Media lies and war crimes: the instructive case of Julius Streicher

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Eleven leading members of Hitler's Third Reich were sentenced to death for their role in instigating a world war that claimed the lives of tens of millions of people as a result of military slaughter and death camps.

The lead defendant, Hermann Goring, cheated the hangman's noose by taking a cyanide capsule that he had concealed under a dental crown. He and nine others condemned to hang had been convicted of the Nuremberg indictment's principal charge: conspiracy to wage a war of aggression. The other charges, which encompassed the mass murder of Jews, gypsies, communists and socialists, and other civilians in Germany and its occupied territories, flowed from the first.

There was one man sent to the scaffold, however, who was acquitted on this first and paramount charge. His name was Julius Streicher, a Nazi party member since 1921. The judges at the Nuremberg tribunal found: "There is no evidence that he was ever within Hitler's inner circle of advisers, nor during his career was he closely connected with the formulation of policies that led to war..."

Rather, Streicher was convicted for promoting aggressive war and atrocities against the Jews in his newspapers—the vile anti-Semitic weekly *Der Stürmer*, and later a daily, *Fränkische Tageszeitung*.

The court found that this propaganda for war and genocide made the newspaper publisher more culpable than many of those defendants who were more directly involved in the workings of the Nazi regime. The historic crimes of that regime, the tribunal found, could never have been carried out without the preparatory work he and others like him did in warping the public consciousness of the German people with a relentless barrage of anti-Semitic and militarist propaganda. As the prosecution stated at Nuremberg: "Without him the Kaltenbrunners, the Himmlers, the General Stroops would have had nobody to carry out their orders."

All over the world, experts in international law have come forward to accuse the Bush administration of the same principal crime for which the Nuremberg defendants were sentenced to death 57 years ago. And not a few have raised the prospect of a new war crimes indictment resulting from Washington's unprovoked war of aggression against Iraq.

"Political leaders in due course could be taken to a national court for an act of aggression," said Louise Doswald-Beck, secretary-general of the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists, which has condemned the invasion of Iraq as a gross violation of international law.

What of those who play an analogous role to that of Julius Streicher today? The American media has worked as an essential instrument of the Bush administration in deceiving and terrorizing the American people in preparation for war. In many cases—Fox News, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages and countless barking commentators on both network and cable talk shows—they have approached the degraded level of *Der Stürmer* in promoting an invasion of Iraq and justifying mass murder.

The media as a whole, with very few exceptions, has obediently turned itself into an extension of the Pentagon's propaganda machine, serving as a conduit for psychological warfare against both Iraqis and Americans. The scoundrels who control what passes for news in the US have parroted all of the administration's lying justifications for war, celebrated its onset, and censored the images of carnage and suffering that are being seen throughout the rest of the world. They share a major portion of guilt for this illegal act.

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How and when those who are responsible for this war of aggression will be made to pay for their crimes remains to be seen. But there can be no doubt there are many candidates to fill the place in the dock that was occupied by Streicher at Nuremberg.

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