

Big Media Has Betrayed the People

For years, Americans relied on the mainstream U.S. news media for information; some folks were even convinced the MSM was “liberal.” But the current reality is that the major papers have become mouthpieces for the national security state while amassing a sorry record of deception, writes Greg Maybury.

By Greg Maybury

In his farewell address to the American people in 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered what turned out to be his most memorable public utterance, famously warning Americans about the perils of the growing “military-industrial complex.” He went on to say: “Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Although it was the “military-industrial” bit that most folks remember, it was the “alert and knowledgeable” part that also needed to resonate. Unfortunately, instead of an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry,” which Ike suggested was the only bulwark against the continued growth, power and influence of this monster within, much of the American citizenry remained oblivious to it all. They either fell asleep at the democratic wheel or chose to remain ignorant of the already disturbing implications of the military-industrial complex’s encroaching reach into every aspect of the American demos and polity.

When the torch was passed to the new generation as John F. Kennedy declared in his Inaugural Address just days after Ike’s warning – the “good life” beckoned. Few, it seemed, wished to rock the boat. More than a half century after Eisenhower’s warning and nearly 15 years into what some like to call the New American Century, the growth of this “military-industrial complex” has far exceeded anything even the Old Warhorse could have imagined. Yet despite this, most Americans are still asleep at the wheel. There seems little evidence that is likely to change anytime soon.

And here we should ponder at least one of the main reasons why this is so.

For those folks who retain any faith or confidence that the mainstream or corporate media is providing us with all the insight we need to make sense of the world and the driving forces behind the big trends and developments, a reality check of the first order is in order. What was once called the Fourth Estate, a public institution of journalism intended to check on the powerful,

has become a Fifth Column against democracy, a means for the Power Elites in business, finance and politics to manage the people, not a way for the people to keep tabs on the powerful.

The big fix is in on behalf of the Agenda Benders of the National Security State. The game is rigged. And it is decidedly not in favor of equality, democracy, freedom, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of the majority; nor is it for that matter, designed to nurture “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry.”

The fundamental principles of journalism sound hunky-dory in theory. But when the rubber hits the road these standards are all too quickly deep-sixed in favor of more prosaic and less lofty goals. Professionalism becomes careerism. The “public interest” becomes “private gain.” But finally much of the public is figuring this game out.

The extraordinary growth of the independent and alternative media underscores this premise and surely points to more people looking for news, viewpoints and opinions outside the MSM. The “marketplace of ideas” isn’t just expanding; the monopoly is breaking down and whole new niches are opening up.

This is of course a welcome development although no one should underestimate the residual power of the MSM and the difficulty of producing truly independent journalism. Although there are promising signs the MSM’s readership is waning, there remain many folks implacably wedded to their daily fix of “*impropaganda*” from the establishment newsmakers and the “*opinionocracy*” whose positioning statement might well read: “*Here is the news we choose, to give you all today.*”

The Great Malaise

Yet, as long as we are not relying on the MSM for our daily dose of context and perspective, examples underscoring the broader trend abound everywhere we care to look. Writer Ulson Gunnar reported in an article at the New Eastern Outlook website that Vladimir Putin’s recent address to the Valdai Discussion Club was wide ranging and well worth reading.

But it is Gunnar’s article that’s pertinent here. After applauding Putin’s willingness to point to Washington’s hypocrisy in key foreign policy areas and noting the seemingly irreversible loss of “respect and legitimacy once commanded” by the U.S. in the international arena, Gunnar then cites the MSM’s “utter failure to hold accountable, poor policy driven by corrupt, criminal special interests” as one of the main reasons:

“Leaving it to Putin to point out the sorry state of American foreign policy grants Russia the respect and legitimacy the US would have otherwise held onto

were it capable of putting its own house in order. The inability of America's media to serve public interests is a symptom of America's greater malaise." [My Emphasis]

But the reality is even worse than that. The major U.S. media has not simply failed to hold U.S. officials accountable for their destructive arrogance. The MSM chose to mock Putin for his undeniably accurate remarks. For instance, *The Washington Post* published an editorial entitled (in print editions), "Putinoia on full display," which said, about Putin's Valdai remarks, "out poured a poisonous mix of lies, conspiracy theories, thinly veiled threats of further aggression and, above all, seething resentment toward the United States."

The *Post* editors then cited examples of Putin's "Putinoia" such as his statements that the United States had "declared itself the winner of the Cold War" and promoted a "unipolar world [that] is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries." Other examples of Putin's madness, according to the *Post*, included his observations that Washington's interventions have created chaos around the world and that the overthrow of Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich was a "coup d'etat." In other words, Putin made observations that were either obviously true or certainly arguably true but the *Post* insisted on its own reality, one that grossly misleads its readers and implicitly sets the boundaries of MSM-approved debate.

For another exemplary case study of this MSM phenomenon of distortion and deception, we might look at the recently released "Kill the Messenger," a film treatment of the life and times of investigative journalist Gary Webb. Webb attempted in 1996 to shed light on the CIA's connections to, and knowledge of, cocaine distribution by the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contras and their associates, and the consequent crack epidemic that spread across America throughout the 1980s.

Ultimately Webb's career was destroyed by a concerted, relentless character assassination and disinformation campaign by the Big Three of the U.S. print media *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*, each one of which variously, yet ruthlessly distorted, and then refuted, Webb's claims, setting up straw men and then knocking them down. Several years later, in 2004, his career and marriage over, and financially destitute, Webb pulled the pin by committing suicide.

If Webb's fate had resulted from a rare manifestation of an unholy mix of journalistic *nonfeasance*, *misfeasance* and *malfeasance* in the history of reportage and public opinion-making, we might be tempted to view this case as an aberration. But sadly it is not. It is part of a pattern of covering up criminal nonfeasance, misfeasance and malfeasance at the highest levels of the U.S.

government, especially in matters of “national security” or in Eisenhower’s phrase, the “military-industrial complex.”

In the Webb case, his destruction also camouflaged the MSM’s own venality and incompetence, since the same Big Three newspapers had missed or disparaged reports of Contra-cocaine trafficking when the crimes were occurring in the 1980s (and when the American people needed to be informed of what the Reagan administration was doing and not doing). It is notable that it was not one but *three* of the so-called newspapers of record in established MSM circles that led the attack against a fellow journalist.

Taking into account the extraordinary significance of Webb’s reportage, along with the fact it is now generally accepted he largely got his story right, his own personal and professional odyssey is a savage, wholly justifiable indictment on all things MSM in the Home of the Brave. Yet insofar as we can gather, none of them has openly or unequivocally acknowledged its complicity in covering up the details of Webb’s revelations and/or for what they did in destroying his career, his family and ultimately his life. No one has been held to account, and no one has forthrightly apologized.

The fact that at least one of these papers the redoubtable *Washington Post* is still trying to defend the indefensible is surely another nail in the coffin of the *ancien régime* of the corporate-controlled media, information and news industry. It seems though the *Post* may only be rubbing salt into its own wounds, as any number of more independent media folk seem determined to set the record straight on Webb’s behalf.

Weapons of Mass Disinformation

As for the rest of the MSM cohorts who jumped onto the Big Three’s “Get Gary Webb” bandwagon, it would appear they are letting sleeping dogs lie in the wake of the film’s release. It’s unknown if they are doing this to preserve whatever integrity they might have left over their own attacks on Webb and/or failure to undertake their own investigations, or whether it is because they really don’t care one way or another. Webb may just have been collateral damage an “expendable” in the perennial War on Truth in mainstream media circles.

If Watergate was a high-water mark in investigative reportage and political news coverage in the U.S. and by some accounts there are compelling reasons after all these years to view this assessment with some skepticism then the Webb affair would have to qualify as a suitable case study at the other end of the spectrum.

As significant as the destruction of Gary Webb was in its implications for a free, fair and fearless mainstream press in America, this MSM behavior has now

become the norm, not the exception. (Indeed, President George W. Bush was able to mislead the American people into the disastrous Iraq War with the MSM especially the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* aiding and abetting his WMD deceptions of the American people).

With this in mind, we can hardly expect that we are going to get the kind of news and information we need to remain "alert and knowledgeable" from the MSM in an age when being so has possibly never been more important in homo sap's sorry-ass history on the Big Blue Ball. There are now so many examples of that Unholy Trinity's nonfeasance, misfeasance and malfeasance in journalistic reportage that it's a challenge to list them all, from Vietnam to the Iran-Contra Scandal; from the first Gulf War to the Balkans War; from Iraq's WMDs to the War on Terror. And these only skim the surface. If these bastions of fair and fearless reportage are the newspapers of record, the record is patchy indeed. Tragically so.

Moreover, there can be no better example of the double standards that prevail in U.S. politics and in its relationship with the Fourth Estate than Obama's 2013 honoring of Ben Bradlee the iconic *Washington Post* editor who famously presided over the paper's coverage of the Watergate scandal, the outcome of which was the downfall of an American president with a *Presidential* Medal of Freedom.

But the real irony is that Obama the president who has done more to curtail and then criminalize the activities of investigative journalists, leakers and whistle-blowers in ways that even Richard Nixon might never have contemplated extolled Bradlee's determination to ensure Americans are not denied the truth about what their increasingly secretive and subversive government does.

Obama's own home-grown hypocrisy in these matters is itself something to behold. We should recall this was a president whose government he promised would be truly accountable and more transparent than previous ones.

In an article in OpEdNews recently, contributor Sherwood Ross takes the President to task for his stance against investigative reporters in particular. Among other examples, Ross cites the case of James Risen, whose book *State of War* looks like it could land Risen in jail in the foreseeable future for refusing to betray a source. Briefly the case which has become something of a *cause celebre* in the mainstream and alternative media circles involves the Justice Department under first the Bush administration and now under Obama seeking to force Risen to reveal a key source for the book, which the journalist has refused to do.

To an investigative journalist revealing the identity of sources that provide information on condition of anonymity is akin to a priest revealing someone's

confession in a sermon from the pulpit at Sunday Mass; to refuse to do so is an article of faith of the profession. But Risen's courage in reporting important facts about the national security state and resisting government pressure to surrender his source (and thus make other sources much less likely to talk) is now the exception in the MSM, not the rule. Many such stories simply go unwritten. Career-wise, that's a lot safer.

There is also the reality that as resources for real reporting continue to decline spending on public relations and other manipulation of the public continues to soar. The highly sophisticated multi-billion dollar lobbying and public relations industries in America are almost entirely employed on the dime of the Powers that Be (industry bodies, political parties, think tanks, Super PACs, sundry foundations, corporations and institutions etc.) Unless the ordinary news consumers go out of their way to seek out reliable sources of information, they don't hazard a chance in Hades of ever getting anything resembling credible, untainted insight into the zeitgeist, so as to be able to maintain whatever might remain of their "alert and knowledgeable" status.

Yet, the MSM still commands attention from many folks. Why in this day and age of accessible and independent-minded news sources is a mystery inside a conundrum. Perhaps it's simply because of the MSM's size and inertia, living off its past reputation for supplying "responsible" news. Maybe people are too busy in their frantic lives or too afraid of being deemed "outside the mainstream," so they stick with what's considered traditional and safe.

But it's no longer possible for anyone who truly wants to be an "alert and knowledgeable" citizen to ignore the establishment media's lengthening reputation as one collective Weapon of Mass Disinformation.

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