In August 2021, the US occupation of Afghanistan ended with images of chaos at the airport in Kabul as people desperately attempted to flee the country. The longest war in US history was known to be unwinnable long before the return of the Taliban, but corporate media and the “papers of record” had enthusiastically backed the war and were held accountable to no one when it failed. A little more than six months later, Russia would invade Ukraine, and once again US media would beat the drums of war and amplify NATO talking points, with weapons-industry talking heads dominating the airwaves. However, as much as corporate news changes, the more it seems to stay the same. Our need to recognize and identify the sometimes familiar, other times changing news practices that mislead, obscure, and promote instead of inform, is what former Project Censored director Peter Phillips had in mind when he coined the term “News Abuse” twenty years ago. Reporting characterized by News Abuse appears seamless, as stories are framed within their own logic and disconnected from information and perspectives excluded by the media’s discursive boundaries. Observing how news professionals frame their stories, using hegemonic language
and refusing to include alternative voices, is part of recognizing what Phillips defined as News Abuse.

This chapter examines News Abuse in establishment news coverage of policing in the United States and war overseas. In both cases, News Abuse promotes state violence, while downplaying or ignoring its deadly consequences, including the failure of state violence to achieve public safety at home or the stated goals of US policy abroad. US corporate media seldom address deeper connections between the weapons of war, domestic gun rights, and formulations of American exceptionalism embedded in white privilege. Nor do they address connections between the costs of wars abroad and the new wave of domestic austerity advocated by political elites in the United States. In the fragmented world of big journalism, the lack of context is often hidden by the logics of News Abuse identified in this chapter.

**WHAT MEDIA WATCHERS HAVE SAID**

Media critics who have followed establishment press coverage of the year’s biggest stories can help orient us to News Abuse. In the *New York Review of Books*, Fintan O’Toole assessed the assumptions that prop up establishment news narratives about current wars. “Nowhere is American exceptionalism more evident or more troubling than in compartmentalizing of military atrocities,” O’Toole wrote.¹ Pointing out the double standard in war coverage, author and peace activist Medea Benjamin tweeted on May 5, 2022, “How come people don’t protest against Saudi oil like they protest Russian oil? Perhaps it’s because Yemeni lives ‘don’t matter’?”² And commenting
on US information wars with Russia, one of the most outspoken media critics, Caitlin Johnstone, observed, “It’s been obvious for a long time that the US empire has been working to shore up narrative control to strengthen its hegemonic domination of the planet.” Journalism that understands US military policies within the context of empire is certainly the domain of alternative media. And, writing about the mass killing of children in Uvalde, Texas, Natasha Lennard explained that “policing is not [what we’ve] been told it is by the police themselves, by those in power, and by the mainstream media culture.” Let’s begin by looking at how policing has been covered in the establishment media.

CRIME, JUSTICE REPORTING, AND COPAGANDA

Last year, Project Censored identified news coverage of protests by Black Lives Matter (BLM) as an egregious example of News Abuse. Legacy and corporate media portrayed BLM demonstrators across the United States as violent and chaotic, despite subsequent evidence that, in 97 percent of cases, protests were peaceful and non-violent. At the time, alternative and independent media carried very different stories, some with headlines accurately describing “police riots.” This year, big media have continued this pro-police bias when reporting on crime, law enforcement, and ongoing struggles to reform the justice system.

Consider, for example, news coverage of a highly anticipated FBI crime-data report, released on September 27, 2021. Newspapers featured sensationalized headlines about one aspect of the multifaceted report. Though major
crimes declined overall, the homicide rate rose. The Washington Post’s headline screamed, “Killing Soared Nearly 30 Percent in 2020, with More Slayings Committed with Guns.”6 The New York Times coverage led with the headline “Murders Spiked in 2020 in Cities Across the United States,” and NPR, NBC News, the Hill, and the Guardian also focused on the homicide spike.7 Journalists failed to use the occasion to question the efficacy of policing, or to open a broader dialogue about public safety in the United States. Writing for The Nation, Scott Hechinger, a longtime public defender and now executive director of Zealous, identified how journalism got the story wrong.8

Without minimizing the terrible loss of each life taken, Hechinger explained that, even though the murder rate rose by 30 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year, homicides were now at historic lows, especially when compared to the 1980s and 1990s. Not surprisingly, establishment journalists jumped on the homicide increase, offering “explanations” primarily from law enforcement, even though ascribing short-term fluctuations in crime data to any particular cause is, according to Hechinger, “impossible.”9

Current crime reporting is not based on “criminological facts” but continues to repeat familiar narratives that helped drive the mass-incarceration binge. As Hechinger detailed, reporting is marred by “alarmist headlines” and “dehumanizing language” with “overly simplistic stories” that “provoke fear in the public.” Indeed, the narrative elements Hechinger described follow the storylines of the docu-cop reality shows that aired on Fox and other networks in the 1980s and 90s, which were often mirrored in local news reporting.10 Today, the misleading
narratives show up across the media, even in prestigious newspapers.

Fear-based coverage of the FBI report excluded the perspectives of public defenders, social workers, health professionals, academics, researchers, and communities with direct experience of the criminal justice system. Foreclosing those voices with editorial selections of “newsworthy” sources is a hallmark of News Abuse. In this case, as Hechinger noted, it allowed police “to use their failures to demand more resources, more funding, more support.” The pro-police framework for reporting on crime and justice issues serves to misdirect policy discussions on policing and blocks solutions to corruption, police brutality, and the criminalization of people and communities of color. Such coverage offers no explanatory framework for addressing mass shootings nor for understanding that more police funding will not solve any of these problems.

**COPAGANDA**

Let’s look at the April 12, 2022, shooting that took place on the Brooklyn subway, where twenty-nine people were injured but no one was killed. Despite the number of police officers now patrolling the subway system and the use of surveillance cameras in every subway station in New York City, police did not stop the shooting spree. Instead of questioning police failures and hefty budgets, the NYPD took center stage in reporting the hunt for Frank James, the suspect. *The New York Times* lionized police efforts, saying hundreds of officers were using methods “as modern as scrutinizing video from surveillance cam-
eras and parsing electronic records, and as old-fashioned as a wanted poster.” Responding to the fawning press treatment, Josmar Trujillo of Copwatch pointed out that the cops actually failed to find James, while the New York Times repeated, “They’re going to stop this guy, they’re going to catch this guy,” though the NYPD did neither.

The New York Times also featured Mayor Eric Adams praising New York City’s law enforcement officers for eventually arresting the suspect, though James walked around the city for hours, went to McDonald’s, and finally called the hotline to give authorities his location. Still, on the sidewalk, New Yorkers had to point the man out to cops to make the arrest. The mayor pronounced the solution to all such crimes, saying, “[If] all goes well, he will never see the outside of a prison cell again.” Trujillo called this “copaganda,” when police agendas lead in media coverage and cops are foregrounded even in the face of failure. Another writer, Mark Anthony Neal, defined copaganda’s active role in countering attempts to hold police accountable for malfeasance as “reinforcing the ideas that the police are generally fair and hardworking, and that ‘Black criminals’ deserve the brutal treatment they receive.”

A different story was told by Adam Gopnik, who described in the New Yorker how passengers attended to strangers. “What was most impressive in the immediate post-shooting phone-cam videos was the extraordinary esprit de corps of the straphangers, showing as they did, despite what must have been an urge to run, an amazing degree of care and calm.”
THE “FERGUSON EFFECT”: BLAMING BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS

A systematic look at media coverage of crime led critic Julie Hollar to identify what has been called the “Ferguson Effect,” defined as the supposed fear and resulting retreat from policing “caused” by Black Lives Matter. One USA Today headline clearly illustrated this: “Why Violent Crime Surged after Police Across America Retreated.”

Hollar observed that blaming BLM is popular among police chiefs and their media boosters who seek to “defend against movements challenging police violence” and “deflect blame back onto protesters.” Hechinger also pointed to an overwhelming media bias that, “against all evidence to the contrary and the FBI data itself,” continues to assert that the increases in homicides could have been “caused by bail reform and protests for racial justice following the police killing of George Floyd.”

Today we know, from experience and overwhelming research, that releasing people from jail prior to trial reduces crime for years in the future—and saves tens of millions of dollars in each major city. Yet police point to BLM protests and measures such as bail reform to account for the rise in murders. Speaking on Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting’s CounterSpin, Alec Karakatsanis, a former civil rights lawyer and executive director of Civil Rights Corps, explained that jailing people “prior to trial just because they can’t make a monetary payment actually increases crime by huge margins.” It makes people more likely to commit crime by destabilizing their lives, disrupting medical treatment and mental health care, forcing them out of jobs and housing, and often separating them.
from their children. “Cash bail is actually really harmful to public safety,” Karakatsanis explained. Police, prosecutors, and judges may still detain anyone who is a danger to the community or is charged with a serious offense.

Yet the New York Times referred to bail reform using the scary, mystifying phrase “the revolving jailhouse door created by bail reform,” a not-so-subtle reference to the infamous Willy Horton commercial that fabricated the criminal justice policies of Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis and helped George H. W. Bush get elected in 1988.22 Ironically, the advertisement, which depicted the entrance to a jail where inmates entered through a revolving door and immediately returned to the streets, was criticized by the Times in 2018, when the paper called it part of “the racially charged politics of crime” that “reverberate to this day.”23 There are political consequences to this type of reporting, such as the successful recall of forward-thinking prosecutor Chesa Boudin in San Francisco. As the Washington Post gloated, “Boudin’s recall proves Democrats have lost the public’s trust on crime,” though it could have been more accurately called a billionaire-funded, pro-police, media-backed political recall.24

THE ROLE OF STATE VIOLENCE AND MASS SHOOTINGS

Much of the police budget in every city is spent on state control measures. According to Alec Karakatsanis, “Cops have tried to surveil, infiltrate, and violently crush every major social, economic, labor, environmental, and racial justice movement since 1900.”25 As a recent example, he
pointed to the police reaction to a peaceful climate protest in Los Angeles in April 2022, where scientists had chained themselves to a fence. Video revealed the disproportionate LAPD response to the scientists—about ten cops for each protester.\(^{26}\)

While corporate media amplify police agendas, other proven measures such as reducing poverty, investing in mental health and substance treatment, education, affordable housing, violence prevention, and restorative justice are rarely mentioned. Corporate “justice” journalism is not just false; it has consequences. It is an insidious and historically rooted contributor to the failed system of policing in our country, “a pro-police worldview deeply ingrained in journalism.”\(^{27}\)

**Mass Shootings**

On May 14, 2022, a white supremacist sought out the Tops Friendly Market in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo, after researching the zip code where the most Brown and Black residents shopped, and killed ten people, wounding three others. In spite of the shooter posting a lengthy “replacement theory” diatribe on social media that reflected the ravings of Fox News host Tucker Carlson, police did not stop this shooter either. Only days later, on May 24, 2022, in a massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, an eighteen-year-old gunman would kill nineteen grade-school children and two of their teachers. The cops’ lack of response for over an hour, a spectacular failure that dumbfounded parents and bystanders, was caught on videotape. Cops aggressively confronted parents with pepper spray and a Taser and handcuffed
a mother who wanted to enter the building to save her child.

As corporate media scrambled to account for police actions, Natasha Lennard dismantled the hegemonic police-driven narrative that failed to explain what happened in Uvalde. “The ‘thin blue line’ does not, as reactionary narratives would have it, separate society from violent chaos,” she asserted in the Intercept.28 Police did not risk their lives going into a hail of gunfire; they “kept themselves safe.” Meanwhile, two teachers died trying to protect the children.

Lennard referenced Supreme Court decisions from 1989 and 2005 that affirmed that police departments are not obligated to provide protection to the public.29 She pointed out that cops don’t solve most crimes, nor do they prevent crime.30 For example, the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk policy was not “prevention”; it criminalized poverty and the communities of color forced to live in it.31 When civilians spotted subway shooter Frank James, he was walking just blocks away from a site where cops were busy destroying a homeless encampment.

**Police, White Supremacy, and the Legacy of Slavery**

Risking their lives to save innocent people from mass shooters is not what police do. In fact, Lennard asserted, upholding “racial capitalism with violence”—and doing so with impunity—is the role police have played since the country was founded. Municipal policing began with state violence such as “slave patrols and colonial counterinsurgencies.” In her book *Loaded: A Disarming*
History of the Second Amendment, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz draws similar connections between police and the role of white militias. In an interview broadcast by the Real News Network, Dunbar-Ortiz noted that the Second Amendment was established for white militia settlers, who were self-organized and self-regulated, “to kill Indians and take their land, and later for slave patrols.” A former FBI agent, Mike German, wrote a series of articles for the Guardian that drew out the connection between law enforcement, the legacy of slavery, and “our government’s official sanction of white supremacy.” For decades, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has routinely warned that white supremacist and far-right militant groups often have links to law enforcement. “Yet the justice department has no national strategy designed to protect the communities policed by these dangerously compromised law enforcers,” German wrote.

White supremacy’s connections to gun culture and militarism are also strong. Dunbar-Ortiz explained that the history of mass shootings by lone gunmen killing strangers parallels “the rise of the gun rights movement and ramped-up militarism.” An increase in the number of guns and the lack of regulations are contributors, but there is also “a gun culture at work along with a military culture.” As the Intercept pointed out, the AR-15 is a weapon of war; it is made to “explode the human body.” Military might is a strong selling point, as evident in one AR-15 advertisement for “professional grade weaponry” that featured helmeted men in uniform blasting their way through a building in what journalist Chris Woodyard called “macho-masculinity.” Employed now in mass killings, AR-15s are assault rifles, not defensive ones, just as
US military invasions of other counties are aggressive, not defensive. Dunbar-Ortiz also articulated the historical roots of US militarism in settler colonialism, genocide, white supremacy, slavery, and structural inequality, all of which we still grapple with today. The benign US narrative of immigrant progress obscures the reality that the country was founded in violence as a settler state, imperialist since its inception.37

As I have detailed, there are connections to be made between guns, mass shootings, state violence, white supremacy, and the culture of war, yet media reports fragment the social, cultural, and political worlds, leaving violence without interconnected causes, motivations, and consequences. If we look at another major event in 2021, the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, we find that corporate and legacy media celebrated weapons and belligerencies in coverage that also illustrates News Abuse.

**THE FAILED FOREVER WARS: PULLING OUT OF AFGHANISTAN IN 2021**

When Taliban fighters swept across Afghanistan in a little more than a week and entered its capital, Kabul, on August 15, 2021, without any bloodshed, they surprised the US media, the Biden White House, and the US military. Twenty years earlier, the United States had said the bombing of Afghanistan was necessary to avenge the attacks on the World Trade Center, and thus began the longest war in US history. From the first bombs that hit Afghanistan in 2001, to the smart bombs that “lit up the night sky” over Baghdad, Iraq, in 2003, to Brian Williams’
adoration of the “beautiful” bombing of Syria in 2017, TV news anchors have not hidden their admiration for US bombing of the Middle East.38 But when the US military turned to secret operations by Special Forces, such as the terror of night raids and drone strikes, those deadly brutalities occurred without fanfare or notice.39

The war in Afghanistan was promoted with a set of false narratives carefully designed by the military and government and repeated in the press. Military belligerencies are justified with recognizable tropes that are constant in establishment press coverage of war: US wars are a fight between “good versus evil”; “you can’t negotiate with terrorists”; and US military might “will always win.”40 Secrecy perpetuated the myth of American moral superiority, enabling an unchallenged war lexicon of “beautiful” bombs accurately targeting terrorists; civilian bodies were simply hidden, remaining unseen, without historical recognition.41 But US corporate media showed up in full force when Biden pulled out of Afghanistan.

**Chaotic Images: The US Evacuation of Kabul**

Desperate to get out of the country, those who had worked with the US-backed Afghan government fled to the airport in Kabul, running across the tarmac and swamping the runways. US corporate media covered the chaos with images of hundreds of people jamming the runways and clinging onto aircraft or forcing their way into military transport planes. With the media focusing on the spectacle of the war’s end, in three days Afghanistan received more coverage than it had in years. As desperate people crowded the Kabul airport, US corporate media expressed
great concern for the lives of those who worked with the American military and its Afghan government. In the twisted logic of war journalism, only some lives are valuable, worthy of safety, security, and dignity. During the US withdrawal of Afghanistan, Gregory Shupak surveyed the editorial pages of five major US newspapers for Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) and noted that not one of them mentioned the 71,000 civilians killed during the course of the US-initiated war: “[C]ivilians evidently aren’t significant enough to factor into ‘the cost’ of the war.”

“Intelligence”-Driven Fake News and Blaming Biden

By August 18, 2021, the New York Times and many cable news outlets adopted a critical stance on the war’s end. President Biden took the blame, with Amanda Marcotte observing in Salon, “The collapse of the Afghan government was portrayed as a massive political liability for Biden.” On CNN, Jake Tapper was shocked that Biden “could have been so wrong,” directing viewers to watch the “tragic foreign policy disaster unfold before our eyes” and describing the White House as “flat-footed.” Yet the CIA, the military, and security agencies were rarely the subjects of criticism, though they demonstrably failed the translators, Afghan security forces, journalists, women, and human rights activists in Kabul.

Unwinnable War

In an unusually critical and candid piece published in
2019, titled “At War with the Truth,” the Washington Post reported on a trove of documents called the “Afghanistan Papers” that revealed how “senior U.S. officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the eighteen-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable.” Yet by August 2021, big journalism seemed to forget the contents of the report. The swift Taliban takeover of Afghanistan should have shattered assertions that military operations always vanquish America’s identified enemies.

Without being held accountable for the lies and disinformation that promoted the “forever wars,” corporate media launched another call for war, this time in Ukraine. Even before Russia invaded the country, US media were gearing up for sending weapons to Ukraine, handing the news agenda over to “defense” industry promoters.

PROFITS OVER UKRAINE

In the weeks leading up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the chief executive officers of Lockheed Martin and Raytheon predicted that the looming war would lead to inflated military budgets and increased sales. Lockheed Martin CEO James Taiclet told investors, “With ‘renewed great power competition’ comes windfall profits.” And Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes predicted that “we’re going to see some benefit” from increased “opportunities for international sales.” Since the start of 2022, the stock shares of Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman have surged in value by nearly 25 percent and 20 percent, respectively, and Raytheon and General Dynamics
have enjoyed “almost double-digit growth in their share prices.”47 As billions in profits rolled in, 6 million refugees fled Ukraine and thousands were killed.48 While bringing misery to millions, weapons companies are the only ones “who win these wars,” said Rachel Small, an organizer with World Beyond War.49 But that point of view was certainly not on the pages or screens of US corporate media.

**From the Military to the Arms Industry to US Broadcasts**

Corporate media tapped into a bevy of former high-ranking Department of Defense officials and military officers who have become lobbyists, board members, executives, or consultants for the weapons industry.50 As the Russians invaded Ukraine, a throng of weapons flacks hit the airwaves. An old favorite was retired US combat general Barry McCaffrey, who ordered his infantry division to fire on innocent women and children during the final days of the First Gulf War and who then promoted the endless Iraq War in the years following 9/11 without disclosing his firm’s financial interests.51 McCaffrey has been a mainstay on MSNBC; his defense industry consulting firm is BR McCaffrey Associates LLC.52 One of CNN’s top-choice military talking heads, former CIA director and retired army general David Petraeus, was cheerleading to get MiG fighter jets “into Ukrainian skies.”53 Petraeus is a partner at KKR, a private equity giant with significant military industry business.54

Retired army general Wesley Clark, who made appearances on CNN during the First Gulf War and has enjoyed a lucrative career working with defense companies since,
was brought back onto the network thirty years later to voice his opinion that this “battle is a long way from over, provided we can continue to provide replenishment to the weapons to the Ukrainians.”

When former US defense secretary Leon Panetta appeared on CNN’s *Newsroom* for the fourth time, he said, “I think the United States has to provide whatever weapons are necessary to the Ukrainians, so that they can hit back, and hit back now.” Panetta is a senior counselor at Beacon Global Strategies; MSNBC did not mention this conflict of interest. Jeremy Bash, who served as chief of staff at the Pentagon and the CIA under President Barack Obama, has been a recurring guest on MSNBC and NBC during the crisis in Ukraine. Days after Putin first launched the invasion, Bash was eager to weigh in, appearing on NBC’s *Meet the Press* to tell audiences, “If the United States can train and equip the Ukrainians and, I think, engage in a second *Charlie Wilson’s War*, basically the sequel to the movie and the book, which is arming and training a determined force that will shoot Russian aircraft out of the sky, open up those tanks with can openers, like the Javelins, and kill Russians, which is what our equipment is doing, I think this is a huge opportunity to hit Putin very hard.” It was a well-rehearsed, gung-ho sales pitch, complete with a war-movie tie-in for a product—the Javelin anti-tank missile—built by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon. No one involved in the broadcast told viewers that Bash’s consulting firm has worked for Raytheon.
No Debate, No Anti-War Voices

MintPress News called attention to the defense industry’s partnership with Politico, “an internet news giant” employing more than 700 people and reaching an audience of 50 million people a month. Alan MacLeod pointed out that both of Politico’s defense and space newsletters “come sponsored by giant military and aerospace contractor Northrop Grumman.” Surveying Politico’s military news, anti-war activist and writer David Swanson looked at a long article about Biden’s proposed 2023 military budget and observed a lack of debate on the increases. Politico referred to a $30 billion funding hike in military spending as “supersizing,” the language of extra-large milkshakes and sodas from fast food chains. The proposed increases total $813 billion, including $773 billion for the Pentagon and “tens of billions for nuclear weapons programs overseen by the Energy Department.” Politico’s coverage ignored the dangers of fighting a superpower with nuclear weapons, and it gave the final say to the top Republican on the House Defense Appropriations panel, Ken Calvert, who simply pronounced, “Non-defense discretionary is going to come down and defense is going to go up at the end of the day. . . . That’s it. It’s not complicated.”

Hawks, Information War, and Atrocity Propaganda Repeated

The war in Ukraine took US military media propaganda to dangerous new levels. Common Dreams observed that journalists were more hawkish at news conferences than
Biden’s press secretary, often “cheerleading for escalation in Ukraine,” with more weapons and no-fly zones.\textsuperscript{66} As part of its “information war” against Russia, the Biden administration released false narratives that were repeated in US establishment media. One fabrication was that Russia might be preparing to use chemical agents in Ukraine, yet three US officials later told NBC, “There is no evidence Russia has brought any chemical weapons near Ukraine.”\textsuperscript{67} NBC repeated the propaganda, then reported the retraction by quoting an unidentified US official who said, “It doesn’t have to be solid intelligence…. It’s more important to get out ahead of them [the Russians].”\textsuperscript{68} Caitlin Johnstone put it unequivocally: they lied. “They knowingly circulated information they had no reason to believe was true, and that lie was amplified by all the most influential media outlets in the western world.”\textsuperscript{69}

Johnstone also pointed to another example of corporate media News Abuse, repeating what should have been easily recognized as atrocity propaganda. Lyudmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian parliament’s commissioner for human rights, posted an unsubstantiated story about how two Russians raped a one-year-old baby boy until he died.\textsuperscript{70} The claims were uncritically parroted by Western media outlets including Business Insider, the Daily Beast, the \textit{Daily Mail}, the \textit{Sun}, Metro, the \textit{Daily Mirror}, and Yahoo News.\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Newsweek} headlined another atrocity narrative, claiming, “Russians Raped 11-Year-Old Boy, Forced Mom to Watch: Ukraine Official,” without evidence.\textsuperscript{72} Denisova was finally relieved of her duties on May 31, 2022.\textsuperscript{73}
The Coverage and Debates on Independent Media

While US corporate media single-mindedly called for more war and more weapons, a vibrant debate took place in independent media, addressing Putin’s imperial motivations (as opposed to caricatures of his personal ideologies and desires), the role of NATO as a context for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Ukraine’s right to self-determination. Peace activists and environmentalists called for an immediate end to the war—an existential threat to a planet already in crisis—and argued that no war in our lifetimes has ever benefited humanity or created a more stable and peaceful planet.

The High Costs of Belligerencies Without Negotiations

In April 2022, the Biden Administration unveiled a plan to send Ukraine Lockheed Martin’s High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, known as HIMARS, the most advanced weaponry to date. In response, Medea Benjamin warned in Common Dreams that weapons shipments were increasing the likelihood of a full-scale conflict between the United States and Russia.74 To promote this move, Biden placed an op-ed in the New York Times claiming that weapons put Ukraine in the “strongest possible position at the negotiating table,” even as Russia’s nuclear forces began holding maneuvers.75 Writing for Jacobin, Branko Marcetic reported, “Almost all knowledgeable observers believe the war in Ukraine will have to end with a negotiated agreement. Yet the US, Ukraine’s leading
patron, has signaled it has no patience for diplomatic efforts that cut against its hope for Moscow’s ‘strategic defeat.’”\textsuperscript{76} Ukrainian professor Ivan Katchanovski agreed, saying, “The US and UK governments show no efforts or desire to achieve peaceful settlement of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine.” As the conflict continued, Inter Press Service reported that US sanctions against Russia were creating food crises and price increases.\textsuperscript{77} Besides contravening the UN Charter, unilateral sanctions are illegal under international law and put “countless civilians” at risk, IPS reported.\textsuperscript{78}

In the face of continuing escalation, most corporate news outlets ignored a possible nuclear apocalypse, but, as noted in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, “the doorstep to doom is no place to loiter.”\textsuperscript{79} The immense environmental damage done by war includes trillions of dollars spent on destruction that could be used for environmental renewal. The enormous fossil fuel footprint of the US Department of Defense makes it the largest institutional user of oil in the world.\textsuperscript{80} The horrific human cost of the weapons of war encompasses millions killed and left in misery, the destruction of infrastructure, homelessness, disease, and starvation. The dreadful economic drain and consequent political fallout was identified by Warren Gunnels, staff director for Bernie Sanders when Sanders headed the Senate Budget Committee. Gunnels pointed to the Democratic Party’s shift to austerity, tweeting, “Ending universal free school lunches, enacting the largest Medicare premium hike in history, restarting student loan payments & failing to extend the $300 a month Child Tax Credit, raise the minimum wage or legalize marijuana, is not a very compelling message.”\textsuperscript{81} Yet mil-
itary spending is never cited as a cause for the failure to fulfill domestic programs popular with Americans, such as Medicare for All and raising the minimum wage, nor is it acknowledged as the reason for reductions in school lunch programs that will leave millions of American children hungry.

**CONSPIRACY THEORIES, SCAPEGOATING, AND MASS SHOOTINGS**

Narratives that obscure connections between the costs of war, domestic austerity programs, and the very real threat of an unlivable planet, go hand in hand with the scapegoating of people of color and mass shootings. Without explanations for the loss of wealth and well-being resulting from war expenditures, conspiracy theories thrive. As Chris Hedges wrote, “The mounting misery of the bottom half of the population . . . will find expression through violence.”82 He continued, “People who are Black, Muslim, Asian, Jewish, and LGBTQ, along with the undocumented, liberals, feminists and intellectuals, already branded as contaminants, will be slated for execution.” Hedges concluded, “Kill them overseas. Kill them at home. . . . Violence, in desperation, becomes the only route to salvation.”83 Hedges’ point about violence was resonant in the online rant of the eighteen-year-old shooter who murdered innocent Black shoppers at the Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, New York, in May 2022. The Buffalo shooter’s diatribe cited “replacement theory,” the conspiratorial belief that low birthrates and immigration are leading to the “genocide” of white people. As the Intercept’s Murtaza Hussain noted, the “vision of a bleak,
The toxic discourse of white supremacists is normalized by media treatment of Republicans who nurture these extreme viewpoints. Indeed, as far-right politics takes hold of the GOP, the Southern Poverty Law Center reports, “Republican members of Congress have worked together with open white nationalists and promoted the racist ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theory that has inspired numerous deadly terror attacks.” Yet, as Project Censored pointed out in 2022, legacy news media continue to treat the GOP as a legitimate political party in a democratic system, and the false claims are repeated in what becomes a meaningless back-and-forth.

CONCLUSION

Today, the United States faces an escalating arms race at home and across the globe. There are an estimated 800 million firearms in civilian hands around the world. Half of those weapons are owned by people in the United States, yet the United States accounts for only 5 percent of the world’s population. These figures are mirrored in international arms sales and US military spending. The United States spends as much on the military and its weapons as the next nine countries combined.

In-depth corporate journalism could play a vital role in connecting these figures with the causes and contexts of belligerencies and mass shootings, such as white supremacy with deep roots in law enforcement; the use of assault rifles against children and Black and Brown com-
munities; and the rising threats posed by far-right hate groups.

As our nation grapples with how to reimagine public safety in the wake of escalating domestic terrorism, it is time to present the historical, economic, and political factors that have led to violence, belligerencies, and destruction, and to break the symbiosis between police and media known as copaganda. It’s time to connect right-wing conspiracies, the politicians who normalize hate and racism, and the support of the powerful gun lobby with the increasing threat of mass shootings. Reports on these issues do occasionally appear in corporate media, but they are presented in isolation and without historical context. Corporate media are currently failing democracy, limiting discussion of life-and-death issues to those calling for war and aggression, excluding any other points of view. Moving away from the practices of News Abuse requires a commitment by news editors and reporters to rethink media frames, the ideological underpinnings that shape them, and the corporate interests that sponsor them.

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Notes

2. Medea Benjamin, Twitter, May 5, 2022, 5:38 a.m.
9. Ibid.
14. Piccoli and Marcius, “Witnesses Describe the Suspect’s Arrest.”
22. Ibid.
25. Alec Karakatsanis, Twitter post, May 23, 2022, 7:13 a.m. Only about 4 percent of police time is spent on what they call “violent crime.”
27. Lennard, “Uvalde Police Didn’t Move to Save Lives.”
29. Ibid., see also Ryan McMaken, “Police Have No Duty to Protect You, Federal Court Affirms Once Again,” *Mises Institute*, December 20, 2018.
31. Lennard, “Uvalde Police Didn’t Move to Save Lives.” Ninety percent of the almost all Black people stopped under the policy were not committing any crime at all. In addition, Lennard pointed out, there is scant evidence that police surveillance reduces or prevents crime.
40. For historical perspective, see, Deepa Kumar, “Play It Again, (Uncle) Sam: A Brief History of US Imperialism, Propaganda, and the News,” in *Censored 2015: Inspiring We The People*, eds. Andy Lee Roth and


47. Ibid.


50. An investigation by the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) about defense contractors hiring former Pentagon officials found, from 2008 to the present, “over 380 within two years of leaving the Department.” See Mandy Smithberger, “Brass Parachutes: The Problem of the Pentagon Revolving Door,” POGO, November 5, 2018.


53. “State of the Union: Interview with Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX); Interview with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Interview with Former CIA Director David Petraeus; Interview with Nadya Tolokonnikova,” CNN, March 6, 2022.

56. The former CIA director also said, “I think we need to understand that there is only one thing that Putin understands, and that’s force.” See “Interview with Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta; Interview with State Department Spokesman Ned Price; Russian Missiles Hit Train Station. Transcript,” CNN, April 8, 2022.
58. MSNBC also failed to include disclosures when it interviewed former Homeland Security secretary Jeh Johnson, who now serves on the board of directors of Lockheed Martin—the biggest defense contractor in the world. See Aditi Ramaswami and Andrew Perez, “The Defense Industry’s Ukraine Pundits,” The Lever, April 12, 2022.
59. Meet the Press (NBC), February 27, 2022. Bash was hired by NBC as a national security analyst in 2017.
60. Bash is also a founder and managing director at Beacon Global Strategies. See Ramaswami and Perez, “The Defense Industry’s Ukraine Pundits.”
62. Ibid.
63. David Swanson, “U.S. Military Spending Is Undebatable Because Indefensible,” World Beyond War, June 6, 2022. Swanson wrote that the spending spree on weapons has now expanded to countries such as Spain, Thailand, Germany, Japan, and Netherlands, “with either no debate at all or with all debate shut down by a single word: Russia.” In many cases, when nations increase their military spending, it’s understood as fulfilling a commitment to the US government.
65. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
70. Caitlin Johnstone, “On Russians ‘Raping Babies’,” Consortium News, May 23, 2022. Narratives of killing and harming innocent babies have been used as war propaganda since its inception and were instrumental in demonizing Germans in World War I. See, Andersen, A Century of Media, A Century of War, Chapter One.
73. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
81. Warren Gunnels, Twitter post, June 5, 2022 8:46 a.m.
83. Ibid.
85. Republicans in Congress have scapegoated the Asian American community, celebrated a vigilante who killed two protesters at a Black Lives Matter demonstration, and defended insurrectionists. They have also enacted a historic number of voter-suppression bills to disenfranchise voters of color and people in poverty. They have rallied their base against inclusive and anti-racist education and introduced a slew of bills that would promote discrimination against transgender people and gut the teaching of Black history. Attempts to ban books are on the rise, targeting in particular titles that address race, sexuality, and gender. See, “The Year in Hate & Extremism Report 2021,” Southern Poverty Law Center, March 9, 2022.
86. Andersen, “False Balance in Media Coverage Undermines Democracy.”
87. Alvarez, “Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz on Uvalde.”