

Unrepentant Propagandist for Iraq War Cheers Iran War

Written by

Friday, 21 April 2006 04:49 - Last Updated Friday, 21 April 2006 04:49

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MediaLens - Why did the BBC decide to focus so prominently and heavily on Iran - a country under serious threat of attack by the United States and perhaps Britain? Why would the BBC choose to isolate and highlight the sins of an official enemy, thereby boosting the government's propaganda campaign? Is this innocent, or are more cynical forces at work here?

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MEDIA LENS: Correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media

April 21, 2006

BBC Distorts Amnesty International Press Release

In a recent speech at New York's Columbia University, John Pilger commented:

'We now know that the BBC and other British media were used by MI6, the secret intelligence service. In what was called 'Operation Mass Appeal', MI6 agents planted stories about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction - such as weapons hidden in his palaces and in secret underground bunkers. All these stories were fake.' (John Pilger, 'The real first casualty of war,' New Statesman, April 24, 2006)

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Wittingly or otherwise, the BBC may now be participating in a rehashed 'Operation Mass Appeal' to generate support for an assault on Iran. Consider the focus of yesterday's BBC online article, 'Mid-East executions are condemned':

'Amnesty International has said that Iran executed 94 people in 2005, while 86 were executed in Saudi Arabia.

'Iran, the rights group said, was the only country known to have executed juvenile offenders in 2005.

'At least eight people were killed for crimes committed when they were children, including two who were still under 18 at the time of execution.

'Some detainees in Saudi Arabia had been tried and sentenced in a language they did not speak or read.' (http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/4925922.stm)

Compare and contrast the above with the opening paragraphs of yesterday's Amnesty International press release, 'Death Penalty: 20,000 on death row across the world,' from which this information was taken. We think it is well worth reading this section in full:

'Amnesty International today revealed that over 20,000 people on death row across the world are waiting to be killed by their own governments.

'In its latest annual analysis on the use of the death penalty worldwide, Amnesty International also disclosed that at least 2,148 people were executed during 2005 in 22 countries -- 94 percent in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the USA alone. 5,186 people were sentenced to death in 53 countries during 2005.

'The organization cautioned that these figures are approximate because of the secrecy surrounding the death penalty. Many governments, like China, refuse to publish full official

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statistics on executions while Viet Nam has even classified statistics and reporting on the death penalty as a 'state secret'.

Figures around the death penalty are truly disturbing: 20,000 people are counting down to the day when the state will take their life. The death penalty is the ultimate, irreversible denial of human rights, because it contravenes the essence of human values, It is often applied in a discriminatory manner, follows unfair trials or is applied for political reasons. It can be an irreversible error when there is miscarriage of justice, said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

The death penalty is not a unique deterrent against crime. Instead of relying on the illusion of control given by the death penalty, governments must focus on developing effective measures against crime.

Despite the shocking figures on the death penalty, the trend towards abolition continues to grow: the number of countries carrying out executions halved in the last 20 years and has dropped for the fourth consecutive year. Mexico and Liberia are the two most recent examples of countries that have abolished the death penalty.

As the world continues to turn away from the use of the death penalty, it is a glaring anomaly that China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the USA stand out for their extreme use of this form of punishment as the 'top' executors in the world, said Ms Khan.

In China -- the country that accounts for almost 80% of all executions -- a person can be sentenced and executed for as many as 68 crimes, including non-violent crimes such as tax fraud, embezzlement and drug offences.

In Saudi Arabia, people have been taken from their prison cells and executed without knowing that a death sentence has been passed against them. Others have been tried and sentenced to death in a language they didn't speak or read.

In the US, two men were released from death row in 2005 after evidence of their innocence

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emerged.

?Iran was the only country known to Amnesty International to have executed juvenile offenders in 2005. Iran executed at least eight people in 2005 for crimes committed when they were children, including two who were still under the age of 18 at the time of their execution. The USA banned the execution of juvenile offenders in March 2005 having previously been a "world leader" in the practice.? (<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGA500092006>)

Notice that Amnesty initially focused collectively on China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States, before focusing in separate paragraphs on China - ?the country that accounts for almost 80% of all executions? - on Saudi Arabia, on the United States, and only then on Iran. Curiously, the BBC article omitted to mention the following statistic reported by Amnesty:

?Iraq: Following reinstatement of the death penalty in 2004, criminal courts handed down more than 50 death sentences during 2005. There were three executions.? (<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-developments2005-eng>

)

In a 900-word press release, Amnesty devoted 47 words focusing specifically on Iran in the 11th paragraph of a 19-paragraph article. While the press release discussed the death penalty ?across the world?, the BBC?s title chose to focus on ?Mid-East executions?.

Why did the BBC decide to focus so prominently and heavily on Iran - a country under serious threat of attack by the United States and perhaps Britain? Why would the BBC choose to isolate and highlight the sins of an official enemy, thereby boosting the government?s propaganda campaign? Is this innocent, or are more cynical forces at work here?

In a recent Guest Media Alert, Richard Keeble, author of Secret State, Silent Press (John Libbey 1997), cited Roy Greenslade, media specialist at the Telegraph: "Most tabloid newspapers - or even newspapers in general - are playthings of MI5."

Keeble commented:

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¶ Bloch and Fitzgerald, in their examination of covert UK warfare, report the editor of ¶one of Britain's most distinguished journals¶ as believing that more than half its foreign correspondents were on the MI6 payroll. And in 1991, Richard Norton-Taylor revealed in the Guardian that 500 prominent Britons paid by the CIA and the now defunct Bank of Commerce and Credit International, included 90 journalists.¶ (Keeble, ¶Hacks And Spooks,¶ Media Alert, March 3, 2006; http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060303_hacks_and_spooks.php)

And what, we are entitled to ask, is the situation at the BBC?

(Thanks to Gabriele Zamparini of The Cat's Dream for drawing our attention to the BBC article: <http://thecatsdream.com/>)

SUGGESTED ACTION

The goal of Media Lens is to promote rationality, compassion and respect for others. When writing emails to journalists, we strongly urge readers to maintain a polite, non-aggressive and non-abusive tone.

Ask the BBC why they misreported the Amnesty International press release by highlighting executions in Iran.

Write to Steve Herrmann, the BBC's online editor:

Email: steve.herrmann@bbc.co.uk

Helen Boaden, the BBC's director of news:

Email: HelenBoaden.Complaints@bbc.co.uk

The first Media Lens book has now been published: 'Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The

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Liberal Media' by David Edwards and David Cromwell (Pluto Books, London, 2006). Described by John Pilger as "The most important book about journalism I can remember", at time of writing (April 21), there have been no mentions or reviews in any mainstream British newspaper. The publisher is nevertheless about to order a reprint of the book after high sales. For further details, including reviews, interviews and extracts, please click here:

http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians_of_power.php

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