



Beware the Lies That Lead to War — and the Commitment of U.S. Troops

Apropos of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, trending on Twitter are memes that say lies from the government and leftist mainstream media are the cause of wars.

"Nearly every war that has started in the past 50 years has been the media lies," free speech advocate Julian Assange says in an interview.

But the lies that pushed the United States into wars began long before that with World War I, a Twitter user observed. Indeed, one might go back to the Spanish-American War that began with outrageous propaganda from press tycoons Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst.



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Lies continue during wars, and sometimes serve the interest of the enemy. Recall the pro-communist media's reporting on the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive in 1968.

Will President Joe Biden lie the United States into war with Russia with pleas that Americans must "defend democracy" in Ukraine? It is certainly possible, considering past lies that provided that rationale for U.S. military interventions from Vietnam (the false claims about the Gulf of Tonkin) to Iraq (the false claims about weapons of mass destruction).

Half-Century Of Lies

"One of the hopeful things that I have discovered, is that nearly every war that has started in the past 50 years has been the result of media lies," Assange said:

The media could have stopped it, if they had searched deep enough, if they hadn't reprint government propaganda.... That means, basically, populations don't like wars. Populations have to be fooled into wars. Populations don't willingly, with open eyes, go into a war. If we have a good media environment, then we will also have a peaceful environment.

"They lied to get us into WW1," another Twitter user wrote, referring to the [sinking of the Lusitania](#) and anti-German propaganda, such as that [depicting Huns](#) bayoneting Belgian babies:

They lied to get us into war in Vietnam and Iraq. Are they lying about Ukraine to maybe start WW3? Do you want your children to die for another lie?



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 25, 2022

The lie that took the U.S. into full-scale war in Vietnam [was about](#) North Vietnam's supposed torpedo attacks on two U.S. ships, the USS *Maddox*, and the USS *Turner Joy*. "For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there," President Johnson said at the time. The lie about an attack ended in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution that committed U.S. troops to war until 1973.

The United States invaded Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration told the American people, because Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. That too [was a lie](#), as Assange's [WikiLeaks documents dump showed](#).

Yet the lies, again, go back to at least the Spanish-American war. Hearst's and Pulitzer's newspapers carried lurid accounts of Cuba's Spanish overlords committing unspeakable atrocities. A typical headline: "CUBANS FED TO SHARKS." "Remember the Maine" was the battle cry after the U.S. battleship inexplicably exploded. The U.S. and the newspaper blamed Spain. War ensued, and the United States took all of Spain's overseas empire and turned into U.S. property.

Lie About Tet

As to Vietnam, the Johnson administration might have hoked up the Tonkin attack to justify its war, but the pro-communist media lied to help North Vietnam.

The biggest lie, as Hudson Institute Senior Fellow [Arthur Herman wrote](#) in 2018, was about the Tet Offensive. U.S. forces decisively defeated the enemy. The media reported otherwise.

"CBS and the other networks, plus the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*," he wrote, "decided to turn the major Communist Tet offensive against U.S. forces and South Vietnam on January 30, 1968, into an American defeat, rather than what it actually was: a major American victory."

Herman noted that the "Communist cause in the Vietnam War was in deep trouble" as 1967 closed, and so the North Vietnamese tried Tet, an a major attack "born of desperation."

It began January 30 and "ended a little more than a month later when Marines crushed the last pockets of resistance in the northern city of Hue," Herman wrote:

It not only destroyed the Vietcong as an effective political and military force, it also, together with the siege of Khe Sanh, crippled the NVA, which lost 20 percent of its forces in the South and suffered 33,000 men killed in action, all for no gain. By the end of 1969, over 70 percent of South Vietnam's population was rated by the U.S. military as under government control, compared with 42 percent at the beginning of 1968.

The American public knew none of this, however. Almost from the moment the first shots were being fired, skeptics of the war effort in the mainstream media, including CBS News icon Walter Cronkite, would use Tet to prove that the war wasn't being won as the Johnson administration was claiming. They went further, representing the failed attacks on the U.S. embassy in Saigon and other sites as symbols of Communist success.

As the *Washington Post's* own Saigon bureau chief Peter Braestrup documented in his book *The Big Story*, reporters caught in the fighting systematically used it to turn the reality of American victory into an image of American and South Vietnamese defeat (reporting for example that Vietcong had overrun five floors of the U.S. embassy when in fact the VC had



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never even gotten inside the building). Newsweek's coverage of the siege of Khe Sanh showed 18 photos (out of a total of 29) of dead or wounded Marines or Marines huddling under cover, never mentioning that the Marines were steadily pushing back the NVA and inflicting heavy casualties.

The media lie "culminated in Walter Cronkite's half-hour TV special on February 27, when he told his viewers with an appropriately glum face that Tet had proved that America was now 'mired in a stalemate' — even as American forces were breaking the siege around Khe Sanh and clearing out the last resistance in Hue."

That lie ended American support for the war. After all, Cronkite, inexplicably, was "the most trusted man in America."

[Continued Herman:](#)

Gallup polls in December 1967 had shown Americans evenly split on whether entering Vietnam was a mistake. The barrage of negative coverage of Tet had nudged the doubters slightly ahead by February 1, 46 to 42 percent. By April, the doubters were ahead by eight points, and support for the war never recovered.

Of course, the media's lies about Tet don't mean U.S. involvement in Vietnam was prudent. But they do show, as Assange notes about lies that push the country into war, how powerful the media are. They can drag the country into war with lies. And they can lie to help the enemy.

Americans had better decide whether to believe their military is "defending democracy" in Ukraine now that Biden [is sending](#) U.S. troops to Europe. [Calling Ukraine a democracy is hopeful at best](#). But even if it is, the U.S. faces invasion at its southern border. That's a rather more pressing matter than protecting a country [almost 6,000 miles away](#).



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