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## Why the War Party Dominates the Media

By Justin Raimondo  
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Stephen Walt has an excellent albeit incomplete piece in *Foreign Policy* magazine that raises an important question: What accounts for the lack of anti-interventionist voices in the “mainstream” media?

Walt uses the term “realist” as a synonym for anti-interventionist, in part because *Foreign Policy* is a quasi-academic journal, and in part because Walt is one of the leading advocates of the realist school, i.e. the school that sees foreign policy as a function of states vying for power in a world where good intentions don’t account for much. “Realism,” of course, is a very broad label, one that includes figures as disparate as Henry Kissinger, on the one hand, and, Andrew Bacevich on the other. In short, it is not so much a stance as a methodology – a way of looking at the world from which one can derive a variety of different policy conclusions. Given this caveat, however, one can say that the realist school is inherently more cautious than its rivals – liberal internationalism and neoconservatism – when it comes to intervening in foreign conflicts.

In any case, Walt’s piece details the realist record when it comes to the issues of the past two decades or so and draws the inevitable conclusion: they’ve been right about practically everything. Realists warned us [pdf] against the folly of invading Iraq. They predicted [pdf] that nation-building in Afghanistan would come to naught. George Kennan, perhaps the quintessential realist, inveighed against the post-cold war push to expand NATO, accurately predicting that it would lead to unnecessary conflict with Russia and the renewed threat of World

War III. Critics of the Clinton era policy of “dual containment” in the Middle East – which sought to take on both Iran and Iraq simultaneously – were right that it would result in failure: one has only to look at the turmoil in the region today to see how people like Brent Scowcroft should have been heeded. The realists were correct once again when they said the Libyan “humanitarian intervention” was a) doomed to fail and b) completely phony because there never was a viable threat of “genocide” – it was all war propaganda from start to finish.

So, realists have a great record when it comes to predicting what would happen if we followed the advice of the Usual Suspects, and why it would happen. Yet they are nowhere visible in the Major Media, which employs platoons of neocon laptop bombardiers and cruise-missile liberals without a single regular spokesperson representing the realist view – the view, by the way, most favored by the American people.

Indeed, the War Party dominates the three major media outlets in the English-speaking print world, and on television as well. As far as the former is concerned, the *War Street Journal* is dominated by the neocons. At the *New York Times*, liberal internationalists – Thomas Friedman, Nicholas Kristof, and Roger Cohen – reign unchallenged. The *Washington Post* is the worst: there the editorial director, Fred Hiatt, is an unabashed warmonger, with the rest of the crew – Charles Krauthammer, Robert Kagan, Jackson Diehl, Marc Thiessen, Michael Gerson, Jennifer Rubin – dyed-in-the-wool neocons.

After pointing out this ideological imbalance, which is replicated in the world of television, Walt wonders how and why it came to be:

*“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with giving these writers a prominent platform, and many of the people I just mentioned are worth reading. What is bizarre is the absence of anyone presenting a more straightforward realist view of contemporary world politics....*

*“Why are these three elite outlets so allergic to realist views, given that realists have been (mostly) right about some very important issues, and the columnists they publish have often been wrong? **I don’t really know**, but I suspect it is because contemporary foreign-policy punditry is mostly about indulging hopes and promoting ideals, rather than providing hardheaded thinking about which policies are most likely to make the United States more prosperous and more secure. And because the United States is already so strong and safe, it can afford to pursue unrealistic goals again and again and let the unfortunate victims of our good intentions suffer the consequences.”* [Emphasis added]

Walt is right: he doesn’t really know. “Indulging hopes and promoting ideals” has nothing to do with it, at least as far as the ideologues of the War Party are concerned. The rank-and-file, such as they are, may be a different matter, but in reality there are very few of them: the interventionist lobby is top-heavy with generals as compared to foot-soldiers. That’s why there are very few pro-war rallies – except when, say, the American Enterprise Institute sponsors a get together.

That’s because the American people are naturally “isolationists,” that is they are usually reluctant to go along with the War Party’s schemes to invade this or that country. This is true not only

because they have little interest in what goes on overseas, but also because they're skeptical of our ability to affect events – not to mention that we have so many persistent problems here at home. Yet this is a “silent majority” that has little or no influence in policymaking and top political circles.

On the other hand, there are interest groups who profit enormously from interventionism, and/or who have ideological motives for promoting a policy of US intervention on a global scale – and they have an outsized influence on these power centers precisely because they are not silent. Not by a long shot.

Walt is correct to say that realist analyses have been correct on all the counts listed above, but the reality is that the success or failure of interventionist policies on the ground has little to do with subsequent policies pursued by governments. These policies are generated not by lessons learned from previous experience but by internal political factors.

The realist analysis of foreign policy holds that nations are motivated by their self-interest, or more accurately by what they perceive to be their self-interest. Yet nations are not floating abstractions or collective entities: they are ruled by individuals, and these individuals also obey the same laws – that is, they act in ways they imagine to be in their self-interest. And what does this self-interest consist of? It is nothing more or less than the continuation and expansion of their power.

In order to accomplish this goal, they must appease powerful domestic interest groups, and in the US these groups are well-known: Big Business, including especially investment banks who often have a financial stake in the “stability” (or instability) of certain governments, foreign lobbyists – the Israel lobby and the Saudi lobby being prominent examples – and immigrant populations from war-torn regions of the world, who often work assiduously for the “liberation” of the mother country by US force of arms. The arms industry plays a major role as a motivator and financier of interventionist organizations: they have an obvious interest in promoting America's role as the military guardian of “world order,” not to mention such boondoggles as NATO expansion.

In short, the “realists” only go so far: they fail to project their own basic assumption – that nations are motivated by a desire to keep and accumulate power – onto the domestic political scene, and bring it down to the micro level. It therefore often looks like realists see the dynamics of international relations as some kind of objective process, one that unfolds out of the realities of geography, national temperament, and the alleged laws of History.

True realism – of the most hardheaded sort – dictates that subjective factors (the ambitions, the vanity, and the moral failings of individuals) are the key to understanding what is happening on the world stage.

Furthermore, there is no such realm of “foreign policy” that can be separated out in any meaningful way from domestic politics: it is all one and the same. That's because no government – be it a democracy or a dictatorship – can continue in office without at least the passive consent

of the populace. And ruling elites are always seeking to shore up their support, and delay the day when they must accede to successors.

The role “foreign policy” plays in all this was summed up in the fourth act of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*. The king is on his death bed, giving advice to his son, and he proffers this pearl of wisdom, advice that has been followed by rulers well before and after the great playwright’s time:

*“I ... had a purpose now  
To lead out many to the Holy Land,  
Lest rest and lying still might make them look Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry, Be it  
thy course, to busy giddy minds  
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out, May waste the memory of the former days.”*

It was ever thus, and so it will ever be.

How does all this play out in the media? The American and British media have long been merely an extension of their respective governments: the revolving door that operates between the media and the State is beyond dispute. They socialize together, their kids go to the same schools, they marry each other, and – most importantly – they are both infused with the hubris endemic in Washington and the capitals of Europe, the idea that *they* have the knowledge and the moral authority to define and enforce the parameters of “world order.” The media is called the “Fourth Estate” for a very good reason – because they are very often part and parcel of the political class. Their function is to reinforce the narrative set out by government officials, and crush any dissent that arises in the hinterlands, and this role has been accentuated in recent times as the gap between ordinary people and the Washington-New York axis of affluence grows ever wider.

The financial, personal, and ideological links between the State and the Fourth Estate are myriad and expanding: they are all part of the same culture of imperialism that flourishes in the power centers of this country.

So don’t wonder why advocates of peace can’t find a niche in the “mainstream” media: the answer should be obvious enough. The solution is to build alternative media that can challenge the interventionist narrative and win the battle for public opinion.