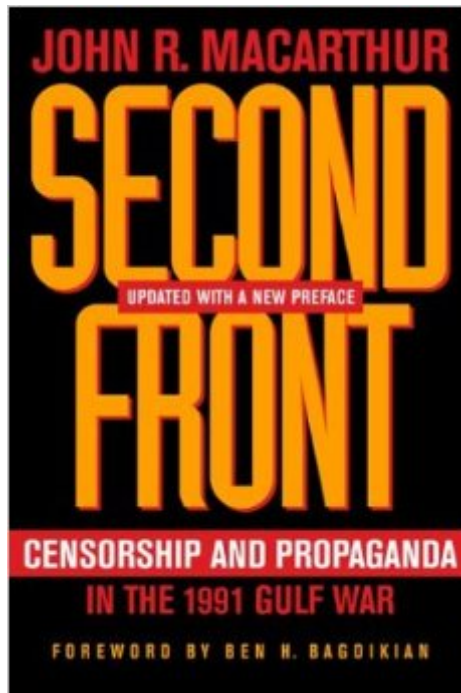


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Second Front: Censorship And Propaganda In The 1991 Gulf War



Synopsis

Now updated with a new preface that examines the current conflict in Iraq, this brilliant work of investigative reporting reveals the government's assault on the constitutional freedoms of the American media during Operation Desert Storm. John R. MacArthur's engaging and provocative account is as essential and alarming today as when the first paperback edition was published ten years ago.

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Customer Reviews

During the Gulf War, I was an elementary schooler who eagerly bought the propaganda the government, my school district, and hometown were promoting in the name of patriotism. I earnestly snapped up everything and anything having to do with the military, American Flags or Yellow Ribbons convinced that our side was the right side--and unlike the war in Vietnam, the reasoning for deployment was universally accepted by the American people. Although I now realize there were people voicing conscientious objection to war with Iraq (because among other reasons, we had once supported Saddam Hussein's rise to power including outfitting his troops with weapons when it suited our international interests and did not seriously care what would happen to the people of Iraq afterwards), if given any coverage in the national news at all, they were ridiculously marginalized as outcasts who were living in a gigantic timewarp and did not understand that this was the 1990's. My parents, having lived through Vietnam, were more cynical about the military operation--but did not challenge the advertising marketed towards their daughter for fear of being perceived as unsupportive of America's objectives. Because they realized that the Gulf War was

fought partly over US Petroleum interests, support was actually a more complex issue than I was receiving from media, institutional, and peer socialization. MacArthur and Bagdikian provide a wealth of information for anybody who wants to revisit this time in international/American history and uncover the truth that all too quickly disappeared and was omitted in the name of national unity.

Harper's Magazine publisher John MacArthur has delivered an excellent piece of journalism on journalism, or at least, on war journalism. MacArthur's "Second Front", subtitled "Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War", provides a well written and easy to read, quick to read survey of the issues surrounding the media's virtual enlistment into Gulf War 1. Dedicated, amongst others to the great "left Jeffersonian" writer Walter Karp, the book definitely shows a Karp like attention to clear thinking and clear unencumbered writing. Six chapters and an afterword penned in 1993 take the reader through the whole field. The "pool" system is examined. Modelled on British experience in the Falklands, it tended to control and co-opt reporters, turning the media's normally competitive instincts into a form of mild self censorship designed to "not rock the boat" and maintain the almighty privilege of "access." In prisons this is called the "trustee" system! MacArthur shows how news management preceded once Desert Shield turned into Desert Storm, and how once the dust settled, how major media organisations, perhaps flushed with Victory themselves, failed to respond to restrictive regime they had just been exposed to. Although naturally beyond the scope of MacArthur's 1993 book, this "lost opportunity" to seek correction after Gulf War 1 perhaps better explains the weakness of the media in the subsequent dozen or so years than most theories mooted more recently. There are two stand out chapters. One dealing with the wholly fabricated story of Iraqis allegedly stealing Kuwaiti baby incubator cribs is told in full detail. This story will surely be a textbook case of the worst kind of wartime propaganda for decades to come.

And that's a lot more than the press had in its coverage of Gulf War I: The Prequel. For those of us old enough to have survived the Vietnam Era, we can recollect that some military and intelligence types blamed the loss of that police action on the media. (Even in that era, I found the media to be pretty wishy washy, but they got much worse.) Volumes have been released--some even by the Pentagon--that dispute that claim, but it was popular among Establishment types who argued that the US can do no wrong. Then there was Granada. That I recall because it was so transparently censored--while US medical students in Granada, the ones whose parents could afford to send them there after they'd been rejected by US med schools, were praising the military's arrival just in time, an obvious placement of the right message at the right time. I thought things couldn't get any

worse than this. But then there was Panama...Up to the present, Gulf War II, following the subject matter of the book, we've evolved to "embedded" journalists, i.e., media personnel accompanying the brave military in staged events to make Cecil B. DeMille jealous. The process and material of this "war" was provided by PR professionals! This book documents a mid point in that process. And I remember it because I was frequently furious during Desert Storm that every local VFW chapter was called upon to comment while even major newspapers abstained from printing letters critical of the event! There's a lot in this spectacular volume. The author begins with explaining how the media plan was designed, the "pooling" of journalists covering it, to the objection of few!

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