



War Made Easy  
HOW PRESIDENTS & PUNDITS KEEP SPINNING US TO DEATH

FEATURING NORMAN SOLOMON  
NARRATED BY SEAN PENN

T R A N S C R I P T

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GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR: Let us pray that peace be now restored to the world, and that God will preserve it always. These proceedings are closed.

1940s NEWSREEL VOICEOVER: The final United Nations victory has been won. The war is over. Peace is here.

A crowd of two million witness the greatest parade of arms ever witnessed.

This is the news that electrified the world. Unconditional surrender. A new world of peace.

GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR: Today the guns are silent ... The skies no longer rain death ... The entire world is quietly at peace.

VOICES OF NEWS REPORTERS: On the way American infantrymen once again hit the road toward Korea's capital city of Seoul. On the way American infantry men ...

And US Marines were ordered into the Dominican Republic as a rebel force collapses ...

Meanwhile US Marines have also taken center stage in South Vietnam ...

This is what the war in Vietnam is all about ...

The first wave of Marines landed in Grenada ... encounter some twelve hundred US Marines would land in Grenada for several days along with ...

Most of the Libyans were terrified with last night's heavy bombing raid ...

President Bush has made the decision to neutralize Panama's General Manuel Noriega ...

Saddam Hussein's reign of terror ...

This is the beginning of the war in Iraq ...

SEAN PENN: Since World War II we have seen a dramatic escalation in United States military actions around the globe, ranging from missile strikes and rapid troop deployments, to all out wars and occupations.

The reasons for these military interventions have varied, each involving complex geopolitical interests in different parts of the world at different times in US history. But the public face of these wars has not reflected this complexity.

Over the past five decades deliberation and debate about US military actions have largely been left to a closed circle of elite Washington policy makers, politicians and bureaucrats whose rationales for war have come into public view only with the release of leaked or declassified documents, often years after the bombs have been dropped and the troops have come home.

In real time, officials have explained and justified these military operations to the American people by withholding crucial information about the actual reasons and potential costs of military action – again and again choosing to present an easier version of war's reality ... a steady and remarkably consistent storyline designed not to inform, but to generate and maintain support and enthusiasm for war.

Nationally syndicated columnist and author Norman Solomon began to notice the basic contours of this official storyline during the war in Vietnam.

NORMAN SOLOMON: As a teenager I read about the war in Vietnam as it escalated. I saw the footage on television.

VIETNAM ERA REPORTER (UNIDENTIFIED): In combat there are no niceties. A dead enemy soldier is simply an object to be examined for documents and then removed as quickly as possible, sometimes crudely.

NORMAN SOLOMON: People that I knew began to go to Vietnam in uniform of the US military. And as time went on I began to wonder, particularly as I became draft age, about the truthfulness of the statements coming from the White House and top officials in Washington.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: We fight for the principle of self-determination. That the people of South Vietnam should be able to choose their own course, choose it in free elections, without violence, without terror and without fear.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And through that process I began to really wonder about whether we were getting more truth or lies.

SEAN PENN: In the years since, Solomon has focused his attention on a set of striking parallels between the selling of the Vietnam War and the way Presidents have rallied public support for subsequent military actions.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Looking back on the Vietnam War, as I did many times, I had a very eerie feeling that while the names of the countries changed, and of course each circumstance was different, there were some parallels that cried out for examination.

Rarely if ever does a war just kind of fall down from the sky. The foundation needs to be laid, and the case is built, often with deception.

COLD WAR PROPAGANDA FILM: In the background was the growing struggle between two great powers to shape the post-war world. Already an iron curtain had dropped around Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria ...

It can't happen here? Well, this is what it looks like if it should ...

Chief of police is hustled off to jail. Public utilities are seized by fierce communists. Editor who operates under a free press, he goes to jail too ...

This will account for some of the enemy, but some will get through to your home ...

SEAN PENN: The use of propaganda to arouse public support for war is not new. Leaders throughout history have turned to propaganda to transform populations understandably wary of the costs of war into war's most ardent supporters – invoking images of nationalism, and channeling fear and anger towards perceived enemies and threats.

And in the United States since World War II, government attempts to win public support for military actions have followed a similar pattern.

FIFTIES PROPAGANDA FILM: We are living in an era marked by the growth of socialism. It's basic godless philosophy --

Lying, dirty ...

It's goal of world conquest --

Shrewd, godless ...

Its insidious tactics --

Murderous, determined ...

And its cunning strategy --

It's an international criminal conspiracy.

NORMAN SOLOMON: It's the same sort of message that's utilized today in often identical techniques.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH (MONTAGE): States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.

These are barbaric people.

Servants of evil.

The cult of evil.

A monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Whether it's the Soviet Union or Al Qaeda, it provides a way to legitimize US plans for war.

You have the comparison between the enemy leader and Hitler.

PETER JENNINGS, ABC: President Bush called Saddam Hussein a little Hitler again today.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: We are dealing with Hitler revisited.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Bin Laden and his terrorist allies have made their intentions as clear as Lenin and Hitler before them.

NORMAN SOLOMON: We don't get information that would help us put the images in perspective

PRESIDENT REAGAN: This mad dog of the Middle East ...

I find that he's not only a barbarian, but he's flakey.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: The drug indicted, drug related, indicted dictator of Panama ...

NEWS REPORTER (UNIDENTIFIED): And to support their claim that Noriega was out of control, ghoulish evidence of Satanic practices with dead animals that one official called “kinky.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Saddam Hussein is a homicidal dictator who is addicted to Weapons of mass destruction.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And as Aldous Huxley said long ago – it’s more powerful to often leave things out than it is to tell lies. For instance, quite often the US government directly helped the dictators that we’re now being told must be overthrown. And it’s that selectivity of history that’s a very effective form of propaganda.

SEAN PENN: This selective view of reality, buttressed by these fear-based appeals, represents a larger pre-war pattern: the repeated claim that the United States uses military force only with great reluctance --

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: We still seek no wider war.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: The United States does not start fights.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: America does not seek conflict.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: I don’t like to use military force.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W BUSH: Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly

SEAN PENN: And only for the most virtuous of reasons: first and foremost, to spread freedom and democracy.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: We want nothing for ourselves, only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The rhetoric of democracy is part of the process of convincing people that even though unpleasant things must be done sometimes in its name, like bombing other countries, democracy is really what it's about.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: The United States has been engaged in an effort to stop the advance of communism in Central America by doing what we do best: by supporting democracy.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And it's almost as though repeating it enough times makes it so.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: Our cause of liberty, our cause of freedom, our cause of compassion and understanding.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: People want democracy, peace, and the chance for a better life and dignity and freedom.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: We want to lift lives around the world, not take them.

NORMAN SOLOMON: These are forms of propaganda that are insidious, because they tug at our heartstrings.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: We must get the Kosovo refugees home safely. Mine fields will have to be cleared. Homes destroyed by Serb forces have to be rebuilt. Homeless people in need of food and medicine --

NORMAN SOLOMON: Of course, we want to help other people. These are propaganda messages that say, don't just think of yourself, America can't just be selfish. It makes bombing other people ultimately seem like an act of kindness, of altruism.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: Today, our armed forces joined our NATO allies in air strikes against Serbian forces responsible for the brutality in Kosovo.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: It was another devastating hit against Yugoslavia's capital.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: We are upholding our values, protecting our interests and advancing the cause of peace.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: Belgrade's largest heating plant up in flames.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: And even as planes of the multinational forces attack Iraq, I prefer to think of peace, not war.

NORMAN SOLOMON: If my motives are pure, then the fact that I'm killing people may not be too upsetting. As a matter of fact, it may indicate that I'm killing people for very good reasons.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: America will stand with the allies of freedom to support democratic movements in the Middle East and beyond, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And so, you have kind of the high-ground president with the lofty motives being proclaimed. We're told that peace is being sought, alternatives to war are being explored. And that's kind of, you know, the official story.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: And I am continuing and I am increasing the search for every possible path to peace.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Whether we're talking about President Johnson or President Nixon or the president today, you have one chief executive after another in the White House saying how much they love peace and hate war.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression, to preserve freedom and peace.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: No one, friend or foe, should doubt our desire for peace.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: The United States wants peace.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: We seek peace. We strive for peace.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Every president of the last half-century has gone out of his way to say that he wanted peace and wanted to avoid war.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: I pledged in my campaign for the presidency to end the war in a way that we could win the peace.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Even while ordering military action.

NIXON WHITE HOUSE TAPES:

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?

HENRY KISSINGER: That would drown about 200,000 people.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: Well, no, no, no. I'd rather use the nuclear bomb.

HENRY KISSINGER: That, I think, would just be too much.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: The nuclear bomb? Does that bother you?

HENRY KISSINGER: [inaudible]

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christ's sake.

NORMAN SOLOMON: So you have this paradox, in a way, of the President, who has just ordered massive military violence and lethal action by the Pentagon, turning around and saying, I want to oppose violence and promote peace.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: I respect your idealism. I share your concern for peace. I want peace as much as you do.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Actually, war becomes perpetual when it's used as a rationale for peace.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: We cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun, that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

NORMAN SOLOMON: As Americans, we like to think that we're not subjected to propaganda from our own government, certainly that we're not subjected to propaganda that's trying to drag the country into war, as in the case of setting the stage for the invasion of Iraq.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.

VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY: There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Weapons of mass destruction.

ARI FLEISCHER: Botulin, VX, Sarin, nerve agent.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Iraq and al-Qaeda.

RICHARD ARMITAGE: Al-Qaeda.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Iraq and al-Qaeda.

UNIDENTIFIED: Terrorism.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Cyber-attacks.

ARI FLEISCHER: Nuclear program.

COLIN POWELL: Biological weapons.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Cruise missiles, ballistic missiles.

ARI FLEISCHER: Chemical and biological weapons.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.

ARI FLEISCHER: President Bush has said Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Tony Blair has said Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Donald Rumsfeld has said Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Richard Butler has said they do. The United Nations has said they do. The experts have said they do. Iraq says they don't. You can choose who you want to believe.



NORMAN SOLOMON: The war propaganda function in the United States is finely tuned, it's sophisticated, and most of all, it blends into the media terrain.

SHEPARD SMITH: The White House says it can prove that Saddam Hussein does have weapons of mass destruction, claiming it has solid evidence.

DAN RATHER: The White House insisted again today it does have solid evidence that Saddam Hussein is hiding an arsenal of prohibited weapons.

NORMAN SOLOMON: It's necessary to provide a drumbeat media echo effect.

JOHN GIBSON: They might fight dirty, using weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological or radioactive.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: There are ties between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda --

BILL O'REILLY: Anthrax, smallpox.

TOM BROKAW: Dirty bomb.

BRIAN WILLIAMS: Dirty bomb.

BRIT HUME: Iraq-al-Qaeda connection.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda share the same goal: they want to see -- both of them -- both of them want to see Americans dead.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And I was very struck by the acceptance, the tone of most of the media coverage, as the sabers was rattled, as the invasion of Iraq gradually went from possible to probable to almost certain.

DAVID LEE MILLER: The President essentially giving Saddam forty-eight hours to get out of dodge. War now seems all but inevitable.

GREGG JARRETT: Short of a bullet to the back of his head or he leaves the country, war is inexorable.

UNIDENTIFIED: Well, I think that's exactly right. War is inevitable, and it is approaching inexorably.

WOLF BLITZER: Is war with Iraq inevitable right now?

LAWRENCE EAGLEBURGER: I think it's 95% inevitable.

CHRIS BURY: You, at this point, right now tonight, don't see any other option but war.

RICHARD HOLBROOKE: Do you?

CHRIS BURY: I'm asking you, Ambassador.

WESLEY CLARK: I agree. I don't think there's a viable option for the administration at this point. We're way too far out front in this.

MAJOR BOB BEVELACQUA: Send us over there, guys. Let's get on with it. Let's get it over with.

MSNBC AD: Showdown Iraq. If America goes to war, turn to MSNBC and "The Experts."

NORMAN SOLOMON: And in many ways, the US news media were equal partners with the officials in Washington and on Capitol Hill in setting the agenda for war.

MSNBC AD: We'll take you there.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And although it's called the liberal media, one has a great deal of difficulty finding an example of major media outlets, in their reporting, challenging the way in which the agenda setting for war is well underway. And when that reporting is so much a hostage of official sources, that's when you have a problem.

CNN: US officials tell CNN --

CNN REPORTER: Bush official says --

CNN REPORTER: Analysts say --

AARON BROWN: Pentagon officials tell us --

DAVID MARTIN: According to US intelligence --

NORMAN SOLOMON: Often, we're encouraged to believe that officials are the ones who make news.

JOHN KING: US officials say --

US officials say that --

US officials here say --

Officials here at the White House tell us --

NORMAN SOLOMON: They are the ones who should be consulted to understand the situation.

COLIN POWELL: I just pull these two things out -- I've laundered them, so you can't really tell what I'm talking about, because I don't want the Iraqis to know what I'm talking about, but trust me. Trust me.

NORMAN SOLOMON: If history is any guide, the opposite is the case: the officials blow smoke and cloud reality, rather than clarify.

VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY: We will, in fact, be greeted as liberators.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: The notion that it will take several hundred thousand US troops to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq are wildly off the mark.

DONALD RUMSFELD: So the money's going to come from Iraqi oil revenue, as everyone has said. They think it's going to be something like \$2 billion this year. They think it might be something like \$15, \$12 [billion] next year.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: A country that can really finance its own reconstruction and relatively soon.

TOM BROKAW: National Security Advisors Ken Adelman and Richard Perle, early advocates of the war, said the war would be a cakewalk.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The sources that have deceived us so constantly don't deserve our trust, and to the extent that we give them our trust, we set ourselves up to be scammed again and again.

REPORTER: There are reports that there is no evidence of a direct link between Baghdad and some of these terrorist organizations.

DONALD RUMSFELD: There are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.

REPORTER: Excuse me, but is this an "unknown unknown"?

DONALD RUMSFELD: I'm not --

REPORTER: Just several unknowns, and I'm wondering if this is an unknown unknown.

DONALD RUMSFELD: I'm not going to say which it is.

REPORTER: But, Mr. Secretary, do you believe --

DONALD RUMSFELD: I'm right here.

REPORTER: If you believe something --

SEAN PENN: In the run-up to the war in Iraq, the failure of mainstream news organizations to raise legitimate questions about the government's rush to war was compounded by the networks' deliberate decision to stress military perspectives before any fighting had even begun.

AARON BROWN: We've got generals and, if you ask them about the prospects for war with Iraq, they think it is almost certain.

SEAN PENN: CNN's use of retired generals as supposedly independent experts reinforced a decidedly military mindset, even as serious questions remained about the wisdom and necessity of going to war.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Often journalists blame the government for the failure of the journalists themselves to do independent reporting. But nobody forced the major networks like CNN to do so much commentary from retired generals and admirals and all the rest of it. You had a top CNN official named Eason Jordan going on the air of his network and boasting that he had visited the Pentagon with a list of possible military commentators, and he asked officials at the Defense Department whether that was a good list of people to hire.

EASON JORDAN: Oh, I think it's important to have experts explain the war and to describe the military hardware, describe the tactics, talk about the strategy behind the conflict. I went to the Pentagon myself several times before the war started and met with important people there and said, for instance, at CNN, here are the generals we're thinking of retaining to advise us on the air and off about the war, and we got a big thumbs up on all of them. That was important.

NORMAN SOLOMON: It wasn't even something to hide, ultimately. It was something to say to the American people on its own network, "See, we're team players. We may be the news media, but we're on the same side and the same page as the Pentagon." And that really runs directly counter to the idea of an independent press, and that suggests that we have some deep patterns of media avoidance when the US is involved in a war based on lies.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: My fellow Americans --

SEAN PENN: In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson falsely claimed that an attack on US gun ships by North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin gave him no choice but to escalate the war in Vietnam.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: ...that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action and reply.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Routinely, the official story is a lie or a deception or a partial bit of information that leaves out key facts.

US NAVY FILM, 1964: In international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin, destroyers of the United States Navy are assigned routine patrols from time to time. Sunday, August the 2nd, 1964, the destroyer Maddox was on such a patrol. Shortly after noon, the calm of the day is broken as general quarters sound. In a deliberate and unprovoked action, three North Vietnam PT boats unleash a torpedo attack against the Maddox.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The official story about the Gulf of Tonkin was a lie.

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT MCNAMARA: The destroyer was carrying out a mission of patrol in those waters, in international waters, when it was attacked.

NORMAN SOLOMON: But it quickly became accepted as the absolute truth by the news media, and because of the press's refusal to challenge that story, it was much easier for Congress to quickly pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which was pivotal, because it opened the floodgates to the Vietnam War.

SEN. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT: I think it's a very clear demonstration of the unity of the country behind the policies that are being followed by the President in South Vietnam and, more specifically, of the action that was taken in response to the attack upon our destroyers.

NORMAN SOLOMON: At that point, the facts were secondary. In the case of the Washington Post reporting, I asked more than three decades later whether there had ever been a Post retraction of its reporting on the Gulf of Tonkin events, and I called the newspaper and eventually reached the man who had been the chief diplomatic correspondent for the paper at the time, Murrey Marder, and I said, "Mr. Marder, has there ever been a retraction by the Washington Post of its fallacious reporting on the Gulf of Tonkin?" And he said, "I can assure you it never happened. There was never any retraction." And I asked why. And he said, "Well, if the news media were going to retract its reporting on the Gulf of Tonkin, it would have to retract its reporting on virtually the entire Vietnam War."

Fast forward a few decades, you have President George W. Bush saying that to an absolute certainty there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that intelligence sources told him that clearly, which was not at all the case.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Secretary of State Powell will present information and intelligence about Iraq's illegal weapons programs, its attempts to hide those weapons from inspectors and its links to terrorist groups.

SEAN PENN: The failure of American news media to check government distortion reached new heights when, on the eve of war, the highly respected Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared before the United Nations to make the case that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

COLIN POWELL: Saddam Hussein's intentions have never changed. He is not developing the missiles for self-defense. These are missiles that Iraq wants in order to project power, to threaten and to deliver chemical, biological and, if we let him, nuclear warheads.

AARON BROWN: Today, Secretary of State Powell brought the United Nations Security Council, the administration's best evidence so far.

NORMAN SOLOMON: After Colin Powell's speech to the UN, immediately the US press applauded with great enthusiasm.

AARON BROWN: Did Colin Powell close the deal today, in your mind, for anyone who has yet objectively to make up their mind?

HENRY KISSINGER: I think for anybody who analyzes the situation, he has closed the deal.

SEAN HANNITY (MONTAGE): This irrefutable, undeniable, incontrovertible evidence today ...

Colin Powell brilliantly delivered that smoking gun today ...

Colin Powell was outstanding today ...

I mean, it was lockstep -- it was so compelling, I don't see how anybody, at this point, cannot support this effort.

ALAN COLMES: He made a wonderful presentation. I thought he made a great case for the purpose of disarmament.

MORT KONDRACKE (MONTAGE): It was devastating, I mean, and overwhelming ...

Overwhelming abundance of the evidence. Point after point after point with -- he just flooded the terrain with data.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It's the end of the argument phase. America has made its case.

FRED BARNES: The Powell speech has moved the ball.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I think the case is closed.

NORMAN SOLOMON: But at the time, it was quite possible to analyze and debunk what he was saying.

SEAN PENN: Whereas the British press and other international news sources immediately raised legitimate questions about the accuracy of Powell's presentation. the major US news media were virtually silent about the factual basis of his claims and near unanimous in their praise.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Even the purportedly antiwar New York Times editorialized the next day that Colin Powell had made a sober case, a factual case. One of the great myths and part of the war propaganda cycle is, way after the fact, to claim that it couldn't have been known at the time that US officials were lying us into war. And in point of fact, it was known at the time and said by many people who were not allowed on the networks, by and large.

SEAN PENN: One such critical voice belonged to MSNBC's Phil Donahue, one of the few mainstream media commentators who consistently challenged the official storyline coming out of Washington.

PHIL DONAHUE: And, you know, we're all now -- everybody's righteous, what a terrible Hitler this is. We were mute when he was doing that. He was our SOB, and now we're sending our sons and daughters to war to fix that mistake. It doesn't seem fair to me.

SEAN PENN: Despite being the highest-rated program on MSNBC, Donahue's show was abruptly cancelled by the network just three weeks before the start of the war.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Phil Donahue was an antiwar voice on MSNBC, one of the cable news channels, and a memo that was leaked as the Donahue show was cancelled is very explicit. It said, we don't want this to be a face of NBC as the United States goes into war. This guy puts antiwar voices on our network.

JIM JENNINGS: The American people need to know there is no just cause for this war.

PHYLLIS BENNIS: But there's no evidence that there is even a weapon that exists in that country yet.

JEFF COHEN: Journalists, too many of them -- some quite explicitly -- have said that they see their mission as helping the war effort. And if you define your mission that way, you'll end up suppressing news that might be important, accurate, but maybe isn't helpful to the war effort.

NORMAN SOLOMON: We don't want to have that kind of public persona, when then we'd be vulnerable to charges that we're unpatriotic. It will make it more difficult to keep

pace with the flag wavers at FOX or CNN, or whatever. And more broadly, news media are very worried, not only government pressure, but advertiser pressure, criticism from readers, listeners and viewers. "Gee, our soldiers are in the field. You got to support them. Don't raise these tough questions."

PAT BUCHANAN: It seems to me that the right thing to do for patriots when American lives are at risk and Americans are dying is to unite behind the troops until victory is won. Now, on this show, Buchanan and Press, we've had a good debate for eight months on this conflict, but now it seems when the war comes, the debate ends. I think unity, Bill, is essential at this time, or at least when the guns begin to fire.

NORMAN SOLOMON: It's a very effective tactic, at least in the short run, to a large extent, to say, look, you've got to support the troops.

PRO-WAR COUNTER-PROTESTER: You're killing the troops!

NORMAN SOLOMON: And that's an effort to conflate supporting the troops with supporting the President's policies.

BILL O'REILLY: Once the war against Saddam begins, we expect every American to support our military, and if they can't do that, to shut up.

SEAN PENN: In addition to Phil Donahue, many other journalists have been silenced for crossing the mythical line known as objectivity.

BRIT HUME: Today, NBC fired journalist Peter Arnett this morning for participating in an interview on Iraqi state-controlled television.

PETER JENNINGS: Arnett criticized American war planning and said his reports about civilian casualties in the Iraqi resistance were encouraging to antiwar protesters in America.

NORMAN SOLOMON: If you're pro-war, you're objective. But if you're antiwar, you're biased. And often, a news anchor will get no flak at all for making statements that are supportive of a war and wouldn't dream of making a statement that's against a war.

TED KOPPEL: I must say, I was trying to think of -- I was trying to think of something that would be appropriate to say on an occasion like this, and as is often the case, the best you can come up with is something that Shakespeare wrote for Henry V, "Wreak havoc and unleash the dogs of war."

NORMAN SOLOMON: And that is a tip-off to just how skewed the media terrain is. We should keep in mind that CNN, which many believe to be a liberal network, had a memo from their top news executive, Walter Isaacson, in the fall of 2001, as the missiles were falling in Afghanistan, telling the anchors and the reporters, "You need to remind people, any time you show images on the screen of the people who are dying in Afghanistan,



you've got to remind the American viewers that it's in the context of what happened on 9/11," as though people could forget 9/11.

NIC ROBERTSON: We talked to several people who told us that various friends and relatives had died in the bombing there in that collateral damage. Nic Robertson, CNN, Kandahar, Afghanistan.

JUDY WOODRUFF, CNN: And we would just remind you, as we always do now with these reports from inside the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, that you're seeing only one side of the story, that these US military actions that Nic Robertson was talking about are in response to a terrorist attack that killed 5,000 and more innocent people inside the United States.

BILL HEMMER, CNN: And we juxtapose what we're hearing from the Taliban with a live picture of the clean-up that continues in Lower Manhattan, Ground Zero, again, a twenty-four-hour operation that has not ebbed. 5,000 killed that day back on Tuesday, September 11, their biggest crime, as civilians, going to work that day.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And yet, we know statistically -- the best estimates tell us -- that more civilians were killed by that bombing in Afghanistan than those who died in the Twin Towers in New York. And the moral objections that could be raised to slaughtering civilians in the name of retaliation against 9/11, those objections were muted by the phrase "war on terror," by the way in which it was used by the White House and Congress and also by the news media.

SEAN PENN: Free flows of information have been further blocked by a more general atmosphere of contempt for antiwar voices.

MICHELLE MALKIN: Among them are a group called CODEPINK, which is headed by Medea Benjamin, who's a terrorist sympathizer, dictator-worshipping propagandist.

BILL O'REILLY: The far-left element in America is a destructive force that must be confronted.

RUSH LIMBAUGH: Some Americans, sadly, not interested in victory, and yet they want us to believe that their behavior is patriotic. Well, it's not.

STEVE MALZBERG: To call the president stupid, he doesn't know much about anything, that's just great. Go with Danny Glover and Susan Sarandon. You fit in perfect.

NEWT GINGRICH: To in any way be defending a torturer, a killer, a dictator -- he used chemical weapons against his own people -- is pretty remarkable, but it's a very long tradition in the Democratic Party.

JOE SCARBOROUGH: Pay no heed to the peaceniks and the left-wing rock stars. They've had their fifteen minutes of fame.

JONAH GOLDBERG: These people are essentially useless. They are reflexively opposed to war. It's a principled position, but it's the wrong position, and you can't take them seriously as a strategic voice.

WOLF BLITZER: Millions and millions of useful people out there?

NORMAN SOLOMON: If you want to have democracy, you've got to have the free flow of information through the body politic. You can't have these blockages. You can't have the manipulation.

SEAN PENN: While mainstream journalists have rarely called attention in real time to failure of news media to provide necessary information and real debate, they have repeatedly pointed to their own failures well after wars have been launched.

CHRIS MATTHEWS: During the course of this war, there was a lot of snap-to in press coverage: we're at war, the world's changed, we have to root for the country to some extent. And yet, it seems something missing from this debate was a critical analysis of where it was taking us.

JIM LEHRER: Those of us in journalism never even looked at the issue of occupation.

CHRIS MATTHEWS: Because?

JIM LEHRER: Because it just didn't occur to us. We weren't smart enough. You'd have had to gone against the grain.

CHRIS MATTHEWS: Right. You'd also come off as kind of a pointy head trying to figure out some obscure issue here --

JIM LEHRER: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

CHRIS MATTHEWS: -- when it's good guys and bad guys.

JIM LEHRER: Yeah, negative. Negativism.

NORMAN SOLOMON: News media, down the road, will point out that there were lies about the Gulf of Tonkin or about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR: I'm sorry to say, but certainly television, and perhaps to an extent my station, was intimidated by the administration and its foot soldiers at FOX News.

WOLF BLITZER: We should have been more skeptical.

NORMAN SOLOMON: But that doesn't bring back any of the people who have died, who were killed in their own country or sent over by the President of the United States to kill in that country. So, after the fact, it's all well and good to say, "Well, the system worked" or "The truth comes out." But when it comes to life and death, the truth comes out too late.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.

[news montage]

SEAN PENN: Once public support is in place and war is finally under way, the news media necessarily turned from covering the rationales for war to covering war itself.

NORMAN SOLOMON: When the President decides he wants the US to go to war, then the war becomes the product.

Particularly in the early stages, news coverage of war is much more like PR about war.

SEAN PENN: Influencing the nature of this war coverage has been a priority of one administration after another since Vietnam, when conventional wisdom held that it was negative media coverage that turned the American people against the war and forced US withdrawal. Since that time, and beginning with new urgency during the 1991 Gulf War, the Pentagon has worked with increasing sophistication to shape media coverage of war.

As then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney noted about the importance of public perceptions during the first Iraq War, "Frankly, I looked on it as a problem to be managed. The information function was extraordinarily important. I did not have a lot of confidence that I could leave it to the press."

NORMAN SOLOMON: So for the invasion of Grenada and invasion of Panama in '83 and '89, then the Gulf War in early 1991, it was like a produced TV show, and the main producers were at the Pentagon. They decided, in the case of the Gulf War, exactly what footage would be made available to the TV stations. They did nonstop briefings, utilizing the increasing importance of cable television. They named it Operation Desert Storm.

DAN RATHER: Breaking news of what's now officially called Operation Desert Storm.

TOM BROKAW: Good evening. Operation Desert Storm rages on.

NORMAN SOLOMON: All that sort of stuff was very calculated, so you could look at that as an era of media war manipulation from the standpoint of the US government. Then you had a different era. You had the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

DAN RATHER: Scores of American reporters have now joined US military units in Kuwait as part of the Pentagon's effort to make any war with Iraq what the Pentagon calls a media-friendly campaign. Another part of that effort is on display at the US Military Command Center in Qatar. A Hollywood set designer was brought in to create a \$200,000 backdrop for official war briefings.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And tied in with that is the worship of Pentagon technology.

HANSON HOSEIN: I've fallen almost in love with the F/A-18 Super Hornet, because it's quite a versatile plane.

BRIAN WILSON: I've got to tell you, my favorite aircraft, the A-10 War Hog, I love the War Hogs.

JOHN ELLIOTT: This morning, around 4:00 a.m. local time, the first three took off. And when you're 300 feet away from them, when they do it, you hear it in your shoes and feel it in your gut.

SEAN PENN: The Pentagon's influence on war coverage has also been evident in the news media's tendency to focus on the technical sophistication of the latest weaponry.

GREGG JARRETT: Should they have used more? Should they, you know, use a MOAB, the mother of all bombs, and new daisy cutters? And, you know, let's not just stop at a couple of cruise missiles.

JAMIE McINTYRE: The newest, biggest, baddest US bomb --

GENERAL BARRY MCCAFFREY: We'll pound them with 2,000-pound bombs and then go in --

PAT BUCHANAN: 2000-pound bombs in urban areas?

GENERAL BARRY MCCAFFREY: Oh, sure.

LESTER HOLT: I'm holding in my hand here the F-117 Stealth Fighter, was used in these attacks significantly --

GRETA VAN SUSTERN: How do you steer this thing? I mean, there's no -- you have a stick, is that right?

PILOT: Sure. Both of us have a matching silver stick with left throttles. You can do every --

NORMAN SOLOMON: Every war, we have US news media that have praised the latest in the state-of-the-art killing technology, from the present moment to the war in Vietnam.

WALTER CRONKITE: B-57s -- the British call them Cambra jets -- we're using them very effectively here in this war in Vietnam to dive-bomb the Vietcong in these jungles beyond Da Nang here. Colonel, what's our mission we're about to embark on?

AIR FORCE COLONEL: Well, our mission today, sir, is to report down to the site of the ambush seventy miles south of here and attempt to kill the VC.

WALTER CRONKITE: The colonel has just advised me that that is our target area right over there. One, two, three, four, we dropped our bomb, but now a tremendous G-load as we pull out of that dive. Oh, I know something of what those astronauts must go through.

Well, colonel.

AIR FORCE COLONEL: Yes, sir.

WALTER CRONKITE: It's a great way to go to war.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And there's a kind of idolatry there. Some might see it as worship of the gods of metal.

AIR FORCE COLONEL: Yes, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED: That's the JDAM. It is a 2,000-pound bomb that is deadly accurate, and that is the thing that is allowing us -- allowed us in Afghanistan and will allow us in this next conflict to be terribly accurate, terribly precise and terribly destructive.

SEAN PENN: In fact, even as US military technology has become increasingly sophisticated with the development of so-called smart bombs and other forms of precision-guided weaponry, civilian casualties now greatly outnumber military deaths, a grim toll that has steadily increased since World War I.

TEXT BOX (MOTION GRAPHIC): During World War I, 10% of all casualties were civilians.

During World War II, the number of civilian deaths rose to 50%.

During the Vietnam War 70% of all casualties were civilians.

In the war in Iraq, civilians account for 90% of all deaths.

UNIDENTIFIED: This is the beginning of the shock-and-awe campaign, according to one official, this is going to be the entire nine yards.

TOM BROKAW: It was a breathtaking display of firepower.

NORMAN SOLOMON: There's kind of an acculturated callousness towards what happens at the other end of US weapons.

LESTER HOLT: Behind the flight deck, the weapons officer who goes by the call sign Oasis, will never see the ground or the target, for that matter. The airfield is simply a fuzzy image on his radar.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And this is another very insidious aspect of war propaganda. There's a bias involved, where, because the United States has access to high-tech military weaponry, that somehow to slaughter people from 30,000 feet in the air or a thousand feet in the air from high-tech machinery is somehow moral, whereas strapping on a suicide belt and blowing people up is seen as the exact opposite.

DONALD RUMSFELD: The targeting capabilities, and the care that goes into targeting, to see that the precise targets are struck, and that other targets are not struck, is as impressive as anything anyone could see. The care that goes into it, the humanity that goes into it, to see that military targets are destroyed to be sure, but that it's done in a way and in a manner and in a direction and with a weapon that is appropriate to that very particularized target. The weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamt of.

SEAN PENN: Within this war friendly news frame the Defense Department has also been successful in shaping actual war reporting. Its influence reached new levels with the embedding of journalists during the war in Iraq.

NEWS REPORT: The Pentagon tightly controlled the media during the 1991 Persian Gulf War – limiting where reporters could go and often restricting access to small groups of pool reporters. This time the Pentagon is doing an about face after running more than 230 journalists through media boot camps, the Pentagon is inviting more than 500 media representatives to accompany US combat units to war.

SEAN PENN: Despite being widely praised as a new form of realism in war coverage, the strategy of embedding reporters has raised new questions about the ability of war reporters to convey balanced information to the American people.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Rather than being kept far away, they were embraced and smothered and participated in the process of being smothered. They were brought along, hundreds and hundreds of them, with the Marines, with the Navy, with the Army. They became, in a sense, part of the invading apparatus. You didn't have embedded reporters with people who were being bombed; you only had embedded reporters with the bombers.

NEWS REPORTER: Last night a tremendous light show here, just a tremendous light show.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And it was through the eyes of the invaders that so much of the reporting was done.

WALTER ROGERS, CNN: It was a gradual process of getting to know and trust each other. And for them trusting me was knowing I would not blow their objective and get us all shelled with artillery.

NORMAN SOLOMON: People who were correspondents for the major US TV networks would express in no uncertain terms that they had been bonding very closely with the US soldiers

SHEPARD SMITH: We have a number of correspondents in bed [SIC] with our troops across the region.

PETER JENNINGS: Very deeply embedded in a personal way with the marines ...

NORMAN SOLOMON: And you had correspondents saying that you know, "I would do virtually anything for them, they would do anything for me." There was all this camaraderie.

RICK LEVENTHAL, FOX NEWS: We had guys around us with guns and they were intent on keeping us alive, because, they said, "You guys are making us stars back home and we need to protect you."

NORMAN SOLOMON: That's very nice, but it has nothing to do with independent journalism, which we never need more than in times of war. It was a very shrewd effort by the Pentagon to say, "You want access, here's plenty of access."

DONALD RUMSFELD: I doubt that in a conflict of this type there's ever been the degree of free press coverage as you are witnessing in this instance.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And the embedding process was actually a new wrinkle in an old game – which was, and is, propaganda for war.

SEAN PENN: Praise for the embedding process as a step forward in balanced war reporting has often invoked comparisons to media coverage of the Vietnam War.

NORMAN SOLOMON: A myth has kind of grown up after the Vietnam that the reporting was very tough, that Americans saw on their television sets the brutality of the war as it unfolded. And people often hark back to that as a standard that should now be rediscovered or emulated.

MORLEY SAFER: This is what the war in Vietnam is all about.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Yes, there was exceptional reporting, but it was the exception. And so you had the Zippo lighters being used by the GI's burning down the huts of a

village that Morley Safer on CBS reported. Well, people mention that actually because it was unusual. And in point of fact very little about the tremendous violence in that war was conveyed through the television set, especially when the US government was responsible for the human suffering. That is in a way the most taboo – to show in detail, graphic human detail, what’s involved when bombs, missiles, mortars paid for by US taxpayers do what their designed to do ... which is to kill and to maim.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: I know that this is a great concern, I think it’s part of the Vietnam syndrome.

WALTER CRONKITE: The Vietnam Syndrome that President Reagan mentioned was a reference to America’s attempt to forget its most unpopular war.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: This will not be another Vietnam. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back.

SEAN PENN: Like President Reagan before him, President George H.W. Bush explicitly set out during the first Gulf War to rid the national psyche of the so-called Vietnam Syndrome, the common belief after the bloody and protracted conflict in Vietnam that the American public no longer had the stomach for war unless guaranteed swift, easy and decisive victory.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR FROM TV SPECIAL “INSIDE THE PENTAGON”:  
Precision weapons and the strategic use of air power helped make the Gulf War an enormous operational victory for the Pentagon, helping it move past the legacy of Vietnam.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: It’s a proud day for America, and by God we’ve kicked Vietnam Syndrome once and for all. Thank you very, very much.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The idea is that supposedly the public is not willing to back strong military action because people have become too skittish about US casualties. In fact, if you look at the actual course of public opinion there’s been a real willingness to support wars without exception at the beginning.

Public support FOR the Second World War never fell below 77%, according to opinion polls. But during the Vietnam War, public support fell to about 30%, and within a couple of years of the US occupation of Iraq public support was down to almost 30% among the US population.

So what’s the difference? In one case, WWII, the US public never felt that the war was fundamentally based on deception. But if it emerges that the war can’t be won quickly, and that the war was based on deceptions, then people have turned against the war.



So, first, the public has to be sold on the need to attack. Then, after the war's under way, withdrawal needs to be put forward as an unacceptable option.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: Withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Vietnam would bring an end to conflict.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: We're not leaving, so long as I'm the President. That would be a huge mistake.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: Our allies would lose confidence in America.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: To yield to force in Vietnam would weaken that confidence.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Any sign that says we're going to leave before the job is done simply emboldens terrorists.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: A retreat of the United States from Vietnam would be a communist victory, a victory of massive proportions and would lead to World War III.

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: If this little nation goes down the drain and can't maintain independence, ask yourself what's going to happen to all the other little nations.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: It would not bring peace. It would bring more war.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And many propaganda lines become stock and trade of those who started the war in the first place.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: The party of FDR and the party of Harry Truman has become the party of "cut and run."

REP. J.D. HAYWORTH: The American people will not stand for surrender.

REP. JEAN SCHMIDT: Cowards cut and run.

REP. PATRICK MCHENRY: They're advocating a policy called "cut and run."

KARL ROVE: That party's old pattern of cutting and running.

REP. CHARLIE NORWOOD: If we high-tailed it and cut and run --

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH (MONTAGE): We won't cut and run.

Cut and run.

Cut and run.

We will not cut and run.

Cut and run.

ANDERSON COOPER: Cut and run. Cut and run. How do you respond?

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH (MONTAGE): We will stay the course.

We must stay the course.

We stay the course.

We will stay the course.

And we're not going to cut and run, if I'm in the Oval Office.

NORMAN SOLOMON: All a president has to do is start a war, and these arguments kick in that you can't stop it. So it's a real incentive for a president to lie, to deceive, to manipulate sufficiently to get the war started. And then they've got a long way to go without any sort of substantive challenge that says, hey, this war has to end.

NEWS ANCHOR: Then appealing for public support for his peace policy, Mr. Nixon said, "The enemy cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans," he said, "can do that."

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON: The peacemakers are out there in the field. The soldier and the statesman need and welcome the sincere and the responsible assistance of concerned Americans. But they need reason much more than they need emotion. They must have a practical solution and not a concoction of wishful thinking and false hopes, however well-intentioned and well-meaning they may be. It must be a solution that does not call for surrender or for cutting and running now. Those fantasies hold the nightmare of World War III and a much larger war tomorrow.

NORMAN SOLOMON: During the Vietnam War public opinion polls were showing after a few years into the early 1970's that a majority of Americans felt the war was wrong, even immoral and yet the war continued because the momentum was there.

NEWS ANCHOR: Vice President Agnew's target tonight, as he put it, was the professional pessimist. Most of those, the Vice President explained at a rally for California Republicans, are Democrats and it was all the kind of rhetoric Republican crowds have been enjoying on this tour.

VICE PRESIDENT AGNEW: In the United States today we have more than our share of the nattering nabobs of negativism.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The same has been the case in terms of the occupation of Iraq.

VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY: The President and I cannot prevent certain politicians for losing their memory or their backbone but we're not going to sit by and let them rewrite history.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And that's an insidious process because often those who oppose a war are simply discounted.

SHEPARD SMITH: Congressman John Murtha, the first Vietnam Vet to serve in Congress, a man awarded a bronze star and two purple hearts, choking back tears as he talked about his change of heart.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN MURTHA: It's time to bring them home. They've done everything they can do, the military has done everything they can do. This war has been so mishandled, from the very start, not only was the intelligence bad, the way they disbanded the troops, there's all kinds of mistakes that have been made. They don't deserve to continue to suffer. They're the targets.

NORMAN SOLOMON: As an original supporter of the war and somebody known as a hawk – pro-military – inside the Congress, John Murtha, despite his credentials, he was not taken terribly seriously.

BRITT HUME, FOX NEWS: This guy has long passed the day when he had anything but the foggiest awareness of what the heck is going on in the world, and that sound byte is naiveté writ-large. And the man is an absolute fountain of such talk.

NORMAN SOLOMON: His recommendations to pull out US troops, discounted by pundits.

RICH LOWRY, FOX NEWS: Pennsylvania Congressman John Murtha once again sounding like the grim reaper when it comes to the war on terror.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Murtha's running a psyop against his own people ...

CRAIG MINNICK: As a veteran, I consider it my duty to defend those who defend America against repeated public attacks by a politician who cares nothing more than political and personal gain than the welfare of our fellow Americans on the battlefield.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And yet you looked at the polls and you found that a large amount of Americans totally were in his corner on this.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN MURTHA: I go by Arlington cemetery every day. And the Vice President – he criticizes Democrats? Let me tell you, those gravestones don't say Democrat or Republican. They say American! [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

NORMAN SOLOMON: And almost any analysis of public opinion data, laid side-by-side with what news media are or are not advocating in terms of editorials, will show that the media establishment is way behind the grassroots. In February of 1968, the Boston Globe did a survey of 39 different major US daily newspapers. The Globe could not find a single paper that had editorialized for withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam.

PROTESTORS AT NIXON STADIUM SPEECH: 1-2-3-4 we don't want your stinkin' war.

SEAN PENN: And even when calls for withdrawal have eventually become too loud to ignore, officials have put forward strategies for ending war that have had the effect of prolonging it – in some cases, as with the Nixon administration's strategy of Vietnamization, actually escalating war in the name of ending it.

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace.

NORMAN SOLOMON: It's the idea that, OK, the war has become unpopular in the United States, so let's pull out some US troops and have the military burden fall on the allies inside that country.

NEWS REPORTER: White House officials say it is obvious that the South Vietnamese are going to have to hack it on their own.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The model is to use air power while pulling out US troops and training Vietnamese to kill other Vietnamese people. And several decades later, in effect, that is a goal of George W. Bush's administration.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Our strategy can be summed up this way: As the Iraqi's stand up, we will stand down.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The rhetoric about shifting the burden of fighting the insurgency onto the shoulders of Iraqi people themselves is very enticing for a president because it's a way of saying to people in the United States, "Hey, we're going to be out of there, it's just a matter of time."

DONALD RUMSFELD: There isn't a person at this table that agrees with you that we're in a quagmire and that there's no end in sight.

NORMAN SOLOMON: The media and political focus on the word quagmire is a good example of how an issue can be framed very narrowly.

JAMIE MCINTYRE, CNN: The criticism would be that you're in a situation from which there's no good way to extricate yourself.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Then the word clearly would not be a good one.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Talking about a quagmire seems to be a positive way of fomenting debate because then we can argue about whether the war is actually working out well.

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY: We are now in a seemingly intractable quagmire.

SENATOR CHUCK HAGEL: That terrible word quagmire.

ROBERT DALLEK, PRESIDENTIAL HISTORIAN: This could be or seems to be a kind of quagmire.

NORMAN SOLOMON: Quagmire is really a false sort of a critique because it says really the problem here is what the war is doing to the United States. Are we able to win.

ANDERSON COOPER: Are we winning in Iraq?

BILL O'REILLY: Do you want the United States to win in Iraq?

DAVID GERGEN, CNN: I can't tell who's winning and who's losing.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: Do you believe that we are currently winning in Iraq?

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES: We are not winning but we are not losing.

SECRETARY COLIN POWELL: We are losing.

GENERAL GEORGE CASEY: We're winning it.

NEWS REPORTER TO SOLDIER: You're winning this war?

SOLDIER: I couldn't tell you.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And a big problem with the media focus is that it sees the war through the eyes of the Americans, through the eyes of the occupiers, rather than those who are bearing the brunt of the war in human terms.

WALTER CRONKITE: We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders both in Vietnam and Washington to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds.

NORMAN SOLOMON: In early 1968, Walter Cronkite told CBS viewers that the war couldn't be won.

WALTER CRONKITE: It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And that was instantly, and through time even more so, heralded as the tide has turned. As Lyndon Johnson is reputed to have said when he saw Cronkite give that report, "I've lost middle America." And it was presented as not only a turning point, quite often, but also as sort of a moral statement by the journalistic establishment.

Well, I would say yes and no. It was an acknowledgement that the United States, contrary to official Washington claims, was not winning the war in Vietnam, and could not win. But it was not a statement that the war was wrong. A problem there is that if the critique says this war is bad because it's not winnable, then the response is, "Oh yeah, we'll show you it can be winnable, or the next war will be winnable."

AMERICAN TROOPS AT IRAQI HOME: Open the door, open the door.

NORMAN SOLOMON: So that critique doesn't challenge the prerogatives of military expansion or aggression, if you will, or empire. And a deeper critique says, "Whether you can win or not, either way, empire enforced at the point – not of a bayonet but of the cruise missile -- that's not acceptable."

SEAN PENN: Over the last five decades we have witnessed a wave of US military interventions – a series of bombings, invasions, and long-term occupations undertaken, we have been told, with the most noble of intentions ... and paid for with the lives of young Americans and countless others around the world.

NORMAN SOLOMON: What has occurred with one war after another is still with us. These dynamics are in play in terms of the US occupation of Iraq, looking at other countries such as Iran, and the future will be replicated to the extent that we fail to understand what has been done with these wars in the past.

The news media have generally bought into and promoted the notion that it's up to the President to make foreign policy decisions. This smart guy in the oval office has access to all the information, he knows more than we do, he's the commander in chief. And the American people have no major role to play, and nor should they, because after all they don't have the knowledge or capability to be responsive to the real situation. That was certainly true during the Vietnam War as it was to be later, time after time.

There were people in Congress that raised these issues and they simply were marginalized by the news media – even though in retrospect, maybe especially because in retrospect, they had it right and the conventional wisdom and the President were wrong.

REP: BARBARA LEE: However difficult this vote may be, some of us must urge the use of restraint. Our country is in a state of mourning.

Some of us must say, Let's step back for a moment, let's just pause just for a minute, and think through the implications of our actions today so that this does not spiral out of control.

As we act let us not become the evil that we deplore.

Thank you and I yield the balance of my time.

UNIDENTIFIED CONGRESSMAN: The gentlewoman's time has expired.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And this is a very common motif of history in the last several decades, where people who at the time were portrayed as loners, as mavericks, as outside of the mainstream of wisdom turned out to understand the historical moment.

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE: We've got to back our President? Since when do we have to back our President, or should we, when the President is proposing an unconstitutional act?

NORMAN SOLOMON: The best example is Wayne Morse, the senior Senator from Oregon who, beginning in 1964, was a voice in the Congressional wilderness. Senator Morse was unusual in that he challenged the very prerogative of the US government to go to war against Vietnam. He said it's up to the American people to formulate foreign policy.

PETER LISAGOR, FACE THE NATION: Senator, the Constitution of the United States gives to the President of the United States the sole responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy.

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE: Couldn't be more wrong, you couldn't make a more unsound legal statement than the one you have just made. This is the promulgation of an old fallacy that foreign policy belongs to the President of the United States.

PETER LISAGOR: Then to whom does it belong, then, Senator?

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE: It belongs to the American people, and the Constitutional fathers made it very clear --

PETER LISAGOR: Where does the President fit into this in the responsibility scale?

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE: What I'm saying is under our constitution all the President is, is the administrator of the people's foreign policy, those are his prerogatives, and I'm pleading that the American people be given the facts about foreign policy --

PETER LISAGOR: You know, Senator, that the American people cannot formulate and institute foreign policy --

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE: Why you're a man of little faith in democracy if you make that kind of comment. I have complete faith in the ability of the American people to follow the facts if you give them to them, and my charge against my government is that we're not giving the American people the facts.

NORMAN SOLOMON: And that's the kind of faith in democracy that's not in fashion among the Washington press corps or the power elite in the nation's capital. But it's a good reading of the Constitution, and it's a good definition of democracy.

The independent journalist I.F. Stone says that all governments lie and nothing they say should be believed. Now Stone wasn't conflating all governments, and he wasn't saying that governments lie all the time, but he was saying that we should never trust that something said by a government is automatically true, especially our own, because we have a responsibility to go beneath the surface. Because the human costs of war, the consequences of militaristic policies, what Dr. King called "the madness of militarism," they can't stand the light of day if most people understand the deceptions that lead to the slaughter, and the human consequences of the carnage. If we get that into clear focus, we can change the course of events in this country. But it's not going to be easy and it will require dedication to searching for truth.

MARTIN LUTHER KING: A time comes when silence is betrayal, and that time has come for us. ...

Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. ...

And I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government ...

What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? ...

Now there is little left to build on, save bitterness ...

We are met by a deep but understandable mistrust. To speak for them is to explain this lack of confidence in Western words, and especially their mistrust of American intentions now ...

The world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to achieve. ...

This way of settling differences is not just. ...



A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. ...

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. ...

I speak as one who loves America, to the leaders of our own nation: The great initiative in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours.

[END]