

The unholy nexus between Britain's royal family, the military and the media in Afghanistan

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According to the Taliban, Saturday's assault on Camp Bastion in Afghanistan was inspired by opposition to the provocative anti-Islamic video concocted by right-wing elements in the US, and the stationing at the base of the third in line to the British throne, Prince Harry.

The response of the British military was a typical mixture of evasion and bluster. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said it was "entirely predictable" that a claim would be made that Prince Harry was the primary target regardless of whether he was near the point of attack or not.

A senior British Army officer told the *Sunday Telegraph*: "This was a determined attack which achieved its aim of getting global press coverage.... But they are deluded if they really think they can storm Camp Bastion and kill or seriously injure Prince Harry."

In reality, the assault on the heavily fortified NATO base has revealed Afghanistan—subject to a bloody 11-year-long US-led occupation—as a country seething with a popular and increasingly sophisticated insurgency.

NATO forces are increasingly besieged by the hostile population and unable to rely on their Afghan "allies". Also at the weekend, a series of so-called green-on-blue shootings of NATO troops by NATO-trained Afghan forces left six US and British soldiers dead.

In the person of Prince Harry, the Camp Bastion attack has thrown into sharp relief the unholy nexus between the British royal family, the military and the media.

Harry was first dispatched to Afghanistan's Helmand province in 2008, after a previous decision to deploy

him to Iraq was rejected as too risky.

Censorship over the details of his deployment revealed an unprecedented level of covert collaboration between the MoD and the palace, with media in Britain and internationally—all of whom conspired to deceive the public.

Brokered during three meetings of 30 to 40 media representatives and military top brass between September and December 2007, the media agreed on a collective blackout until Harry's tour of duty was completed, in return for pre-deployment interviews and several journalists being embedded with his regiment to pool interviews, video footage and photographs. It was even arranged for Harry to be brought home on a Friday for the convenience of the printing schedules of daily and Sunday newspapers.

When the story eventually broke, a statement by General Richard Dannatt, then head of the British Army, praised the British media for their "highly responsible attitude."

The BBC justified its complicity by saying, "A news blackout is unusual, but not unique" and claimed it was to "minimise the danger" to Harry and other troops fighting alongside him.

But as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, the attempt of the media to rationalise its actions only further exposed the central fiction.

"If the issue was Harry's safety and that of his fellow soldiers, how was this facilitated by having reporters and cameramen follow him around Helmand, supposedly only hundreds of metres away from the front line?"

The deployment and ensuing press coverage was aimed at serving up raw propaganda in support of US

and British-led aggression against the peoples of the Middle East.

No effort was spared to portray the “warrior prince” as “in step” with the common foot soldier. The *Daily Mirror* wrote, for example, “Prince Harry, 23, looks like a battle-hardened veteran as he sits surrounded by sandbags and with a box of ammo at his feet to fire on Taliban fighters 650 yards away. And with nerves of steel he declared: ‘It’s just no-man’s-land. They poke their heads up and that’s it’...we have a prince with a purpose. His mother would have been hugely proud of him—and so should we... Not many members of the royal family can claim to be ‘one of us.’ Harry can.”

Earlier this month, Captain Wales, as he is known in the military, was re-deployed to Afghanistan as part of a 100-strong 662 Squadron, 3 Regiment Army Air Corps. He will serve as a co-pilot gunner with the Apache unit for the duration of his four-month tour.

This time, the MoD revealed the deployment from the beginning—no doubt in part because it was satisfied by the media’s previous compliance.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, editors were told in advance when Harry would arrive in Afghanistan, having already agreed to abide by an embargo that expired a few hours after he landed in Helmand.

“A reporter and photographer from the Press Association news agency were flown to Camp Bastion by the MoD in advance, so they could provide copy and pictures to newspapers and websites on a pooled basis, while the BBC’s Kabul film crew was flown to Helmand to provide pooled TV footage.”

Praising Camp Bastion as the “largest and most secure British base in Afghanistan”, the *Telegraph* stressed that Harry’s presence “is unlikely to have any pronounced effect on the threat level to other members of the Armed Forces living there.”

But on Monday, Defence Secretary Phillip Hammond revealed that the prince was never in danger during the assault on Camp Bastion, as special arrangements had been made for his safety.

“He is serving there as an ordinary officer but clearly there are additional security arrangements in place that recognise that he could be a target himself specifically as a result of who he is,” he said.

Once it was apparent an attack was under way, “he would have been moved to a secure position under effective guard,” Hammond said.

Asked whether this meant Prince Harry was not, in fact, being treated the same as other soldiers, Hammond replied “that in combat he’s at the same risk as any other Apache pilot.”

But as the *Telegraph* had explained, “Flying Apache attack helicopters, one of the most advanced aircraft in the world, puts him almost beyond the reach of the Taliban unless his aircraft is downed by mechanical failure....”

The Apache is one of the most lethal pieces of military hardware in action in Afghanistan and is often the weapon of choice when NATO troops face insurgent fire. The helicopter carries a variety of deadly weapons including rockets, anti-tank Hellfire missiles and a 30-mm multibarrelled chain gun.

It is not Harry that is at risk but the Afghan population. Revelling in the murderous task for which the spare heir has been selected, the *Telegraph* reported, “The Prince, who graduated from his training course as ‘Top Gun’ among more than 20 other co-pilot gunners in his class, will be part of the unit with the greatest ‘kill rate’ of any in Afghanistan, currently averaging around two Taliban killed every week.”

It cited one defence source stating, “Killing insurgents is what the machine Prince Harry flies is there for; you cannot put it any other way.”

On Sunday, a NATO air strike killed nine young women, aged 18 to 25, who had been gathering firewood in Laghman province’s Alingar district, near the Afghan capital, Kabul. Seven other women and girls were also wounded in the attack.

After initially claiming that the strike had killed insurgents, the International Security Assistance Force released a statement admitting its “full responsibility for this tragedy.”



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