

# New York Times and Washington Post remain silent on murder allegations against Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi

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Paul McGeough, the award-winning Australian journalist who published eyewitness accounts that Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi carried out the extrajudicial execution of six prisoners, authored a further comment on the issue in the August 12 edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

McGeough's original article, containing the accounts of two anonymous sources describing Allawi's murderous actions, was carried on July 17 by two of Australia's leading daily newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*. It included charges that American military personnel were present at the scene of the crime, which allegedly occurred in late June.

McGeough's latest comment, headlined "They Saw No Evil, Heard No Evil, and Certainly Will Not Speak of It," is a denunciation of the US government for opposing any investigation of the allegations against Allawi. (See: <http://smh.com.au/articles/2004/08/11/1092102521384.html>)

The Australian journalist declared: "Now there is unambiguous proof of two things we knew were happening in liberated Iraq—Iraqi prisoners are being abused by the new, US-appointed regime; and the Americans, as a matter of policy, refuse to do anything about it."

McGeough drew attention to the events of June 29, when US National Guardsmen in Baghdad intervened to stop the torture of Iraqi prisoners by Allawi's Interior Ministry police, only to be ordered by their commanders to leave the victims in the hands of their tormentors. This crime took place several weeks after Allawi's alleged murder of six prisoners at Baghdad's Al-Amariyah security center. (See: "US commanders stop troops from protecting Iraqi torture victims")

To document the US government cover-up of Allawi's

actions, McGeough recounted in his August 12 article an exchange between US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher and a reporter that occurred at a Washington press briefing held on August 3.

The following is taken from the State Department transcript of the briefing, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2004/34897.htm>:

**Question:** I'd just like to ask, has the United States Government or the State Department made any attempt to ascertain the truth or otherwise of reports that Prime Minister Allawi, on or about the third weekend in June, while the Coalition Provisional Authority was still in charge in Iraq, executed six prisoners, shot seven in front of witnesses reported to include US Security personnel? If not, will you do so, given the serious natures of the charge, claims by two independent witnesses to an Australian journalist and, as I said, the claim that American personnel were present?

**Mr. Boucher:** I think this is something that has been dealt with and discussed in Baghdad and here. Prime Minister Allawi himself has said there is nothing to these reports. I think he's responded very directly when asked about them. We have said before we have no information to indicate such an event had taken place, and that's where I stand at this point.

**Question:** But my question was whether you had done any investigation, in the sense there were Americans allegedly present.

**Mr. Boucher:** I don't know who those Americans might have been. I don't know if any of the Armed Forces or other units in Baghdad might have done some sort of investigation, but I'm told the U.S. Government has checked and that we don't have any information that would indicate those reports are true.

**Question:** So you are satisfied there is absolutely no

truth to those reports?

**Mr. Boucher:** We have nothing to indicate those reports are true. I'm not going to rephrase it. I tell you the extent of our knowledge, but that's the extent of our knowledge.

**Question:** But you're not making any effort to extend the extent of your knowledge?

**Mr. Boucher:** I'd say we have checked on what information we do have and we don't have any information that would indicate those reports are true.

**Question:** And you're not looking to make any further investigations to—

**Mr. Boucher:** We're always open to any further information or investigations that might be done.

**Question:** Thank you.

The first thing to be said about this exchange is that Boucher, while carefully parsing his responses, did not deny the truth of the allegations against Allawi. The second thing is that Boucher made clear the US government has no intention of investigating the incident.

McGeough draws the following entirely justified conclusion from this remarkable exchange: “[I]t seems that if you have Washington's backing, you can get away with murder.”

The American media is complicit in facilitating this US government cover-up. It has for the most part failed to even report the account of Allawi's crimes published by McGeough. Similarly, the major media outlets have suppressed the report that US military officials ordered National Guardsmen to withdraw their protection of Iraqi prisoners being tortured by Iraqi Interior Ministry police.

Among the newspapers that have refused to report these stories are the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The news briefing recounted by McGeough makes it clear that the allegations against Allawi are a hotly discussed issue within press and government circles. Those who publish such newspapers as the *Times* and *Post* are well aware that the eyewitness accounts of murder carried out by Washington's hand-picked interim prime minister are, far from a marginal question, a matter of immense importance.

The *Times* and the *Post* have maintained their silence, despite the fact that prominent political figures in Britain and Australia have called for an independent investigation. Allawi himself was obliged to publicly deny the accusations at a press conference in Baghdad.

On July 19, this writer emailed the public editor of the *New York Times* and the ombudsman of the *Washington Post*, seeking an explanation for the failure of their

newspapers to report the allegations against Allawi.

The *Washington Post* ombudsman, Michael Getler, has failed to reply to my inquiry.

The *New York Times* public editor, Daniel Okrent, replied on July 29 that the *Times* would be guilty of unethical journalism if it were to report the allegations against Allawi without independently substantiating them or disproving them. (See: “Murder allegations against Iraq's Allawi: an exchange of letters with the *New York Times*' public editor”)

Okrent's argument does not hold water. The *Times* prominently reported all sorts of unverified gossip about Clinton during the rightwing impeachment campaign spearheaded by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, as did the *Post*. Both papers routinely publish unsubstantiated statements by government officials, often anonymous, concerning alleged terrorist threats, the war in Iraq, and other matters. They infamously retailed the Bush administration's bogus claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and collaboration between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq, without ever undertaking a critical and independent investigation of the government's assertions.

There is no innocent explanation for the silence of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* on a story that illustrates the criminal character of the US intervention in Iraq, and exposes Washington's man in Baghdad as a thug and killer.

The editorial boards of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have decided it is better that the American people not know that murderers and torturers have been imposed on Iraq in their name.



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