

Extra!

The Magazine of FAIR—The Media Watch Group

*The 'Inevitable' Hillary Clinton
BP as Victim of BP's Gulf Spill*

War Coverage: More of the Same



Threat of ISIS Looms on 13th Anniversary of September 11 Attacks



Extra!

The Magazine of FAIR—The Media Watch Group

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Extra! (ISSN 0895-2310) is published 10 times a year, monthly except for July/August and January/February by FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, Inc.). U.S. & Canadian subscriptions are \$25 per year (foreign \$48), write to Extra! Subscription Service, P.O. Box 170, Congers, NY 10920-9930, call 800-847-3993, or email extra@cambey-west.com. Periodicals postage paid at NY, NY 10001 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Extra! Subscription Service, P.O. Box 170, Congers, NY 10920-9930. © FAIR 2014. All rights reserved.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



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Cover clockwise from upper left: David Muir, ABC World News Tonight; Brian Williams, NBC Nightly News; Elisabeth Hasselbeck (with Gary Painter, Texas sheriff), Fox & Friends; Scott Pelley, CBS Evening News

FAIR, the national media watch group, has been offering well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship since 1986. We work to invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater diversity in the press and by scrutinizing media practices that marginalize public interest, minority and dissenting viewpoints. As an anti-censorship organization, we expose neglected news stories and defend working journalists when they are muzzled. As a progressive group, we believe that structural reform is needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting and promote strong non-profit sources of information.

The Eternal Sunshine of David Brooks' Mind

New York Times columnist David Brooks advised readers to “Snap Out of It” (9/23/14), arguing that we’ve never had it better in this modern world:

The scope of the problems we face are way below historic averages. We face nothing like the slavery fights of the 1860s, the brutality of child labor and industrialization of the 1880s, or a civilization-threatening crisis like World War I, the Great Depression, World War II or the Cold War. Even next to the 1970s—which witnessed Watergate, stagflation, social decay and rising crime—we are living in a golden age.

Brooks has heard of climate change, right? Because if he has, he was asserting that an average temperature rise of as much as 11 degrees Fahrenheit does not threaten civilization—unlike, say, efforts by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to control the Balkans.



“We are living in a golden age.”

Of course, some problems of the past that Brooks listed are not actually in the past: The UN’s International Labor Organization estimates that 21 million people worldwide are currently engaged in forced labor, while about 168 million children are in the global workforce, more than half in hazardous occupations.

Starbucks vs. Chik-Fil-A vs. the Planet

On September 21, hundreds of thousands of people marched in New York City—with similar events in major cities around the world—to

call for immediate action on climate change, the largest such demonstration in history. The Sunday network TV talkshows, however, either didn’t know it was happening or didn’t think it was important. Panelist (and **Nation** editor) Katrina vanden Heuvel did mention it on **This Week**, noting that the march was passing within blocks of **ABC**’s studios; it didn’t even come up on either **Face the Nation** or **Meet the Press**. The latter’s new host, Chuck Todd, did have time, though, to explain his theory that the 2014 midterms would be “Starbucks country versus Chick-Fil-A country.”

He’s Got the Corporate Media Vote, Anyway

A headline in the **Washington Post** (9/3/14) declared, “Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto’s Popularity Slips Despite Legislative Wins.” Among the “wins” listed for Peña Nieto: “American oil companies will soon be drilling in Mexican waters,” he’s had “confrontations with the teachers union,” and he imposed “higher taxes on junk food.” “Yet his popularity is flagging,” the paper marvels. It doesn’t seem to occur to reporters Joshua Partlow and Gabriela Martinez that a neoliberal agenda—anti-labor, pro-foreign investment—might not be as popular with ordinary people as it is with the **Washington Post**.

NPR to Talk More About ‘Brands That Matter’

BOB GARFIELD, On the Media: You’ve said you can generate a lot more underwriting revenue than **NPR** has been getting, that we’ve essentially been undervaluing our ad inventory, considering the size and affluence of our audience. Which makes perfect sense, but it also infuriates and terrifies some listeners who fear for **NPR**’s independence, and for its very soul. What can you say to talk them down?

NPR CEO JARL MOHN: They’re not going to, as a listener, notice anything different. We’re not talking about adding more units to each hour. The only thing that I think they might perceive differently is that we’re going to be talking about brands that matter a little bit more to them, ones they’re interested in. And we’re going to ask for larger commitments from these underwriters... The audience is growing. It’s not just affluent, it’s a smart audience and it’s very engaged. What more could a brand want than this type of audience?

—**On the Media** (9/5/14)

Norms Are for Other Countries

“If any international norm can still be called uncontroversial, it is the stricture against cross-border aggression by one sovereign state against another. Certainly any failure to enforce it in one place invites violations elsewhere.”

—**Washington Post** editorial (8/29/14), referring to Russian intervention in Ukraine

“One moral truism that should be uncontroversial is the principle of universality: We should apply to ourselves the same standards we apply to others—in fact, more stringent ones.... The crimes of enemies take place; our own do not, by virtue of our exemption from the most elementary of moral truisms.”

—Noam Chomsky (**Philosophy**, 2005)

Bezos Finds Promises to Break Closer to Home

New **Washington Post** owner (and **Amazon.com** CEO) Jeff Bezos decided to unilaterally cut retirement benefits for many of the paper’s employees, taking up to hundreds of thousands of dollars from some workers’ retirements (**Washington Post**, 9/23/14). Where did he get this ruthless idea? Perhaps from reading the **Post**, which has tirelessly campaigned for governments to take promised retirements away from public workers.

Earlier that month, the **Post** (9/10/14) praised the primary victory of Rhode Island Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gina Raimondo, saying she faced down “ferocious opposition from labor” to explain “the plain budgetary impossibility of

maintaining pensions” as promised. To the **Post**,

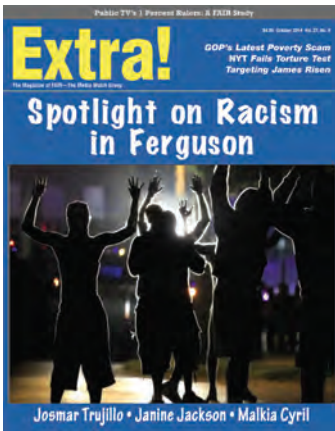
“her primary victory is an encouraging sign that many voters, including Democrats, have woken up to the peril posed by years of reckless promises by office-holders beholden to public-employee unions.”

As economist Dean Baker (**Beat the Press**, 9/11/14) pointed out, the **Post** is fond of using scary numbers to make a modest shortfall sound like a looming fiscal disaster. But is it just a coincidence that less than two weeks after this cheerleading for stiffing workers, Bezos woke up to the profit potential of breaking his own paper’s promises?

Don’t Ask USA Today to Solve Your Problems

“More Want US to Flex Muscle” read **USA Today**’s headline (8/29/14) over a story by Susan Page that argued that “shifts in public opinion could make it easier for President Obama to order more muscular options in striking Islamic State terrorists in Syria and Iraq.”

What’s the evidence for this shift? The story centers on a poll by the Pew Research Center that asked, “Do you think the United States does too much, too little or the right amount to try and solve the world’s problems?” **USA Today**’s interpretation only makes sense if you think solving problems and launching airstrikes are the same thing. ■



October 2014

Nicholas Wade's Deep Confusion

What defines 21st century human thinking better than Steve Rendall's quote from Nicholas Wade's book (*Extra!*, 9/14) comparing Tibetans' adaptation to high altitude to Jews' adaptation to capitalism? This quote demonstrates nothing other than a deep confusion regarding the natural world, something we can experience with our five senses, and human constructs such as economic systems.

Wade appears to know nothing about evolution—adapting oneself to cultural expectations and limits is NOT an evolutionary process—an interesting quality in a so-called science writer. There is essentially no difference in the thinking of someone such as Wade and someone who believes the

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Susan Elizabeth Siens
Unity, Maine

Unions Do Themselves No Favors

Your piece about "Labor Leaders Left Out" under "SoundBites" (10/14) comes as no surprise to me. As a retiree after 30 years as a union representative and organizer, I have been aware for years the corporate media pays no attention to unions unless it is a strike. Almost always, the coverage is negative.

I have worked for several unions in both the private and public sectors, and have noted there is a sad fact the pro-union progressive journalistic community fails to understand about labor's "leadership": They are unbelievably incompetent.

The AFL-CIO has never had a communications program that put labor's story in front of the public, let alone union members. I belong to a union and receive retiree's checks from two unions, yet I never hear a thing from them. Our state labor council has a "communications director" who does not seem to know how to issue simple press releases.

So...no doubt the corporate media are driven by a capitalist philosophy hostile to organized labor, but the unions do themselves no favors.

With 15 million members, you would think they could be a bit more "public." Unfortunately, their continuing demise is part of this lack of any effort to reach out or educate.

Love *Extra!*... Keep it up!!!
Bill Johnston
Tacoma, Wash.



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

1. Publication Title: *Extra!* 2. Publication no.: 003-341. 3. Filing date: September 30, 2014. 4. Issue frequency: monthly, except for January/February and July/August. 5. No. of issues published annually: 10. Annual subscription price: \$25. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 124 West 30th Street, Suite 201, New York, New York 10001. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: 124 West 30th Street, Suite 201, New York, New York 10001. 9. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Deborah Thomas, 124 West 30th Street, Suite 201, New York, New York 10001; Editor: Jim Naureckas, 124 West 30th Street, Suite 201, New York, New York 10001; 10. Owner: FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, Inc.), 124 West 30th Street, Suite 201, New York, New York 10001. 11. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None. 12. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. 13. Publication name: *Extra!* 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2014. 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average Number Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: a) Total Number of Copies Printed: 4,500. b) Paid Circulation: 1) Mailed Outside-County: 4,330. 2) Paid In-County Subscriptions: none. 3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails: none. 4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS: 40. c) Total Paid Distribution: 4,370. d) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution: 1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies: none. 2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies: none. 3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS: 15. 4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail: 50. e) Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution: 65. f) Total Distribution: 4,435. g) Copies not Distributed: 65. h) Total: 4,500. i) Percent Paid: 98.53%. 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Number of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: a) Total Number of Copies: 4,500. b) Paid Circulation: 1) Mailed Outside-County: 4,329. 2) Paid In-County Subscriptions: none. 3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails: none. 4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes Mailed through the USPS: 38. c) Total Paid Distribution: 4,367. d) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution: 1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies: none. 2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies: none. 3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS: 13. 4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail: 43. e) Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution: 56. f) Total Distribution: 4,423. g) Copies Not Distributed: 77. h) Total: 4,500. i) Percent Paid: 98.73%. 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership will be printed in the November 2014 issue of this publication. 17. Signature and title of publisher: Deborah Thomas, Publisher. Date: September 30, 2014.

Using the oppression of women to sell another Iraq War

Drone-Strike Feminism

by Rania Khalek

Of all the justifications the Obama administration has employed to sanctify yet another war on Iraq, none have been more disingenuous than the portrayal of the latest US bombing campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, aka ISIL) as a feminist rescue mission.

Rather than challenge the obvious hypocrisy of this narrative, US corporate media outlets have acted as cheerleaders and stenographers, allowing the US government to hijack the deterioration of women's rights as a selling point for perpetual war.

Media have even published complaints that ISIS's campaign of sexual violence is being ignored by the West. Haleh Esfandiari, director of the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, complained in the *Wall Street Journal* (9/2/14) that ISIS's brutality towards women is receiving "scant attention." A similar article appeared in *Foreign Policy* (9/16/14) lamenting Washington's supposed failure to even "talk about" sexual crimes committed by ISIS.

Meanwhile, Catherine Russell, US ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, wrote an op-ed in the *Huffington Post* (9/12/14) headlined "ISIS's Abuse of Women and Girls Must Be Stopped."

Citing ISIS's abduction and selling of women and girls into sexual slavery, Russell made the case that US bombs have the power to free them, claiming, "These are women and girls who pleaded to be killed in airstrikes rather than be brutalized by ISIL."

But if airstrikes are warranted because ISIS is engaged in sexual violence, then the governments of the nations the US has appointed to spearhead its anti-ISIS coalition may need to be bombed as well—namely, the Iraqi, Egyptian and Saudi regimes.

After all, Saudi Arabia—which America has tasked with saving the Middle East from ISIS's vicious beheadings—openly practices gender apartheid and beheaded at least eight people in August for nonviolent offenses,

including sorcery (UNOHCHR, 9/9/14). Nevertheless, the Obama administration refuses to raise objections to Saudi officials about their country's human rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 3/31/14).

A decade after George W. Bush famously declared that "every woman in Iraq is better off because the rape rooms and torture chambers of Saddam Hussein are forever closed" (State Department, 3/12/04), torture and rape of women in pre-trial detention by US-installed Iraqi government forces has continued with impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2/6/14).

And despite Egyptian police forcing detained female activists to submit to virginity tests (CNN, 2/21/14), the Obama administration recently announced the delivery of 10 Apache helicopters to Egypt's coup regime (Reuters, 9/20/14).

Addressing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in September about the US strategy to defeat ISIS, Secretary of State John Kerry reiterated his boss's selective outrage against human rights abuses in a rant directed at members of the women-led peace group Code Pink.

Referencing his opposition to the Vietnam war, Kerry insisted: "I understand dissent. I've lived it."

He then proceeded to lecture the women of Code Pink about how to help ISIS's female victims, whom American bombs are apparently equipped to liberate:

Code Pink was started by a woman and women who were opposed to war but who also thought the government's job was to take care of people and to give them healthcare and education and good jobs. And if that's what you believe in, and I believe it is, then you ought to care about fighting ISIL because ISIL is killing and raping and mutilating women and they believe women shouldn't have an education.

"Code Pink and a lot of other people



If the US is attacking ISIS because of beheadings and abuse of women, a number of US allies—like Saudi Arabia—will need to be bombed as well.

SaudiArabian.TV

need to stop and think about how you stop them and deal with that," said Kerry.

Rather than highlighting the hypocrisy in his claims, the few media outlets that bothered to cover Kerry's paternalistic finger-wagging practically applauded him. *Huffington Post* (9/17/14) ran the headline "Kerry Takes On Code Pink at ISIS Hearing," while *The Wire* (9/17/14) went with "Kerry Reminds Code Pink He Was Anti-War Before It Was Cool."

The voices of women-led Iraqi civil society groups are completely absent from the establishment media. You won't see any mention in the corporate press of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), which, along with its sister organization MADRE, strongly opposes US airstrikes and holds the US responsible for creating and perpetuating the sectarian violence that fueled ISIS's rise to power. (*MADRE News*, 9/10/14)

Instead, and with the complicity of an unquestioning and largely pro-war corporate media establishment, the US government is adding fuel to the fire it ignited in Iraq, ignoring and further endangering the very women it intends to "save." ■

In ISIS, media find another problem that requires US violence

Addicted to Intervention

by Steve Rendall

When ISIS burst into the American consciousness by capturing the Iraqi cities of Tikrit and Mosul in June, many US elites blamed a lack of US intervention. The US should have kept troops in Iraq, they said, and intervened in Syria's civil war. This analysis, coming from both conservatives and liberals, went virtually unchallenged by journalists whose response to the latest US wars has been a depressing replay of the coverage of more than a decade ago. Few lessons seem to have been learned.

"It's like watching a train wreck," Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) told CNN (9/29/14). "A residual force would have stabilized the situation. It is a direct result of our failure to leave a residual force there." McCain, who once said it "would be fine" with him if the US stayed in Iraq for "a hundred years" (*Mother Jones*, 1/3/08), added, "If we had armed the Free Syrian Army [two years ago], the situation on the ground would be dramatically different now."



Sen. John McCain on ISIS: "Kill 'em... They've got to be destroyed."

These messages were repeated incessantly on Fox News and conservative talk radio (e.g., *O'Reilly Factor*, 10/2/14; *Townhall Weekend Journal*, 9/25/14), echoed by the corporate center—"We Never Should Have Left Iraq," read a *Slate* headline (6/12/14)—and by prominent pundits like Sen. Lindsey Graham (*National Review*, 9/22/14) and Charles Krauthammer (*Washington Post*, 9/26/14).

Touring with his new book about his years as Barack Obama's Defense secretary, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace*, putative liberal Leon Panetta criticized his old boss in a *USA Today* interview (10/6/14). Panetta chided Obama for not intervening earlier in Syria and, more pointedly, for not maintaining US troops in Iraq.

Though Panetta has been telling this story in various media outlets, virtually no journalist has reminded him that when the US withdrew from Iraq in 2011, he defended the White House, explaining that the decision was the Iraqi government's. As Walter Pincus reported at the time (*Washington Post*, 11/22/11), both Panetta and Joint Chiefs of Staff chair Gen. Martin Dempsey, who has also recently criticized Obama on this point,

insist[ed] that negotiations broke down primarily because the Iraqis—based on their own domestic political situation—insisted that any remaining US forces would not continue to have immunity from prosecution under Iraq criminal law.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (*Independent*, 6/15/14) wrote a 3,000-word essay in which he blamed premature withdrawal from Iraq for the rise of ISIS—not the 2003 invasion he had championed. "It is a bizarre reading of the cauldron that is the Middle East today, to claim that but for the removal of Saddam, we would not have a crisis," he said.

Though no one actually makes the strawman claim that Blair was attacking, it is hard to see how, without the invasion of Iraq, ISIS would have become a regional factor. No Islamist militias were operating in Iraq before the 2003 invasion. In fact, the removal of Saddam Hussein wasn't the key issue. The Iraq War and occupation were catastrophic for Iraq. Besides killing hundreds of thousands, and maiming and dis-

placing many more, Iraqi society was ravaged by the corruption and ethnic resentments exacerbated by the war.

Close observers of the rise of ISIS see the chaos resulting from the Iraq War and occupation, and Syria's civil war, as the key events leading to ISIS's emergence. "It is the product of the Iraq War," Trinity College history professor Vijay Prashad told FAIR's radio show *CounterSpin* (8/15/14), adding, "If they had not gone and destroyed the Iraqi state, we wouldn't be in the state we are in today":

It took about 100 years to build the Iraqi state, and the Americans and British destroyed it in an afternoon. So it's on the detritus of the destruction of the Iraqi state that the Islamic State first emerges....

It has everything to do with the Iraq War and the policy that followed, which was to utterly destroy the Iraqi army. I mean, once you tell people, "There's no jobs for you, you are all ex-Baathists, go home," well, they went home and they joined the Islamic State.

While some pundits blamed ISIS on the failure to maintain an occupation force in Iraq, others insisted that the militant movement could have been thwarted if only the US had intervened in Syria against the Assad government that ISIS was fighting against. Hillary Clinton made that claim in the *Atlantic* (8/10/14), and ABC's Cokie Roberts (8/10/14) concurred:

We're not acting like a superpower, that's the problem.... I agree with Hillary Clinton, as you quoted her earlier, saying, well, if we had gotten into Syria when the rebels were begging us to come in, and saying, here we are, trying to secure our freedom, where is America, then you wouldn't have had this group filling the vacuum.

Such arguments generally rest on the



ABC's Cokie Roberts: "We're not acting like a superpower, that's the problem."

assumption that US policy towards Syria can be characterized as nonintervention. As the **New York Times** (9/10/14) reported:

Mr. Obama has resisted military engagement in Syria for more than three years, out of fear early on that arming the rebels who oppose Mr. Assad would fail to alter the balance in the civil war while more direct military intervention could have spillover effects in the volatile region.

This is seriously misleading—and contradicted by the **Times'** own reporting. Under the headline "CIA Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition" (6/21/12), the paper reported that the US government was playing a very active role in supporting the armed revolt, with CIA officers in Turkey helping to deliver weapons to particular opposition groups. Days earlier, the **Wall Street Journal** (6/13/12) was reporting that the CIA was working with opposition groups to "develop logistical routes for moving supplies into Syria and providing communications training."

As journalist Patrick Cockburn, who has covered the region for three decades for the **Independent** and other outlets, reports in his new book *The Jihadis Return* (see page 11), the arms that the CIA was "steering" to Syrian rebels were instrumental in enabling ISIS to expand the territory it held in Iraq:

An intelligence officer from a Middle Eastern country neighboring Syria told me that ISIS members "say they are always pleased when sophisticated weapons are sent to anti-Assad groups of any kind because they can always get the arms off them by threats of force or cash payments."...Arms supplied by US allies such as Qatar and Turkey to anti-Assad forces in Syria are now being captured regularly in Iraq.

The US has gone back to war in Iraq and entered Syria's civil war over the murder of two journalists and bombastic threats from a militia that US intelligence says poses little threat (FAIR Media Advisory, 9/12/14). Why have these new wars commenced with so little debate?

The real story of the rise of ISIS shows that US interventions in Iraq and Syria were central in creating the chaos in which the group has thrived. But that story doesn't get told in US corporate media. Nor will you often see the likes of Prashad or Cockburn on network television or in major newspapers. The informed input of actual experts on the region, who don't march in lockstep with Washington elites, might put a crimp in the public's support for the war, support largely informed by pro-war pundits (see page 8) and reporters, and the familiar retired military brass—often with ties to the military/industrial complex (**Nation**, 9/16/14).

With pundits reflexively calling for more attacks, there's virtually no one to note that US wars have been catastrophic for the people in the targeted countries—from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya. Nor have we heard much about the catastrophic policy failures that have resulted from the wars, which have not even achieved the sort of anti-democratic "stability" Washington actually prefers (**Extra!**, 3/11), let alone the thriving democracy of US official rhetoric. In a media culture that sees military violence, against all evidence, as an effective way to solve conflicts, sources who point out the folly in that thinking will not be readily welcomed.

And so here we are again. The journalistic mistakes made in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks are being repeated today. The same press corps and commentariat that cheered the earlier aggressions have returned, largely intact.

"Kill 'em," Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) barked at **Fox News** host Greta Van Susteren (9/2/14). "They've got to be destroyed." Bill Kristol glibly told radio host Laura Ingraham (8/25/14) that the US should try bombing ISIS: "What's the harm of bombing them at least for a few weeks and seeing what happens?"

And McCain's hawkish Senate comrade Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) told **Fox News** (9/14/14) that if ISIS wasn't stopped with a full-spectrum war in Syria, we were all going to die: "This president needs to rise to the occasion before we all get killed back here at home."

Face the Nation anchor Bob Schieffer (9/14/14) quoted Graham's hair-on-fire rant—not to question the lawmaker's grip on reality, but to suggest the US wasn't doing enough to counter this threat: "So, should there be more of a sense of urgency about meeting this threat? We haven't had any airstrikes in it seems like a week." ■

CounterSpin

The News Behind the Headlines



CounterSpin is FAIR's weekly radio show, hosted by Janine Jackson, Steve Rendall and Peter Hart. It's heard on more than 135 noncommercial stations across the United States and Canada.

CounterSpin provides a critical examination of the major stories every week, and exposes what the mainstream media might have missed in their own coverage.

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Missing perspectives on Obama's attack on ISIS

Debating How— Not Whether— to Launch a New War

by Peter Hart

Moments after Barack Obama's September 10 primetime address laying out a military plan to attack ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria, CNN featured a debate between Republican Sen. John McCain and former White House press secretary Jay Carney. The somewhat contentious exchange went viral. "Carney, McCain Spar on CNN Over ISIS Strategy" was the headline on the NPR website. "John McCain Has a Huge Fight With Jay Carney on CNN" was how it was billed at the *Huffington Post*.

But to anyone who actually listened, the two did not represent especially divergent positions: Both agreed that Obama should launch military attacks, although McCain—to no one's surprise—thought they could be more aggressive.

The fact that such a narrow disagreement could be seen as a "huge fight" speaks volumes about how little debate exists in corporate media over this new phase of the "war on terror."

To gauge the range of debate over the White House airstrikes plan, FAIR surveyed some of the key discussion/debate shows during what should have been the moment of most intense consideration of military options: Right after the release of the ISIS video beheadings of two American journalists, through Obama's televised address and right up to the beginning of US airstrikes on Syria.

From September 7 through September 21, FAIR analyzed the major Sunday chat shows (NBC's *Meet the Press*, CBS's *Face the Nation*, ABC's *This Week*, Fox News Sunday and CNN's *State of the Union*), several cable news shows (the first hour of CNN's *Situation Room*, MSNBC's *Hardball* and Fox's *Special Report*) and the *PBS NewsHour*.

The study analyzed the interview and debate/discussion segments that were focused on the question of attacking Iraq and Syria. Soundbites in taped segments were not counted.

Guests were coded by partisan affiliation and relevant occupation, and whether or not they expressed a clear position on the US military strikes in Iraq, Syria or both. Sources were coded as being pro-military intervention, anti-military intervention or taking no strong position on the question.



Chuck Todd (right) interviews two senators (from left, Ron Johnson and Chris Murphy) taking "opposite sides" on Obama's ISIS war—though both support the war.

In total, 205 sources appeared on the programs discussing military options in Syria and Iraq. Just six of these, or 3 percent, voiced opposition to US military intervention, while 125 (61 percent) spoke in favor of US war.

On the high-profile Sunday talkshows, 89 guests were invited to talk about the war. But just one, *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel, could be coded as an anti-war guest.

The guestlists for all the programs leaned heavily on politicians and military insiders. Current and former US government officials—politicians and White House officials—made up 37 percent of the

guestlists. Current and former military officials accounted for 7 percent of sources. Journalists of various stripes—pundits, columnists and correspondents—made up 46 percent of the sources who appeared on the shows to discuss the wars.

Democrats outnumbered Republicans, 53-36, mostly due to the heavy presence of Obama administration officials advocating for White House policy.

The question of whether to launch an attack seemed almost not worth talking about. As MSNBC host Chris Matthews (9/9/14) put it, "When it comes to down to how we fight this, everybody seems to be for air attacks, airstrikes. Everybody is for drone attacks." If by "everyone," he meant the lawmakers who appear on the talkshow circuit, he was virtually correct. The most vocal critics of the Obama plan were the hawkish lawmakers who found it insufficient or strategically incoherent.

Another main point of contention was whether Congress needed to approve airstrikes on Iraq, Syria or both, or whether the executive branch could carry these out independently. This led to discussions that had the appearance of a debate, but were really just about the mechanics of warmaking.

"In the studio with me now are two members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who are on opposite sides of the president's request," *Meet the Press* host Chuck Todd explained as he introduced senators Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Ron Johnson (R-Wisc.) (9/21/14). But "opposite sides" referred to a vote on funding certain anti-government forces in Syria; Murphy voted no, telling Todd that while he was "broadly

supportive of the president's strategy," he was not sure that "getting involved in a very complicated sectarian civil war in Syria is necessary to the overall strategy." So the debate was between two advocates for war who disagree on the type of war the United States should wage.

PBS NewsHour liberal Mark Shields (9/26/14) declared, "The absence of a debate in this country is a shame." He was referring only to Congress abdicating its responsibility to weigh in on war, but the same principle could be applied to the elite media. ■

Research assistance: Aldo Guerrero

Raed Jarrar on ISIS

'We Can't Defeat Extremism by Dropping More Bombs'

Broadcast news in this country has never lacked for chest-thumping pundits advocating from their armchairs for wars neither they nor anyone they know would have to fight. But the rise to international attention of the Islamic State, or ISIS, and wide circulation of video evidence of its violence have unleashed a combination of media war- and fear-mongering that's easy to mark as irresponsible, whatever one thinks the correct course of action to be.

Confusing the public about the situation and the possible responses threatens not only lives, but also our ideas about what sort of world it's possible to work toward. CounterSpin's Janine Jackson (9/19/14) discussed media and extremism with Raed Jarrar, policy impact coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee.

CounterSpin: CBS's Bob Schieffer [**Face the Nation**, 9/14/14; **FAIR Blog**, 9/15/14] says: "We have no choice now. Whatever it takes and, as the president has said, however long it takes, this evil must be eradicated. These forces must be destroyed."

A lot rides on the presentation of ISIS as singular, uniquely barbaric and especially threatening to us—though, Tony Blair insisted recently, ISIS has nothing to do with the US and British invasion of Iraq. Some people clearly want to hear a story about good guys—including us—versus evil forces. What's a clearer way, though, for Americans to situate ISIS, or the Islamic State, within sectarianism in Iraq today?

Raed Jarrar: There are so many myths that have been thrown around in the last few weeks. One of them, as you mentioned, is that there's one bad guy that we are stepping in with our good allies to save the day and get rid of. And this is not an accurate description of the situation in Iraq or in Syria. Although ISIS, this terrorist group, has been committing gross violations of human rights and other atrocities, other groups in Iraq—the ones we call our allies—have been also committing similar atrocities.



AFSC's Raed Jarrar: "I don't think the crimes committed by ISIS in any way are unique."

Actually, a couple of days ago, one of our allies beheaded Sunni militants, and we didn't see much about that in US media. A few weeks ago, there was a massacre committed by one of the Shiite militias backed by the Iraqi government. This massacre was documented by Human Rights Watch and other international organizations. We didn't hear about that, either. We never hear about violations and war crimes committed by the Iraqi government itself, or by other ethnic and sectarian militias in Iraq.

So that is one part of the problem: There is media focus on the crimes of one faction in Iraq without focusing on other factions. I don't think the crimes committed by ISIS in any way are unique. They are bloody, but they are similar to other crimes committed by others in Iraq, and especially those who we are funding by taxpayers' money.

The other point that is a myth is that we can defeat ISIS through military action. And that is, I think, one of the byproducts of our foreign policy, which brings up the question that you mentioned: We have to act! We either not act at all or we have to act by dropping bombs. It doesn't seem like there are any shades of gray between not acting and dropping bombs on other nations.

And this myth that we can bomb Iraq into stability and bomb Iraq into modera-

tion, that we can destroy extremism by throwing more bombs on Iraq, there is no evidence that this can happen. The US has tried that many times in the past. Actually, the US tried it while the US had more than 100,000 troops on the ground in Iraq. There was a military engagement with ISIS, used to be called ISI at the time (the Islamic State in Iraq), and obviously the group was not defeated.

I think this is what many people in the US and around the world have been saying for a long time: We can't defeat extremism by dropping more bombs. Actually, dropping more bombs and having US military intervention fuels extremism.

CS: And then what about the idea that military strikes would represent the beginning of US intervention, as though what the US involvement has been up to this point has been doing nothing?

RJ: Correct. I mean, that is another myth that is being sold to the US public, that the United States is a bystander, a charity organization. We're looking at this poor country falling apart and we're stepping in to feed some hungry children, we're stepping in to stop these warring factions from killing each other. This is not the story.

The story is that most of Iraq's destruction—to its national identity or infrastructure or its state and state institutions, including the military—most of it happened either directly by the US, it was caused directly by US intervention that started in 1991 and has never stopped. Or it happened under the US's watch by other players during the US occupation.

So to claim that we're stepping in to help Iraq is not accurate, because the US has no moral or legal authority left in Iraq, because it is blamed for many of Iraq's problems. It is seen as a part of the problem, not a part of the solution. I think that the US has to take a few steps back, stop interfering in Iraq militarily—directly or through arming and training different factions in Iraq and Syria—and

work through international mechanisms to try to reach long-term solutions.

CS: Let me just ask you, finally, even though very few in the media are really talking about non-military responses, my inbox tells me that lots of individuals and organizations are. Groups including Peace Action, United for Peace and Justice, organized congressional call-ins just recently.

People seem to understand the idea that not bombing doesn't mean doing nothing. I wonder if you could just speak briefly to the idea of beyond not sending military, which is itself a positive action, what could be some of the other core elements of a long-term non-military response?

RJ: The first and most important thing to do is to follow a no-harm strategy, or do-no-more-harm strategy, which [means] stopping any further US intervention. But in addition to that, political and social solutions, of course, would have a better impact. They are not as dramatic as dropping a bomb, but they will have the long-term impact.

And these include, for example, isolating extremist groups in Iraq—especially in Sunni provinces in Iraq—isolating them by re-engaging the majority of the public and political parties, and even armed groups, in the political process. Many of these groups have legitimate grievances that can be addressed by re-engaging them in the political process.

Now, if we do that, then we will draw a wedge between ISIS and other extremist groups, on the one hand, and more legitimate players in Iraq. If we drop bombs on them, we will unite them and we will make extremism even more popular, and these groups can recruit additional people.

There are other ideas about how to engage other Iraqis from other ethnicities and geographic areas, amazing ideas. But we can't work on diplomacy while we're dropping bombs. We can't work on diplomacy while we're training and funding ethnic and sectarian militias that have been committing atrocities with our money. We have to stop the intervention first, and then start listening to very smart and thoughtful long-term solutions. ■

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In post-9/11 conflicts, media often misidentify the victors

Propaganda Wars

by Patrick Cockburn

The four wars fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria over the past 12 years have all involved overt or covert foreign intervention in deeply divided countries. In each case, the involvement of the West exacerbated existing differences and pushed hostile parties towards civil war. In each country, all or part of the opposition has been hardcore jihadi fighters.

Whatever the real issues at stake, the interventions have been presented by politicians as primarily humanitarian, in support of popular forces against dictators and police states. Despite apparent military successes, in none of these cases have the local opposition and their backers succeeded in consolidating power or establishing stable states.

But there is another similarity that connects the four conflicts: More than most armed struggles, they have all been propaganda wars in which newspaper, television and radio journalists played a central role.

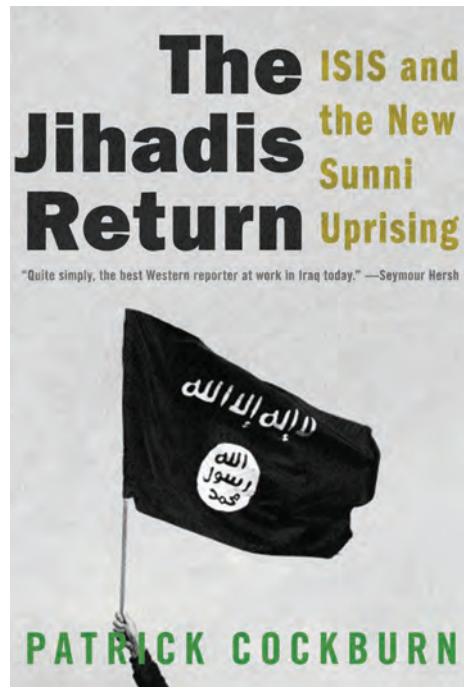
In every war, there is a difference between reported news and what really happened, but during these four campaigns, the outside world has been left with misconceptions even about the identity of the victors and the defeated.

In 2001, reports of the Afghan war gave the impression that the Taliban had been beaten decisively, even though there had been very little fighting. In 2003, there was a belief in the West that Saddam Hussein's forces had been crushed when in fact the Iraqi army, including the units of the elite Special Republican Guard, had simply disbanded and gone home.

In Libya in 2011, the rebel militiamen, so often shown on television firing truck-mounted heavy machine guns in the general direction of the enemy, had only a limited role in the overthrow of Moammar Gadhafi, who was mostly brought down by NATO air strikes. In Syria in 2011 and 2012, foreign leaders and journalists repeatedly and vainly predicted the imminent defeat of Bashar al-Assad. These misperceptions explain

why there have been so many surprises and unexpected reversals of fortune.

The Taliban rose again in 2006 because it hadn't been beaten as comprehensively as the rest of the world imagined. At the end of 2001, I was able to drive, nervously but safely, from Kabul to Kandahar. But when I tried to make the same journey in 2011, I could go no farther south on the main road than the last police station on the outskirts of Kabul.



In Tripoli two years ago, hotels were filled to capacity with journalists covering Gadhafi's fall and the triumph of the rebel militias. But state authority still hasn't been restored there. In the summer of 2013, Libya almost stopped exporting oil because the main ports on the Mediterranean had been seized as a result of a mutiny among militiamen. The prime minister, Ali Zeidan, threatened to bomb "from the air and the sea" the oil tankers the militiamen were using to sell oil on the black market. Soon Zeidan himself was forced to flee the country.

Libya's descent into anarchy was scarce-

ly covered by the international media. They had long since moved on to Syria, and more recently to Egypt. Iraq, home a few years ago to so many foreign news bureaus, has also dropped off the media map, although up to a thousand Iraqis are killed each month, mostly as a result of the bombing of civilian targets. When it rained for a few days in Baghdad in January, the sewer system, supposedly restored at a cost of \$7 billion, couldn't cope: Some streets were knee-deep in dirty water and sewage.

In Syria, many opposition fighters who had fought heroically to defend their communities turned into licensed bandits and racketeers when they took power in rebel-held enclaves.

It wasn't that reporters were factually incorrect in their descriptions of what they had seen. But the very term "war reporter," though not often used by journalists themselves, helps explain what went wrong. Leaving aside its macho overtones, it gives the misleading impression that war can be adequately described by focusing on military combat.

Irregular or guerrilla wars are always intensely political, and none more so than the strange stop-and-go conflicts that followed from 9/11. This doesn't mean that what happened on the battlefield was insignificant, but only that it requires interpretation.

In 2003, television showed columns of Iraqi tanks smashed and on fire after US air strikes on the main highway north of Baghdad. If it hadn't been for the desert background, viewers could have been watching pictures of the defeated German army in Normandy in 1944. But I climbed into some of the tanks and could see that they had been abandoned long before they were hit. This mattered because it showed that the Iraqi army wasn't prepared to fight and die for Saddam.

It also pointed to the likely future of the allied occupation. Iraqi soldiers, who didn't see themselves as having been defeated,

expected to keep their jobs in post-Saddam Iraq, and were enraged when the Americans dissolved their army. Well-trained officers flooded into the resistance, with devastating consequences for the occupying forces: A year later, the Americans controlled only islands of territory in Iraq.

In one respect, war reporting is easier than other types of journalism: The melodrama of events drives the story and attracts an audience. It may be risky at times, but the correspondent talking to a camera with exploding shells and blazing military vehicles behind him knows his report will feature prominently in any newscast. “If it bleeds, it leads” is an old American media adage. The drama of battle inevitably dominates the news, but is oversimplified if only part of what is happening is disclosed.

These oversimplifications were especially stark and deceptive in Afghanistan and Iraq, when they dovetailed with political propaganda that demonized first the Taliban and later Saddam Hussein as evil incarnate. They helped cast the conflict in black and white, as a struggle between good and evil, something that was particularly easy in the US amidst the hysterical atmosphere following 9/11. The crippling inadequacies of the opposition in these countries were simply ignored.

By 2011, the complexity of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan was evident to journalists in Baghdad and Kabul, if not necessarily to their editors in London and New York. But by then, the reporting of the wars in Libya and Syria was demonstrating a different, though equally potent, form of naïveté.

A version of the spirit of 1968 prevailed: Antagonisms that predated the Arab Spring were suddenly said to be obsolete; a brave new world was being created at hectic speed. Commentators optimistically suggested that, in the age of satellite television and the Internet, traditional forms of repression—censorship, imprisonment, torture, and execution—could no longer secure a police state’s power; they might even be counterproductive. State control of information and communication had been subverted by blogs and mobile phones; **YouTube** provided the means to expose, in the most graphic and immediate way, the crimes and violence of security forces.

In March 2011, mass arrests and torture effortlessly crushed the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain. Innovations in infor-

mation technology may have changed the odds marginally in favor of the opposition, but not enough to prevent counterrevolution, as the military coup in Egypt on July 3, 2013, underscored. The initial success of street demonstrations led to overconfidence and excessive reliance on spontaneous action; the need for leadership, organization, unity and policies that amounted to more than a vague humanitarian agenda all went by the wayside.

History, including the histories of their own countries, had little to teach this generation of radicals and would-be revolutionaries. They drew no lessons from what had happened when Nasser seized power in Egypt in 1952, and didn’t ask whether the Arab uprisings of 2011 might have parallels with the European revolutions of 1848, easy victories that were swiftly reversed.

Many members of the intelligentsia in Libya and Syria seemed to live and think within the echo chamber of the Internet. Few expressed practical ideas about the way forward. Conviction that a toxic government is the root of all evil is the public position of most oppositions, but it is dangerous to trust one’s own propaganda.

The Iraqi opposition genuinely believed that Iraq’s sectarian and ethnic problems stemmed from Saddam, and that once he was gone, all would be well. The opposition in Libya and Syria believed that the regimes of Gadhafi and Assad were so demonstrably bad that it was counterrevolutionary to question whether what came after them would be better.

Foreign reporters have by and large shared these opinions. I recall mentioning some of the failings of the Libyan militia-men to a Western journalist: “Just remember who the good guys are,” she replied reprovingly.

Good guys they may have been, but there was something troubling about the ease with which oppositionists provided media-friendly locations, whether in Tahrir Square or at the frontlines in Libya. Protesters in Benghazi would hold up placards written in perfect English, which they often could not read themselves, for the benefit of television viewers.

At Ajdabiya, two hours’ drive along the main coast road south of Benghazi, foreign journalists often outnumbered opposition fighters, and cameramen had to maneuver their correspondents so the predominance of

the press wasn’t evident to their audience. The main danger there was being run over by a pickup truck fitted with a heavy machine gun: The drivers often panicked when a shell exploded in the distance.

The Libyan militiamen were effective when they were fighting for their own cities and towns, but without an air umbrella they wouldn’t have lasted more than a few weeks. Media focus on colorful skirmishes diverted attention from the central fact that Gadhafi was overthrown by military intervention on the part of the US, Britain and France.

There is nothing surprising about all this. Public appearances by Western leaders with smiling children or cheering soldiers are invariably contrived to show them in a sympathetic light. Why shouldn’t Arab rebels have the same public relations skills? ■

*Patrick Cockburn is Middle East correspondent for the London **Independent**, and previously wrote for the **Financial Times**. This piece is excerpted from his book *The Jihadist Return: Isis and the New Sunni Uprising*, available from **OR Books**.*

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Narrowing Our Options

by Sarah Jaffe

The average American would perhaps be forgiven for thinking that the 2016 presidential election was already underway—that the Democratic Party, at least, had held its primaries and chosen its candidate: Hillary Clinton.

Despite the fact that Clinton has, at press time, yet to declare that she is running for any office, most of the media treats her candidacy—and frontrunner status—as a foregone conclusion. Despite the fact that at present, she holds no elected or appointed office, having left her post as secretary of State on February 1, 2013, her every move is followed intently by the press.

Between September 10 and September 17, 2014, for example, **CNN.com** ran articles headlined “Hillary Clinton Returns to Iowa; So Is This a Fresh Start or Deja Vu?” (9/15/14), “Bernie Sanders Challenges Hillary Clinton: ‘Is [She] Going to Say That?’” (9/10/14) and “Iowa Democrats to Hillary Clinton: Slam the Door in Iowa, Win the Nomination” (9/17/14), among others. Video titles included “Hillary Clinton, Madam President?” (9/12/14) and “Clinton Acknowledges What We All Knew” (9/15/14).

A Nexis search for news articles with “Hillary Clinton” in the headline between August 17 and September 17 turned up 1,383 results. Major newspapers in that month had 20 headlines about Clinton.

For comparison, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), another female politician with a recent book who is rumored to be a future presidential contender, appeared in two headlines in major newspapers in that same time period, and 210 headlines in all news sources. Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate minority leader facing a tight race for re-election this November, appeared in just four headlines over that month in major newspapers, and 208 headlines across all news sources collected by Nexis.

President Barack Obama just barely got more press than Clinton, managing only 1,461 headlines, despite giving major speeches about the economy and foreign

policy in that time.

It's not just the corporate press that's in on the Clinton fest, either. Even award-winning nonprofit progressive magazine **Mother Jones** has an entire Hillary Clinton vertical on its website, alongside its verticals for “Dark Money,” “Iraq,” “China,” “Race and Ethnicity” and “Tech.” No other politician, not even the president, has one.

What's with the obsession? Why do we care what Hillary Clinton thinks of the Washington football team's name (**FusionTV**, 7/29/14) or the situation in Ferguson, Missouri (**Washington Post**, 8/29/14), or ISIS (**New York Daily News**, 9/10/14)?

Perhaps ISIS is understandable—she was, after all, the secretary of State not that long ago. But as for the rest, it seems as though many news outlets want Clinton to act not just like a candidate for office, but, as Megan Carpentier at the **Guardian** (8/27/14) pointed out, like “the current president of the United States.”

We've got a long way to go before that might come to pass, though, and the media's treatment of Clinton as the inevitable winner does a disservice to current issues, to the candidates for office in the more immediate 2014 midterm elections, and most of all, to voters who, at some point two years in the future, want to have more options from which to choose for the presidency.

In 1968, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, two communications scholars, studied the presidential election through the news media in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, comparing the issues given prominence in a combination of local and national media with the issues regarded as important by the voters who used that media to inform themselves. They found that the public's opinion of what mattered mirrored the press's ranking almost exactly, and coined the term *agenda-setting* to describe what happened there.

In the years since, McCombs writes in the 2005 Oxford anthology *The Press*, hundreds of empirical studies have confirmed



Hillary Clinton: right-wing media mogul Rupert Murdoch says he could live with her as president.

the agenda-setting ability of the media. They have also found evidence that “the press is not only frequently successful in telling us *what* to think about, the press also is frequently successful in telling us *how* to think about it.”

This is not to argue that the media brainwash all who consume them, injecting us with opinions that we parrot without thinking. However, it is worth noting that the more often a particular issue or person is in the news, the more likely the public is to form an opinion about that person—positive or negative. When a person like Clinton is repeatedly portrayed as a candidate for an office, indeed the frontrunner, we are pushed to believe that this is the case, whether we like it or not.

New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen has written extensively about what he considers a defining feature of today's pundit-heavy political media: the worship of savviness. “In politics, our journalists believe, it is better to be savvy than it is to be honest or correct on the facts,” he wrote in 2011 (**PressThink**, 8/26/11). “Savviness is what journalists admire in others. Savvy is what they themselves dearly wish to be. (And to be unsavvy is far worse than being wrong.)”

A perfect example of such savvy coverage is the **Washington Post's The Fix** blog. Nia-Malika Henderson (9/19/14) takes an actual occurrence—Clinton giving a speech at a Democratic Party event in support of

women candidates in this year's midterm elections—and spins it into an analysis of Clinton's future presidential campaign. Clinton's speech, Henderson writes, is significant not just for the candidates who are actually running in tight races for election this year, "but for what it reveals about what might be a key argument for a Clinton presidency when (oops, if) she runs in 2016."

That cute "oops, if" functions as a wink to the reader, who is assumed to be in on the joke. We all know Clinton is inevitable (despite the fact that she hasn't declared anything), so we might as well skip right over the races happening this year to analyze what might happen two years from now.

Far from a declaration of political bias, savviness goes hand in hand with the pretense of objectivity. If all the in-the-know political watchers just know Clinton is going to run for office and continue to call her the frontrunner, then it's just a fact that journalists can report on. When called on it, they point to other stories from other supposedly objective outlets, and to polls that show Clinton in the lead.

But as Thomas Patterson, who studies government and the press at Harvard, pointed out in his book *Out of Order*, poll stories are "entirely manufactured" by the press: It puts the items on the agenda, pays the pollster, asks the questions and then reports on the answers.

Covering the horse race of political campaigns is easy, Rosen noted, because it allows reporters and pundits to remain "objective" and to avoid talking about anything sticky, like real issues.

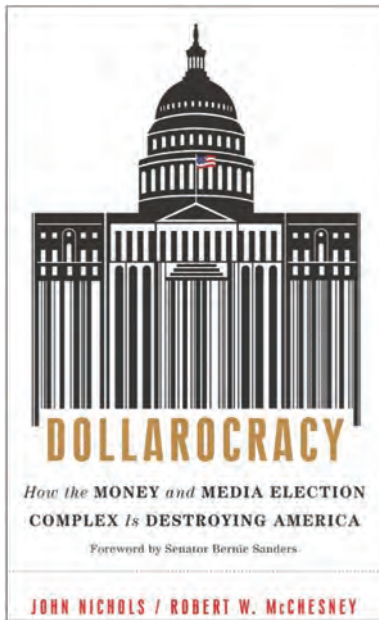
It is real issues that are kept out of the news—and out of the electoral process itself—when well-heeled centrist politicians like Clinton are fetishized by the savvy press. Clinton is a favorite of Wall Street, widely seen as more hawkish than Obama, and unlikely to demand change to the status quo (**Huffington Post**, 6/24/14).

As long as the media continue to laugh off Vermont independent Bernie Sanders, we won't hear much about whether single-payer healthcare would be preferable to the patchwork that exists under the Affordable Care Act. As long as Elizabeth Warren gets one headline for every ten about Clinton, we won't hear about breaking up the Wall Street banks. And that's just fine with the corporate media. It allows them to stay in power.

Even right-wing **Fox News** honcho Rupert Murdoch, who financially backed

Clinton's Senate campaigns, says he could "live with Hillary" as president (**Fortune**, 4/10/14).

The continued production of substance-free political speculation comes at a cost to our democracy; in his book *The Vanishing Voter*, Patterson traces the steady decline in US voter turnout to, among other things, the endless drone of campaign coverage. As John Nichols and Robert McChesney point out in their 2013 book *Dollarocracy*, countries that have shorter, well-defined campaign cycles also have higher voter turnout.



Nichols and McChesney: The ad dollars that flow from political candidates are a cash bonanza for broadcast outlets.

But media companies, Nichols and McChesney explain, have a particular incentive to keep the campaign coverage flowing. The ad dollars that flow from political candidates—and, now more than ever, from "independent" groups—are a cash bonanza for broadcast outlets. Meanwhile, the ongoing financial crisis in journalism has meant layoffs for thousands of enterprise journalists—while political analysis and punditry are cheap.

Money, too, helps decide which politicians the media will take seriously. Though Hillary Clinton hasn't had to disclose her net worth since she left public office, we know that her name still rakes in the dollars—the Ready for Hillary Super PAC, which is not legally allowed to coordinate with the (as yet undeclared, remember) candidate, revealed in July of this year that it had raised \$2.5 million in the past three months (**Bloomberg**, 7/15/14). When it

comes to money, anyway, Clinton is serious business.

But money, we should remember, isn't everything. Just this summer, Fordham law professor Zephyr Teachout mounted a significant primary challenge to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in two months with around \$200,000 in funds. (The governor had upwards of \$35 million.) While she didn't win, her 34 percent of the statewide vote should have been a sharp rebuke to all the pundits who shrugged her off as hopeless.

There may be candidates out there right now considering a run for the presidency who have brilliant ideas we have yet to hear, who could motivate the grassroots, whose ideas would challenge the wealthy and powerful who, poll after poll shows, Americans think have too much control over our politics. When they are told, over and over, in the pages of major newspapers and on broadcast and cable news and even public radio (**NPR**, 9/15/14) that one candidate is inevitable, that she is the far-ahead frontrunner, will they decide not even to run?

We should ask who benefits from the endless coverage of Hillary Clinton's every move and word. It is most certainly not our democracy. ■

Sarah Jaffe is a staff writer at *In These Times* and the co-host of *Dissent* magazine's *Belabored* podcast.

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Business as Usual Is a Disaster

by Janine Jackson

A federal judge has ruled that recklessness and negligence in pursuit of profit led to the 2010 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig that killed 11 people and dumped more than 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico—the worst oil spill in US history.

US District Court Judge Carl Barbier found primary leaseholder BP “grossly negligent,” but also cited negligence by Halliburton, which served as cement contractor, and rig owner Transocean.

One would hope that with Barack Obama talking about expanding offshore drilling, media would take seriously the judge’s conclusion that the Deepwater disaster was not a matter of accidental missteps by a few “bad apples,” but implicates business as usual for an entire industry, as well as those agencies meant to regulate it.

Newspaper reports led with the fact that a finding of gross negligence by BP “could quadruple the billions of dollars in penalties the oil giant faces” (**Times-Picayune**, 9/5/14)—with emphasis on how this further beleaguers a company that, in the words of one analyst (**Washington Post**, 9/5/14), “has already paid dearly for the accident.”

“The significance of today’s ruling is that when you put it together with how much was spilled, it considerably increases the size of a possible fine,” one source (**LA Times**, 9/5/14) explained.

But the costs to BP—which the **New York Times** (9/6/14) noted will likely be much lower than the \$18 billion now being discussed, and in any event won’t be paid for years—are not the most salient point. By stating that—far from a “glitch” in a few frenzied moments—the spill was caused by a series of decisions, made over a period of time, by three of the largest operators in the world, the ruling “demonstrates the lack of safety of all existing offshore oil operations and severely challenges the notion that those activities should be allowed to expand,” argues Antonia Juhasz (Institute for Public Accuracy, 9/5/14), author of



The Deepwater Horizon disaster resulted from a “conscious disregard of known risks,” a federal judge found.

Black Tide: the Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill.

Based on years of evidence review, Barbier’s 153-page ruling concluded that BP acted with “conscious disregard of known risks” and made decisions “motivated by profit,” including ignoring leaks in the well’s casing, forgoing critical tests that would have revealed problems (and offering suspiciously optimistic interpretations of the tests they did run), and rushing to drill the last 100 feet of the well using unsafe practices.

A BP engineer was convicted for “deleting incriminating emails” about the spill (**Times-Picayune**, 9/21/14); a phone call between a BP executive and an engineer in Houston, in which they “discussed the results of a pressure test that should have prompted quick action” (**New York Times**, 9/5/14), was omitted from the company’s own investigative report.

Certainly many people guilty of such crimes would appreciate coverage describing them as “legal setbacks” (**New York Times**, 9/6/14).

Some media suggest that BP is the victim of false claims. “BP Made a Mess in the Gulf, but Still Shouldn’t Get Fleeced,” argued a **Times-Picayune** piece (9/10/14), referring to “an unseemly frenzy over an

uncapped gusher of cash.” (Reporter Jim Varney has also called climate change “a faux environmental crisis”—**Times-Picayune**, 9/24/14.)

In 2010, **60 Minutes** (5/16/10) interviewed Deepwater crew member Mike Williams, who recounted how workers were told how much money was being lost by delays, and pushed to “pick up the pace,” a supervisor dismissing damage to a vital piece of safety equipment as “no big deal,” and “chest-bumping” battles between Transocean and BP officials about who was in charge.

Sadly, the program’s latest report (9/7/14) portrayed BP as “the victim of Gulf Coast swindlers” who have the company “over a barrel.”

Talk of litigious excess implies that any real harm has already been addressed. But the impacts of environmental disasters—on wildlife, ecosystems and local economies—take years to assess. Beyond initial accounts of thousands of dead fish,



Oil-soaked birds are followed by years of less visible ecological damage.

birds and mammals, for example, University of South Florida scientists in 2013 discovered a massive die-off of foraminifera, tiny organisms that form the base of the aquatic food chain. As **Tampa Bay Times’** Craig Pittman (4/4/13) reported:

Although initially some pundits said the spill wasn’t as bad as everyone feared, further scientific research has found that corals in the Gulf died. Anglers hauled in fish with tattered fins and strange lesions. And dolphins continue dying.

Most media omitted discussion of the ongoing damage caused by the Deepwater disaster from stories about who was to blame. BP, meanwhile, has expanded drilling operations in the Gulf (**Washington Post**, 9/5/14). ■

US Chemical Safety Board

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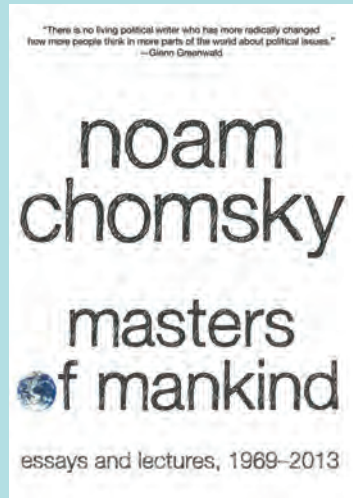
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