



MEDIA WORKERS AGAINST THE WAR

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What about the other atrocities?

Haditha *is* exceptional – for being reported

By Sami Ramadani

The Haditha massacre is one of countless crimes. By ignoring the mass of atrocities committed by the US/UK occupation, the media are portraying the Haditha massacre by US troops as an exception, when in fact it is the rule.

The murder of 25 members of three families, including children, inside their homes in November is at last receiving serious media attention in the US and Britain.

The tone of the reporting is one of shock and surprise. Shock is a natural reaction to a horrific crime, but surprise there shouldn't be.

While the Haditha massacre is getting coverage now, search as you might you will not find the following item in the mainstream media.

'A new accusation was made yesterday [31 May 2006] by an

Iraqi police officer that US soldiers killed unarmed civilians in their home a few weeks ago. Lieutenant Fadhil Mohammad Mussa'id said in a statement that a unit of the multinational forces raided a house in Samarra, killing three and injuring two members of the same family.

'Talking at his home in the al-Sikkak neighbourhood in Samarra, Mr Zaidan Khalaf confirmed that US soldiers killed his wife, Khairiya Jassim, aged 60, his son Khalid Zaidan Khalaf, aged 40 and mentally handicapped, and his daughter, Ina'am Zaidan Khalaf, aged 20.'

This was published on the internet by an Iraqi news agency.

I have come across scores of similar stories coming out of >> [back page](#)



US marine patrolling al-Ish, al-Anbar Province

Photo: Brian M Hemmer/Department of Defense

'Wiping Israel off the map' is a media myth

The media are exaggerating the threat posed by Iran, just as they did with Iraq and WMD

By Media Workers Against the War

Did Mahmoud Ahmadinejad call for Israel to be 'wiped off the map'? The media now routinely accuse the Iranian president of doing so.

Respected Middle Eastern expert Juan Cole, professor of history at the University of Michigan and author of an essential blog on Iraq, says that this quote has been wrongly translated.

The quote, which comes from an old speech of former Iranian leader Khomeini actually said that 'the occupation regime over Jerusalem should vanish from the page of time.'

Cole comments: 'Ahmadinejad was not making a threat, he was quoting a saying of Khomeini and

urging that pro-Palestinian activists in Iran not give up hope – that the occupation of Jerusalem was no more a continued inevitability than had been the hegemony of the Shah's government.'

The phrase does not imply military action against Israel.

Accuracy vanishes from the page

To its shame, the respected pro-Democrat website, slate.com, published a scurrilous attack on Cole by Christopher Hitchens, the attack dog of the pro-war right, accusing Cole of being an apologist for Ahmadinejad.

The virulence of this attack perhaps explains why more journalists haven't questioned the use of this phrase to demonise Iran and justify the case for

pre-emptive military action.

However, Cole's conclusion is backed up by the conservative, Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute. Its independent translation of Ahmadinejad's October 2005 speech reads:

'Imam [Khomeini] said: This regime that is occupying Qods [Jerusalem] must be eliminated from the pages of history.'

It is important to note here the use of the term 'regime', not nation. Ahmadinejad was using the Khomeini quote to draw attention to US support for the Shah, the fall of the Soviet Union and the demise of Saddam Hussein. If all these 'regimes' fell then he believed there was hope for Israel's removal from Palestinian

land. This is very different from calling for Israel to be wiped off the map using nuclear weapons.

Opposing an attack on Iran does not mean being an apologist for the Iranian government. But neither should the media take part in demonising that government.

As professor Cole stated: 'Every time you see a newspaper article that alleges that Ahmadinejad said that Israel should be wiped off the face of the map, please write to the editor. Say that this idiom does not exist in Persian, and that what Ahmadinejad actually said was, "This occupation regime over Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time."' <http://www.juancole.com> <http://memri.org>

ID cards are a threat to the media

By Christina Zaba

The Government begins assembling data for the ID system, the most invasive ever implemented anywhere in the world, as early as October, when biometric scanning – irises, faces and fingerprints – will become part of passport renewal.

Around 70 new registration points will be built across the UK to accommodate this early registration. It'll be a quiet process at first, merely linking body recognition to passport data online.

But pretty soon the thing will escalate. According to research by the London School of Economics, within a few years we'll be having to pay up to £300 a head (with a £2,500 civil penalty for non-compliance) to register 51 pieces of information, including our biometrics, to acquire an ID card. The card will soon become essential for everything from claiming benefits to shopping at

The new database threatens reporters' sources and exposes journalists to monitoring and malicious interference

Sainsbury's or going to the GP.

The card will be linked online to the biggest citizen database the world has ever seen. Every time you use your card, a record of what you did with it and where will automatically register online under your number.

We know where you...

Your movements and life habits will become transparent to the authorities. They'll own it: your data, like your card, will be the property of the Home Secretary, who can nominate whoever he chooses to take a good, hard look at what you've been up to.

Police will have the power to demand your ID on the street and examine your database at their leisure; so will the Inland Reve-

nue and a whole slew of authorities and commercial bodies. The system will alter forever the relationship of citizen to state.

The architecture of this new ID database is already out of date. It's going to be easy to break into – as I was told in a Warsaw vodka cellar at 3:30am by some computer security specialists (aka hackers turned straight). They laughed at Britain's naïvete. Just a twenty-quid gadget, easily bought on the internet, would do it, they said.

But it doesn't take a drunken genius to tell you that, with ID offices everywhere, all you'll have to do is slip a clerk a few hundred pounds for a password to enter the system.

No one will be safe, journal-

ists included. Never knowing who's watching us, how can we ensure safety or anonymity for our sources? How can we go about our work without being at risk from malicious attack? This system will facilitate – and encourage – ID theft, falsification of records and criminal activity on an epic scale.

So what can you do? People in the know are getting their passports renewed before October, to evade the first wave of biometric registration. The NUJ will be campaigning against the ID database and supporting members who refuse to register. So if you're not an NUJ member, join now. And join the rapidly growing No2ID campaign (www.no2id.net) for up-to-date info on what you can do to protect yourself.

We all need to shout together in protest against this Bill. Otherwise we may soon have no voice at all.

<http://www.no2id.net>

Independent review slates BBC on Israel

BBC's Middle East coverage is condemned as 'incomplete' and 'misleading'

By Bruce Whitehead

An independent review has found that the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is 'incomplete' and 'misleading' and fails to adequately report the hardships of Palestinians living under occupation.

The report, commissioned by BBC governors from a panel of academics and journalists, urged that BBC policy should be bolder about use of the word 'terrorism' to describe attacks by either side.

In evidence to the panel, Israeli Government representatives acknowledged that a definition of terrorism along these lines could apply to the actions of Israeli forces. The campaign group Arab Media Watch in its evidence to the panel suggested using the terms 'extra-judicial execution' or 'assassination' when referring to Israeli attacks on Palestinian leaders.

Crucially, the report, which was compiled from programme and audience analysis carried out by Loughborough University, also criticised the BBC's 'failure to convey adequately the disparity in the Israeli and Palestinian

experience, reflecting the fact that one side is in control and the other lives under occupation'.

Faced with a constant dilemma over the use of words like terrorist or insurgent, extremist or vigilante, the BBC was warned in the report that it should nevertheless refuse to let balance and impartiality become a 'straightjacket' which might prevent it from relaying what the report called the 'dual narrative' of both sides.

Bias reflects imbalance of power

Responding to the report, the Glasgow Media Group said it confirmed its own 2003 findings that there was distinct bias against the Palestinians in BBC and ITV coverage.

Its concern, and that of Media Workers Against the War, is what the BBC intends to do about a report which concludes that there are major problems with its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Report of the Independent Panel for the BBC Governors on the Impartiality of BBC Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, April 2006

Band censored for not dancing to Blair's tune

By a BBC journalist

There were farcical scenes on the *Top of the Pops* set at the end of April as the Pet Shop Boys fell foul of BBC 'impartiality' rules.

Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe are former New Labour acolytes; Tennant reportedly donated thousands of pounds to the party during its first term in office. But like many former Labour supporters the duo have been alienated by the invasion of Iraq and the imposition of policies such as compulsory ID cards.

Their new single, *I'm With Stupid*, ridicules the supposed 'special relationship' of Tony Blair and George Bush, with lyrics including: 'See you on the TV/Call you every day/Fly across the ocean/Just to let you get your way/No one understands me/Where I'm coming from/Why would I be with someone/Who's obviously so dumb?.../Oh-oh, I'm with Stupid'.

The band were asked to perform the single on *TOTP* on 23 April – and brought along masks of Tony Blair and Dubya for their six dancers to wear. But during rehearsal an order came down from the editorial department.

'Originally there were three Tony Blairs and three George Bushes,' the band said on its

website. 'But the BBC insisted, for "political balance", the other UK party leaders had to be shown, and there could be only one Blair and one Bush.'

So, to the band's chagrin, *Blue Peter*-style cardboard cutouts of other political leaders were frantically prepared and minutes before transmission the performance finally got the go-ahead from on high. On stage with Tony and Dubya were David Cameron and Menzies Campbell – with Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin to make up the numbers.

Political evenhandedness gone mad

It's a funny story, but one that also poses some serious questions. Why is the BBC so willing to jettison supposedly cherished notions of freedom of expression in favour of abstract conceptions of political balance? How does the BBC calibrate the scales by which it weighs political balance? Should it reflect popular feeling in the nation? If so, an ICM poll in 2003 found that 57% of the British population shared the Pet Shop Boys' concerns that Blair and Bush were 'too close'. Why is it wrong to allow space for that feeling to be expressed?

But never mind. Menzies and Dave can really move!

BBC sleepwalks into a new crisis over Iran

The BBC's agenda-setting news broadcast is swallowing propaganda for war on Iran as if Iraq had never happened

By Dave Crouch

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq the British media – with a few honourable exceptions – accepted the essential premise for war set out by Bush and Blair. Saddam was a serious threat, having armed himself with weapons of mass destruction with a delivery time of 45 minutes.

The revelation that the WMD threat was 'sexed up' by US and UK governments that had already decided to go to war ought to have inured editors to the deliberately manipulative way in which governments sell war to the public.

But now the media are swallowing the same propaganda for war on Iran as if Iraq had never happened.

Radio 4's flagship morning broadcast, *Today*, is an example of the general trend. Its coverage of Iran in April and May has paid lip-service to notions of 'balance' while presenting the debate over Iran in such a way as to legitimise a US military response.

On some days that coverage has been a travesty of balance. On Thursday 13 April,

This full-page ad was published in the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times* and other newspapers in April. What can be its purpose, other than to cause fear and provide justification for a Western attack on Iran? Haven't we seen this tactic before, employed with appalling consequences against Iraq?

for example, *Today* devoted over half an hour to Iran. The broadcast:

- Presented without challenge or qualification lengthy comment on Iran from figures known to have played crucial roles in preparing the ground for the Iraq invasion;
- Made no attempt to explain the Middle-Eastern context in which the belligerency of the US administration and its allies has strengthened conservative elements in Iran;
- Allowed contributors to make alarmist statements unchallenged about the Iranian 'threat' on the basis of pure speculation;
- Contributed to strengthening the notion

among listeners that Iran poses a danger that must be dealt with aggressively by the West.

Today wheeled out a series of US and UK government figures deeply implicated in the invasion of Iraq, including the US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, and the UK's former UN ambassador, Sir Jeremy Greenstock. *Today* also gave free voice to Reza Pahlavi, son of the ousted Shah of Iran.

An intervention in search of a threat

The programme's presenters repeated the myth that 'Iran is committed to wiping Israel off the map' and allowed their guests to make alarmist statements about 'dirty bombs' and 'state-sponsored terrorism' unchallenged.

MWAW put these points in detail to *Today*, and deputy editor Gavin Allen replied. He made the obvious points that *Today* does not necessarily share the opinions of its guests, and that it is unfair to pick on one broadcast: 'Across a range of programmes I'm confident that listeners can and do hear the range and breadth of the debate.'

Today's listeners have indeed heard from Seymour Hersh, Hans Blix and the Iranian ambassador to the UN on other editions. But this in no way restores balance to the programme's

assumption of *Today's* coverage is that Iran is a problem and something must be done about it. It is taken as common sense that Iran is a dangerous theocratic state with an irrational and unstable political and clerical leadership that has supported terrorists and threatened Israel and is therefore not to be trusted with a nuclear programme.

Today doesn't even acknowledge the respectable and widespread notion that Iran is example of 'blowback' from US policies in the Middle East. The programme has ignored the fact that Israel has hundreds of nuclear warheads, and that US attitudes to nuclear weapons in India, Pakistan and North Korea strongly suggest double standards on Iran.

Unrepresentative representatives

The result is that *Today* has left the case against military action to be put by establishment figures such as Madeleine Albright and Prince Hassan of Jordan. The academic commentators on the programme are typified by Timothy Garton Ash, a man whose self-confessed 'tortured liberal ambivalence' on Iraq sums up the hopeless weakness of his comments on Iran.

So *Today's* coverage is 'balanced' only in that it represents different sides of a debate taking place within the establishment.

Finally, and most disturbingly – despite the obvious similarities – *Today* fails to draw any parallels between the run-up to the invasion of Iraq and the current crisis over Iran.

Iran is not the problem – or rather, Iran is a problem for peace and stability only in so far as the US and Britain have created that problem through their century-long history of bloody intervention in Iran and across the Middle East.

Until the BBC wakes up to this fact we can expect its coverage of Iran to fall far short of the standards expected of a public service broadcaster.



Can anyone within range of Iran's missiles feel safe?

Suppose Iran one day gives nuclear devices to terrorists. Could anyone anywhere feel safe?

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IRAN ALERT

Who's saying what about Iran ●●●●●

Bush the peace-maker?

The United States' offer on 31 May to open talks if Iran suspends uranium enrichment raised eyebrows among those who suspect Washington of other motives. But the media almost universally took the move at face value and hailed it as a 'significant shift' in US policy.

The BBC was not alone, however, in concluding that action against Iran was now more likely if Iran didn't do as it was told.

The *New York Times* reported that the move by the Bush administration was effectively a gamble that would 'pave the way for a confrontation with Iran'.

Telegraph tantrums

On 29 May Janet Daley wrote a comment piece in the *Daily Telegraph* headlined 'West must take pre-emptive action for its own security'. She backed Tony Blair and wrote: 'The lunatic in charge of Iran must not be permitted to acquire nuclear weapons under any circumstances.'

Who is Janet Daley? She was one of the paper's leader writers who pushed hardest for war on Iraq in 2002-03, condemning the UN's reluctance as appeasing dictatorship.

Cohen on the warpath

Nick Cohen, the *Observer* columnist, has signalled whose side he'll be on if the B52s ever head for Iran. He has devoted several articles to demonising Iran, a clear case of 'softening up' the paper's readers for possible military action.

And in a vile rant against the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Cohen wrote recently in the *New Statesman*: 'The obvious course for those sincere about nuclear disarmament is to oppose Tehran as vigorously as they oppose a replacement for Trident. But standing by its principles would put CND on the same side as George W Bush and Tony Blair.'

Cohen is happy to line up with Bush and Blair, just like he did on Iraq.

One of countless crimes

Front page>> Iraq during the past three years, but I have rarely seen any of them reported in the mainstream media.

Given this level of negligence, Haditha naturally becomes the surprising exception and commentators even start praising the Pentagon for investigating the crime. And then we get the nauseating ministerial comment that things were worse under Saddam:

'UK International Development Minister Hilary Benn welcomed the inquiry and said it was important that the perpetrators were being brought to justice. "The big difference between now and the 30 years that people endured under Saddam is that when things happened nobody was called to account, there was no due process," he said.' (BBC News website, 23 March)

Little is said, of course, about the need for a completely independent investigation of this and

other crimes and that, like torture at Abu Ghraib, the involvement of senior officers will not be investigated by the Pentagon. Nor will they uncover the culture of indiscriminate violence instilled into the US occupation forces and aimed at terrorising the Iraqi people into submission.

In this sense the brutal occupation is no different from the equally brutal and indiscriminate 13 years of sanctions, which killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

But we are all required to rejoice that this is not as bad as Saddam's brutality.

One wonders where the cut-off point will come for the media to declare that the occupation's brutality is as bad as, or worse, than Saddam's massacres.

Sunni-Shia solidarity ignored

Meanwhile, the headlines shout about Shias killing Sunnis, killing Shias, killing Kurds, killing Christians, and all without producing a shred of evidence that the masked men, night raiders and death squads are representative of their communities.

Almost unanimously the media is happy to go along with the Sunni-Shia strife stories, mostly generated by the occupation and its collaborators, and will not highlight a story like this, reported by an Iraqi news agency last week:

'The people of the predominantly Shia town of Balad have expressed their full solidarity with the citizens of Dhullu'iyah in their predicament of

US marine patrol in al-Ish in May



Photo: Brian M Henner/Department of Defense

being besieged by the US occupation forces for the past six days. They have dispatched large quantities of food to the town, but the US forces stopped them from getting it through... A mass demonstration of solidarity was also held in Balad.

'The police chief of Dhullu'iyah said: "The people here don't feel under siege as long as the people of Balad feel for their tragedy..." A retired teacher said: "This is a beautiful stand and is not alien to our fellow citizens in Balad. It expresses the unity of the Iraqis and their common destiny. It also shows the failure of the policy of divide and rule pursued by the enemies of Iraq."

As I write (1 June), the siege of Dhullu'iyah continues.

Most of our mainstream media are so firmly embedded with the politicians in London and Washington and the occupation's public relations officers that they are complicit in justifying the biggest crime: the crime of occupation.

They are busy pedalling the communal civil war scenario and the myth that Bush and Blair are trying so hard to prevent such a catastrophe.

They are also busy selling us disinformation and scare stories similar to those preceding the war on Iraq, but this time against Iran. So much so, that the demand for unconditional surrender before talks can start between the US and Iran is headlined as a major peace gesture by the US administration.

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