

Report documents attacks on press freedom in US and Europe

Nick Barrickman
17 February 2015

Reporters Without Borders released its 2015 World Press Freedom Index last week, documenting a global rise in censorship, repression and attacks on freedom of the press. The report, which ranks over 180 countries based upon their adherence to international press freedom standards, declares “media freedom is in retreat on all five continents.”

The report ranked the United States at number 49 on press freedom, behind nations such as Burkina Faso, Niger and El Salvador. The US fell three spots from last year, and is down 32 spots from its ranking of 17 in 2002.

The report quotes *New York Times* investigative reporter James Risen, who has resisted US attempts to get him to reveal journalistic sources, as saying that the US government is “an Orwellian state claiming to be the most transparent.”

While hypocritically raising the flag of “human rights” in pursuit of its foreign policy aims, the United States has moved toward openly dictatorial forms of rule at home. The report references the Obama administration’s continuing “war on information,” stemming from its persecution of a record number of reporters and government whistleblowers, including Pvt. Bradley (Chelsea) Manning, former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, and the whistleblowing group WikiLeaks.

The report notes that “No fewer than eight whistleblowers ... have been charged under the Espionage Act during Barack Obama’s two presidential terms, compared with just three under all the other administrations since its adoption in 1917.”

Similarly, the report notes US law enforcement’s arrest of over a dozen news reporters during peaceful demonstrations late last year against police violence in Ferguson, Missouri.

Meanwhile, regions that the US has bombed or invaded, ostensibly in the name of protecting democracy and freedom, have seen a disastrous decline in press freedom. Reporting is considered to be an “act of heroism” in places such as Libya, where Islamist militias have overrun the state after the NATO-backed ouster of Col. Muammar Gadhafi. Similarly, the slaughter of journalists captured by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq have plunged both nations to the bottom of the list.

Out of all global regions that the report uses to break down its findings, Europe had by far the largest relative increase in attacks on press freedoms between 2014 and 2015. France (38th), the United Kingdom (34th), and several other close US allies in the “war on terror” have had their rankings plunge in recent years.

In the section titled the “European Model’s Erosion,” the report notes, “The EU appears to be swamped by a certain desire on the part of some member states to compromise on freedom of information.

The report also documents the growth of the extreme right throughout Europe. In France, the neo-fascistic National Front of Marine Le Pen, which has been increasingly embraced by the political establishment, has adopted a media strategy intended to “attack journalists,” and is known for physically targeting journalists at its demonstrations.

The report refers to a number of information “black holes,” or areas in which “independent information simply does not exist.” Unsurprisingly, many of US imperialism’s key client regimes can be located in or near this bottom-tier category. Both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (163rd and 164th), major US allies in the Middle East, are located within this category of informational black holes.

Despite making damning admissions about the attack

on press freedoms in the US, the report in large part pulls its punches on the US, while it reserves disproportionate condemnation of governments that America is seeking to overthrow or destabilize in the name of “human rights.” It denounces “Russian propaganda” in the Ukraine conflict, and seeks to make a clear demarcation between the US and “authoritarian regimes.”

But regardless of its deficiencies, the report presents a scathing indictment of the hypocritical claims of the US and other imperialist powers to be bombing, occupying and destabilizing other countries in the name of “human rights,” even as they lock up, brutalize and intimidate whistleblowers and journalists at home.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact