Australia's state-funded broadcaster pumping out pro-war anti-Russian propaganda

Richard Phillips
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The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), in line with the Morrison government and Labor's full-throated backing of the US-led war drive against Russia, continues to churn out militarist propaganda while politically censoring or silencing those who oppose the official pro-war narrative.

On Monday night, "Media Watch"—a 15-minute weekly television show hosted by Paul Barry—presented what its producers claimed would be an analysis of the "media war" over coverage of the Ukraine conflict.

"Media Watch" purports to highlight media lies, fake news and violations of journalistic standards. Its reports, however, are mostly trivial and never challenge the existing corporate media setup. Exposures of questionable reportage by ABC journalists are rare and largely aimed at trying to maintain the show's flagging credibility.

This week's program was a travesty, providing no serious analysis of the media coverage, let alone the US-led provocations and geo-political factors that produced the conflict. The program featured two so-called experts, Peter W. Singer and Dr Ian Garner. Viewers were told next to nothing about their military and political credentials.

Dr Garner, who was referred to as a Russian war propaganda expert, is a historian and Russian-language translator, and has written for the *Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy*. His forthcoming book, entitled *Stalingrad Lives! Stories of Combat & Survival* argues that the Soviet army's resounding defeat of Hitler's Nazi army at Stalingrad in 1942–43, the deadliest battle of WWII, was not a triumph but a tragedy that was transformed into a "myth" by Soviet authors.

Singer, who was presented as a "New American Strategist and Senior Fellow," is a senior consultant for US military and intelligence and a best-selling "military futurist" author. He was coordinator of President Obama's defense policy task force and a member of the US Military's Transformation Advisory Group, NATO's Innovation Advisory Board, the NSA's Advisory Board, and an Associate with the US Air Force's China Aerospace Studies Institute.

Throughout "Media Watch," presenter Paul Barry and the two experts breathlessly promoted Ukrainian President Zelensky, hailing his government's social media strategy, including its use of fake news.

"Ukraine has not just been winning the information war, they've won it," Singer declared. "They've set the narrative of how this war will be interpreted, both inside Ukraine but also the wider world."

This was echoed by Garner, who said that Ukrainian government videos were "slick," and "savvy," even though several of the social media postings screened on "Media Watch" used fake or entirely unrelated material.

These included a video of a young girl reportedly challenging a Russian soldier that was, in fact, a Palestinian girl confronting an Israeli soldier. Another clip was supposedly air combat footage of a Ukrainian fighter pilot shooting down a Russian plane. In fact it was lifted from a computer war game. Another bogus report hailed a Ukrainian army "laser-sniffing cat" that had allegedly located four Russian snipers.

The fact that this footage was entirely false, thus constituting clear war propaganda, was of no consequence for "Media Watch."

Asked by Barry whether it mattered that this was fake news, Garner replied, "Morally and ethically on our

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part that's a big question. But for Zelensky it doesn't matter, for Zelensky what is important is that he is bringing the nation together." In other words, if it works for Zelenksy and his US-led NATO allies, then it's fine.

"Media Watch" made a passing reference to Russian government and media evidence that neo-Nazis were operating in conjunction the Ukrainian government. This fact was cynically dismissed as ridiculous by the show's host because Zelensky was Jewish, as if one's religious heritage was some sort of permanent political immunity to extreme-right positions and alignments.

The program then cited various examples of Russian propaganda and listed newspapers and broadcasters, including *Novaya Gazeta* and *Meduza*, that have been banned or shut down by Putin's dictatorial regime and its brutal and anti-democratic censorship laws.

No reference was made to the vicious attacks and arrests of Ukrainians who have fallen foul of the Ukrainian regime or the recent capture and torture of Ukrainian medal-winning mixed martial arts athlete Maxim Ryndovskiy by neo-Nazis in that country.

Nor was anything said about the closure of RT America, the Russian state-funded cable news network in the US, the cancellation of concerts and contracts with Russian classical conductors and musicians, or the banning of Russian films at international film festivals.

Barry's most glaring omission, however, was his failure to utter a single word about ABC-TV journalist Stan Grant's unprecedented silencing, and then removal from the "Q+A" audience, of a Russian-Australian student just four days earlier. The young student was kicked out because he questioned the media's biased coverage of the military conflict.

"Media Watch" pontificates every week about "journalistic ethics," but it dared not say anything about Grant's attack on freedom of speech, an event that shocked ABC viewers around the country and produced a wave of angry denunciations on social media.

Many of its viewers have now begun exploring the pro-war pedigrees and political agendas of journalists like Stan Grant, who has close connections with Australia's military establishment. He has a senior role at ASPI, a government- and defence industry-funded think-tank that churns out a continuous stream of pro-war, anti-Russian and anti-Chinese material.

The day after her appearance on "Q+A," Olga Boichak posted a Twitter photograph of herself and other Ukrainian nationalists posing with Grant after the show and thanking him for his "good judgment" and "excellent moderation."

Grant gave Boichak the final word on "Q+A" during which she called for increased military aid from Australia, a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which would lead to direct military conflict by NATO with Russia, and the "outlawing" of Russian media in Australia. "We have to talk about whether we can allow the Russian state media to keep spreading its propaganda [in Australia]," she declared.

The state-funded ABC has for decades been popularly viewed as the most trusted media outlet in the country. Last week's "Q+A" attack on free speech, and now the refusal of "Media Watch" to even discuss the incident is prompting many workers, students and youth to think more carefully about the network and the role it plays in promoting the interests and geopolitical ambitions of Australia's ruling elite.

The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party opposes the Putin regime, which represents a Russian capitalist class, and its reactionary invasion of Ukraine. We fight for an independent anti-war movement of the international working class based on a socialist, anti-capitalist program.

All those seeking to understand the war in Ukraine and the escalating US-NATO intervention must study the historical background of these developments, which is being suppressed and falsified by the state-funded and corporate media.

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