

How Corporate Media Beats the Drums Of War, Smears Alternative Voices

By [Mnar Muhawesh](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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Transcript of Speech by Mnar Muhawesh of Mint Press News on the Role of the Alternative Media

Thank you so much for having me. I'm honored to be here and to be surrounded by a group of people who have dedicated their lives to understanding the world around them and to helping bring people closer together through the ideals of peace, unity, compassion and understanding.

But since September 11, 2001, it seems like the basis of those ideals, this crazy idea of peace, is nearly impossible to find in the world we live in today.

How we hear and learn about the world, and even about what's going on in our own nation, is through one lens, which is the media. But never has this lens been more narrow and more extreme than it is today. We do not have a mainstream media anymore; we have an extreme, corporate media beating the drums of war.

Between the over-hyping of topics like Ebola, ISIS, the iPhone, Renee Zellweger's facelift and personal attacks between the two-party candidates from last week's elections, the media is actually training us to fit the mould of a shallow consumer-driven society that thrives off of fear, sensationalism, and one that supports war.

More specifically, the coverage of the Middle East: ISIS, the beheadings of journalists, Iran's nuclear ambitions, Syrian chemical weapons attack as a pretext for war, the Sunni-Shiite divide, and Palestinian resistance — it seems almost instantly the naïve and evil preconceptions about the Middle East post-9/11 have resurfaced once again.

Muslims are the boogeymen of our time.

Yet those who are truly concerned about war and its human casualty, those who are concerned about the growing inequality in this nation, those who are concerned about climate change, net neutrality, about big money in politics, police brutality, Big Brother, the fading away of our civil liberties — are not the concerns of a fringe minority, nor the concerns of a silent majority. In fact, these are the concerns of *the* silenced majority.

We are silenced by this extremist corporate media, which is why it's more important now than ever that we take our media back through independent and alternative journalism like MintPress. Because without an independent media acting as a watchdog to those in power, we are only feeding into a system that drives revenue to elitists through the most profitable act of business our nation has come too comfortably to love: WAR.

Between 1983 and the year 2000, our media consolidated from over 50 corporations to six: GE, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, News Corp, CBS.

These [six major corporations](#) now control over 90 percent of what Americans see, hear and read. These six corporations rake in over \$300 billion in revenue each year — that's \$36 billion more than Finland's GDP.

So, for the past 30 years or so, it's never been a better time for big business like the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, oil, defense and construction industries, special interest groups, and even foreign governments like the Arab Gulf states and Israel, to invest in the American media.

Between arming separatist militias in Ukraine, Libya and Syria, providing arms to our allies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Israel, Iraq, Qatar and many more, fighting a "War on Terror" in Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Kenya, Mali, Niger and elsewhere, and propping U.S.-friendly leaders across the globe and arming revolutions — U.S.-made military weapons can be traced to nearly every conflict in the world.

Yet most Americans don't know this and are unaware of who we're actually at war with.

Speaking of war: The U.S. is now involved in [134 acts of wars](#) or none, depending on your definition of "war." World War II was actually the last time Congress officially [declared war](#). Since then, the conflicts we've called "wars" — from Vietnam to the Second Iraq War — have actually been congressional "authorizations of military force."

This kind of doublespeak that our politicians and media use is supposed to sound defensive, like we're protecting ourselves — *It's a matter of national security* — but actually it's nothing but offensive.

As John Kerry put it: "We're engaged in a major counterterrorism operation." This is the "War on Terror" he is referring to.

Jumping to the current "war" we're involved in now that the media has fearmongered the public into supporting is the one against ISIS.

It has turned into a gravy train for profits. From [a report that we conducted at MintPress](#): Since the beginning of this year, the defense stocks of America's top five arms producers — Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon and Northrop Grumman — are trading at record prices as shareholders reap the benefits from escalating military conflicts around the world including against ISIS, fuelling the very military-industrial complex that has ownership of our media and drives the public into war.

But it's important to break down this specific conflict because it would help us understand not only how the media manipulates conflict narratives to justify war, but it could better help us understand how we need to reform our foreign policy to focus more on a peace economy.

The war on ISIS: It seems complex and hard to follow, thanks to our media.

The fact that U.S. intelligence assesses that ISIS poses no current threat to the U.S. is repeatedly ignored by our politicians and media. In the last two months, President Obama and John Kerry have presented the American public with the idea that ISIS could pose a

threat to the U.S. — which is why our “no boots on the ground” initiative against ISIS has begun, completely contradicting evidence provided by U.S. intelligence.

In fact, what the media has done is provided unlimited airtime to these politicians, analysts and pundits who directly profit from war, who represent the defense industries, who work for the oil companies and construction industries, without questioning them once.

It's sectarian. They can't get along. ISIS will attack us. The people in the Middle East need us. Our allies in the region support U.S. involvement.

But the story is as simple as this: What we see taking place in the Middle East is indeed a mess fueled by sectarianism, but it's a mess that we allowed to happen. It's a mess that is also being fomented by competing regional allies in the Middle East — Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — not only for economic and regional influence, but most importantly for control over oil and gas supplies. Because at the end of the day, money means power.

The story really begins in invading Iraq, last year's near-invasion of Syria.

According to [retired NATO Secretary General Wesley Clark](#) in a video that has gone viral, a memo from the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense just a few weeks after 9/11 revealed plans to “attack and destroy the governments in seven countries in five years,” starting with Iraq and moving on to “Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran.”

In a subsequent interview, Clark argues that this strategy is fundamentally about control of the [region's vast oil and gas resources](#).

Thanks to alternative media like WikiLeaks, leaked emails from the [private intelligence firm Stratfor](#), including notes from meetings with [Pentagon officials](#), have confirmed that the U.S. and U.K. were actively training Syrian opposition forces since 2011, [training activities] aimed at the “collapse” of Assad's regime “from within,” which would essentially undermine Iran.

This was the same strategy the U.S. would engage in Libya with the fall of Gadhafi.

These leaked documents I was just referring to go on to say: “The geographic area of proven oil reserves coincides with the power base of much of the Salafi-jihadist network. This creates a linkage between oil supplies and the long war that is not easily broken or simply characterized... For the foreseeable future, world oil production growth and total output will be dominated by Persian Gulf resources.”

And how this will be accomplished will be through sectarianism and civil strife.

This goes on to say:

Divide and Rule focuses on exploiting fault lines between the various Salafi-jihadist groups to turn them against each other and dissipate their energy on internal conflicts.

This strategy relies heavily on covert action, information operations (IO), unconventional warfare, the United States and its local allies could use the nationalist jihadists to launch proxy campaigns. US leaders could also choose to capitalize on the ‘Sustained Shia-Sunni Conflict’ trajectory by taking the side

of the conservative Sunni regimes against Shiite empowerment movements in the Muslim world.

And how this would be executed — this report lays out the plan of “shoring up the traditional Sunni regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan as a way of containing Iranian power and influence in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.”

Noting that this could actually empower al-Qaida jihadists, the report concluded that doing so might work in Western interests by bogging down jihadi activity with internal sectarian rivalry rather than targeting the U.S. — all of this supports a military-industrial complex that supports endless war.

And as a result, this same terror group — ISIS — that we’re air striking has taken control of oil and gas reserves there in Syria and Iraq. They’re now officially the richest and most well-financed terror group in the world, according to reports from the last two weeks.

But the media won’t tell us that it’s about economics. Who would support a war for oil, for gas, or for money? That’s not ethical or respectable. It’s immoral. Not many people would jump on board.

We do jump on board when we say *we’re ending tyranny, we’re fighting an enemy that hates us, we’re saving those people. They do not get along. Our allies in the region need our help.*

To put all of this in context: This kind of promoting war by the media started with Iraq. As we prepared to invade Iraq those who did act as a government watchdog, those who provided an alternative perspective, were censored and attacked.

As the U.S. launched its invasion of Iraq, MSNBC canceled anti-war anchor Phil Donahue’s talk show after an internal memo that was leaked argued that he would be a “difficult public face for NBC in a time of war.” He was described as anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration’s motives in Iraq.

The report warned that the Donahue show could be “a home for the liberal anti-war agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity.” And that’s according to FAIR [Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting], a media watchdog.

John Perry, the reporter for Newsweek that provided alternative coverage about Iraq and challenged the WMDs narrative, provided an interview that showcased that Iraq didn’t possess weapons of mass destruction — which is why we went to occupy Iraq in the first place, isn’t it?

Not only was he ridiculed, but he was smeared, called a conspiracy theorist, pro-Saddam and anti-Bush. And of course, later we learned that Saddam never possessed WMDs and our politicians lied to us about that.

And MintPress has been on the forefront of providing alternative coverage to our wars, including the one we see taking place today against ISIS.

Now, if we take a look back to last year, when our media was beating the drums of war to attack Syria, and in last year’s case it was to save the Syrian people from the Assad regime — CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, trickling down all the way to the local level to our newspapers

and local TV stations.

Our media became the official mouthpiece for President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to promote airstrikes on Syria because, as our administration put it, the Assad regime is using chemical weapons against his own people.

It was weapons of mass destruction all over again. It was nearly the same narrative we used to justify the war in Iraq and we're now using it to justify war in Syria. The Obama administration used the chemical weapons attack as a pretext for war.

Now, Obama and Kerry actually made it clear to the American public that they don't have evidence that Assad used chemical weapons on his people, nor did they need it, but they were sure that he did — therefore, the U.S. was ready to strike Syria. This was the pretext for war.

Two days later, a MintPress article went viral. It was on-the-ground reporting from our journalists who spoke with Syrians in Ghoutha. We spoke with doctors, with rebels themselves, their family members, and we asked them, because those were the experts, those were the witnesses, and those are the people at the heart of the story: Who committed this chemical weapons attack?

And they told us that the [al-Qaida-linked rebels](#) let off the sarin gas and that the rebels were receiving arms, funding and even the sarin from Saudi intelligence.

Shortly after, our Syria coverage was actually used and cited between John Kerry and Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov in discussion about U.S. airstrikes against Syria. MintPress, alternative and independent media, helped stop last years airstrikes. But it didn't come without a price.

Shortly after we published that article, my team was under attack, intimidated, bullied and smeared. Our reporters on the story were bullied into retracting their involvement from this coverage a month after the [reporting was published](#).

Next thing we knew, I was being attacked in a direct character assassination.

BuzzFeed and other bloggers who were beating the drums of war attempted to discredit our alternative coverage on Syria, and instead of challenging our reporting, it became a personal attack on myself and my family.

But this is an intimidation and silencing tactic which has been used against many of our truth-tellers before us, like Phil Donahue from MSNBC, like John Perry from Newsweek, like revolutionary truth-tellers Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Julian Assange, Bradley [Chelsea] Manning, Glenn Greenwald and Edward Snowden.

Not once in any of these smears was our reporting challenged. The conversation shifted away from the U.S. nearly dragging us into war based on false pretexts to what I was wearing.

It was sexist, Islamaphobic, xenophobic and ignorant.

But MintPress is not alone. Just a few months after our newsroom was bullied and attacked, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist by the name of Seymour Hersh made international

headlines when he published an article called "[Whose Sarin?](#)," which detailed leaked intelligence he had received about the U.S. knowing that the al-Qaida rebels had most likely propagated this sarin gas attack to frame the Assad regime as a pretext for war.

But Obama was being pressured by Turkey and Saudi Arabia to strike Syria.

And this Seymour Hersh we're talking about here: [He's] the same journalist who exposed the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam and its cover-up and exposed abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Soon after, he was also smeared and ridiculed by the media like never before. This revered journalist, like John Perry from MSNBC, was labeled as pro-Assad and a conspiracy theorist by the same organizations that are beating the drums of war and who smeared MintPress.

It's not just Syria or the war in Iraq — the manipulation of narratives, the censoring of stories, the ridiculing of alternative voices happens across the board for nearly every conflict we see.

My dear friend Amber Lyon, who produced a brilliant documentary for CNN about the Bahraini government repressing calls for freedom and revolution there, became a whistleblower after CNN refused to air her documentary.

She had discovered that CNN was receiving PR money from Bahrain and nearly every Gulf nation to ensure their coverage of those nations was positive.

She went on to expose that those national security reporters we see are actually spokespeople for the U.S. government and defense contractors. Those foreign affairs reporters who are in other countries bringing us those stories are paid hush money if they report on a conflict that is not in the interest of our government and our allies.

Fox News: Now it's no secret that Fox News is entertainment news. They actually admit that. But it begs the question: Why does Saudi Prince al-Waleed own the largest stake in Fox?

BuzzFeed: The same organization that smeared MintPress, who questioned how could a woman could fund her own news organization, is receiving PR money from an Israeli lobby group to ensure BuzzFeed's international coverage fits Israel's political interests — and that's according to NPR and [the Atlantic](#). The reporter Rosie Gray who directed the smear, was also recently [exposed as being part](#) of a ring of journalists tied to pro-democracy groups that push a neoconservative agenda in corporate newsrooms.

The New York Times actually [receives gag orders](#) from Israel when it's about to publish an article that goes against Israeli interests.

All these news organizations that I just mentioned are all tied to our local newspapers and channels. It all trickles down to the local level.

What we've actually done, though, is shot ourselves in the foot because not only have we violated the U.S. Constitution in its definition of how the media should function under our First Amendment rights, but we've actually crushed any notion of real information about our own communities and our world today by being influenced by the very same groups we're meant to act as a watchdog to.

The role of journalism in the United States, as defined by the U.S. Constitution, is to act as a government watchdog and to work in the interest of the public to hold those in power accountable and prevent them from abusing their power.

Journalism is a public interest entity that is actually a form of activism because as George Orwell put it, in a world full of deceit, speaking the truth is a revolutionary act.

There's always a light at the tunnel because alternative and independent media is a growing voice. More Americans are turning to alternative media to get to the heart of the stories.

In fact, we're actually experiencing a renaissance, if you will, since 2001 of independent journalists and independent media outlets like MintPress, who want to fill in this major void of honest media.

One that speaks truth, that informs the public, that holds those in power by acting as a watchdog, by exposing the atrocities that are committed by war, and [one] that shares stories that matter to humanity to bring us all closer together, and one that unites us all — a media that actually promotes peace.

The world is a complex place, but it can only take independent media to bring back that understanding that we lack for the world around us.

The corporate media divides us, it creates boogeymen, it induces fear, and survives off of sensationalism and to hate what is different. Although the world is complex, we are actually interconnected more than we know.

It's no wonder why over 60 percent of Americans actually don't trust the media anymore, according to a recent [Gallup poll](#).

Political language has unfortunately been designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.

Malcolm X once said, "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."

Today it's the Muslims, yesterday it was the Russians, and many years ago it was the Communists. Different enemies, altered narratives, same motive: money, oil, gas, resources and influence.

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