

An exchange on "Danger of a new US-made crisis in Persian Gulf"

8 July 1998

Letter from JC

I check the news daily through Yahoo's 'Full Coverage' section and enjoy reading the articles posted by reporters. I think of a perfect reporter being one who writes the news as it happens, not with their own personal opinions or beliefs diluting the issue they are covering. It is to this extent that I bring up the article written by Barry Grey. The story he has posted is not a news story, it is an attempt to bring the views he possesses to other people. For example, let me quote you part of the article.

This is the beginning of the paragraph and it is decently done:

'The missile attack, the first US military action inside Iraq since 1996, is the latest in a series of recent events that have further roiled relations between Baghdad and western governments,'

The following is the end of the paragraph and has nothing to do with the story. It states his opinion and confuses the issue with his own personal beliefs:

'and provided the American media and politicians with ammunition to whip up public opinion against Iraq. The sequence of happenings points to a deliberate campaign of provocation on the part of Washington.'

And the following has no basis for proof and is a personal fabrication of Barry Grey and should not even be considered reporting:

'Butler has in the past toed the American line, continually placing new obstacles in the way of Iraqi compliance and insisting that Baghdad prove the unprovable, i.e., the non-existence of chemical and biological weapons or the means of producing them.'

And if Barry had took the time to do his research instead of 'making up' stories he would have known that:

'The news accounts for the most part buried or concealed entirely the fact that the warheads had been produced prior to the Gulf War, and subsequently destroyed by the Iraqis in accordance with UN demands.'

The point was that Iraq denied ever making VX. It was found out that they had lied and not only had made it, but had been able to put it into warheads. And since they had lied about all of that, the point was that they might be lying about not having any more. It appears that either Barry does not do his research or that he was keeping that part out so as to mislead people into

thinking along different lines.

In summary, I watch the news daily and am constantly vigilant of any new articles. Today was the first time I have seen anything by your organization and was very disappointed in the way it was delivered by this reporter. I want to receive the news as it happens, not diluted by someone's own opinions and beliefs. I will probably visit your site again and perhaps look at any other media you put out, but if I see another article like this one, it will be the last I do look at.

JC

Reply by Barry Grey

Dear JC,

In responding to your letter criticizing my article 'Danger of a new US-made crisis in Persian Gulf,' posted on the WWSW July 2, I will begin with the factual issues, and then discuss the broader questions you raise about objectivity in reporting.

You object to my assertion that the July 1 missile attack on Iraq was 'the latest in a series of recent events that have ... provided the American media and politicians with ammunition to whip up public opinion against Iraq. The sequence of happenings points to a deliberate campaign of provocation on the part of Washington.'

This, you say, is purely my personal opinion, injected into the story to confuse and mislead the public in accordance with my unstated bias. You then proceed to ignore what follows, that is, the bulk of my article, which sets out precisely the sequence of events leading up to the missile attack: Butler's trip to Iraq, his initial statements pointing toward an early end to the sanctions, the sharp and negative reaction from US government officials and the press, Butler's apparent about-face in his subsequent report to the UN, the announcement that US army tests show VX nerve gas on Iraqi missile fragments, US statements hailing the report and gloating that it sets back Iraqi efforts to end the sanctions, and the missile attack itself. All of this within the space of 16 days.

That you dismiss out of hand my conclusion that these events 'point to a deliberate campaign of provocation' indicates, I would suggest, a certain lack of objectivity on your own part.

Next you denounce as a 'personal fabrication' my assertion that Butler has in the past 'toed the American line, continually placing new obstacles in the way of Iraqi compliance and insisting that Baghdad prove the unprovable, i.e., the non-

existence of chemical and biological weapons or the means of producing them.' Are you suggesting that Butler has in any significant way diverged from US policy on the question of sanctions? What examples of such divergence can you provide?

On the contrary, it is well known that Russia, China and France, for their own policy reasons, have chafed at Butler's subservience to the Americans and the British, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan all but acknowledged Butler's provocative role during his discussions last winter with the Iraqi regime.

As for the second part of the offending sentence: I for one would like an explanation as to how one can prove the non-existence not only of weapons of mass destruction, but the means for producing them. The latter can be interpreted to include the most elementary forms of modern technology. This requirement becomes all the more absurd when those rendering the verdict are sworn enemies who have repeatedly pledged to destroy you.

Finally, you deride me for either not knowing, or concealing the fact, that Iraq had denied making VX gas. Here the mistake is clearly yours. As all of the news reports at the time explained, the lie allegedly exposed by the US army tests did not concern Iraqi production of VX gas prior to the Gulf war, a fact that Baghdad has acknowledged, but rather Iraq's denial that it ever succeeded in producing weapons grade VX and mounting it on missile warheads.

Let me cite just one report published by Gannett News Service on June 24. It began: 'The news Saddam Hussein had deadly VX nerve gas in his chemical warfare arsenal is not new. The discovery he was able to harness it to existing weapons is.' The same article quotes Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon along similar lines: 'They have maintained for a long while that they were unable to produce VX in large or stable quantities, and therefore, had been unable to weaponize it.'

Now to the more basic question of objectivity in covering and reporting the news. You write: 'I think of a perfect reporter being one who writes the news as it happens, not with their own personal opinions or beliefs.... The story he has posted is not a news story, it is an attempt to bring the views he possesses to other people.'

I, and the entire editorial board of the WSWs, agree that news developments must be reported and analyzed with the most scrupulous attention to facts, and that any attempt at falsification is impermissible. However your conception of the 'perfect reporter' seems to assume that fidelity to the truth is incompatible with partisanship in the struggle between social classes, as well as the struggle between powerful capitalist nations and the poor nations they have historically dominated.

You posit a neutral reporter who stands outside of the reality of social life and the class struggle, and whose basic premises--the assumptions that shape his choice of facts, his evaluation and presentation of 'the news'--are likewise without

any class significance. There is no such animal.

The relationship between socioeconomic life and human thought is a complex one. However, the notion that thinking is simply a passive and purely individual process is a false conception that has long been superseded by the development of philosophy and science. All human thought is the product of a protracted historical and social process. World outlooks and methods of thought and analysis are bound up, not always directly and immediately, but bound up nevertheless, with the historical struggle of social forces.

It is remarkable how uncritically you seem to accept the premises of the establishment media. The difference between the *World Socialist Web Site* and the bourgeois media is this: we openly and frankly declare our political and class standpoint, while they, under the guise of 'objectivity,' conceal theirs. Precisely because we do not accept the myths promoted by official society and its media adjuncts, we are in a position to make a far more insightful and truthful analysis of events than one can find on the network news or in the 'major' press.

The media coverage of the Gulf war and its aftermath has provided a textbook example of biased, superficial, misleading, manipulative and politically driven reporting, all in the name of 'the news.' The fact that hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians have died as a result of a US vendetta against an essentially defenseless country--motivated not by democratic principles, but rather the drive for hegemony over the oil-rich Persian Gulf--is not even hinted at by the supposedly objective commentators who are paid six- or seven-figure salaries by the corporate controlled media.

I hope you are at least as critical of them as you are of the WSWs.

Sincerely,

Barry Grey, for the WSWs Editorial Board

See:

Missile attack on Iraq

Danger of new US-made crisis in Persian Gulf

[2 July 1998]



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