

Understanding the 'Fake News' Hysteria

The mainstream media's hysteria over "fake news" is aimed less at the few instances of intentionally fabricated stories than at well-reported articles that challenge the U.S. government's dubious official narratives, says David P. Hamilton.

By David P. Hamilton

For the most part, "fake news" is a fake concept designed by the corporate news media to discredit those who challenge the official U.S. hegemonic narrative. The typical MSM fake news accusation starts with some egregious fictionalization and then morphs over to the real targets: the subversives, those who would dispute foundational elements of the official history or its recent approved updates.

These subversive elements are likely to question important myths, such as the necessity of the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima or – before the Iraq War – Saddam Hussein possessing WMD, and hence must be silenced.

There are people in this world who write what they know to be fiction and try to pass it off as fact. Many of them work for the CIA and related institutions. Then, there are satirists like The Onion who write fictionalized truth. These professional prevaricators are not what draws the ire of the corporate "news."

The approved rendition of U.S. history is a composite of lies, euphemisms and dubious rationales taught in schools, public and private, since the nation's founding. It is continuously updated by the corporate news media. There is an army of PR types and psy-op warriors working constantly on this project; some private sector, some public, who often switch roles and sectors, but work hand-in-glove regardless.

The real fake news is the fake narrative that flows perpetually forth from these functionaries of the MSM to dominate the discourse which the billionaire owners allow voiced via their facilities. In this manner, we are all being played, all the time, and have been since birth.

For the record, the official narrative follows certain principles. Among them are:

1. The U.S. is never wrong in any conflict with other nations.
2. If the U.S. ever happens to be wrong, it was a reasonable mistake.
3. U.S. intentions are always benign and honorable.

4. U.S. judgment is always objective and fair.
5. The U.S. is a democracy and always supports democracy.
6. Americans are a peaceful people.
7. Americans are a superior people, so American lives matter more.
8. Americans are always on the high moral ground because God is on our side.
9. The word of our leaders is sufficient proof of any assertion.
10. The U.S. is the greatest nation in history.
11. Private is always better than public.
12. Individualism is always better than collectivism.

One-Sided 'News'

In application of these principles, NPR's "All Things Considered" never considers the Maduro government's position in Venezuela, nor is Noam Chomsky, often voted the world's foremost public intellectual, to be heard on this "public" radio. Nor will North Korea's negotiating position relative to their nuclear weapons program be explained. It requires the U.S. military to refrain from conducting war games on North Korea's border in exchange for freezing their weapons program; unmentionable because the U.S. militaristic leadership is unwilling to consider the proposal and because it sounds too rational.

You will hear from the world's greatest exporter of terrorism that Iran, which hasn't invaded a neighbor since Darius I in 500 BCE, is the world's greatest exporter of terrorism. And that apartheid Israel is a democracy. And that the Saudis are jolly guys in silk robes you want to hold hands and dance with.

Are the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, et al, lying knowingly? Not exactly. The news media doesn't have to invent the lies, only repeat them. They are mainly the stenographers of governmental agencies that provide the raw material to be quoted, invariably substantiating the validity of the official position. The owners of those news outlets likely believe that narrative, but mainly they want you to believe it.

The pundits and talking heads of those news media, the on-camera personalities, must think within the parameters the official narrative or they wouldn't have been hired to the position of highly paid spokesperson for it. Wolf Blitzer is a Zionist true believer who used to do P.R. for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Anderson Cooper is a Vanderbilt heir worth \$100 million.

How objective can you be about issues of income inequality when you've been the top .0001% for six or seven generations? And if one dare to go off the reservation, the next thing you know you'll be working for RT for a lot less money like Ed Schultz.

This process of narrative creation is principally a matter of focus, parameters and interpretation. On major U.S. cable news channels, the great bulk of coverage involves domestic politics, mass murders and “natural” disasters. In Europe, the focus is far more on international relationships.

The spectrum of opinion allowed in the U.S. is limited to the point that Hillary Clinton is considered “the left” and the anti-capitalist left might as well not exist. The range of permissible opinion typically stretches from pro-capitalist social liberals to pro-capitalist social conservatives. This is hardly surprising if one considers that billionaire investors own the controlling interest in all major U.S. news media. One outcome is that the U.S. is the only major industrial nation without a significant socialist political party.

The private interests that own the news media don’t have to get together and compare notes because they all have a high level of ruling-class consciousness that includes shared economic fundamentals, e.g., socialize debts and privatize profits. Their message control is described far more clearly by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in *Manufacturing Consent*, chapter 1 on “the propaganda model”.

Dubious Conformity

It is generally accurate to assume that there is an entirely reasonable interpretation of news events that contradicts what you are being told to believe by the corporate news media. Cases of official duplicity are notorious and legion: the Gulf of Tonkin, WMD in Iraq, the black kid killed by the police had a gun, etc.

Central among the American myths is that the myth surrounding the origins of the Cold War. This myth would have you believe that the Soviet Union in 1945, despite having lost over 30 million of its citizens during two German invasions in less than 30 years and with a devastated infrastructure, would suddenly decide to invade Western Europe, into the teeth of the world’s sole nuclear armed military power, the USA, and its various formidable allies.

Furthermore, that the Soviets would do this despite having achieved their major war aims, a divided and demilitarized Germany and a “sphere of influence” between themselves and Germany, an arrangement agreed upon by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt at Yalta. This Cold War creation myth of Soviet aggressive intent is essentially a U.S. cover story to mask U.S. aggression disguised as defensive.

Like Germans in 1939 believing the Polish horse cavalry was about to attack their tanks, Americans bought this spurious interpretation. These steady U.S. “defensive” efforts have now brought NATO, essentially an agency of U.S. foreign

policy, to Russia's very doorstep in the Baltic states, with Ukraine up next for NATO membership. Who is the aggressor?

Every other late Twentieth Century storyline of official U.S. history had to conform to the basic foundational concept of the U.S. defending freedom against an expansionist Soviet Union/Russia bent on destroying us. And so, today, we have thousands of NATO troops, innumerable missile batteries and nuclear-armed aircraft carrier-led naval battle groups patrolling Russia's borders and shorelines, including the Black Sea, because "THEY are the aggressor."

Try to imagine the U.S. reaction to a Russian fleet cruising the Gulf of Mexico, although that might be difficult given that 11 of the world's 17 aircraft carriers, a uniquely aggressive weapon, belong to the U.S., all with unlimited range, and Russia's only puny little single carrier rarely leaves Russian territorial waters and doesn't have enough range to get to the U.S. and back.

The U.S. has an estimated 800 foreign military bases in well over 100 countries while Russia has three in two countries. U.S. military budget is at least ten times that of Russia's and was just increased by 10 percent while the Russians just reduced theirs by 7 percent. Who is the aggressor?

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Iraqi Forces Clash with Kurdish Militia

Iraqi military forces have seized strategic positions around the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as a showdown over Kurdish calls for independence enters a dangerous new phase, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Overreaction in Baghdad, Ankara and Tehran to what in essence was a symbolic vote for independence by Iraqi Kurds last month has brought the Iraqi government to the brink of full-scale war with Kurdish authorities over the disputed, oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

According to the latest reports, the Iraqi army on Sunday night launched a military operation to take back the city and its environs. So far it has seized a military base occupied by Kurdish forces as well as Kirkuk airport.

The Iraqi army had built up its forces outside the oil-producing city over the past several days while the Kurdish peshmerga militia re-enforced the town with 6,000 fighters. According to peshmerga intelligence, the Iranian army, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and Shi'ite militias joined Iraq's military build-up.

Some peshmerga units fled from advancing Iraqi forces on Monday, while others have stood their ground and engaged in clashes. The long dispute between Baghdad and the Kurds over control of Kirkuk may well come to a head if the Iraqi army enters the city, where fighting could be intense.

All this came about because of a referendum for independence held on Sept. 25, in which 93 percent of Kurds voted to leave Iraq. However, Kurdish leaders repeatedly made clear they would not declare independence, despite their overwhelming mandate. Instead they want a one- to two-year negotiation with Baghdad to achieve sovereignty.

That has been flatly rejected by the central government, which asserted that there would be no negotiations for independence. Regionally, the Kurds also are isolated. Only one country openly supported the referendum and said it would recognize Kurdish independence – Israel.

Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed quasi-independence since the 2003 U.S. invasion. It has its own flag, army, and government ministries, and issues its own visas to foreign visitors. It has a robust oil industry, selling petroleum illegally through Turkey. Massive corruption and mismanagement however has not allowed the Kurds to build a modern state. It has no railroad, only one stretch of a highway inside the Kurdish capital city Erbil; government workers go months without pay; and the regional government cannot provide electricity without frequent power cuts throughout the day.

A Risky Fantasy

Despite a legitimate argument to be a sovereign state, the idea of independence in the current political climate was a fantasy.

Except for the Kurds, it was a meaningless referendum. The vote was also a political move to build support for the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party in presidential and parliamentary elections in two weeks, on Nov. 1. Otherwise, this referendum was not unlike a 2005 independence vote, which also garnered more than 90 percent in favor, but which also went nowhere.

The Kurdish vote has made negotiations with Baghdad over oil, Kirkuk and other disputed territories virtually impossible, as the central government demanded Erbil first cancel the referendum's results. A planned 2007 referendum for the

people of Kirkuk to decide whether they wanted to belong to Baghdad or Erbil was never held. Instead the fate of the city appears set to be decided by force of arms.

Given the tense, but stable situation, last month's referendum could have been simply ignored by its opponents. It would have died of its own accord. Instead the governments of Iraq, Turkey and Iran have severely overreacted, giving it more legitimacy than it had on its own.

Turkey and Iran feared the vote could stir up their own restive Kurdish populations who already have been agitating for years. Turkey has fought a 30-year insurgency against its Kurds, and Iran periodically puts down uprisings. Turkish and Iranian Kurds did not need an Iraqi Kurdish referendum to continue pursuing their separatist aims.

For Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, however, the overly strong reaction to the vote bolsters his domestic political support ahead of parliamentary elections next April. It is a reckless electioneering strategy risking bloodshed.

On Sept. 29, Baghdad imposed an international flight ban on the Kurdish region. On Sunday, Iran closed its three border crossings with the Kurdish region and has cut off all trade.

Border crossings from Turkey have been taken over inside Turkish territory by the central government. But so far Turkey has not cut off billions of dollars of exports to the landlocked Iraqi Kurds. Ankara is still importing the banned Kurdish oil, which Baghdad has demanded be sold through the central government.

The Iraqi military has been conducting joint exercises with Turkish and Iranian troops just kilometers from the Kurdish borders with those countries. Baghdad gave Erbil a 2 a.m. Sunday deadline to cancel the referendum and pull the peshmerga out of Kirkuk.

According to a local media report, Baghdad's other demands were to turn over Kirkuk airport; return an Iraqi military base; give back all oil fields; hand over ISIS prisoners held by the peshmerga; permit the Iraqi army to return to positions it vacated when ISIS attacked the city in 2014, which allowed the peshmerga to take control of the city; and remove the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk governorate, who was fired by the Iraqi parliament but who has refused to step down. The Iraqi army now has enforced the first three demands.

Like the rest of the world, the U.S. opposed the referendum and urged negotiations. On Friday, Secretary of Defense James Mattis said: "We can't turn on each other right now. We don't want this to go to a shooting situation. These

are issues that are longstanding in some cases ... We're going to have to recalibrate and move these back to a way (in which) we solve them politically and work them out with compromised solutions."

Yet Washington was unable to stop the Iraqi army's advance on Kirkuk and the possibility of a new conflict breaking out in the Middle East.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist. He has written for the Boston Globe, the Sunday Times of London and the Wall Street Journal among other newspapers. He is the author of *How I Lost By Hillary Clinton* published by OR Books. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe).
