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The Military-Industrial-Media Complex

Norman Solomon

Address to Union for

Democratic Communications

May 20, 2006, Boca Raton, Florida

Recorded by Jeffery Keating, South Florida Indymedia Center

Transcribed and revised for publication by James F. Tracy.

At the first World Social Forum in 2001 Eduardo Galleano spoke of walking down the streets of a Latin American city, and on a wall somebody had written in big letters, “Let’s save pessimism for better times.” In retrospect, who could have predicted that pessimism would turn out to be very unwarranted in Latin America. In deference to the importance of optimism I won’t talk about the other continents right off. The question that often comes up that I sometimes do dread is, “Well, aren’t you optimistic?” I’m not optimistic or fatalistic. I’m hopeful, with some caveats, and it all depends on what people do. Of all the options that we have in front of us the most deadly is passivity. The most deadly is simply going along with the program or, as Galleano says, “In some way accepting the idea that the future is another word for the present and the past.”

This morning Deborah James spoke very incisively about the key crossroads that humanity finds itself at this moment, economically, politically, geopolitically, and in what kind of society we want to have. When she was speaking about coverage of Venezuela in the US news media, I remembered something that Aldous Huxley had written in an introduction to *Brave New World*. “Lies are powerful. But even more powerful is silence about truth.” The omission of both information and the human dimensions of war is really the most powerful way in which the anesthetic of distortion and passivity is administered. Now, because of the 24 hour news cycle, every minute is now a nanosecond cycle, as we can see when we learn about the Michael Jacksons and J. Los and everything else that passes for news on cable.

I’ve lately thought of the metaphor of the body politic, whereby for democracy to function in a meaningful way there has to be a free flow of information, a circulation of analysis, debate, facts, contention. There have to be different views of

the world simultaneously competing, or at least contesting, in the public arena. In the United States we have a systemic blockage of the body politic. We know what happens physiologically when there's blockage in the circulatory system, but chronically in the U. S. society the concentrations of capital, of power, and of the capacity to pass along information together work to have debates blocked and blocked, and we've seen the results manifested again and again with the country is being dragged into one war after another.

Only after *War Made Easy* was published did I realize that, of all the different meanings the phrase had for me that I was trying to include in the title, the one I hadn't thought of when it came off the press was class war. War from the top down on the basis of class is also made easy in so many ways through the punditocracy; through the ways in which government officials function and don't function; through the routine ways in which some reporting goes on and other reporting does not. The most powerful propaganda is what blends in with the scenery. Deborah, Jim, and I, and people here in general, have a bias. We have a political agenda. This sets us apart from Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, and Tom Brokaw because they blend in with the scenery and essentially constitute the definition of balance. They're part of the prevailing power structure and the wallpaper that is put up in the echo chambers of the news media.

If Adam Smith came back today he would be considered by the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page to be a Marxist because he really didn't believe in the top-down notion that wealth creates all labor. He had it backwards in terms of the tacit and sometimes explicit orthodoxy the U. S. news media project out onto the world. Routinely, on so-called Public Radio and on Public Radio International, we get the business reports. We get the hourly updates on every tick of the Dow and the Nikkei and on and on. Yet we don't have an hourly, a daily, or a weekly labor program. The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, the *New York Times*, or any other daily paper in the country, large or small, all have a business section. Not one has a labor section. Why? There are only 100 million or more people in the country working or trying to work for a living every day. How could that compete in terms of importance to the trials and tribulations of the CEOs, the investors, and the company they keep?

Over time that dismissive regard towards American workers becomes normalized. It becomes routine, objective, and professional. If you went into a newsroom as an employee tomorrow and ask, "Hey what gives? I picked up the paper this morning and there's a business section again. There's no labor section." Or, go into *All Things Considered* or *Morning Edition's* production facilities and ask, "With your half hour newscasts there's a business update. Where's the labor update?" "Where's the report on the average wait times now in emergency rooms for people without medical coverage?" "What is the on-the-job injury rate that is now preventable released by the Department of Labor?" Let's give an update not based on just every fluctuation of the stock market. Obviously, that's not considered to be in the realm of responsible journalism, which says a great deal about responsible journalism as it's defined in the United States.

The militarism of our political culture, as well as our political economy and the media, is much more extreme than it was just five, ten, or twenty years. My first attendance at a UDC conference was in 1991, just after the Gulf War. Who would

have thought there would be so many wars in the next ten or fifteen years? While there is a historical continuity, there is also an extreme direction that the policy makers have moved in.

I think we're at a point where quantity does beget a qualitative difference in the kind of policies we have, the way in which the policies are administered, the effects on people, and the dangers involved. People say, "Well, what difference will it make to wrest away from the Republican Party the control of the Congress or the White House?" And in many ways we know that it will make very little difference. Yet it's impossible to imagine how we would get the kind of progressive change or momentum that we want as long as they remain in power, even though if they're ejected we may not get very far either.

Having studied the last fifty years historically, I've really been struck by how militarism and class war have been absolutely central to the basic political and media power structure of the country. The practice of omission really promotes this process by putting statements by mainstream leaders deep down into the Orwellian hole. For instance, Dwight Eisenhower's observations about the military-industrial complex are rarely mentioned in the U S news media, except perhaps as a kind of toss-off phrase. In Eisenhower's Cross of Iron speech several decades ago he said that every tank, every battle ship, every bomber, every bullet is, in a real sense, a theft from the children of the world. This is a powerful, real, human-based analysis and message rarely heard in the news media of this country.

To provide another example, if you watch *Washington Week in Review* on PBS on Friday night, and if you can stay through the whole half hour and be awake at the end of it, you'll notice that there's a lot of commercial plugs at the beginning and end of the program. The first of this year a company that you might say has a passing interest in decision making in Washington, the Boeing Corporation, has signed on to purchase "advanced underwriter credits." (You'll notice the difference between "commercials" and "underwriting" on PBS; you're not really taking in a commercial when a combination of Mozart and Volvos create that special kind of erudite ambience.) I called the people who do the PR for *Washington Week in Review*. They said, "Well, of course, having underwriters such as Boeing doesn't influence us," which is the standard response from the PR department. But, as you watch the show, you realize how certain topics are simply off the table which, again, speaks to the propaganda function of omission. Somebody quoting Eisenhower along the lines noted above is something that would not really enhance the possibilities of Boeing renewing their contract. These are obviously topics that have been redefined as highly controversial and, even worse, not worth exploring because they're not part of certain political agendas of the country.

The media also have a way of redefining terms. For example, "Are you for globalization or against it?" Well, there are many, many people around the world who are for the globalization of human rights, for the sharing of cultures, for solidarity and labor rights, for protection of the environment. Corporate globalization, on the other hand, gets very different responses from the elites versus the grass-roots. I was in Greece just a couple of weeks ago and was asked at a forum, "What has happened to the American dream?" The best response I could come up with was, "Well, for over two hundred years there have been basically two American

dreams. One has been for social justice and the other has been to get as rich as possible.” Those are competing visions, and the news media have increasingly promoted one more than the other, even though in terms of the values it was never a pretty picture to begin with.

The manipulation of television, radio, and print journalism in the United States can be broken down into dozens or hundreds of layers, but I’ve come to think of three layers in particular: factual information, analysis, and human realities. The first, factual information, is where key facts are omitted or rarely mentioned. This might be referred to as public secrets. They’re not “never mentioned.” They’re just possibly in the very back of a *New York Times* article where the most important information is, if it gets in at all. This otherwise involves the insertion of lies, deceptions, and distortions. Second, there’s one of analysis. What does it mean? How is it being spun? Finally, the numbing anesthetic administered by media to distance us from war. Again, people’s lives and their suffering and their death are also simply subjected to an enormous amount of media manipulation, much of which involves omission.

The reliance on official sources for all of these layers is pivotal. The stenographic function of news media almost invariably works for the powerful. If you choose your sources you choose your perspective. That’s the way bias is put forward. We hear journalists say how the professionalism of the news media is so good now, and it’s true that there have been some changes. A hundred years ago on the front pages of the US media outlets it might say, “Country X is a great threat to the American way of life.” Now, because the standards of journalism have improved so much, the lead might be, “The leaders of country X are a threat to the American way of life, senior administration officials said yesterday.” It’s when you come down to either coverage of particular countries or the dynamics of US policy that the grotesque and the sometimes overused “Orwellian” term really does become applicable.

Take, for instance, the story about the National Security Agency’s eavesdropping on US citizens. It took many days after the NSA scandal broke in the *New York Times* in December 2004 for me to realize the background of the NSA’s involvement in spying and war preparation in the last few years vis-à-vis the United Nations. The typical praise the US news media receives is for its alleged watchdog role. The good news is that last December the *New York Times* broke the story on NSA eavesdropping on international telephone conversations with one of the parties being in the United States. The bad news is that the top management at the *Times*, Bill Keller and so forth, sat on the story for more than a year. They waited. They had the essential story before November 2004, and part of the explanation for why they held the story is that when they first became aware of the NSA’s activities ordered by the Bush administration it was too close to the US presidential election. They didn’t want for it to appear that they might be trying to influence the election. We’re left to with the bizarre notion that journalism should hold back from actually doing its job when it would really matter the most. As Napoleon said, “It’s not necessary to censor the news. It’s sufficient to delay it until it no longer matters.” We could say in response, “Well, history always matters but it certainly matters a lot more in real time.”

When the US was in its final stages of so-called diplomacy before the invasion of Iraq it was engaged in this time-honored process which we now find ourselves in the midst of. Washington appears to be preparing for what will be an air attack on Iran. The pundits and the policy makers are now involved in this ritual of what might be called laying the flagstones on the path to war. To mix metaphors, part of that requires using diplomacy as a kind of launch pad for the war simply because it matters what people think. We live in a society with elements of democracy so therefore getting the population to feel, if not overwhelmingly supportive of the war, at least neutralized so as to not produce enough opposition to cause a real problem. It's therefore necessary to generate the idea that diplomacy is underway and there's this ritual that typically takes place. The Secretary of State and other officials go to New York to the UN. They shuttle off to foreign capitals saying how they're really hopeful that this problem can be solved through diplomacy. As Bertholt Brecht said, "When the leaders speak of peace, prepare for war." When they speak about how much they really care about diplomacy then you know you've got a very serious militaristic problem. One of the horsemen is galloping along to deliver at least a bit of an apocalypse to some people.

Back on the first Sunday in March 2003 the *Observer* newspaper in Britain broke this story that the six swing vote member delegations of the UN Security Council had been targeted for what the NSA called a "spying surge." This involved the wiretapping of the home and office telephones in New York of these diplomats, which violates all kinds of protocols and conventions the US is signatory to. They were trying to get the goods on and to understand what the possibilities were to get a war resolution through the Security Council. They had already succeeded in getting a kind of half-baked measure through. Tony Blair wanted a real war resolution. Bush kind of wanted one. Although they never did get one, the NSA was being used as a manipulative instrument to push one through. When the story about NSA's spying appeared in the *Observer* it was widely circulated in much of the world, particularly in countries such as Chile that have had some experience with US intervention, spying, and so forth. In many other countries there was also an outcry. In *War Made Easy* I chronicle how in the United States there was very scant and transitory coverage and, in the "newspaper of record," no coverage at all.

A couple of days after this story broke in the *Observer* I called up Daniel Ellsberg to get his comment. He said, "This is potentially *more* important than the Pentagon Papers because this is a story that has broken *before* the war has begun." Just about 72 hours later, when it still had not been reported in the *New York Times*, I called their foreign desk and talked to an editor there, Allison Smalley. I asked, "Why are we not seeing this in the *New York Times*?" And she replied, "Well, we like to do our own intelligence reporting." Then she added how their sources at the CIA had been unable to confirm this memo, which is an interesting example of the government's veto power over what appears in the US press. The *Los Angeles Times*, being a little bit less inside the beltway, did report about a 500-word story, along with saying, "Everybody does it." The *Washington Post* also rationalized the report by explaining how spying at the UN is routine. What is more, the *LA Times* story strongly implied that the NSA memo was a bogus, counterfeit document; that this was not really about the spying on the Middle Six at the UN. Days later, a 29-

year old woman and intelligence agency employee in England by the name of Katherine Gunn was arrested for leaking the document. Although her name wasn't released the fact of her arrest was reported in the British media and in Britain people aren't ordinarily arrested for leaking counterfeit or bogus documents. This was ipso facto confirmation that it was real, and yet the *New York Times* just didn't want to cover it at all.

The media's history of collusion, participation, and being part of what we call the warfare state is sordid and ugly, but it isn't new. In his 2004 presidential campaign Howard Dean put out a statement that read, "For the first time in US history the President of the United States had launched a war in a country without exhausting all avenues for peace." What planet is Dean living on? Is this some kind of surrealistic version of what we're supposed to believe history is? Does the Washington approach that "perception is reality" make such a take on history a reality? Whether we are scholars, educators, students, researchers, or activists, just putting out bogus history because it's useful at the moment will come back and bite you sooner or later. If the baseline of US military intervention is assumed to be normal and appropriate, and we merely have this glitch called the Bush administration, then there's something terribly wrong in the body politic indeed.

When CNN did a story a number of years ago on the use of gas in Laos it caused an uproar and CNN felt compelled to retract it. It was actually a fairly well documented piece but some real heat came down from officials with a long track record of veracity, including Henry Kissinger, who demanded a retraction. CNN dutifully complied. This was the late 1990s and I thought, "Gee, you know, the Gulf of Tonkin reporting is known now to be totally deceptive and fallacious." So, I wondered if the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have ever retracted their coverage of the incident. I proceeded to the microfilm, of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *LA Times*, and each paper in early August 1964 were reporting as absolute facts what were in reality absolute lies. I called the *Times* and couldn't get any sort of answer. I then called the *Washington Post* and was eventually referred to Murray Marder who I could see on the microfilm had written the front-page diplomatic coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I reached him at home, since he's long retired, and I asked him if there's ever been a retraction of the stories. He replied, "No, I can assure you, Mr. Solomon, that there's never been a retraction of the Post coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin." I asked Marder, "Well, why not?" He paused and said, "Well, if the news media were going to retract their coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin events then they'd need to retract their coverage of just about the entire Vietnam War." He wasn't trying to be funny. It's not exactly a perspective that, shall we say, gets a lot of discussion in the US news media.

While *War Made Easy* got almost no mass media attention, the one exception was the *Los Angeles Times*, which gave it a fairly positive review. The one caveat the reviewer noted was that the first chapter had belabored on a kind of obscure event, which was the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. Actually, it was because this event has been so obscured that I wanted to lead off with that, and certainly it wasn't obscure to the 3,000 people who were living in the Dominican Republic who were estimated to have lost their lives, or the few dozen US soldiers who died and the loved ones they left behind. You have these kinds of patterns

which are so boilerplate that just the evidentiary record, the history, obvious in what has come out of the archives through FOIA, is devastating.

A few years ago President Johnson's phone conversations having to do with the invasion of the Dominican Republic were released and the tapes and transcripts are available. They basically show how President Johnson fabricated evidence and then brought on his favorite exile, Joaquín Balaguer, who's kind of a precursor to Ahmed Chalabi. Balaguer was in New York so he obviously knew very well what was going on in the Dominican Republic. That qualified him as somebody who was an advisor to the US government for the invasion of the Dominican Republic to then come back and be installed as president in 1966. Fast forward several decades and you see the enduring decimation and devastation of the economy. *That* was a victory. The real *US* victory is that in the twenty-first century now you still have this horrible poverty and enormous inequity in the Dominican Republic, simply because the president, saying that US citizens lives were in danger and, days later, saying, with equal falsehood, that the "communists" were involved and therefore something had to be done to restore democracy in the Dominican Republic. The upshot is that the threat of democracy was repelled and oligarchy was essentially restored.

If we are to reflect on the wars in Central America there are a tremendous set of parallels where we had a great many "Hitlers" opposing US foreign policy. In the mid-1980s, then Secretary of State George Schultz declared that a friend of his, after having just returned from Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua, was reminded of the Third Reich. Hitler analogies go a long way, and they've punctuated the news media's coverage of US foreign policy over the years. With Ho Chi Minh there were a lot of invocations of the man with the umbrella, Neville Chamberlain. Common phrases included, "You can't have another Munich," and "We're not going to engage in appeasement." This imagery and these notions underpinned the media's rationale for initiating and continuing the Vietnam War.

Of course, Slobodan Milosevic was a Hitler. Saddam Hussein *became* a Hitler a few years after December 1983 when Donald Rumsfeld, representing the Reagan Administration, went to Baghdad. The famous photo of the handshake deal between Hussein and Rumsfeld, where the US increased agricultural credits, precursor chemicals for chemical weapons, and all sorts of aid, is seldom shown in the US news media today. Saddam Hussein didn't become a Hitler until he crossed the US Government. The *New Republic* magazine published a story in the late 1980s where they said, point blank, that the aid given to Saddam Hussein's regime by the United States wasn't enough and that more was necessary. This even though the US was tilting towards Iraq in terms of its war with Iran and giving tremendous aid and political support to Saddam Hussein's regime. A couple of years later when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait the *New Republic* published a full-cover picture of Saddam Hussein's face, digitally altering his mustache so that it would look much more like Hitler's.

The question, "Does history matter?" is one that the US news media dodge constantly. This is a possibility that we have to simply bring up history. More and more, journalists and historians see Progressives as fighting for history to be preserved or exhumed, whether it's the Donald Rumsfeld photograph and all that it

implies, or whether it has to do with all kinds of double standards on human rights that have been in play and continue to be in play in terms of news media and US foreign policy. It was Phillip Graham who revived the *Washington Post* of the 1930s and 1940s as the owner. Graham said that journalism is a first draft of history, which is kind of scary, especially since it's also understood in the long run to be the last draft of history. When you look at the quality of what is being printed we find ourselves again in an Orwellian land.

One of the key aspects in setting the stage for war is the double standard on human rights. If it were to be possible for the US news media and public discourse to establish a single standard of human rights it would fundamentally change the terrain through which the powers that be drag this country into war time after time. Here are a couple of contrasting examples. You may have heard once or twice, or a few hundred times, about Saddam Hussein's crime of gassing the Kurds. What is seldom mentioned is that across the border in the 1990s the Turkish government, a loyal US ally for many years, committed horrible crimes by any definition. These included extreme ethnic cleansing, destroying thousands of villages, torture, the outlawing of the Kurdish language, things that would make what Slobodan Milosevic did seem (while certainly horrible), comparatively mild in terms of magnitude. Yet as the agenda building went on through the news media for the invasion of Iraq there was no mention of what Turkey had been doing to the Kurds. When I, as well as others, would bring this up on radio talk shows or similar venues the common response was, "Well, that's ancient history. Why are you bringing up the late 1990s? Or even before that?" Yet these are the same sources that continue to say, "Well, Saddam Hussein, he gassed his own people." What are they trying to ignore? What he did in the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s? This was, of course, concurrent with the disbursement of a lot of US aid in the process.

A war that the "liberal media," and people who are self-described as "liberals" on the left love to love was the war on Yugoslavia. For 78 straight days the US-led NATO forces bombed Kosovo, Yugoslavia. After the bombing the Pentagon proudly announced that not a single US life had been lost throughout that entire 78 days. The argument was that we needed to stand against this Hitlerian force in Europe – that ethnic cleansing could not be tolerated. But if you do reach into that Orwellian vacuum tube you find that in August 1995 at least 150,000 Serbs were forcibly driven out of the Krajina region. Franjo Tudjman, essentially a fascist, announced and launched what he called "Operation Storm," kind of like a force of nature. (There's an example of good branding learned from the US government, when one recalls "Desert Storm" from 1991.) In his book, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, BBC correspondent Misha Glenny noted how Serbs were being shot like rabbits. As the ethnic cleansing ensued former Swedish Prime Minister and EU negotiator Carl Bildt said, "If we accept that it is alright for Tudjman to cleanse Croatia of its Serbs, then how on earth can we object if Yeltsin cleanses Chechnya? Or if perhaps one day if Milosevic sends his army to clean out the Albanians from Kosovo?" This is in the middle of 1995. The media image was often, "Well, the [US] president, he's busy." "The president has other priorities," or, "He didn't take action quickly enough." One might therefore be left to assume that that was the case, but it was not the case. As Misha Glenny reports, "The entire offensive was undertaken

in Zagreb with the support of the United States government.

President Clinton himself welcomed Operation Storm.” Thus, Clinton was not in a good position to preach against ethnic cleansing since he supported it, anymore than he was in a good position to get on the presidential bully pulpit when the tragedy happened at Columbine High School and talk about how violence is never a way to vent one’s emotions or outlook, for as the tragedy at Columbine took place some of the heaviest bombing of Yugoslavia was going on under orders from the President. These are not contradictions that our country’s news media are interested in talking about, but they are contradictions that are really part of the lynch pin of what Progressives can do to expose the kind of political economy and media system that we live under.

If we are to go back and look at the *New York Times* front page from the last Sunday of April 1999, the lead of one of its top news reports stated, “NATO began its second month of bombing yesterday against Yugoslavia with new strikes against military targets that disrupted civilian electrical and water supplies.” This is just remarkable. You can bomb military targets that disrupt civilian electrical and water supplies, but it’s just military bombing, even though it violates Geneva Conventions and other accords the US is a signatory to. Obviously hospitals, medical clinics, homes for the elderly and others who are vulnerable are going to have their electricity and water cut off as a result. This is a crime. This is a war crime, and yet it’s being reported in the *New York Times* as bombing military targets.

Not to be left out of the equation, that same month, in his April 23rd column, Thomas Friedman wrote, “It should be lights out in Belgrade. Every power grid, water pipe, bridge, road, and war-related factory has to be targeted.” Let’s not pick on Fox News for the moment, because Friedman has written some astounding things. During the bombing of Yugoslavia Friedman went on television, he wrote columns, and he recycled the phrase again and again, “Give war a chance. Give war a chance.” And then, when the bombing of Afghanistan was underway, a couple of years later, he carted the phrase out again, “Give war a chance.” Likewise, Judith Miller’s front page stories in the *New York Times* had more to do with driving this country into the invasion of Iraq than Fox News could ever dream of.

I do political and media analysis, not psychoanalysis, but I think that one of the principal factors in US media commentary is that there’s a strong streak of sadism among policy makers that’s shared by a lot of the pundits. What are we to make of, for example, Thomas Friedman’s comments? His book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, published in 1999, the same year as the bombing of Yugoslavia, may provide some analytic context. Friedman wrote, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonalds cannot flourish without MacDonnell-Douglas, the designer of the US Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corp.” We should give him credit for candor there.

The “war on terrorism” is an outgrowth of a godsend for the right wing and the Bush administration. What happened on September 11th, 2001, probably saved the Bush presidency if you look back at the trajectory of the polls. With this in mind I think one of the huge challenges we have now is to really look at the me-

dia's and the political elite's functional use of the word "terrorism." This isn't easy because it's been walled off as a discussion. Yet if we're going to have a single standard of human rights we also need to have a single standard for what terrorism is. For instance, Colin Powell was in Latin America when 9-11 happened, and he very quickly issued a statement where he said, "We have to condemn those people who destroy buildings and kill people for political purposes." I think he's absolutely correct.

If one is to go back and you look at what Powell told a *New York Times* reporter who asked when the Gulf War was over, "What's your assessment or view of the civilian casualties in Iraq as a result of the six weeks of the Gulf War?" he replied, "That's not a number that concerns me very much." You have what is essentially state terrorism, where the actions that are taken will predictably kill large numbers of civilians, yet we're told that that's very different than any sort of thing under the category of terrorism. But the experience of people who have a cruise missile arrive in their neighborhood is a form of terrorism that is directly perpetuated on the basis of deceptions which serve as political and media rationales for the attack to begin with. The lies are recycled and the news media seldom, if ever, challenge the lies. The same media also wall off the kind of terroristic experiences at the other end of the US missiles, depriving us of the ability to make that connection. The president lies, people are terrorized. It's not simply an inevitable war or, to use that terrible phrase, "collateral damage," but rather has to do with an entire system of the warfare state.

When the US troops were crossing the border into Iraq a few years ago, NBC's Tom Brokaw, who really worked for the owner of the network, General Electric, was not going to bite the hand that signs the paycheck. He knew full well that when the missiles were fired his bosses were hearing the cash registers ring, and this is what he said on the air: "One of the things that we don't want to do is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq because in a few days we're going to own that country." And so it does kind of raise that question that has been brought up on posters at many demonstrations, "What is our oil doing under their sand?"

The whole problem of aggressive war is one that we have to deal with. It's part of the warfare state of the United States, as well as of a disappearing history. Following World War Two the Nuremberg Tribunals had Robert Jackson as the representative of the United States, who said that the worst crime was aggression against another state; that to plan and implement military aggression on another country was a supreme international crime. While we can understand why the top officials of the US government do not want the US to be part of the International Criminal Court, it does beg the question, "Why is there virtually no mass media discussion in this country of whether George W. Bush is a war criminal?" It certainly is debatable. It could be talked about in serious terms. Briefs could be filed. Op-ed pages could be filled. When this comes up people sometimes say, "I see a lot of diversity of opinion in the *New York Times*. In the major media outlets you hear just *all kinds* of discussion." Well, let's do a little measurement here. Go to Nexis and find the number of daily newspapers in the country that have published an op-ed piece in any way exploring the possibility that George W. Bush should be brought to trial on charges of being a war criminal. When you total up that number

you'll get an index of the diversity of US news media in terms of ideology and in terms of raising questions that would be difficult for the power structure to respond to.

Something that has been very striking to me throughout the years involves the idea of very lethal messages being sent back and forth by our leaders. Chris Hedges wrote a book called *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* after working as a Middle East correspondent for the *New York Times* during the Gulf War, and before that being stationed in Central America. He recounts that in the 1960s, Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara, who's almost a dead-ringer for Donald Rumsfeld, talked about how the US government was bombing North Vietnam to send a message to the Communist leaders in Hanoi. Hedges recalls one morning during the 1980s, when working as a reporter based in San Salvador, he woke up to discover that several corpses had been dumped in front of the hotel where he and other reporters were staying. Inside the mouths of the corpses were warning messages to the journalists. As Hedges points out, the death squads which, as we know, are aligned with the US-supported government, were sending a message in that way to those reporters. On September 11th, 2001, Osama bin Laden sent a message to leaders he didn't like. Then, in bombing Afghanistan, George W. Bush sent a message to leaders who he didn't like. This form of very lethal message sending is urged on by a kind of American exceptionalism where, again, killing becomes rationalized. "Well, they should understand that we're sorry that some people got killed because of our actions. They should understand that we didn't mean it, unlike those other bad people."

That kind of exceptionalism provides little genuine solace for the people who've been injured or killed, and yet it's really an inherent and almost automatic assumption in US media coverage. Imagine if there were a bank robbery or a murder and we were to go down the streets of West Palm Beach, and the police at noon hour are *spraying* the storefronts with machine gun fire because they think somewhere out there is a perpetrator of the crime. All of the people who've been shopping and working in the stores are killed, and the explanation is, "Well, we didn't mean to kill you." I don't think that would be acceptable in a civilized society, and yet that's exactly the kind of argument that we get from the media as they justify US foreign policy and war. "Unlike those bad people, we don't *intend* to do it. We know it's going to happen, but because we didn't intend to do it we're not culpable at all." It's what might be called jingo-narcissism – an exceptionalism that's chronic with one war after another.

There is also a worship of technology in media war coverage that needs to be dealt with. If you're a suicide bomber you're very low-tech. Strapping dynamite or explosives to your body is reprehensible and inhuman. On the other hand, we're civilized and have high values if we go into urban neighborhoods and kill people with helicopter gun ships or satellite guided missiles. I thought of something that Lenny Bruce used to talk about just before he died in the mid-1960s. He recounted a poem by Thomas Merton, "You think you're better because you burn your enemies from high in the air." I thought of that when, on November 17th, 2003, the *New York Times* published a photograph on the top of its front page of a gunner aiming a machine gun out of the back of a Blackhawk helicopter over Baghdad.

Underneath the photo on the front page, in a reportorial voice attributable to no one, was a statement that alluded to the fact that these aircraft were having more and more trouble flying over Baghdad without being shot down. The quote from the *New York Times* reporter read, “In two weeks the Blackhawks and Chinooks and Apaches that once zoomed overhead with such grace and panache have suddenly become vulnerable.” When a news medium describes machines of mass killing as functioning with grace and panache then its fairly safe for us to make conclusion about the media manifestations of the warfare state.

I often think of something that Martin Luther King said. “We need to confront the arrogance of feeling that we have everything to teach and nothing to learn from the rest of the world.” We have so much to learn, and so much that the United States has been teaching has been so reprehensible that obviously we have a lot of work to do.

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