

# The Imperial Press

## The American Empire and Its Media



graphic: Swiss Propaganda Research

By Norman Solomon

US mass media mirror the limited ideological diversity of the two main political parties, including the range of viewpoints and the outlooks in commentaries. Media outlets do include a variety of views on many domestic issues, but criticisms of corporate power are rare — and do not often challenge the huge leverage great wealth and institutional concentrations of capital exert over government policies.

With 750 military bases overseas, and a military budget that exceeds the next ten countries combined, the US government routinely sends missiles across borders. The Institute for Policy Studies reported last year that 62 per cent of the federal discretionary budget went to “militarized programs” of one sort or another.

But for the USA’s corporate media, which include not only the avowedly commercial outlets, but also the big “public broadcasting” networks NPR and PBS — the militarized budget and its reflexive political mentality are taken as a given. This is not a conspiracy of a few plotters behind closed doors. The core problem is not individual; it’s structural.

The media ownership worth countless billions and the flow of advertising revenue drive acceptance of the US war train. The military-industrial-media complex is lucrative for all concerned, whether the major investors and CEOs of big news organizations or the corporate institutions they serve. In late April, when Congress approved and President Biden signed legislation to send tens of billions of dollars’ worth of arms to Israel and Ukraine, it was yet another gift to military contractors who thrive on the largesse of the warfare state.

In sync with such profit-taking for war-making, the atmosphere for mainstream journalists on the subject of wars fought by the Pentagon or US allies is: if you are pro-war you’re objective; but if you’re anti-war you’re biased.

Yet there are cracks in the walls of mainstream media. And there are great opportunities to grow independent media systems that treat agendas for peace and

justice as an imperative rather than a danger.

Progressives can and should fight for space in corporate media. Local newspapers as well as TV and radio outlets should be challenged to broaden and deepen their coverage. The true costs of war — human, economic, social and environmental — should gain coverage in human and policy terms. News stories, opinion articles, letters to the editor, broadcast interviews and more should routinely include information and analysis that challenges instead of just reinforces what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the madness of militarism.”

Meanwhile, building and sustaining alternative, progressive media for the long haul are essential. Though it is hard to match the financial resources of traditional media outlets, the ingenuity and grassroots capacities of progressive organizers have created many outlets that strive for social justice and peace instead of destructive systemic injustice.

Whether facing the conformist militarism of mainstream media or the challenge of countering the propaganda systems with people-powered means of communication, we have enormous opportunities to shake off the passivity encouraged by corporate media and the entire capitalist system. Horizontal communication instead of top-down newspeak is essential to break the money and violence social order.

The great media critic George Seldes said that “the most sacred cow of the press is the press itself.” *While the media establishment keeps worshipping itself, we have vast opportunities to create media for democracy.*

*Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>*

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**Insistence on horizontal communication instead of top-down newspeak is essential to breaking the grip of a social order based on money and violence.**