

War, lies and censorship

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The United States, Britain and France are in the final stages of preparing a new bloodbath in the Middle East. A US naval strike force, headed by aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, is steaming toward the Persian Gulf, bombs are being loaded onto aircraft, and troops are on the move, as the imperialist powers prepare to launch military aggression against Syria that could quickly develop into a direct conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.

But imperialist war is propelled by more than soldiers and missiles: it is powered by lies.

For the past month, all the major US, British and French news outlets have been working overtime to peddle a series of lies, one after the other, to sell the public a re-hash of the “weapons of mass destruction” narrative used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The democratic conception of the free press centers on it's being a so-called “fourth estate,” independent from and skeptical toward the claims of the political establishment. But in the frenzied war fever, the distinction between journalism and state propaganda has been obliterated.

While journalism seeks to question and probe, propaganda seeks to sensationalize, simplify and incite. Journalism sees all claims as suspect; propaganda treats the statements of the government as sacrosanct and everything else as lies.

Last month, the press howled with indignation at what they called an attempt by Russia to poison former double agent Sergei Skripal on British soil. On one day, the press proclaimed with certainty that the poison “circulated through the vents of Skripal’s BMW.” On another day, and with equal certainty, these same outlets declared that “the lethal nerve agent Novichok was placed on the door handle of Sergei Skripal’s house in Salisbury.” No attempt was made to probe the changing narrative.

When UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson declared that the Porton Down chemical weapons laboratory in Britain was “absolutely categorical” that Russia was behind the poisoning, the US media cheered his proclamation and the subsequent expulsion of Russian diplomats from the US and other countries. But when he was flatly contradicted by that same laboratory, and when the Skripals inconveniently recovered from what was purportedly one of the world’s most lethal poisons, the press simply buried the story and

went on to the next lie.

Just two days after Porton Down exploded the Skripal narrative by publicly contradicting Johnson, the CIA-backed propaganda outfit known as the White Helmets released images of children lying motionless, crying and being doused with water to substantiate claims by US-backed militia that the Syrian government had killed dozens of people in a chemical weapons attack. For days, those images were plastered on the front pages of newspapers and endlessly looped on the broadcast news.

Conveniently enough, the attack came a week after a statement from Trump indicating that US troops would soon be withdrawn from Syria. The US media howled in outrage at that suggestion, with the *Washington Post* declaring that “a US withdrawal would create an Obama-style vacuum that would be filled by Iran, Hezbollah” and “Russia.” This was the day before the supposed chemical weapons attack in Syria.

By the next day, the narrative had changed completely. Gone was all talk of countering Russian and Iranian “influence” and securing “American Interests.” From that point on, the sole aim of the United States in Syria was the protection of children from, as Trump himself put it, the “Animal Assad.” News broadcasts all proclaimed their absolute certainty that the Assad government had carried out a chemical weapons attack.

That no evidence has been presented for this claim is of no import, nor the fact that previous claims of a similar character were later refuted. The lie has had its effect, and the US, Britain and France are on the war path.

Now, the aim of the media war-mongers is to ensure maximum carnage. On Wednesday, *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens called for a “decapitation strike” to murder Syrian President Assad, declaring, “If we are serious about restoring an international norm against the use of chemical weapons, then the penalty for violating the norm must be severe.” If Stephens had his way, Assad’s scalp would be nailed to the mantle of the White House next to that of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Every predatory war launched by the United States against a weaker country has been waged under false pretenses. The

Mexican War of 1846 was begun with the lying declaration by President Polk that Mexico “invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil.” The Spanish–American War, which led to the bloody conquest of the Philippines, was egged on by the Hearst press in the textbook definition of “yellow journalism.”

The escalation of the Vietnam War was justified by lie that an American ship was attacked by the North Vietnamese in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The invasion of Afghanistan was justified by the September 11, 2001 terror attacks—carried out by individuals close to the Saudi monarchy, America’s key Arab ally in the Middle East, who were actively monitored by the US intelligence agencies as they took flight lessons and prepared their plot. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, which cost the lives of more than one million people, was justified by Colin Powell’s lies to the United Nations and the “dodgy dossiers” cooked up by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.

But the basic problem with conducting foreign policy through the Big Lie is the old adage attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.”

There is no popular support for NATO’s drive to war in Syria. In Britain, where Prime Minister Theresa May declared she would seek to sidestep a vote in parliament, only 22 percent of the population supports a missile strike against Syria, while more than three quarters either oppose it or did not express their opinion. There can be no doubt that the figures for the United States would be similar—if the press even cared to conduct such polls.

After years of shameless lying to justify predatory wars, the mainstream media has lost the public’s support. According to a recent poll by Monmouth University, “More than 3 in 4 Americans believe that traditional major TV and newspaper media outlets report ‘fake news.’”

The discrediting of mainstream news outlets in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, however, has corresponded with an explosion in the diversity of political viewpoints and news outlets available to the population through the rise of the Internet and social media. As an antidote to the propaganda pumped out by the *New York Times*, real journalists, such as Pulitzer-Prize winning reporter Seymour Hersh, have debunked the claims by the US media of previous poison gas attacks in articles accessible to millions of people online.

This is what accounts for the US media’s hysteria, over the past year-and-a-half, on the need to block what they call “fake news.” The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, through the implementation of state censorship, are seeking to regain their monopoly over political discourse.

As former Obama administration official Samantha Power

noted last year, “During the Cold War, most Americans received their news and information via mediated platforms. Reporters and editors serving in the role of professional gatekeepers had almost full control over what appeared in the media.” It is to this halcyon past—when the Western governments and their flunkies in the mainstream press were able to lie with impunity—to which the media propagandists are seeking to return.

This is precisely the aim of the campaign for Internet censorship waged by the Democrats, the major media outlets and their partners in Silicon Valley. Since last July, when the WSWS exposed the efforts by Google to censor the Internet through the manipulation of its search results, the campaign for Internet censorship has sharply escalated, in conjunction with the growth of working class struggle and opposition to the policies of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg delivered testimony before Congress in which he outlined the company’s plans, through the power of artificial intelligence, to “evaluate” and “police” all the content posted on the world’s largest social network in order to block the dissemination of “fake news.” Measures are being taken to limit the reach of oppositional publications or shut them down altogether.

The real target of the censorship campaign is not “fake news,” but true news—that is, genuine journalism and independent reporting, which by its very nature contradicts the lies of the war-mongers in Washington, London and Paris.

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