

Media Disinformation: The Role of Powerful Political Lobbies and Moneyed Interests in America

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Renowned American intellectual and cultural critic believes that the United States, is exercising double standards with regards to Iran's nuclear program and treating Iranians in a discriminatory way through imposing unilateral and unjust sanctions.

"Iran has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which gives it the right to develop enriched uranium for peaceful use of nuclear power. The USA and Israel are not signatories of the treaty. Both of them have enormous arsenals of nuclear missiles arsenals. Thus they stand in violation of the international law on nuclear proliferation," said Michael Parenti in an exclusive interview with the Fars News Agency.

Michael Parenti is a leading American author, political scientist, historian and anti-war activist. His writings are very popular in the progressive circles as he staunchly opposes the U.S. foreign policy and its war adventures around the world, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Parenti is considered a prominent anti-imperialist thinker in the United States and around the world. His latest book "The Face of Imperialism" was published by the Paradigm Publications in 2011. Among his other books are "Make-Believe Media: the Politics of Entertainment" and "Inventing Reality: the Politics of News Media." Parenti has received his Ph.D. in political science from the Yale University.

What follows is the text of FNA's interview with Michael Parenti with whom we've discussed a number of issues including the Occupy Wall Street movement, racism in the United States, Zionism and its influence on the U.S. media and governmental institutions and controversy over Iran's nuclear program.

Q: In one of your articles, you had pointed at the mainstream media's disappointing performance in giving coverage to the Occupy Wall Street movement. Why are the corporate media usually silent on the progressive movements? Are they afraid of losing their audience or their benefactors and sponsors? They even didn't report the death of the renowned progressive journalist Alexander Cockburn who passed last year. What's your take on that?

A: The mainstream media in the United States is owned and controlled by a few corporate conglomerates. This pattern of ownership and its resulting control leaves very little room for critical and challenging journalism of the kind that exposes the hypocrisies and duplicities of the ruling moneyed interests. These moneyed interests claim to bring us prosperity when in fact they bring us poverty. They claim a dedication to democracy when in fact they

propagate oligarchic dominance in this country and in many others. They profess a dedication to peace while bombing and invading various countries that dare to step out of line.

They talk about a “family of nations” while pursuing a policy of global imperialism. This constant disparity between what reality at home and abroad is like and what the corporate media claim it to be is one of the great propaganda achievements of modern history.

Concerning your question about Alexander Cockburn, the New York Times and a few other mainstream newspapers did carry obituaries about him. They mentioned his views but never spelled them out. The broadcast media had very little to say about him. He was too radical for them to give respectful and extensive notice.

Q: The issues of racism and racial discrimination have always been widely and also controversially discussed in the intellectual circles of the United States. Could we trace footsteps of protest against racism in the insurrections of the Occupy Wall Street?

A: I don't believe that issues relating to racism “have always been widely” discussed in U.S. intellectual circles. It often took years of struggle to get intellectuals to acknowledge and inform themselves about the urgent and terrible crimes of lynch-mob rule in this country. It took years of conflict to mobilize democratic forces against Jim Crow and the racial discrimination that permeated all dimensions of White society in the United States. It continues to be a struggle to confront the racism of white police forces in communities throughout the country.

The Occupy Wall Street movement certainly opposes racial discrimination in all its forms but it primarily focuses on the great class divide, the conflict between the 1% and the 99%. The class struggle and the struggle for racial equality are not mutually exclusive. They are connected. Class oppression battens on racism. One way to move closer to racial equality is to struggle also for economic justice.

Q: Is it a realistic view to say that certain political lobbies, including AIPAC and its affiliates are behind the mainstream media and dictate to them what to publish and cover and what to withhold from the public? In a broader term, let me ask you: Who is really running such multinational, money-spinning media as CNN, NPR, Fox News, CBS and Washington Post?

A: Powerful political lobbies and moneyed interests can exercise direct pressure on the handling of specific news stories. AIPAC, a pro-Zionist interest group, exercises an exceptional influence in Congress, the White House, and public and private agencies —and in planting stories in the conservative media. Most of these corporate media are already sympathetic toward the U.S.-Israel imperium in the Middle East even before they are pressured by lobbyists.

I already answered your other question which repeats what was raised in your first question above: the news is shaped by corporate media that are run by the corporate financial interests that own most of America and much of the world.

Q: You seem to be quite dissatisfied and unhappy with the U.S. government's health care programs and the way the patients, the nurses, the physicians and other medical staff are treated. What deficiencies does the U.S. medical sector suffer from? Is it really the case that many impoverished Americans die of different illnesses because they cannot afford the

medical treatment expenses?

A: The medical industry in the USA is not [made of] government programs. They consist of private hospitals, private insurance companies, private health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and private pharmaceutical companies—all of which are madly profit-driven. Their concern is not to save lives and care for people's health but to make as much money as possible. Yes, people in poverty often cannot afford the costly tests and services that are needed for health care. So many of them do without and end up dying. The government Medicaid program that is intended to serve the poor is grossly insufficient in its provisions.

Q: The 16th summit of the heads of state of the Non-Aligned Movement was held in Tehran in August 2012. What's your assessment of the influence of non-aligned countries and regional powers in creating a new world order? Can they outperform the superpowers and global hegemonies?

A: Nonaligned countries could do very well among themselves if allowed to function. Libya under Qaddafi was attempting to organize African countries for development programs and a common currency region. Iraq was turning to the Euro and discarding the dollar. Venezuela and several other Latin American countries have been trying to get out from under the U.S. dominated global imperium. But the imperialists have an unanswerable military force that makes these efforts difficult to sustain.

Q: How much do you know about Iran, its people, culture and ancient civilization? Of course the mainstream media in the West don't speak about Iran unless they give references to the 1979 hostage crisis, Iranian President's alleged mentioning that Israel should be wiped off the world map and controversy over Iran's nuclear program. Beyond these stereotypes, have you had the opportunity to study Iran and its culture and its contemporary civilization?

A: I know a fair amount about Iran and its people, along with Persian culture and history. Why do you ask? Knowing about Iran does not guarantee an enlightened policy. It depends on what your political goals are. There are Middle East specialists who work for the CIA and the U.S. State Department who speak Persian and who know far more about Iran than I do. But they work to undermine Iran and advance U.S. power and influence in the Middle East.

Q: So many people in Iran complain of the United States' double standards in dealing with Iran's nuclear program. They say that the U.S. allows Israel to circumvent the international law and build atomic bombs, which the Federation of American Scientists has confirmed, while it impedes Iran's way to developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. What do you think in this regard?

MP: Iran has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which gives it the right to develop enriched uranium for peaceful use of nuclear power. The USA and Israel are not signatories of the treaty. Both of them have enormous arsenals of nuclear missiles arsenals. Thus they stand in violation of the international law on nuclear proliferation while presuming—with outrageous audacity—that they have the right to police Iran's peaceful use of nuclear power. It is the kind of arrogance that imperialists always manifest.

Q: The United States and its European allies have imposed several rounds of biting economic sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. The sanctions include travel restrictions for Iranians, limitations on the enrollment of Iranian students in foreign universities, a ban on medicine and medical equipment and foodstuff, agricultural goods,

industrial accouterments and even scientific papers accessed by the universities. What are these sanctions aimed to achieve? What's your viewpoint?

A: Sanctions cause considerable suffering mostly among the common population, increasing unemployment, depleting public resources, lowering the living standards and health conditions of the people. Sanctions are an act of aggression against [another] nation to undermine its entire polity and society. When performed against the apartheid regime in South Africa, sanctions brought worthwhile results. When performed on behalf of imperialist interests, as against Iran, they achieve destructive goals.

Q: There are the Iranian people who read this interview. Iran is one of few nations in the world which has steadfastly kept up with its anti-imperialist approaches in both foreign and domestic policies. What's your message to them, as someone who has had Iranian students and has surely heard about controversies and hullabaloo surrounding Iran?

A: I would urge the Iranian people to do their utmost in getting their side of the picture before the world, speaking not to the U.S. government but to U.S. student groups, anti-war groups, and others, along with people around the world, telling them about the human costs and injustices of U.S. policy.

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Michael Parenti is an internationally known award-winning author and lecturer. He is one of the nation's leading progressive political analysts. His highly informative and entertaining books and talks have reached a wide range of audiences in North America and abroad.

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