

Iraq Killings and Media Indifference

Leaked video mostly ignored by corporate media

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A leaked videotape of a 2007 U.S. helicopter attack in Baghdad that killed a dozen Iraqis was unveiled on April 5 by the website WikiLeaks. To much of the corporate media, though, it was either not worth reporting at all, or an unfortunate incident to be defended.

The graphic and disturbing [video](#) includes audio of the helicopter pilots cheering their attacks. Two journalists working for Reuters—photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen and driver Saed Chmagh—were killed in the assault, which U.S. military officials had claimed was a response to insurgent activity. WikiLeaks says it acquired the video from whistleblowers within the military.

The release of the video, though, got only cursory treatment in the mainstream press. The New York Times ([4/5/10](#)) ran a relatively thorough piece, which summarized the video this way:

But the video does not show hostile action. Instead, it begins with a group of people milling around on a street, among them, according to WikiLeaks, Mr. Noor-Eldeen and Mr. Chmagh. The pilots believe them to be insurgents, and mistake Mr. Noor-Eldeen's camera for a weapon. They aim and fire at the group, then revel in their kills.

"Look at those dead bastards," one pilot says. "Nice," the other responds.

A wounded man can be seen crawling and the pilots impatiently hope that he will try to fire at them so that under the rules of engagement they can shoot him again. "All you gotta do is pick up a weapon," one pilot says.

The helicopters also fire on a van that appears on the scene to carry away some of the victims. The Times had two follow-up stories on April 7.

A leaked video that seems to show the U.S. military killing and wounding civilians should be a big news story. But most of the media seemed to think otherwise, with a search of the Nexis news database showing scant pick-up.

CBS Evening News (4/5/10) reported on the video, with anchor Harry Smith opening the segment, "In the heat of battle, things are not always as they might seem." Correspondent Bob Orr closed by offering something of a justification: "Now, it appears from the tapes that at least some of those hit on the ground were unarmed, but a journalist who was in the general area that same day says it's important for all of us to remember it was a hectic, violent and uneasy day."

On CNN's Situation Room (4/5/10), the network decided not show any of the shots that were fired "out of respect for the families of the two Iraqi employees of the Reuters news organization that were killed," explained Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr. (The photographer's father was quoted in the [April 7 Times](#): "God has answered my prayer in revealing this tape to the world.... I would have sold my house and I all that I own in order to show this tape to the world.") Starr went on to claim:

There was an investigation of this incident. The Army found no one at fault, that the units in the air—the helicopters in the air had no reason to believe that there were journalists there on the ground with the insurgents. They say that nearby U.S. troops had come under attack and that this shooting, which we are not showing the specifics of, was justified.

While it is correct that the military conducted some sort of investigation, it is unclear how Starr could know that any of the victims were "insurgents."

And there has been little discussion of the relevant history of U.S. forces firing on and killing journalists working in Iraq, including a tank firing on journalists at the Palestine Hotel and attacks on the Baghdad offices of Al Jazeera and Abu Dhabi TV (FAIR Media Advisory, "Is Killing Part of Pentagon Press Policy?," [4/10/03](#)). While those who defend the helicopter attacks in the video say that the U.S. forces could not have known there were journalists on the ground, these earlier incidents suggest that knowledge of the whereabouts of media workers does not necessarily prevent attacks.

There has been other coverage of the video. MSNBC's Dylan Ratigan (4/5/10), for example, hosted a lengthy discussion with former military officials, Salon's Glenn Greenwald and Julian Assange from WikiLeaks. Democracy Now! ([4/6/10](#)) hosted a discussion with Assange and Greenwald as well. National Public Radio aired two reports on April 6. But where is the rest of the media on this story?

This news comes on the heels of the revelation that a Special Forces raid in Afghanistan killed five civilians, including three women, in a house raid in February. NATO forces had originally claimed that the three women were found dead at the scene; the London Times reported ([4/5/10](#)) that according to Afghan investigators, "U.S. special forces soldiers dug bullets out of their victims' bodies in the bloody aftermath of a botched night raid, then washed the wounds with alcohol before lying to their superiors about what happened."

Both incidents, of course, demand more scrutiny. So far, U.S. corporate media are mostly ignoring them.

To view the WikiLeaks video:

[Full version with transcript](#)

[Edited version](#)

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