

# CNN imposes new “script control”

Henry Michaels  
5 March 2003

Even as the Pentagon released the details of its planned wartime censorship, CNN was imposing a draconian system of internal vetting that suggests the major media networks will give the US administration little concern.

Writing in the British-based *Independent* last week, Robert Fisk quoted extracts from a new CNN document, “Reminder of Script Approval Policy.” Dated January 27, 2003, the instruction requires reporters to send all of their copy to officials in Atlanta to ensure it is suitably “balanced.”

“All reporters preparing package scripts must submit the scripts for approval,” it says. “Packages may not be edited until the scripts are approved.... All packages originating outside Washington, LA or NY, including all international bureaus, must come to the ROW in Atlanta for approval.” (“ROW” refers to the editors in Atlanta).

“A script is not approved for air unless it is properly marked approved by an authorized manager.... When a script is updated it must be re-approved, preferably by the originating approving authority.”

In a further message dated January 31, CNN staff were told that a new computerized system of script approval will allow “authorized script approvers to mark scripts in a clear and standard manner. Script EPs (executive producers) will click on the colored APPROVED button to turn it from red (unapproved) to green (approved). When someone makes a change in the script after approval, the button will turn yellow.”

Fisk provided examples of how, even before the latest edicts, CNN reports had been doctored to produce pro-Israeli accounts of atrocities committed against Palestinians. He cited an exchange last year between CNN’s reporter in the occupied West Bank town of Ramallah and Eason Jordan, one of CNN’s top officials in Atlanta.

The journalist complained about a story by reporter

Michael Holmes on Red Crescent ambulance drivers who were repeatedly shot at by Israeli troops.

“We risked our lives and went out with ambulance drivers ... for a whole day. We have also witnessed ambulances from our window being shot at by Israeli soldiers.... The story received approval from Mike Shoulder. The story ran twice and then Rick Davis [a CNN executive] killed it. The reason was we did not have an Israeli army response, even though we stated in our story that Israel believes that Palestinians are smuggling weapons and wanted people in the ambulances.”

The Israelis refused to give CNN an interview, only a written statement, which was then written into the CNN script. But again Davis rejected it. Only when, after three days, the Israeli army gave CNN an interview did Holmes’s story run—with the dishonest inclusion of a line saying the ambulances were shot in “crossfire.”

The reporter complained: “We were told by Rick that if we do not get an Israeli on-camera, we would not air the package. This means governments and armies are indirectly censoring us and we are playing directly into their hands.”

Fisk noted the implications for the impending Gulf war: no report from Iraq will appear unless and until US military authorities deny whatever has been reported.

CNN became notorious after it revealed following the 1991 Gulf War that it had allowed Pentagon “trainees” into the CNN newsroom in Atlanta. According to Fisk, however, CNN “is not alone in this paranoid form of reporting. Other US networks operate equally anti-journalistic systems.”

There is ample evidence for this assertion. During the Gulf War, NBC’s Tom Brokaw echoed the White House and the dominant media mantra when he told viewers that the US was not responsible for civilian casualties. “We must point out again and again that it is

Saddam Hussein who put these innocents in harm's way," he said.

Today, in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, the media routinely presents unadulterated pro-administration propaganda as news, citing sources such as "senior defense officials," "administration officials," "some American intelligence officials," "military officials" and "defense officials."



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**