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Inside the Invisible Government: War, Propaganda, Clinton and Trump

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The American journalist, Edward Bernays, is often described as the man who invented modern propaganda. The nephew of Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psycho-analysis, it was Bernays who coined the term "public relations" as a euphemism for spin and its deceptions.

In 1929, he persuaded feminists to promote cigarettes for women by smoking in the New York Easter Parade – behaviour then considered outlandish. One feminist, Ruth Booth, declared, "Women! Light another torch of freedom! Fight another sex taboo!" Bernays' influence extended far beyond advertising. His greatest success was his role in convincing the American public to join the slaughter of the First World War.

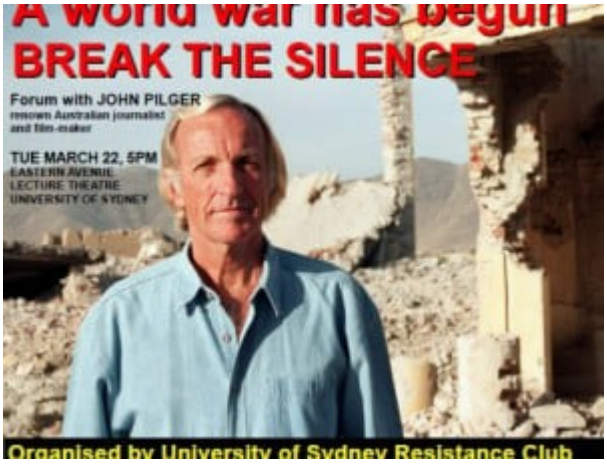
The secret, he said, was "engineering the consent" of people in order to "control and regiment [them] according to our will without their knowing about it".

He described this as "the true ruling power in our society" and called it an "invisible government".



Today, the invisible government has never been more powerful and less understood. In my career as a journalist and film-maker, I have never known propaganda to insinuate our lives

as it does now and to go unchallenged.



Award-winning author and filmmaker John Pilger (image right)

Imagine two cities. Both are under siege by the forces of the government of that country. Both cities are occupied by fanatics, who commit terrible atrocities, such as beheading people. But there is a vital difference. In one siege, the government soldiers are described as liberators by Western reporters embedded with them, who enthusiastically report their battles and air strikes. There are front page pictures of these heroic soldiers giving a V-sign for victory. There is scant mention of civilian casualties.

In the second city – in another country nearby – almost exactly the same is happening. Government forces are laying siege to a city controlled by the same breed of fanatics. The difference is that these fanatics are supported, supplied and armed by "us" – by the United States and Britain. They even have a media centre that is funded by Britain and America. Another difference is that the government soldiers laying siege to this city are the bad guys, condemned for assaulting and bombing the city – which is exactly what the good soldiers do in the first city.

Confusing? Not really. Such is the basic double standard that is the essence of propaganda. I am referring, of course, to the current siege of the city of Mosul by the government forces of Iraq, who are backed by the United States and Britain and to the siege of Aleppo by the government forces of Syria, backed by Russia. One is good; the other is bad.

What is seldom reported is that both cities would not be occupied by fanatics and ravaged by war if Britain and the United States had not invaded Iraq in 2003. That criminal enterprise was launched on lies strikingly similar to the propaganda that now distorts our understanding of the civil war in Syria. Without this drumbeat of propaganda dressed up as news, the monstrous ISIS and Al-Qaida and al-Nusra and the rest of the jihadist gang might not exist, and the people of Syria might not be fighting for their lives today.

Some may remember in 2003 a succession of BBC reporters turning to the camera and telling us that Blair was "vindicated" for what turned out to be the crime of the century. The US television networks produced the same validation for George W. Bush. Fox News brought on Henry Kissinger to effuse over Colin Powell's fabrications. The same year, soon after the invasion, I filmed an interview in Washington with Charles Lewis, the renowned American investigative journalist. I asked him, "What would have happened if the freest media in the world had seriously challenged what turned out to be crude propaganda?"

> He replied that if journalists had done their job, “there is a very, very good chance we would not have gone to war in Iraq”.

It was a shocking statement, and one supported by other famous journalists to whom I put the same question — Dan Rather of CBS, David Rose of the *Observer* and journalists and producers in the BBC, who wished to remain anonymous. In other words, had journalists done their job, had they challenged and investigated the propaganda instead of amplifying it, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children would be alive today, and there would be no ISIS and no siege of Aleppo or Mosul. There would have been no atrocity on the London Underground on 7th July 2005. There would have been no flight of millions of refugees; there would be no miserable camps.

When the terrorist atrocity happened in Paris last November, President Francoi Hollande immediately sent planes to bomb Syria – and more terrorism followed, predictably, the product of Hollande’s bombast about France being “at war” and “showing no mercy”. That state violence and jihadist violence feed off each other is the truth that no national leader has the courage to speak.

> “When the truth is replaced by silence,” said the Soviet dissident Yevtushenko, “the silence is a lie.”

The attack on Iraq, the attack on Libya, the attack on Syria happened because the leader in each of these countries was not a puppet of the West. The human rights record of a Saddam or a Gaddafi was irrelevant. They did not obey orders and surrender control of their country.

The same fate awaited Slobodan Milosevic once he had refused to sign an “agreement” that demanded the occupation of Serbia and its conversion to a market economy. His people were bombed, and he was prosecuted in The Hague. Independence of this kind is intolerable. As WikLeaks has revealed, it was only when the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad in 2009 rejected an oil pipeline, running through his country from Qatar to Europe, that he was attacked.

From that moment, the CIA planned to destroy the government of Syria with jihadist fanatics – the same fanatics currently holding the people of Mosul and eastern Aleppo hostage. Why is this not news? The former British Foreign Office official Carne Ross, who was responsible for operating sanctions against Iraq, told me: “We would feed journalists factoids of sanitised intelligence, or we would freeze them out. That is how it worked.”

The West’s medieval client, Saudi Arabia – to which the US and Britain sell billions of dollars’ worth of arms – is at present destroying Yemen, a country so poor that in the best of times, half the children are malnourished. Look on YouTube and you will see the kind of massive bombs – “our” bombs – that the Saudis use against dirt-poor villages, and against weddings, and funerals. The explosions look like small atomic bombs. The bomb aimers in Saudi Arabia work side-by-side with British officers. This fact is not on the evening news.

Propaganda is most effective when our consent is engineered by those with a fine education – Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Columbia — and with careers on the BBC, the *Guardia*n, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*. These organisations are known as the liberal media. They present themselves as enlightened, progressive tribunes of the moral zeitgeist. They

are anti-racist, pro-feminist and pro-LGBT.

And they love war.

While they speak up for feminism, they support rapacious wars that deny the rights of countless women, including the right to life. In 2011, Libya, then a modern state, was destroyed on the pretext that Muammar Gaddafi was about to commit genocide on his own people. That was the incessant news; and there was no evidence. It was a lie.

In fact, Britain, Europe and the United States wanted what they like to call “regime change” in Libya, the biggest oil producer in Africa. Gaddafi’s influence in the continent and, above all, his independence were intolerable. So he was murdered with a knife in his rear by fanatics, backed by America, Britain and France. Hillary Clinton cheered his gruesome death for the camera, declaring, “We came, we saw, he died!”

The destruction of Libya was a media triumph. As the war drums were beaten, Jonathan Freedland wrote in the *Guardian*: “Though the risks are very real, the case for intervention remains strong.” Intervention — what a polite, benign, Guardian word, whose real meaning, for Libya, was death and destruction.

According to its own records, Nato launched 9,700 « strike sorties » against Libya, of which more than a third were aimed at civilian targets. They included missiles with uranium warheads. Look at the photographs of the rubble of Misurata and Sirte, and the mass graves identified by the Red Cross. The Unicef report on the children killed says, « most [of them] under the age of ten ». As a direct consequence, Sirte became the capital of ISIS.

Ukraine is another media triumph. Respectable liberal newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian*, and mainstream broadcasters such as the BBC, NBC, CBS, CNN have played a critical role in conditioning their viewers to accept a new and dangerous cold war. All have misrepresented events in Ukraine as a malign act by Russia when, in fact, the coup in Ukraine in 2014 was the work of the United States, aided by Germany and Nato.

This inversion of reality is so pervasive that Washington’s military intimidation of Russia is not news; it is suppressed behind a smear and scare campaign of the kind I grew up withduring the first cold war. Once again, the Ruskies are coming to get us, led by another Stalin, whom *The Economist* depicts as the devil.

The suppression of the truth about Ukraine is one of the most complete news blackouts I can remember. The fascists who engineered the coup in Kiev are the same breed that backed the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Of all the scares about the rise of fascist anti-Semitism in Europe, no leader ever mentions the fascists in Ukraine – except Vladimir Putin, but he does not count.

Many in the Western media have worked hard to present the ethnic Russian-speaking population of Ukraine as outsiders in their own country, as agents of Moscow, almost never as Ukrainians seeking a federation within Ukraine and as Ukrainian citizens resisting a foreign-orchestrated coup against their elected government.

There is almost the *joie d’esprit* of a class reunion of warmongers. The drum-beaters of the *Washington Post* inciting war with Russia are the very same editorial writers who published the lie that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

To most of us, the American presidential campaign is a media freak show, in which Donald Trump is the arch villain. But Trump is loathed by those with power in the United States for reasons that have little to do with his obnoxious behaviour and opinions. To the invisible government in Washington, the unpredictable Trump is an obstacle to America's design for the 21st century.

This is to maintain the dominance of the United States and to subjugate Russia, and, if possible, China.

To the militarists in Washington, the real problem with Trump is that, in his lucid moments, he seems not to want a war with Russia; he wants to talk with the Russian president, not fight him; he says he wants to talk with the president of China. In the first debate with Hillary Clinton, Trump promised not to be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into a conflict. He said, "I would certainly not do first strike. Once the nuclear alternative happens, it's over." That was not news.

Did he really mean it? Who knows? He often contradicts himself. But what is clear is that Trump is considered a serious threat to the status quo maintained by the vast national security machine that runs the United States, regardless of who is in the White House. The CIA wants him beaten. The Pentagon wants him beaten. The media wants him beaten. Even his own party wants him beaten. He is a threat to the rulers of the world – unlike Clinton who has left no doubt she is prepared to go to war with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Clinton has the form, as she often boasts. Indeed, her record is proven. As a senator, she backed the bloodbath in Iraq. When she ran against Obama in 2008, she threatened to "totally obliterate" Iran. As Secretary of State, she colluded in the destruction of governments in Libya and Honduras and set in train the baiting of China. She has now pledged to support a No Fly Zone in Syria — a direct provocation for war with Russia. Clinton may well become the most dangerous president of the United States in my lifetime –a distinction for which the competition is fierce.

Without a shred of evidence, she has accused Russia of supporting Trump and hacking her emails. Released by WikiLeaks, these emails tell us that what Clinton says in private, in speeches to the rich and powerful, is the opposite of what she says in public. That is why silencing and threatening Julian Assange is so important. As the editor of WikiLeaks, Assange knows the truth. And let me assure those who are concerned, he is well, and WikiLeaks is operating on all cylinders.

Today, the greatest build-up of American-led forces since World War Two is under way – in the Caucasus and eastern Europe, on the border with Russia, and in Asia and the Pacific, where China is the target. Keep that in mind when the presidential election circus reaches its finale on November 8th, If the winner is Clinton, a Greek chorus of witless commentators will celebrate her coronation as a great step forward for women. None will mention Clinton's victims: the women of Syria, the women of Iraq, the women of Libya. None will mention the civil defence drills being conducted in Russia. None will recall Edward Bernays' "torches of freedom".

George Bush's press spokesman once called the media "complicit enablers".

Coming from a senior official in an administration whose lies, enabled by the media, caused

such suffering, that description is a warning from history.

In 1946, the Nuremberg Tribunal prosecutor said of the German media: “Before every major aggression, they initiated a press campaign calculated to weaken their victims and to prepare the German people psychologically for the attack. In the propaganda system, it was the daily press and the radio that were the most important weapons.”

This text is adapted from an address to the Sheffield Festival of Words, Sheffield, England.

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A propos :

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