

U.S. Propaganda 101: Illegally Invade Countries, Fund the Media, Call it “Independent”

By [Julie Lévesque](#)

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Foreign Policy Magazine recently had a column called [Crank, Troll, and Useful Idiots](#), in which the author, Dalibor Rohac, hunts down “Russia’s information warriors” who, he claims, have infested the web with their lies and propaganda on websites potentially paid for by the Russian government.

Rohac writes:

“Throughout the conflict in eastern Ukraine, these sites have systematically regurgitated Russian propaganda, spreading lies, half-truths, and conspiracy theories, often directly translated from Russian sources...

The Czech weekly Respekt published a [feature article](#) about the mysterious “news” site Aeronet (also known as AENews). Started in 2001 by aviation fans, the domain has changed ownership several times. Since the summer of 2014 it has regularly published articles [accusing](#) the new Ukrainian government of fascism and [claiming](#) that American and British mercenaries were fighting in eastern Ukraine. (Dalibor Rohac, [Crank, Troll, and Useful Idiots](#), Foreign Policy, March 12, 2015)

First let’s look at the weakness of the claims in the article.

The author accuses news outlets of doing exactly what he himself and the U.S. mainstream media in general does when reporting about foreign policy issues such as Ukraine: they “systematically [regurgitate U.S. propaganda, spread] lies, half-truths, and conspiracy theories.” The advantage they have is that they don’t need to translate anything. Apparently for Rohac an article written in Russian has to be Russian propaganda. It’s that simple: Russians are just not producing any honest journalistic content. This argument about texts being “directly translated from Russian sources” is not only weak, it is xenophobic.

In addition the author’s examples to prove his points are unsound. Aeronet is not the only website to have not only accused but also proven the fascistic nature of the Ukrainian government. Numerous independent media outlets have published countless articles to that effect, demonstrating that several key figures within the unelected government were neo-Nazis and that the Azov Battalion was filled with members linked to neo-Nazi groups:

The Cabinet is not only integrated by the Svoboda and Right Sector (not to mention former members of defunct fascist UNA-UNSO), the two main Neo-Nazi entities have been entrusted with key positions which grant them de facto control over the Armed Forces, Police, Justice and National Security.

While Yatsenyuk's Fatherland Party controls the majority of portfolios and Svoboda Neo-Nazi leader Oleh Tyahnybok was not granted a major cabinet post (apparently at the request of assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland), members of Svoboda and the Right Sector occupy key positions in the areas of Defense, Law Enforcement, Education and Economic Affairs. (Michel Chossudovsky, [The U.S. has Installed a Neo-Nazi Government in Ukraine](#), Global Research, March 2014)

Even mainstream media like *The Guardian* and the BBC admitted that "many members [of the Azov Battalion] have links with neo-Nazi groups", although they downplay their own claims saying that it's "overblown":



"I have nothing against Russian nationalists, or a great [Russia](#)," said Dmitry, [a member of the [Azov battalion](#)],... "But Putin's not even a Russian. Putin's a Jew."

The battalion's symbol is reminiscent of the Nazi [Wolfsangel](#), though the battalion claims it is in fact meant to be the letters N and I crossed over each other, standing for "national idea". Many of its members have links with neo-Nazi groups, and even those who laughed off the idea that they are neo-Nazis did not give the most convincing denials. ([Shaun Walker, Azov fighters are Ukraine's greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat](#), The Guardian, September 10, 2014)

Mikael Skilt is a Swedish sniper, with seven years' experience in the Swedish Army and the Swedish National Guard. He is currently fighting with the Azov Battalion, a pro-Ukrainian volunteer armed group in eastern Ukraine.... As to his political views, Mr Skilt prefers to call himself a nationalist, but in fact his views are typical of a neo-Nazi...

Mr Skilt believes races should not mix. He says the Jews are not white and should not mix with white people. His next project is to go fight for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad because he believes Mr Assad is standing up to "international Zionism". (Dina Newman, [Ukraine conflict: 'White power' warrior from Sweden](#), BBC News, July 16 2014)

As for Rohac's second argument regarding Western mercenaries fighting in Ukraine, in May last year several media reported that mercenaries from the private military company Blackwater, now called Academi, were operating in Ukraine. The information came not from the Kremlin but rather from a German news source and was published by the German mainstream newspaper *Bild am Sonntag*.

About 400 elite mercenaries from the notorious US private security firm Academi (formerly Blackwater) are taking part in the Ukrainian military operation against anti-government protesters in southeastern regions of the country, German media reports.

The Bild am Sonntag newspaper, citing a source in intelligence circles, wrote Sunday that Academi employees are involved in the Kiev military crackdown on pro-autonomy activists in near the town of Slavyansk, in the Donetsk region. ([400 US mercenaries 'deployed on ground' in Ukraine military op](#), RT.com, May 11, 2014)

A few days after the German revelations, the mainstream French Magazine *Paris Match* published an article including witnesses saying they saw foreign mercenaries on the ground in Ukraine:



Christopher Garrett aka Leon Swampy

Several witness (sic) also said they heard some of the gunmen speaking with strong western Ukraine accents. They also noticed that some of the gunmen appeared to come from the Caucasus area, possibly mercenaries from Chechnya. Other gunmen never spoke a word and seemed foreign to the region. French war photographer Jerome Sessini spent about an hour face to face with the gunmen before they opened fire. "I found that their general attitude and their very precise techniques gave off the impression that they were American mercenaries, or people trained by American mercenaries" said Sessini.

"I can't guarantee this for sure, but I'd give it a 95 per cent," added the photographer, who frequently interacted with various U.S. security contractors during his years covering the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Krasnoarmeysk, several of the gunmen were masked or wearing keffieh-style cloaks, which made it difficult to pinpoint whom among them had fired the lethal shots. Alfred De Montesquiou, [Revelations on the Krasnoarmeysk Killing](#), Paris Match, May 15 2014)

In late January this year, an armed man in uniform clearly speaking with an English accent has also been [caught on camera](#) by a Ukrainian local news channel. He was later identified as Christopher Garrett aka [Leon Swampy](#). According to RT, he was not the only one:

"Armed people in uniform speaking fluent English with no accent have been spotted in Mariupol in the aftermath of the rocket hit, fuelling allegations that foreign private military contractors are serving among Ukrainian troops. (RT, [Ukraine: Military-Clad English-speakers Caught on Camera in Mariupol Shelling Aftermath. Who Are They?](#), January 26, 2015)

It is also well-documented that the French have been recruiting fighters for Ukraine. Former member of the French Foreign Legion Gaston Besson was a [recruiter for the Azov Battalion](#). More on NATO legions [here](#).



So, as we can see, what the Foreign Policy writer calls “accusations” and “claims” are actually verified and easily verifiable facts for anyone who knows how to use a computer.

He admits “there is no direct evidence linking the Aeronet site to Russia”, while suggesting that “it is run by an individual or organization whose motives are closely aligned with those of the Kremlin”.

The reasons he invokes to justify the possible link are flimsy at best: “the politics of the site’s content, the secrecy surrounding it, and its relatively professional appearance”. In addition, Rohac stresses, the Aeronet editor says “he sometimes travels to Moscow for business, adding that he has ‘friends in Russia.’” That does not prove anything and would not hold in front of a judge.

The Aeronet website is clearly critical of the U.S. and of the anti-Russian propaganda, but that doesn’t systematically imply Russian funding. There are numerous Western independent news outlets, including this one, which express a similar view and have no links to the Russian government.

This *Foreign Policy* piece is typical of the post-9/11 Western mainstream media witch hunt. In today’s world, if you publish articles that criticize Western policies and contradict the one-sided Western media narrative, you are either a “conspiracy website” or a shadow propaganda outlet of the Kremlin or whoever is the enemy du jour. What has become obvious to many Western citizens, is that those who are making accusations are committing the misdemeanor. The Western mainstream media has been engaged in war propaganda for Washington for a very long time and has spread numerous conspiracy theories (Iraq’s WMDs, the Syrian government using chemical weapons on civilians, Gaddafi forces raping Libyan women on Viagra, among many others).

U.S.-funded “independent” media abroad

While accusations against Russia’s “shadow funding” of state-controlled news outlets

abound in the Western mainstream media, we hardly, if ever, hear about the U.S. funding of foreign media.

The U.S. government funds media abroad and, most of the time, covers its tracks by giving money to so-called non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which in turn give grants to foreign news outlets aligned with the Western mainstream media narrative.

When Russia does it, the media on the receiving end is described as a state-controlled media. When the U.S. engages in this kind of endeavour, however, it is presented in its very own Orwellian way as an effort to “develop an independent media sector abroad”. State-funded “independent media?” That sure sounds like an oxymoron.

Since 2007, the US government has directly given at least \$25.5 million dollars in grants to various US non-profit organizations for media projects in Ukraine only. On 18 grants, 14 went to [Internews Network](#). A quick look at its website shows it is aligned with the Western mainstream media narrative, thus, with the White House’s foreign policy agenda. Among Internews Network’s donors are numerous Western governmental agencies and well-known “democracy makers”, namely organizations committed to furthering US interests abroad under the guise of defending democracy and human rights. Here are some of them:

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Rockefeller Family & Associates

Rockefeller Foundation John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

John S. and James L Knight Foundation

Google

Open Society Foundations

Omidyar Network

European Commission

Various Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International development Agencies
(Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK, U.S.)

World Bank Group

Freedom House

National Democratic Institute (NDI) (Demorats’ non-profit organization)

National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy have proven to be CIA partners in the past. As [Robert Parry explained](#), “Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy stress their commitment to freedom of thought and democracy, but both cooperated with a CIA-organized propaganda operation in the 1980s, according to documents released by Ronald Reagan’s presidential library.”

NED has been connected countless times to “activists” in foreign countries who are

opposing governments which do not submit to Washington. In a way, NED has replaced the CIA. On its [about page](#) it states that after WWII, "U.S. policy makers resorted to covert means, secretly sending advisers, equipment, and funds to support newspapers and parties under siege in Europe. When it was revealed in the late 1960's that some American PVO's were receiving covert funding from the CIA to wage the battle of ideas at international forums, the Johnson Administration concluded that such funding should cease, recommending establishment of 'a public-private mechanism' to fund overseas activities openly."

And NED was born. It describes itself as non-governmental even though it is "funded largely by the U.S. Congress... distributing funds to private organizations for the purpose of promoting democracy abroad." Since it is well known and documented that the U.S. has a long history of overthrowing democratically elected left-wing governments and supporting dictatorships around the world, such as Saudi Arabia, NED's "purpose of promoting democracy abroad" is preposterous.

As we can see in these articles from the 70's and 80's, Johnson's establishment of "'a public-private mechanism' to fund overseas activities openly" did not stop CIA media propaganda.

A Worldwide Network for Dissemination of Propaganda Was Built by the C.I.A.

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men may still roam the world, disguised as correspondents for obscure trade journals or business newsletters.

The C.I.A.'s propaganda operation was first headed by Tom Braden, who is now a syndicated columnist, and was run for many years by Cord Meyer Jr., a popular campus leader at Yale before he joined the C.I.A.

Mr. Braden said in an interview that he had never really been sure that "there was anybody in charge" of the operation and "that 'Frank Wiener kind of handled it off the top of his head.' Mr. Meyer declined to talk about the operation.

However, several other former C.I.A. officers said that, while the agency was wary of telling its American journalist-agents what to write, it never hesitated to manipulate the output of its foreign-based "assets." Among those were a number of English-language publications read regularly by American correspondents abroad and by reporters and editors in the United States.

Most of the former officers said they had been concerned about but helpless to avoid the potential "blow-back"—the possibility that the C.I.A. propaganda filtered through these assets, some of it purposely misleading or downright false.



Tom Braden, now a columnist, was first to head propaganda unit.

tions through a C.I.A. front in New York called Foreign Publications Inc.

The dozen recipients of these subsidies reportedly included *Avance*, *El Mundo*, *El Prensa Libre*, *Bohemia* and *El Diario de las Americas*. In addition, the C.I.A. is said to have financed AIP, a radio news agency in Miami that produced programs sent free of charge to more than 100 small stations in Central and Latin America.

The C.I.A. initially intended to clandestinely distribute copies of the subsidized publications into Cuba, but that plan was dropped after the Cuban exiles who had agreed to take them by boat refused in the last minutes to approach the Cuban shore.

The subsidies continued anyway, and the publications were widely read in the Cuban community in Miami and, in the case of *Bohemia*, a weekly magazine that received more than \$3 million altogether, throughout Latin America as well.

The intelligence agency's onetime support of *Encounter*, the British journal, has been reported, but agency sources said that the Congress of Cultural Freedom, the Paris-based group through which the C.I.A. channeled the funds, also supported a number of other publications, many of them now out of business.

that specializes in translations of academic works, and Walker & Co., jointly owned by Samuel Sloan Walker Jr., a one-time vice president of the Free Europe Committee, and Samuel W. Meek, a retired executive of the J. Walker Thompson advertising agency and a man with close ties to the C.I.A.

A spokesman at Franklin confirmed that the publisher had received grants from the Asia Foundation and "from another small foundation for an African project, both of which were exposed in 1967 as being supported by C.I.A." The spokesman added, "Franklin was unaware of that support."

Mr. Walker said through a secretary that his concern had never "printed books on behalf of the C.I.A. nor published any book from any source which was not worthy of publication on its merits."

Other publishing houses that brought out books to which the C.I.A. had made editorial contributions included Charles Scribner's Sons, which in 1951 published "The Yenan Way," by Eudocio Ravines, from a translation supplied by William F. Buckley Jr., who was a C.I.A. agent for several years in the early 1950's. Also in 1951, G. P. Putnam's Sons published "Life and Death in Soviet Russia," by Valentin Gonzalez, the famous "El Campesino" of the Spanish Civil War.



The late Robert Blum, who several sources say resigned from the C.I.A. to head Asia Foundation.

editor for the Copley newspaper organization to join the C.I.A.

Other newspapers on whose staffs the C.I.A. is said to have placed agents over the years included *The Guyana Chronicle*, *The Haiti Sun*, *The Japan Times*, *The Nation of Rangoon*, *The Caracas Daily Journal* and *The Bangkok Post*.

And before the 1959 revolution *The Times of Havana*, owned by a former C.I.A. man, contributed to the "cover" of Mr. Phillips by signing him on as a columnist.

The C.I.A. reportedly had agents within a number of foreign news services, including LATIP, a Latin American agency operated by the British news agency, Reuters, and the Ritzhaus organization in Scandinavia.

Although there were C.I.A. agents in the overseas bureau of The Associated Press and United Press International, the C.I.A. is said to have had none in Reuters because that agency is British and thus a potential target of the British Secret Intelligence Service.

But sources familiar with the situation said that the C.I.A. occasionally "borrowed" British "assets" inside Reuters for the purpose of planting news articles. Asked about the much-publicized assertion by William E. Colby, the former Director of Central Intelligence, that the

Rare moment of truth in The New York Times in 1977 "investigating the CIA's role in global propaganda efforts, including Radio Free Asia." Click on the image for the source.

Jack Anderson

CIA's Misleading Tactics

WASHINGTON — In a triple assault on the public's right to know, the Central Intelligence Agency is (1) trying to shut off channels of information to the electorate, (2) seeking criminal penalties against reporters whose stories might identify CIA operatives and (3) spreading "disinformation" to news agencies.

The most disturbing is the disinformation campaign. This poisons the well from which Americans draw the facts they need to govern themselves. The wise Thomas Jefferson sought to lay this issue to rest two centuries ago when he argued that the people's right to know is more important than the officials' right to govern.

Now along comes Bill Casey, the doddering CIA director, with the argument that the government has the right to mislead the public by planting phony stories in the press.

His purpose ostensibly is patriotic. He wants to build public support for the political, economic and military measures that the Reagan administration believes are necessary to counter the worldwide conspiracies of the Soviet Union.

Legal experts have warned that the CIA is forbidden by law from conducting operations within the United States and that disinformation aimed at the American public, therefore, would be illegal. But Casey has found a way that he thinks the CIA can get around the law. The disinformation will be planted with foreign news bureaus whose stories are routinely picked up by U.S. newspapers.

Thus the phony stories may be con-

cocted by CIA dissemblers in McLean, Va., but will reach the American audience circuitously through foreign sources. Casey believes this deception does not violate the restrictions against domestic operations.

Trusted CIA sources have told my associate Ron McRae that the foreign press, in the words of one insider, "is already being manipulated directly."

Consider the campaigns to discredit Libya's radical ruler, Muammar Qaddafi, for example. There should be no need to portray him as being any more vile than he is. He has committed outrages that should be sufficiently repugnant to arouse American public opinion against him. I have called Qaddafi the world's most irresponsible ruler and have backed up this opinion with facts that need no embellishment.

But under the imaginative Casey, the CIA is busily creating rumors connecting Qaddafi to the slave trade in Mauritania, the only nation that still auctions people on the block.

The CIA is also spreading stories that Qaddafi is manipulating Libyan accounts in international banks and otherwise mismanaging the Libyan peoples' petrodollars.

The agency has even considered arranging the disappearance of a moderate Moslem leader after a visit to Libya. This could revive the outrage against Qaddafi in the Moslem world that followed the actual disappearance of a holy man,

named Mousa Sadr. He never returned from Libya after a set-to with the dictator.

What Casey doesn't understand is that truth — just the simple, straightforward truth — is the most effective method of persuading people and influencing events. If the U.S. government could re-establish its credibility, its word could become a powerful weapon for combating communism.

Casey has done his utmost to obstruct the flow of CIA information to the public. He has also sought criminal penalties against newsmen who divulge the identity of CIA agents. These steps are necessary, he has contended, to protect the CIA's secret operations.

The truth is that the CIA's own ineptness, not newspaper stories, has jeopardized secret activities and exposed its operatives. The most damaging disclosures have come from Philip Agee, who is a renegade CIA agent, not a newsmen. The CIA allowed him to slip through its fingers.

The CIA has loudly complained that its station chief in Athens, Robert Welch, was gunned down because his identity was revealed in anti-CIA publications. But the CIA station chief had occupied the same house in Athens for two decades, and sightseeing guides used to point it out to tourists. So Welch was more likely the victim of CIA carelessness than press exposure.

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Article in the September 22, 1981 Santa Cruz Sentinel about a CIA disinformation campaign. Click on the image for the source.

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, published several yearly reports on media development around the world.

The first report was called [U.S. Public and Private Funding of Independent Media Development Abroad](#).

The report's stated goal is to "learn who are the major donors, on what part of the sector they focus (direct assistance to media outlets, journalism training, public information campaigns, improving the legal environment for media, and media management) and what opportunities exist to educate potential donors about the importance of developing independent media as an essential component of democratic societies."

Some of the key findings of the 2007 report were:

- U.S. funding for international media development in 2006—public and private—exceeded \$142 million;
- U.S. government funding totaled nearly \$69 million;
- Funding from government-supported nonprofit organizations—the National Endowment for Democracy and U.S. Institute of Peace—totaled \$13 million

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State/Bureau

of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor were the most important governmental donors, respectively giving \$ 49,684,000 and \$ 11,800,000 in 2006 alone. The number one private donor that same year was the Open Society Institute with \$40 million, followed by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, with \$7 million.

Particularly of interest is the government's strategy for 2007-2012 outlined in the report. According to the State Department-U.S. Agency for International Development's Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2007-2012, the government will "advance media freedom by helping to create and develop independent media outlets..."

USAID plays a key role in funding "independent" media overseas, especially in the former Soviet Union:

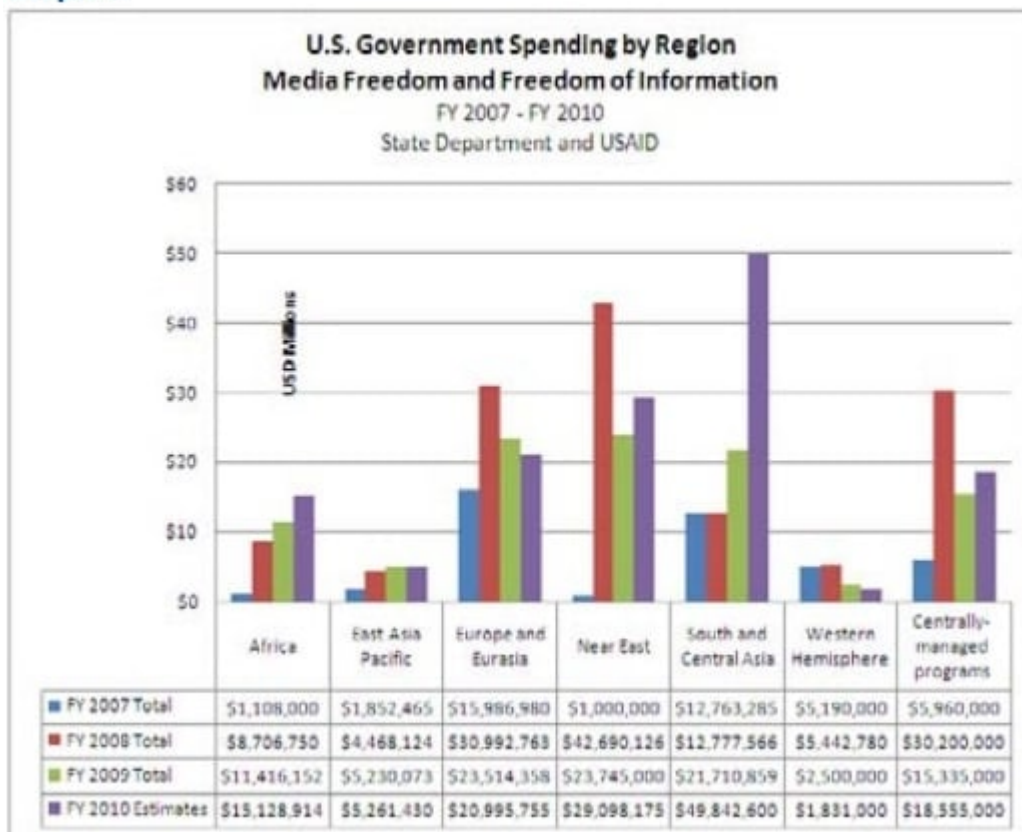
"As a result of efforts in post-Soviet states to transform state-controlled media into independent media, Europe and Eurasia is the only one of USAID's four geographic bureaus with a designated media development expert." (Ibid.)

The rhetoric used in this report is pure propaganda and does not even bother being logical. It clearly says that the U.S. state is investing money and resources "to transform state-controlled media into independent media". If it is funded by the U.S. state, how can it be labeled independent? What we are led to believe is that Russian-funded media is state-controlled whereas U.S.-funded media is "independent".

For some reason, maybe reason itself, in the 2010 report called [U.S. Government Funding for Media Development](#), the word "independent" has been removed. It states that U.S. funding for foreign media rose "dramatically" between 2005-2010:

"Over the past five years, the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have spent more than a half billion dollars to support international media development... The State Department and USAID budgets for fiscal year 2010 totaled more than \$47.9 billion. Of this sum, less than .3 percent—or \$140.7 million—was spent on media development efforts. Still, this represents a 36 percent—or \$37.3 million—increase from media development spending in the previous fiscal year and an even more dramatic rise when compared with the \$68.9 million spent five years earlier."

Graph 4:



Source: CIMA 2010 report

The US government even directly funds Russian media. For example, in 2011-2012 [USAID gave \\$2 540 000 in grants](#) for a program called “Independent print media in Russia”. The top recipients are Russian organizations FNE and Foundation Finformpolicy Dvl.

It sounds very little but, as we saw earlier, most of the state funding for “media development”, in other words for propaganda and political subversion, is channeled through government-funded “non-governmental” organizations such as NED and Freedom House to obscure the origins of the funding. These organizations will surely not give grants to news outlets which oppose the Western mainstream media narrative.

NED’s 2012 annual report, for example, [shows over \\$4,6 million](#) in funding for various “freedom of information” programs in Russia alone, including but not limited to: \$74,730 “To continue developing an environmental investigative journalism network in Russia” and \$80,000 to an organization which “will monitor the use of torture by law enforcement officials through reports in the regional press and consultations offered at its local headquarters. The organization will publicize the results of its monitoring on its website, through partner NGOs, and in local and national media outlets.”



If the amount spent by the U.S. government on “independent” media has decreased in recent years, CIMA explains in its 2013 report [U.S. Government Funding for Media: Trends and Strategies](#) that it is due to “the cutbacks in media development funding associated with the U.S. drawdowns in Iraq and especially Afghanistan, a drop of \$28 million from 2010 to 2012 in South and Central Asia and \$17.7 million in the Near East.”

Two spikes in U.S. government funding occurred since CIMA started reporting: “The data showed a spike in funding in 2008 as part a major investment in democracy and governance- including media-in Iraq and another in 2010 due to a similar investment in Afghanistan.”

This is very telling and completely destroys the “independent media” idea being promoted by the U.S. government and NED. It clearly shows that in the last decade the US government has substantially increased its funding of “independent media” in countries it has illegally invaded and militarily occupied.

How can the U.S. claim to be funding media development to “advance freedom” as claimed in the 2007 report, when the money comes after it has waged illegal wars against countries, killed millions of their citizens, destroyed their infrastructures and militarily occupied them?

If that’s not the essence of propaganda and state-controlled media, what is?

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