

Is the US Media Leading America into Another War?

America's Armed Forces are "Embedded in the Media"

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In the past, war reporters bravely followed soldiers into the jaws of war. Today, it looks like the soldiers are embedded in the media instead, simply going along for the story.

This article asks a simple question that unfortunately has no simple answer: "Where should media publications draw the line when it comes to using 'anonymous sources' to substantiate their news reports, especially ones that risk skewing public opinion in favor of yet another disastrous war?"

The bitter lesson that the American people thought they had learned from the War in Iraq was that it is essential to question, question and question again the information that our politicians and media organizations feed us before we jump headlong into yet another war. Never again, we shouted in practically one voice, would we allow our leaders to loll us to sleep with scare tactics as they sow the seeds for yet another costly military campaign. But that was yesterday, and the public memory is a notoriously short one. Thus, the nightmare of war is happening all over again.

In the afterglow of the misguided "Mission Accomplished" celebrations, after it became embarrassingly clear that there were no WMDs in Iraq, the American media machine (with no small help from the rabble-rouser filmmaker Michael Moore, courtesy of his film "Fahrenheit 9/11") publicly flagellated itself, vowing that it would never again accept an argument for war sitting down.

At the same time, the equally complicit American people were free to debate the ugly fact that we took our eye off the ball long after the US military was already bolted down in Baghdad for the long haul. And this exercise in sheer futility we proudly, pompously called "democracy in action."

Today, the US media is not only standing up in the face of yet another Middle East mishap, quickly spiraling into a funnel cloud in Pakistan, but is actually leading the military march to it. This is a far cry from the Vietnam days, when newspapers vigorously questioned the behavior of the US military. And once again there is hardly a peep from Main Street, USA, as the drumbeat for more war intensifies.

Hello Pakistan Taliban

"There will be blood," wrote James Gordon Meek on Monday in The New York Daily News. "The fight against the terrorists may finally be no-holds barred with the revelation

that Faisal Shahzad was trained and dispatched by the Pakistani Taliban to slaughter innocents in Times Square.”

Hold your horses, Mr. Meek.

First of all, nobody – not least of all our prime suspect, whom nobody outside of the law enforcement agencies has heard speak – is certain as to who or what motivated Faisal Shahzad to leave his car running in Times Square with an amateurish bomb rigged to fireworks smoking in the back seat.

“If Mr. Shahzad did attend a jihadist academy in South Waziristan,” the Christian Science Monitor rightly asked on Monday, “or some other remote Pakistani region, why wasn’t he a better bomb maker?”

“Shahzad’s explosive device appears to have been odd, and amateurish. Yet the Taliban’s basic field manual has two chapters on explosives and addresses everything from the correct creation of detonators to the exact chemical compositions required for homemade bombs.”

The article goes on to quote law enforcement officials as saying that the bomb was made of fireworks, gasoline, propane tanks, and fertilizer – a slightly unusual list of bomb-making ingredients.

“While these substances are flammable and dangerous in their own right, they are not typical bomb components, with the exception of fertilizer. For ammonium nitrate fertilizer to become a powerful explosive, it must be mixed with fuel oil – a step Shahzad reportedly had not taken,” the Christian Science Monitor concluded.

Surely Shahzad, a college grad who reportedly traveled back to Pakistan “numerous times” since first coming to the United States on a student visa in 1999, would have easily grasped such rudimentary skills had he really been training with bona fide terrorists. Why isn’t the US media asking some hard questions about this obvious incongruity?

Moreover, nobody is certain that the “Pakistani Taliban,” otherwise known as Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP), who allegedly claimed responsibility for Mr. Shahzad’s actions, was behind the attack. Indeed, the TTP told reporters that, although they cheered his actions, their organization had “no links whatsoever” with Faisal Shahzad.

“The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has had no links with Faisal Shahzad whatsoever,” the group’s spokesman, Azam Tariq, told reporters via telephone in Peshwar. “We never imparted training to him, nor had he ever come to us.”

Alarm bells should be ringing since TTP regularly went out of its way to claim responsibility for attacks, even when they had nothing to do with them. After all, nowhere does the adage “bad publicity is good publicity” have more significance than in the terrorist business. But in the United States, the “damage” is already done: it is practically etched in stone that the Pakistan Taliban – a group that just several months ago could barely lace up its boots – is responsible for Shahzad’s would-be act of terrorism.

Meanwhile, Faisal Shahzad himself has claimed that he “acted alone” without any formal

connections to any terrorist organization. After all, we may safely assume that there are at least a few Muslim-Americans who, to put it mildly, do not agree with US military activities in the Middle East. In fact, we have already witnessed exactly such a scenario in the case of Muslim-born Nidal Hassan, the Fort Hood shooter who acted alone when he killed 13 fellow soldiers and wounded 30 on November 30, 2009.

Finally, the US media has provided practically zero substantive evidence linking Faisal Shahzad to Pakistan Taliban. At a time when the American people need facts as opposed to fantasy, the best they can get is a steady stream of “anonymous sources” telling them what they should believe. Thus, it may happen yet again that the American people find themselves involved in another war for the stupidest of all reasons: nobody – most importantly the media community – bothered themselves with some basic fact-checking.

“I am comfortable in saying that they were involved in what Shahzad tried to do,” said Attorney General Eric Holder in an NBC interview broadcast Sunday. That, ladies and gentlemen, is about the most definitive accusation uttered by a living person against Mr. Shahzad and the reincarnated Pakistan Taliban. The rest of the story is pure speculation, the vast majority attributed to “anonymous sources.” This gives the “freedom of the press” an entirely different meaning than what was originally intended.

The American media is digging up numerous mystery sources about the Pakistani Taliban, Faisal Shahzad, and the man who is quickly looking meaner than Osama bin Laden himself, Hakimullah Mehsud, the leader of the TTP.

“Investigators believe that Times Square bombing suspect Faisal Shahzad had ties to TTP,” reported CNN, “a Pakistani Taliban group, a senior law enforcement official and a US intelligence official said...”

“Did he receive help in Pakistan? Yes he did,” said the official, in response to his own question. “The official said Shahzad is believed to have received training of some sort, but would not say if the training was specific to the Times Square bombing attempt.”

In yet another case of anonymous attribution, The New York Times quoted a “senior US intelligence official” as saying “[T]hey trade bomb makers and people around... It’s becoming a witches’ brew.”

If the reader would take the time to examine other articles on this particular case, it would become immediately obvious that the vast majority of government officials, law enforcement agents and other such apparently high-ranking figures are regularly introduced into the stories without attribution, as if they were simply dreamed up by the reporters themselves. This slipshod approach to reporting on what may become the story of the century is simply inexcusable.

But there are other easily identifiable problems.

First, it is paramount that we hear these misguided individuals – that is, the terrorists – speak for themselves in lengthy public interviews. Yet not a single alleged terrorist – not Richard “Shoe-bomber” Reid, nor Abdul Farouk Abdulmutallab, the would-be Christmas Day bomber of Detroit Flight 253, or even Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, who was “water-boarded” hundreds of times by his American captors, which finally led to his confession – has had a chance to tell his side of the story before the

American people. And with closed-door military tribunals becoming the latest fashion in fighting terrorism, this dark trend promises to continue.

Why have we not heard anything from these detained ‘terrorists,’ some of whom are still rotting away without legal representation in Guantanamo Bay Detention Center? Would it really compromise any court proceedings, investigation or war on terror to let the American people – together with the rest of the global community – hear something from these dangerous individuals? In light of the ultra-secret, ultra-undemocratic tactics employed in the War on Terror, such as torturing individuals in order to extract confessions, this is our right.

Yet the only thing we read about today is the expansion of the “war effort” in Pakistan:

“The approval given to the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) by the administration of President Barack Obama to expand drone strikes in Pakistan’s tribal regions is on face value a declaration of war by the US inside Pakistan,” reported the Asian Times at the weekend. “The move comes at a time when Pakistan is trying to win some breathing space to delay an all-out operation in North Waziristan, home to powerful militant groups and an Al-Qaeda headquarters.”

The article went on to say that “The CIA was given authority... to expand strikes by unmanned aerial vehicles against low-level combatants, even if their identities are not known. Obama had previously said drone strikes were necessary to ‘take out high-level terrorist targets’.”

“At least 10 militants have been killed by unmanned US drones in the Pakistani tribal region of North Waziristan near the Afghan border, local officials say,” as reported by the BBC.

“The US has stepped up pressure on Pakistan’s government since linking a failed car bombing in New York to the Pakistani Taliban.”

Some might call this terribly convenient.

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