, the weapons makers, service contractors, and Big Oil—wield massive power through lobbying, money, and the revolving door. In Chapter 3, I focused on the corporate media and the consolidation of power within the industry that has taken place over the last several decades. Due to this consolidation, the vast majority of messaging and information power rests in the hands of just a few gigantic corporations, which, even as a stand-alone phenomenon, threatens our democracy and the ability of the people to stay informed and hold their government to account.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the MIC intersects with the modern-day corporate media. Through outright ownership, interlocking directorates, revolving doors, embedded journalism, and over-reliance on “official” sources that are usually spokespersons for the military, government, and the Pentagon, the mainstream media is intertwined in countless ways with the profiteers of war. As Chediac states, “This relationship between media and the military has become such a fixture that it is an integral part of the for-profit capitalist system.”258 The media corporations benefit from this lucrative relationship; Kellner notes, “The dirty little secret of U.S. corporate broadcasting networks was that they profited greatly from war,” which is why they “tended to promote U.S. military interventions.”259

259 Ibid, 42.
In Chapter 5, I provided evidence of the effect this military-industrial-media complex has had on our news media. The corporate media has contributed to a pre-war climate of fear and hysteria, suppressed or downplayed information relevant to military activities, created a sanitized coverage of war that obscures the true cost of violence in human terms, failed to properly investigate, criticize, and debate issues of war and military involvement, been complicit in spreading lies and false information regarding war, and produced countless instances of skewed reporting, such as letting the passage of massive defense budgets slip under the radar and burying information about the U.S. military’s massive contribution to carbon emissions.

The result is an unknowledgeable and ill-informed public failing to hold policymakers to account for spending taxpayer dollars on the war machine and its profiteers rather than on the needs of its own people. The result is a citizenry that blindly accepts the necessity of a $934 billion defense budget\textsuperscript{260} while squabbling over whether or not we need universal healthcare or stimulus checks during a pandemic. The result is a manufactured war, coldly calculated with tremendous conflict of interest, fabrication, and lies to the American public, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and devastated an entire nation, all for the sake of American imperialism and enriching the war machine and oil industry.

Let us return to Eisenhower’s speech:

“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.\textsuperscript{261}"


\textsuperscript{261} The White House, “Text of the Address by President Eisenhower, Broadcast and Televised from His Office in the White House, Tuesday Evening, January 17, 1961, 8:30 to 9:00 P.M., EST,” news release.
The military-industrial complex has succeeded in its acquisition of unwarranted influence. The disastrous rise of misplaced power has occurred. The military-industrial-media complex has endangered our liberties and democratic processes—in spite of important (and oftentimes buried by the media) anti-war protests and movements. The American citizenry, as a whole, is neither alert nor knowledgeable, and thus cannot check the power of the MIC. The post-9/11 era and the War on Terror has already given rise to a period of endless war and the violation of democratic laws and principles, exemplified by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, and the detainment and torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

If we do not find a way to check the corporate powers of the media and the MIC in order to achieve a truly informed citizenry, we risk not only endless war and the colossal financial and human cost it entails, but also threats to our very democracy and the rise of the type of society feared by theorists in the early 20th century, such as a garrison state or a permanent war economy. As Kellner states, “Without an expanded and improved alternative media and an informed citizenry, democracy in the United States will continue to atrophy.” What, then, might be done about the military-industrial-media complex?

As I have illustrated, the MIMC is the result of the intersection of multiple different industries as well as the consolidation of power within these industries. Thus, an effective approach to curbing the effects of the MIMC must address each of these branches individually, as well as the intersection of each. Firstly, regulations on the media industry should be tightened. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 opened the floodgates for mergers and consolidation, and this should be reversed. We desperately need new legislation that will place limits on

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acquisitions within the media industry, so that we can return to a norm of diverse and local
ownership of the news media.

Secondly, the MIC itself must be tackled in some way. Given the complex intertangling
of the government with arms makers, Big Oil, and other industries, this is an extremely difficult
task, to say the least. One of the first things to be done is to dismantle the revolving door. The
ethics laws that are currently in place are weak, unenforced, and do very little to deter the
exchange of personnel between the defense industry and government. There should be explicit
bans on former senior government officials, military officers, members of Congress, and senior
legislative staff going on to work for defense contractors as lobbyists or executives after
retirement from public service. They should also be prohibited from sitting on the boards of these
companies. Similarly, top executives and lobbyists from defense contractors should be forbidden
from acquiring government jobs in the Pentagon or in White House administrations.

The linkages between Big Oil and the MIC are harder to regulate, given that oil
companies’ influence on government is less direct than that of companies that hold defense
contracts. The restrictions to mediate the revolving door mentioned above would indirectly affect
Big Oil, as they would affect oil servicing companies such as Halliburton which hold contracts
with the government. To fully undo the influence Big Oil has on government, however, one
would need to drastically reduce the world economy’s dependence on oil. In today’s world, oil
equals money, and money equals political influence—hence the oil companies’ enormous
contributions to the Bush-Cheney campaign, the domination of Iraqi oil by foreign firms post-
invasion, and the immense profits reaped by Big Oil due to the American occupation of Iraq.
Thus, a true subversion of the role that Big Oil plays in the MIC would require a shift away from
dependence on oil towards renewable resources. We need to pass comprehensive climate change
legislation—not only to mitigate the effects of climate change, but also to dismantle the MIC (and the MIMC).

Finally, a substantial effort needs to be made to monitor, expose, and counteract the pro-war bias in the news media. The United States could definitely benefit from more watchdog agencies such as FAIR, as well as more willingness on the part of reporters and media outlets to call out their colleagues and competitors when they print or broadcast information that is false, skewed, overly sanitized, or overly pro-war. We also need more progressive journalism and reporters who are willing to question United States foreign policy—even in times of war and when doing so may be deemed unpatriotic.

These goals may be ambitious, or even unattainable in the current political climate. However, they are possible under the structure of United States government, and they are necessary if we wish to maintain our democracy. This nation was founded on the principles of a free press, without which a government “of the people, for the people, and by the people” is simply an empty aspiration and not a reality. The mainstream, corporate media is not a free press, but is beholden to profits—of both the media corporations themselves and the military-industrial complex, with which it is so deeply intertwined. If we care about the free press; if we care about the so-called principles upon which the United States was founded; if we care about the lives of American citizens and the lives of those peoples whom we destroy and ravage with war; if we care about peace; if we care about democracy—if we care about these things, we must find a way to curb the military-industrial-media complex and foster an alert and knowledgeable citizenry, so that security and liberty may, in fact, prosper together.
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