

A 21st Century Cold War Calls for 21st Century Propaganda

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When it became apparent that U.S. global hegemony was being replaced by a multipolar world, the American ruling class decided it would be necessary to restart a 21st century cold war with Russia and China. Even before this new level of warfare became the priority, it was apparent to U.S. elites that if a long-term era of tensions between great powers were to be engaged in, it would require much greater governmental control over information provided to the domestic population.

This was the reasoning I believe the U.S. was using when it carried out the early-to-mid 2010s policies which have since led to a new cold war. The story of how the current cold war started follows in the same pattern as the run-up to the last one during the 1940s: the emergence of a threat to U.S. hegemony, a campaign to demonize Russia and its allies, and a period of escalating tensions, correlated with the creation of a new propaganda apparatus by the U.S. government.

Expanding propaganda power to prepare for upcoming geopolitical maneuvers

To assemble the propaganda arsenal that it would need throughout the first cold war, the U.S. created the CIA, an unaccountable institution that began covertly influencing world politics from its founding in 1947. In 1948 the CIA [created](#) a covert action wing, called the Office of Policy Coordination, which was led by 'Wall Street' lawyer Frank Wisner. The office's secret charter described its purposes as:

"propaganda, economic warfare, preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation procedures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world."

Through these tools, the CIA has since been spreading psychological operations (psyops) within American foreign propaganda outlets like [Radio Free Europe](#) and [Radio Free Asia](#), as well as assimilating much of the American press through projects like [Operation Mockingbird](#).

With 2013's amendment of key parts of the Smith-Mundt Act, the government freed this propaganda network to covertly broadcast messages to the American people with official legal impunity. Prior to then, the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 had banned the domestic dissemination of U.S. government-produced propaganda. But when representatives Mac Thornberry and Adam Smith passed the "The Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012" by slipping it into the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act, a routine piece of legislation that gets voted on and signed annually, that restriction was lifted. On July 2nd of 2013, the government finally began spreading its propaganda messages under the new rules.

The change was immediately visible. In July of 2013, John Hudson of Foreign Policy [reported](#) that the U.S. had begun the "unleashing of thousands of hours per week of government-funded radio and TV programs for domestic U.S. consumption." Since then, the repeal of the propaganda ban has [created](#)

many strange and troubling trends for the American media, such as the emergence of a revolving door between intelligence officials and cable news stations, the government assimilation of formerly independent outlets like Vice News, and the enablement of Silicon Valley oligarchs like Jeff Bezos to partner with the military/intelligence complex while simultaneously exerting control over the media outlets they own (The Washington Post, in this case).

"Since 2013, newsrooms across the country, of both the mainstream and 'alternative' variety, have been notably skewed towards the official government narrative, with few outside a handful of independently-funded media outlets bothering to question those narratives' veracity", Whitney Webb of Mint Press News [wrote](#) last year about the propaganda ban repeal.

"While this has long been a reality for the Western media (see John Pilger's 2011 documentary 'The War You Don't See'), the use of government-approved narratives and sources from government-funded groups have become much more overt than in years past."

It's clear that the motivation behind the repeal of the ban was at least partly to get the U.S. government ready to manage a society which would soon be in an escalating state of great power conflict. In his initial press release on the bill, Thornberry [said](#):

"We continue to face a multitude of threats and we need to be able to counter them in a multitude of ways. Communication is among the most important. This outdated law ties the hands of America's diplomatic officials, military, and others by inhibiting our ability to effectively communicate in a credible and transparent way. Congress has a responsibility to fix the situation."

At a moment when the U.S. empire was already in a state of rapid decline, and when Russia and China were subsequently turning into more effective perceived adversaries, I suspect this statement from a House neocon reflected a larger plan among the ruling class to create a propaganda apparatus for the coming new era of warfare.

Indeed, in the last six years it's been very much necessary for the U.S. empire to expand its efforts to control the sentiments of its own citizens. This recent escalation of government-engineered mass persuasion has involved not just propaganda, but censorship as well. And its emergence six years ago correlates with the U.S.-created proxy wars that started the new cold war.

The ramifications of the U.S. coup in Ukraine and regime change war in Syria

The fact that another cold war between the U.S. and Russia was imminent became clear when Washington began its latest attempt at regime change in Syria. In 2011, the terrorist groups that the U.S. had been arming and training started an ongoing campaign to destabilize Syria, having provoked armed conflict with the Syrian government in an attempt at violent revolt. Washington's proxy war on Syria was motivated both by a desire to advance Israel's interests, and by its larger-scale "need" to maintain control over Eurasia amid China's rise. Naturally, Russia's interests in Syria clashed with those of the U.S., and naturally this wouldn't be the end of Washington's provocations.

2013's propaganda ban repeal, which served the U.S. in its efforts that year to manufacture popular belief in a supposed chemical attack by Assad on the citizens of Syria, also served Washington in its February 2014 coup in Ukraine. As Strategic Culture's Eric Zuesse has written about the Ukraine coup's origins:

"The network behind this coup had actually started planning for the coup back in 2011. That's when Eric Schmidt of Google, and Jared Cohen, also now of Google but still continuing though unofficially as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's chief person tasked to plan 'popular movements' to overthrow both Yanukovich in Ukraine, and Assad in Syria."

These and the other pieces of evidence that Ukraine's regime change was U.S.-engineered were hidden from Western media consumers, who only heard about a Ukrainian "democratic revolution" that prompted a heinous act of aggression in Ukraine by Vladimir Putin.

In reality, it was the U.S. that had caused the crisis in Ukraine, and it's the U.S. that had consequently initiated a new cold war. After the Ukraine coup, Russia had reason to fear NATO nuclear missiles not just near, but on, Russia's border. And Victoria Nuland, Barack Obama's central agent behind the coup, had made sure that the new person to head Ukraine's government would be the far-right and rabidly anti-Russian Arseniy Yatsenyuk. As a result, Ukraine's government has since been a fascistic and aggressive antagonist towards Russia, with the Nazi-tied regime carrying out anti-Russian war provocations, inflaming armed conflict with pro-Russian separatists at the behest of the Trump administration, and engaging in ethnic cleansing against Ukraine's Russian-speaking communities.

In this light, the return of the cold war tensions was not initiated by Russia. Indeed, Putin's 2008 intervention in Georgia and his 2014 intervention in Ukraine were largely done in response to NATO's aggressive expansionism, and Russia's efforts to militarily protect Syria and Venezuela have also been the result of the U.S. empire's belligerence. The new cold war is, rather, the result of America's operations to strong-arm China and its allies Russia, Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and north Korea into submission. And the catalyst for this potential run-up to nuclear conflict was the 2014 regime change project in Ukraine, whose surrounding atmosphere of intensive state-manufactured propaganda has reflected the nature of the years since then.

An empire of illusion

Talking from my experiences and observations as an American, the onset of this new cold war has produced a dystopian new era, one where reality is constantly being twisted by powerful actors who seek to perpetuate a war that has no end in sight. This is a more extreme version of the War on Terror, whose dozen years of existence prior to the start of the new cold war had already primed the American people for a scenario where they would be told to fear not just terrorists, but also the world's other major superpowers.

The messaging campaigns used to manufacture consent for all of these war campaigns have been carried out both through the dissemination of state propaganda itself, and through the suppression of information that contradicts this propaganda. The onslaught of online censorship throughout the last several years was begun with a statement from the U.S. government whose purpose was to declare war on voices which challenge the official narratives; in January 2017, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence published a report on Russia that devoted seven of its 25 pages to RT America, the chief television hub for America's small selection of antiwar and socialist commentators. The report said that:

"RT's reports often characterize the United States as a 'surveillance state' and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use.

RT has also focused on criticism of the US economic system, US currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the US national debt. Some of RT's hosts have compared the United States to Imperial

Rome and have predicted that government corruption and "corporate greed" will lead to US financial collapse."

This McCarthyist view of the critics of capitalism and imperialism is one that U.S. intelligence agencies, as well as the online companies they hold influence over, have been applying to how they treat journalists who object to the war effort. Since the media sensation around supposed Russian interference in U.S. elections began in 2016, the world has experienced the biggest wave of Internet censorship in history. The algorithm manipulations and content purges from the online companies have accompanied ambitious new projects from the U.S. and E.U. to police the Internet, which threaten to constrain Internet freedom all around the globe.

After Facebook's big purge of alternative media accounts in October 2018, a top neocon insider promised that the shutdown of the open Internet will go much further. Jamie Fly, director of the Asia program at the influential U.S. and NATO-funded think tank the German Marshall Fund, stated that:

"Russia, China, and other foreign states take advantage of our open political system. They can invent stories that get repeated and spread through different sites. So we are just starting to push back. Just this last week Facebook began starting to take down sites. So this is just the beginning."

Fly and the other power players within the empire are attempting to influence world events by controlling the flow of information. It's crucial to them that the Western public views the current geopolitical developments through the American-centric, pro-imperialist lens through which the government presents current events. Having fully expanded their propaganda operations, they're now in the process of de-platforming the opposition press, which is their only obstacle to total control over the narrative.

However, while the empire may try to insulate those within its sphere of control from reality, reality itself is remarkably stubborn. The CIA's propaganda, sophisticated as it is, can't reverse the trend of imperial collapse that the United States is experiencing. No matter how much the think tanks, intelligence agencies, and corporations work to shut down dissenting voices, climate change and other threats to the system will continue to progress. The coming years and decades will be a period of great instability, where the collapse of global capitalism and the accelerating ecological crisis will upend civilization as we know it.

During this upheaval, we can't let society's collective mind be controlled by a circle of oligarchs who intend to deceive us into remaining docile in the face of emerging dystopia. We must continue to seize control of the narrative and take society in a different direction.

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