

Media Manipulation and the United Nations

UNESCO Severs Ties to Democracy Manipulators?

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On March 12, 2008, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) decided to withdraw their patronage of Reporters Without Borders second annual Online Free Expression Day. UNESCO's [press release](#), said that they had granted Reporters Without Borders (RSF) their patronage for the international day on February 28, 2008, on the condition that UNESCO "could not 'be associated with the activities envisaged for this occasion' by RSF." However, they add that:

"[In its](#) communications on the day, RSF published material concerning a number of UNESCO's Member States, which UNESCO, had not been informed of and could not endorse. Furthermore, UNESCO's logo was placed in such a way as to indicate the Organization's support of the information presented."

Reporters Without Borders hit back at UNESCO by saying that "[UNESCO's grovelling](#)" was a result of "direct pressure" from several of the governments on their list of 15 'Internet Enemies', observing that UNESCO had "behaved with great cowardice". Controversially, Reporters Without Borders concluded by pointing out that "it seems we have gone back 20 years, to the time when authoritarian regimes called the shots at UNESCO headquarters in Paris."

Which 'authoritarian' regime Reporters Without Borders are referring to is not entirely clear, because just over 20 years ago (in January 1985) it was the US government that "called the shots at UNESCO". Indeed they successfully undermined UNESCO's proposal for a progressive New World Information and Communication Order, by withdrawing from the agency at a time when they were providing a quarter of UNESCO's funding. Of course needless to say, this progressive proposal was strongly opposed by the world's dominant Western media corporations, because UNESCO's proposals if met "even partially, would constitute a serious diminution in the influence of the existing transnational corporate information system." Consequently the UK also withdrew from UNESCO, and as a result UNESCO suffered severe funding problems, which combined with the ongoing attacks on their legitimacy, in the US, British and French media, served to undermine the implementation of the New World Information and Communication Order. [1]

Returning to the present controversy, according to another article from a Cuban newspaper: "[Diplomatic sources](#) from UNESCO told *Prensa Latina* that the agency made the decision due to the repeated demonstration of a lack of ethics on the part of Reporters Without Borders in its goal of disqualifying a certain number of countries." [2] This report then adds that "because of this and previous actions, UNESCO decided to completely end its relationship with RSF and rule out any type of future collaboration." To date, this information has not been reported on the website of either RSF or UNESCO. Yet even if this report is true, it is

wishful thinking to believe (as this article does) that UNESCO withdrew their support of RSF because of the latter's [intimate involvement](#) with imperial democracy manipulators like the [National Endowment for Democracy](#).

The truth of this observation becomes apparent upon examination of the list of press freedom groups "[maintaining official](#) relations with UNESCO", as many of the organizations are linked in some way to the work of the global democracy manipulating establishment. These media 'freedom' groups include [Internews International](#), the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), the [International Federation of Journalists](#), the World Press Freedom Committee (a group that "[\[o\]riginally created](#) to oppose proposals" for UNESCO's New World Information and Communication Order), and the International Press Institute.

In recent years a [number of authors](#) have criticized the activities of Reporters Without Borders, and much attention has been paid to the fact that they have received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy. However, to date, next to no attention has been paid to the work of similarly 'democratic' UNESCO-linked organizations, like the International Press Institute. Therefore, the rest of this article will provide the first critical enquiry into the work of the International Press Institute by primarily examining the 'democratic' backgrounds of the recipients of their annual Free Media Pioneer Award.

The International Press Institute as Annual Democracy Manipulator

The International Press Institute (IPI) was founded in 1950 at Columbia University, and they describe themselves as a "[global network](#) of editors, media executives and leading journalists, is dedicated to the furtherance and safeguarding of press freedom, the protection of freedom of opinion and expression, the promotion of the free flow of news and information, and the improvement of the practices of journalism". Most notably, the current president and chair of the IPI, Piotr Niemczycki, serves as the deputy president of the management board of Agora, and as the publisher of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Election Gazette). The IPI's president was also involved in [founding](#) both *Gazeta Wyborcza* and Agora. Niemczycki's links to these two organizations are important because Agora is a media company with tight connections to the democracy manipulating establishment.

Formed "on the eve of the [Polish] parliamentary elections in 1989", Agora's website notes that *Gazeta Wyborcza* was the "first independent newspaper in Poland, while Agora grew into one of the largest and most renowned media companies in Central and Eastern Europe." *Gazeta Wyborcza* "was established... as a daily representing the Solidarity opposition", but their website neglects to mention that this political party, Solidarity, obtained vital support from the [CIA, the National Endowment for Democracy](#), and the notorious democracy manipulator [George Soros](#). Moreover, according to the Polish American Library, the National Endowment for Democracy "[was the](#) original funding source for *Gazeta Wyborcza*".

George Soros was highly active in supporting the work of Solidarity, and in 1988 he created the Stefan Batory Foundation (an ostensibly "independent private Polish foundation") to help direct his democracy manipulating efforts. Currently the Batory Foundation's largest funder, aside from the Open Society Institute, is the [Ford Foundation](#), but the Batory Foundation has also received funding from other 'democratic' groups like the National Endowment for Democracy, [Freedom House](#), and the [Institute of International Education](#). Writing in 2004, Srdja Trifkovic notes that the:

“[Hoi polloi](#) are force-fed the daily fare of OSI [Open Society Institute] agitprop by ‘the Soros media’... from the *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Warsaw to *Danas* (Today) in Serbia, the *Monitor* in Montenegro, the *Markiza* TV channel in Bratislava, and *Vreme* weekly and the B-92 electronic media conglomerate in Belgrade. They invariably parrot Soros’ views and ambitions, reflected by the agenda of the local Soros foundation at home and, in world affairs, by the International Crisis Group (ICG), largely financed by Soros and run by his appointees.” (For more information on some of these media groups see later)

Given the intimate relations that exist between George Soros and the National Endowment for Democracy it is little surprise that in 2000, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, “awarded him the title of the *Man of Year* for his “[support of](#) the development of democracy, education and civil society in the countries of the CEE [Central and Eastern Europe] region.”

Another of the IPI’s [executive board](#) members, Kavi Chongkittavorn, also has excellent democracy manipulating credentials, because in September 2007 she received the National Endowment for Democracy’s coveted Democracy Award. In addition to her IPI affiliation Chongkittavorn presently serves as the assistant group editor of *Nation Media Group*, is a member of the steering committee of the NED-created World Movement for Democracy, and serves as the chair of the Southeast Asian Press Alliance – a group that has received annual support from the NED for its work in Malaysia (since 1999).

Finally it is worth mentioning that the IPI’s ‘democratic’ roots can be traced to its founding in 1950, as from 1951 until 1954 their [founding chair](#) was Lester Markel. At the time of the founding of the IPI Markel was the Sunday editor of *The New York Times*, but it is most interesting to note that in 1947 he “initiated” the creation of the [Council on Foreign Relations](#)’ “Propaganda and Foreign Policy” group, which was soon renamed as the “Public Opinion and Foreign Policy” group. Given this knowledge, it is entirely consistent that Anthony Giffard (1989) should have classified the IPI as an organization that “played an active role in opposing” UNESCO’s proposal for a New World Information and Communication Order in the late 1970s and early 1980s. [3] Thus, having provided a little background on the ‘democratic’ orientation of the IPI, this article now introduces the ‘democratic’ recipients of their annual press freedom award.

Awarding ‘Democracy’

Established in 1996, the IPI’s annual [Free Media Pioneer Award](#) is awarded to “[recognize individuals](#) and organizations that have fought against great odds to ensure freer and more independent media in their countries.” This annual award is co-sponsored by Freedom Forum, a group that was founded in 1991 and describes itself as a “[nonpartisan foundation](#) dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people”. [4] Yet despite Freedom Forum’s benign sounding self-description, they, like the IPI, have solid democracy manipulating credentials. For example, Freedom Forum’s founder Allen H. Neuharth serves on the [advisory committee](#) of the aforementioned World Press Freedom Committee; another of their trustees, Wilma P. Mankiller, recently served as a [trustee](#) of the Ford Foundation; while a further Freedom Forum trustee, Bette Bao Lord, is chair emeritus of Freedom House. Thus both sponsors of the Free Media Pioneer Award are well connected to the democracy manipulating credentials establishment. Following is a demonstration of how this press ‘freedom’ award is used to legitimate the work of ‘democratic’ media groups all over the world.

In 1996, the [first](#) Free Media Pioneer Award was given to the Russian commercial TV station, NTV - which is owned by media oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky - for its objective reporting on the Chechnya conflict. Yet while NTV's coverage may have been a thorn in the side of President Boris Yeltsin, this didn't stop the [president](#) of NTV, Igor Malashenko, from working as Yeltsin's [chief media advisor](#) for his re-election campaign in April 1996. Indeed, as in other "[electoral interventions](#)", the global democracy manipulators had selected their favored candidate (Yeltsin in this case) and, despite NTV's critical reporting on Chechnya, it appears that they could be relied upon not to rock the boat *too* much. Thus NTV won the IPI's first Free Media Pioneer Award just as the struggling independent media in Russia "[were falling](#)" into the hands of two rival oligarchs, Boris Berezovsky (TV-6) and Vladimir Gusinsky (NTV)". As Edward Herman observed a few years later: "[Boris Yeltsin](#) is a 'reformer,' in the contemporary post-Orwellian usage of the word: that is, one who is carrying out policies approved by dominant Western interests." [5]

The [second](#) Pioneer Award was distributed to the Indonesian-based Alliance of Independent Journalists, a group that was critical of the Western-backed Suharto dictatorship. The timing of this award may have to do with a change of heart of western governments' 'democratic' plans for Indonesia, as, at around this time, they were beginning to start thinking about withdrawing their support for Suharto (the PR disaster), and sure enough in 1998 he was eventually removed from power. In addition, the Alliance of Independent Journalists is one of five members of the aforementioned NED-funded Southeast Asian Press Alliance, and in 1998 their founder, Goenawan Mohamad, was [awarded](#) the International Press Freedom Award by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

In [1998](#), Serbian-based Radio B-92 was honored with the Pioneer Award for its unrelenting commitment to democracy, of which one important part was the role it played in the creation (in 1993) of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM). There can be no question that ANEM successfully protected media broadcasters from state repression in Serbia, but there is also no doubt that this would have been impossible without the financial and diplomatic support that they received from Western governments. [6] In fact, the democracy manipulating establishment had been extremely busy in the former Yugoslavia throughout the early 1990s, [providing between](#) US\$7-10 million for media development during this time; while after 1995 the US gave a further US\$23 million and the European Union augmented this with another 17 million Euros for supporting 'independent' media groups.

More specifically, Radio B-92 received a grant from the NED the year before they obtained the IPI's Pioneer Award, which was used - in the NED's words - to help "break the stranglehold of government-dominated media in Serbia by strengthening an independent source of news and opinion and will ensure the free flow of unbiased information throughout the country". In 1998, Radio B-92 then received a grant from the [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#) (the British version of the NED to enable them "to conduct a systematic and critical analysis of the coverage of the war in Kosovo presented by Serbian state television." (NED grants were also given to Radio Television B-92 in 2001 and 2005.) Finally ANEM themselves received their first NED grant in 1998, and subsequently went on to obtain indirect NED support in 2004 and 2005, when NED grants were channeled to them via the intermediary media group Medienhilfe. As in other 'democratic' interventions, it seems that the main reason the democracy manipulating community supported the development of 'independent' media outlets like Radio B-92 and ANEM was to ensure a 'favorable' change of government, that is, to [facilitate the ouster](#) of President Milosevic.

In 1992 and again in 1993, the NED gave grants to support independent journalism in Ethiopia. The 1992 grant is most notable here as the NED noted that it was to be used to “lay the foundation for an indigenous and self-sustainable training center for journalists and publishers in Ethiopia.” In 1999, the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists’ Association received the fourth Pioneer Award. Although it seems that this association has no direct links to democracy manipulating bodies it is worth noting that this Association was formed in 1993 shortly after the aforementioned NED grants.

The next recipient of the Pioneer Award was the Instituto De Prensa Y Sociedad (or the Peruvian Press and Society Institute) – a group that was founded in 1993, and has exemplary ‘democratic’ credentials that I have outlined in full [elsewhere](#). Two years before receiving the 2000 Pioneer Award, the Peruvian Press and Society Institute received their first NED grant to help “develop a national network to protect journalists”; they then received renewed NED support in both 2000 and 2001. Like the IPI’s Kavi Chongkittavorn, the Peruvian Press and Society Institute were rewarded with the NED’s annual Democracy Award in 2007.

The 2001 winner of the IPI’s Press Award was the Malaysian website Malaysiakini.com, a site that was [launched](#) in 1999 by the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA). With the [assistance](#) of the World Press Freedom Committee, Freedom Forum, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, SEAPA were formed by IPI executive board member Kavi Chongkittavorn (n 1989) to campaign for press freedom in Southeast Asia. Since 1999, SEAPA have received annual grants from the NED to support their work in Malaysia, which focuses on the “development and protection of journalistic independence and professionalism”. Here it is important to note that out of all of SEAPA’s annual NED grants the only grant that specifies “support for online media” was given to them in 1999.

In 2002, the Serbian newspaper, *Danas*, received the Pioneer Award, and like previous award winners, they too received prior aid from the NED. Thus, the year after *Danas* was launched (in 1997), they received a NED grant to “open a news bureau in... Prishtina” to help “improve the paper’s ability to gather up-to-date information on developments in Kosovo.” In 2000, they received another NED grant channelled to them via the regular NED aid recipient the BETA News Agency. [7]

The Media Council of Tanzania won the Pioneer Award in 2003, and – although they have not obtained any funding from the NED – they have [received](#) aid from other prominent international democracy manipulators. For example, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency gave the Media Council a three year grant of SEK 4,000,000 in 2001, while the Netherlands-based Communication Assistance Foundation awarded them NLG 364, 522 for the same period.

In 2004, the Baku-based Central Asian and Southern Caucasian Freedom of Expression Network (CASCFEN) received the Pioneer Award. This group most likely played a significant role in two [NED-backed](#) revolutions in both Georgia (2003) and in Kyrgyzstan (2005). In both cases the ‘independent’ media played a [crucial role](#) in the success of the revolutions.

The founder of CASCFEN, Azer Hasret, formerly served as the [president](#) of the Journalists’ Trade Union – the group that helped [launch](#) CASCFEN in August 2001 along with five other groups which included the Azerbaijan National Committee of International Press Institute, the Independent Association of Georgian Journalists, Public Association “Journalists”, the Union of Independent Journalists of Uzbekistan, and the National Association of Independent

Mass Media of Tajikistan. [8] Interestingly while only the latter group went on to receive NED aid (in both 2003 and 2005), in 2003, [Zviad Pochkhua](#), the president of the Independent Association of Georgian Journalists [critiqued](#) another Georgian-based NGO – the Liberty Institute – for receiving funding from US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Soros Foundation. [9] So it is ironic that even CASCEN’s work has received [support](#) from George Soros’ Open Society Institute-Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan. Finally, between 2004 and 2005, the Azerbaijan-based Journalists’ Trade Union worked on the Election Monitoring Center’s media programme, which is significant because in 2005 this Center received a grant from the NED to “inform the public about the electoral process and the political platforms of different parties and candidates by producing newspaper inserts, radio programs, and televised debates.”

Zimbabwe’s *SW Radio Africa* won the Pioneer Award in 2005, making it the first externally broadcast media group to receive the award – due to government repression they are based in London (UK). SW Radio Africa first started operating in December 2001, and according to [diplomatic sources](#) they are funded by the USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives. [10] Furthermore, from 2005 to 2006 Violet Gonda a “producer and presenter for the news section of SW Radio Africa” served as a [fellow](#) at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) at Stanford University. This is particularly noteworthy because the [Director](#) of the CDDRL is Michael McFaul, an individual who happens to be a director of the National Endowment for Democracy’s International Forum for Democratic Studies, and is a [trustee](#) of both Freedom House and the [Eurasia Foundation](#).

The 2006 recipient of the Pioneer Award was the *Yemen Times*, a newspaper that only exhibits tenuous links to the NED, as from 2006 to 2007, one of their reporters, Hafez Al-Bukari, [served](#) as a Reagan Fascell Democracy Fellow at the NED. [11] In addition, it is more than coincidental that another former *Yemen Times* reporter, Hatem Bamehriz, previously served as the [Deputy Country Director](#) of the Yemen field office of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (which is one of the NED’s core grantees). [12]

The winner of the [2007](#) Free Media Pioneer Award was the Mizzima News Agency, an Agency that was formed in 1998 by a group of exiled Burmese journalists based in both India and Thailand. According to Reuters, “[Mizzima is](#) one of several outlets, like the Oslo-based Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), that have become major source of information on the country.” Consequently it is highly significant that since 1999 the Agency has received [support](#) from George Soros’ Open Society Institute, and in 2006 (at least) they obtained [financial support](#) from the NED (and two other NED-supported groups: Internews and the Southeast Asian Press Alliance). Given that the impetus for this article was UNESCO’s controversial relationship with Reporters Without Borders it is appropriate that Mizzima is also linked to this notorious press ‘freedom’ watchdog. This connection comes through the presence of Maung Maung Myint on Mizzima’s advisory board, as he is also currently the [president](#) of [NED-sponsored](#) Burma Media Association, and serves on [international jury](#) for Reporters Without Borders [Fondation de France Prize](#).

Democratizing the United Nations?

This article has demonstrated that the ostensibly progressive International Press Institute is a key member of the global democracy manipulating establishment. This information is problematic on a number of levels, not least of which is that UNESCO maintains cordial relations with the International Press Institute and many other NED-linked media groups. Moreover, this is not the first time that the United Nations has compromised its integrity

through ties with the NED. Indeed, as I illustrated in a recent article, the recently formed [UN Democracy Fund](#) works extremely closely with the NED and their global cadres; furthermore, my limited critiques of the United Nations are amplified by many [other authors](#) whose work can be found on the *Center for Research on Globalization's* website.

In January 2007, Ban Ki-Moon succeeded Kofi Annan as the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, but it is highly questionable as to whether he is he going to be able (or willing) to reform the United Nations. Indeed, as Professor Rodrigue Tremblay writes, so far the "[only reforms](#) the new Secretary-General has espoused have been minor administrative arrangements—and even those were contested". He adds:

"[What the](#) United Nations needs is more than simply shuffling the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. It needs a fundamental structural reorganization if it is to play the role it was assigned originally in 1945, that is to say to promote international cooperation and to maintain international peace and security."

Yet, perhaps the United Nations cannot be reformed after all, as the job that it was initially set up to fulfill – as intended by the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) War and Peace Studies Group – was to [legitimate](#) America's imperial ventures. [13]

As Edward Herman observes, we are already in the "[midst of](#) a crisis within the post-war international system, as a serial aggressor [the United States] is now able to mobilize the [United Nations] Security Council... to declare the state that it threatens with war a menace to the peace and to help the aggressor disarm its target." The United Nations has gone far beyond simply legitimating US domination; it now acts as a critical armament of imperialism, both in its soft form – as exemplified by its work with the NED – and in justifying harder militaristic forms of imperialism. So the question remains, 'is the United Nations the type of institution that should be reformed in the first place?' If not, then we need to think hard about the type of institution that should replace it, because what is urgently need is an international organization that can help reign in aggressor states not encourage them, and promote popular democracy not elite 'democracy'.

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Endnotes

[1] William Preston, Jr., Edward S. Herman, and Herbert I. Schiller, [Hope and Folly: the United States and UNESCO, 1945-1985](#) (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1989) , p. 297, pp. 203-81.

[2] Incidentally Cuba was on Reporters Without Borders 'Internet Enemy' list.

[3] Anthony C. Giffard, *UNESCO and the Media* (New York: Longman, 1989), p.28.

[4] Freedom Forum is "[supported by](#) income from an endowment now worth more than \$1 billion in diversified assets" and in 1997 they distributed over \$48 million in grants. See JoEllen Gorg, [U.S. Foundations: A Review of International Funding Priorities 2002](#), Prepared for the USAID/ANE Bureau, May 2002.

[5] Edward Herman notes: "[The Russian](#) election was badly compromised by Western

intervention, some of it contrary to Russian law, all of it in violation of nominal Western principles of fairness. Western leaders gathered in Moscow during the campaign to proclaim their opposition to 'terrorism' (in the midst of Yeltsin's terrorist attacks on Chechnya) and to give a boost to the 'reformer.' German president Helmut Kohl traveled to Moscow, as did U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, for photo appearances with our man. The IMF made a \$10.2 billion loan to Russia in the midst of the campaign, despite the fact that Russia was in violation of IMF loan conditions and was dispensing large sums of public money for election purposes. A trio of Republican advisers joined the Yeltsin election campaign, although such foreign participation in an election violates Russian law. U.S. ambassador [Thomas Pickering](#) urged candidate Grigory Yavlinsky to drop out of the election in order to help Yeltsin."

[6] Spasa Bosnjak, [Fight the Power: The Role of the Serbian Independent Electronic Media in the Democratization of Serbia](#) (Simon Fraser University: Unpublished MA thesis, 2005), p.71.

[7] The BETA News Agency received NED grants annually from 1997 to 2005.

[8] In 2003 Azer Hasret was also the [Secretary General](#) of the Azerbaijan Journalists Confederation.

[9] Although not noted in [Zviad Pochkhua's article](#), the Georgian-based Liberty Institute received NED funding in 1999, 2001, and 2004. It is also interesting that the vice president of the Independent Association of Georgian Journalists, Geno Jokhidze, has also been the [editor-in-chief](#) of *Echo* newspaper since 2002. This is because from [2003 to 2004](#) the deputy editor-in-chief of the daily *Echo* served as a NED Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow.

[10] A Radio Netherland Media Network report notes that SW Radio Africa "[receive millions](#) of dollars from a department of the US International Development Agency, known as the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), although according to the station its funding comes from unspecified 'human rights and media freedom groups'".

[11] Hafez Al-Bukari was also "[a member](#) of the informal advisory board of the [neoconservative] [American Enterprise Institute's](#) Arab Reform program and coordinator of the International Federation of Journalists' Project in Yemen."

[12] Hatem Bamehriz is now [currently](#) working for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Somalia. Although I have demonstrated that the *Yemen Times* can be linked to the NED, they appear to utilize reporters from a variety of political persuasions, as according to the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2002): "[In May](#) the PSO [Political Security Organization] detained journalist Hassan al-Zaidi and held him incommunicado for 16 days, at times in solitary confinement, in the detention center under the PSO headquarters in Sana'a. Authorities never formally charged al-Zaidi with any crime, but told him that he had 'exceeded the red lines.' In addition to being a reporter for the *Yemen Times*, al-Zaidi is a member of the Islamist opposition party Union of Popular Forces (UPF) and belongs to the al-Zaidi tribe, which has been responsible for kidnappings of foreigners and other destabilizing activity."

[13] [Laurence Shoup and William Minter \(1980\)](#) noted that Council on Foreign Relations member, [Isaiah Bowman](#), observed in a Council meeting in May 1942 that: "[\[T\]he United States](#) had to exercise the strength need to assure 'security,' and at the same time 'avoid conventional forms of imperialism.' The way to do this, he argued, was to make the exercise

of that power international in character through a United Nations body.”

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