

American media suppresses report on US military atrocities in Afghanistan

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The corporate-controlled US media has maintained a virtual blackout on Pentagon documents released Wednesday that reveal grisly atrocities by American soldiers in Afghanistan, including murdering civilians and cutting off their fingers as trophies (See: ?US soldiers killed Afghan civilians and kept fingers, skull as trophies?)

The Army released official charge sheets against 12 soldiers from the 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, based at Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, Washington. Five were arrested for murder in June, but the charge sheets supplied gruesome new details, including the fact that the killings were for ?sport,? and that several of the soldiers took body parts of the victims, including finger and leg bones, a tooth and a skull.

Seven soldiers were charged for the first time Wednesday with participating in efforts to cover up the murders and the widespread use of hashish in their company, both by lying to military investigators and by savagely beating up a fellow soldier who was cooperating with the investigation.

The significance of these revelations was widely recognized around the world. The British newspaper the Guardian published a front-page expose Thursday morning, and there were major articles in other newspapers in Britain, Canada and Australia. The Seattle Times and the Tacoma Tribune-Review carried extensive accounts based on interviews with local military personnel and family members of some of the accused. Both the Associated Press and United Press International carried accounts Thursday on their wire services.

However, as of Friday, none of the leading US daily newspapers?the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times?had carried any independent report, with the Post publishing only the brief AP account, and the other three publishing nothing. Nor was there any reference to the devastating Army admission in the evening news broadcasts of NBC, ABC, CBS or Fox.

The only national network coverage came on CNN, which broadcast a report by Pentagon correspondent Chris Lawrence, beginning with this apt summary: ?The charges against 12 American soldiers sound like crimes terrorists would be accused of?murdering civilians, chopping off body parts to keep as trophies, and beating those who?d speak up against them.?

Two regional papers, the tabloid Daily News in New York City and the Boston-based Christian Science Monitor, published articles on the atrocity revelations. The Daily News cited both the Guardian account and the Associated Press. The Monitor cited CNN and the

French news service Agence France Presse, as well as AP and the Seattle Times.

These exceptions to the rule only demonstrate even more clearly that the silence in the New York Times and on the network television news programs was a deliberate and conscious act of politically motivated censorship.

The CNN report included pictures of the charge sheets and of several of the accused soldiers, as well as excerpts of the response by Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell to a question by Chris Lawrence at Wednesday's regular press briefing for Pentagon correspondents.

According to the Pentagon transcript, Lawrence asked, "Geoff, you mentioned the potential risk to troops because of the Koran-burning. But at the same time, there are these?up to a dozen soldiers now charged with premeditated murder of Afghan civilians, chopping off body parts, keeping body parts as souvenirs?. How worried are you about the reaction to these charges, especially considering it doesn't concern one person but multiple people in the unit?"

Morrell responded that "allegations like this are very serious, and that's reflected, I think, in the fact that the charges levied against these individuals are very serious." He said he was not at liberty to discuss the specifics, but claimed they were an "aberration in terms of the behavior of our forces."

Whether eventually proved or not, he continued, the allegations were "unhelpful. It does not help the?you know, the perceptions of our forces around the world. And so, the sad part about this is, even if these individuals are vindicated, even if they're not true, the damage will have been done. The people in that area who are impacted by these alleged incidents will think differently of us as a result of that."

The reporters who regularly cover the Pentagon for the television networks and national newspapers were present at the news conference and heard Lawrence's question (and a follow-up) and Morrell's two responses. These reporters also had access to the charge documents, which were posted on the Seattle Times website after their release by the Army. Again, the subsequent silence on the sensational revelations can only be the result of deliberate editorial choice.

The New York Times finally broke its silence with a posting on its website at 3:16 p.m. Friday, by Robert Mackey, mentioning the details of the charges against the Stryker Brigade troops. The account focused most of its attention on the claim by the father of Spc. Adam Winfield, one of the five soldiers charged with murder, that his son had tried to tip off military authorities after the first of the three murders of Afghan civilians. Winfield's father described making multiple phone calls to the Army, without any action being taken until two more murders had taken place.

Mackey's report concluded with the following observation: "The grisly details of the crime spree have attracted international attention at a time when America is struggling to convince Afghans that its soldiers are fighting to defend them from extremists." He did not acknowledge that this "international attention" did not include his own newspaper, the supposed "paper of record" in the United States.

For the New York Times, such censorship is part of a long and contemptible record of suppressing damaging revelations about the humanitarian consequences of the US wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, the newspaper has consistently suppressed the results of surveys showing the horrific death toll in Iraq, like the study conducted by Johns Hopkins University and published in the British medical journal, the Lancet, that estimated more than one million Iraqis had been killed in the war.

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