

Censorship. Does the U.S. Military Assassinate Journalists?

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As the cries of United States' 'exceptionalism' are heard from the hallowed halls of Congress, one of the alleged hallmarks is freedom of the press. No nation, the breathless masses are told, protects press freedom like the United States. This belief is similar to Santa Claus: pleasant, comforting, but having no basis in truth.

The government only allows news to be reported that is favorable to the U.S.

Censorship has accompanied all its major wars, with the government actually writing articles for news outlets. Historian William Clayton Mullendore, in commenting on censorship during World War I, said: "...the idea of a 'free' press publishing government-authored articles is bound to raise red flags and illustrates how coordinated war propaganda was." [1]

Three days after the U.S. joined World War II, the Office of Censorship was established, although it was six months before the so-called 'Office of War Information' came into being. President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that

"All Americans abhor censorship, just as they abhor war. But the experience of this and of all other nations has demonstrated that some degree of censorship is essential in wartime...." [2]

There was little, if any, opposition to this by the press. "As in World War I, nearly every media outlet in the country stood squarely behind, or in fact became a partner with, the government in promoting its wartime requirements." [3]

During the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman said, "that a propaganda agency was a creature of total war." [4] Yet he issued a 'gag order, prohibiting all government officials from making any public statements about 'controversial' foreign policy issues. [5]

These are just three examples among many that indicate the lack of free press in the United States.

In the twenty-first century, worse instances of censorship have been uncovered, including the murder of journalists by U.S. military members. At the World Economic Forum of 2005, CNN news chief Eason Jordan allegedly "...told the audience that U.S. forces had deliberately targeted journalists in Iraq. This charge is nothing new; journalists in other countries, especially colleagues of journalists killed by U.S. troops, have said this repeatedly. But in the United States corporate media, it is the job of people like Jordan to ignore such allegations.

To hear them instead echoed by a CNN official meant the rules of the game had been broken.”[6] While this was not the first time Jordan had made this accusation (he had done so in 2002 and 2004, and had also accused Israel of the same thing as early as 2002), this statement garnered more publicity. Jordan almost immediately tried to backtrack, saying his words were taken out of context, he had the utmost respect for the military (he had been embedded with them during the Iraq War), and basically said he never actually said the words attributed to him. The World Economic Forum refused to release a transcript of the conversation, which was videotaped, although several people present when Jordan spoke corroborated his statements. But all Jordan’s groveling was in vain, and he was forced to resign. The rules of U.S. censorship and propaganda must not be violated.

In 2004, the secretary of state at the time, Colin Powell visited Iraq on the first anniversary of the U.S. invasion of that country. As he entered the large dining hall to greet soldiers, many Arab journalists walked out in protest of the murder of two other Arab journalists by U.S. soldiers.

“Mr. Powell said he regretted the loss of life, but added he was certain the Americans did not kill the journalists on purpose.”[7]

The evidence that they did so is, at best, incriminating, if not overwhelming. “Al Arabiya employees say U.S. soldiers fired on a car carrying the TV crew, after another car ran through a checkpoint. Cameraman Ali Abdelaziz was killed immediately...”[8] News correspondent Ali al-Khatib died a short time later in the hospital. One wonders what the relevance of one car running a checkpoint had to do with the attack on a press vehicle in the same general area.

Yasser Salihee was an Iraqi journalist working for Knight Ridder, who covered a story about extra-judicial killings by U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Within a week of beginning their research, he and another journalist uncovered thirty cases of such killing by U.S.-supported and U.S.-trained Iraqi death squads.

“On June 24, while Salihee’s article was in press, a U.S. military sniper killed him...”[9] in the same manner that many of the thirty victims he’d uncovered had died: a single shot to the head.

A statement from Knight-Ridder following this assassination said this:

“‘There’s no reason to think that the shooting had anything to do with his reporting work.’ Such disclaimers seem to be a de facto mandate these days. When an investigative report is shot dead by a member of an organization he or she is investigating, there’s a clear rationale for suspicion.”[10]

How many such murders occur? Journalist Michael I. Niman said the following:

“Eason’s comment cost him his job – and no genuflecting to the god of disclaimers and apologies could save it. He resigned. The problem was that he was right. I also looked at the Reporters Without Borders investigation into the deaths of two journalists killed by U.S. troops in Baghdad, and at other

subsequently confirmed killings of journalists by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Serbia - showing how U.S. military documentation offers evidence that many of these dead journalist were in fact deliberately targeted by U.S. forces.”[11]

Freedom of the press, like many other alleged freedoms within the United States, is a myth; corporate-owned media outlets report what the government tells them to report since government officials and corporate executives all benefit financially by repeating government lies. And when journalists get too close to the truth, eliminating them is not too extreme a measure to take. Rather than let the populace know that U.S. soldiers are torturing and executing innocent, defenseless people, kill those who report such atrocities. This eliminates the current problem and serves as a warning to other journalists.

Freedoms in the U.S. are as illusionary as its exceptionalism. Like a magician distracting the audience from one thing while he does something else to indicate ‘magic’, U.S. government spokespeople repress real news, and proclaim that the U.S. is the greatest country in the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

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Notes

[1] Celia Malone Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 35.

[2] Ross F. Collins and Patrick S. Washburn, *The Greenwood Library of American War Reporting*, Volume 5: World War I and World War II (Westport, CT., Greenwood Press, 2005) 250 (referenced in *Children, War and Propaganda*, page 32).

[3] Ross F. Collins, *Children, War and Propaganda*. (Peter Lange, Inc., 2011).

[4] Steven Case, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the Untied states, 1950 - 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008),

[5] *Ibid*, 218 - 219.

[6] Michael I. Niman, “Truth, Death, and Journalism: We Kill Journalists, Don’t We?” *The Humanist*, May-June 2005.

[7] “Powell Surprise Visit Greeted by Hostile Reporters; Journalists Protest Deaths of Two Colleagues,” *The Washington Times* (Washington, DC), March 20, 2004.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Michael I. Niman, "We Kill Journalists: Part Two in an Unfortunately Continuing Series," The Humanist, September-October 2005.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

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