US media covers for Allawi—Washington's executioner-in-chief in Iraq

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22 July 2004

On July 17, two of Australia's leading daily newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, published the testimony of two unnamed Iraqi men who claim to have witnessed the interim prime minister, Iyad Allawi, shoot and kill at least six prisoners at the Al-Amariyah security center in Baghdad. The murder of the suspected anti-US insurgents was reportedly carried out in mid-June, in the presence of Iraq's interior minister and American military personnel, among others.

The eyewitness testimony was gathered by Paul McGeough, a respected foreign correspondent, award-winning journalist, and former editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Both McGeough and the newspapers are standing by the credibility of their story. The information they published included the names of three of the victims: Ahmed Abdulah Ahsamey, Amer Lutfi Mohammed Ahmed al-Kutsia, and Walid Mehdi Ahmed al-Sammarrai. (See WSWS article: Iraqi prime minister accused of murdering detainees)

Under pressure from sections of the Australian media and prominent British political figures, the Iraqi human rights minister, Bakhtiar Amin, said on July 19, "I will check this and I will talk to the prime minister as well." British and Australian politicians, including former British foreign secretary Robin Cook, have called for an independent investigation, possibly involving the International Red Cross.

McGeough's eyewitness accounts come in the wake of a raft of reports in the international and American press that have commented on Allawi's ruthlessness and the dictatorial steps he has taken—including threatening to delay elections, establishing the mechanisms for martial law, and forming a secret police agency to hunt down political opponents. Some articles have cited the pervasive rumors of the longtime CIA operative's thuggishness. Among them was a July 11 *New York Times* feature by Dexter Filkins which detailed a story about Allawi cutting off a prisoner's hand in order to make him to confess to "terrorist" activities.

McGeough told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Lateline" program that, having heard rumors about the prison killings, "I proceeded to check it, to investigate it, to see if it had a factual basis." He found two men, independently of one another, who both claimed to have been present and gave virtually identical descriptions of the crime.

By any journalistic standard, this report merits the most prominent and comprehensive news coverage, especially in the US. Allawi, after all, has been presented to the world by the Bush administration, which hand-picked him for the post of interim prime minister, as the political agent of democratic transformation in the occupied country.

One might think, therefore, that the American media would feel obliged to at least inform the US public that credible charges have been made that Washington's man in Baghdad is a mass murderer—especially since the US invasion and occupation have been justified on the grounds that the toppled president, Saddam Hussein, was a killer.

It will, however, come as no surprise to those who follow the American media that it has almost universally buried the story. Those newspapers that have made reference to the allegations against Allawi have dismissed the report as mere rumor, while implying, in a semi-jocular tone, that a mass killer is precisely the kind of strongman the Iraqi people want and need.

The blather about "democratizing" Iraq has, for the present, been relegated to second place behind praise

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for Allawi's "tough" measures against those Iraqis who are fighting against the colonial occupation of their country. The operating principle is evidently: "He may be a despot, but he's our despot."

Only three pieces have appeared in the American press that directly refer to the eyewitness accounts: an article in the latest edition of *Newsweek* magazine, an article in the July 20 *Chicago Tribune*, and an article in the July 21 *Los Angeles Times*.

All three reports suggest that the accusations against Allawi somehow confirm the longing of the Iraqi people for the return of a Saddam-style dictator. *Newsweek*'s article, entitled "Iraq's new SOB," opines that the reports of Allawi's crimes show that "Iraqis are desperate for someone who will impose order." The *Tribune* declares that "ordinary Iraqis say the story suggests Allawi is tough and for that they hail him" and adds that "many Iraqis... think swift justice might be a good idea again." The *LA Times* declares such "apparent urban myths" are the product of a "society stripped of any frame of reference for leadership other than a system that relies on the fear of violence."

The only references to the allegations that have appeared in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are contained in an Associated Press story on Allawi, posted on the websites of the newspapers at 2:15am on July 20. The AP report makes no direct mention of McGeough's report or his citation of eyewitness accounts. Nor does it take note of the calls for an investigation. It refers only to "one persistent rumor" that has Allawi "killing as many as six blindfolded and handcuffed terror suspects," and reports Allawi's denial at a press conference held last week.

That Allawi was directly confronted at a press conference makes it clear that the lack of serious attention in the American media is not due to ignorance of the charges raised, or the seriousness with which they are being taken in some circles. The entire press contingent in Baghdad, and therefore their editors in the US, are well aware of the issue.

This *World Socialist Web Site* reporter emailed the ombudsman/public editor of both newspapers on July 19 and asked whether they would be reporting on the eyewitness accounts of Allawi's extra-judicial killings. The *New York Times* merely responded with a link to the July 11 commentary by Filkins, and the *Washington Post* failed to give any response.

The US media had no reservations in April and May about reporting unsubstantiated charges made by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq that Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr was responsible for the murder of a rival cleric a year earlier. In that case, the murder allegation assisted the Bush administration in demonizing the uprising of Iraqi Shiites led by Sadr as the work of "thugs" and "terrorists."

The incident described by McGeough is fully consistent with the brutality that has characterized life in Iraq since the US invasion. In the attempt to force the Iraqi people to submit to American rule, thousands of Iraqis have been killed by the US military in cities like Baghdad, Fallujah, Najaf and Karbala, thousands more have been detained without charges, and prisoners have been murdered and tortured by American guards at Abu Ghraib prison and other facilities.

The US media's silence on Allawi's murderous ways underscores its complicity in promoting a brutal imperialist war and colonial occupation, and concealing from the American people the real war aims of the American ruling elite, which is intent on seizing control of Iraq's oil resources and establishing a military base for further aggression in the Middle East and beyond.

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