

Media Disinformation and the “Arab Spring” Color Revolutions

The Tainted Legacy of I.F. Stone

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On April 10 Democracy Now! correspondent [Sharif Abdul Kouddous received the I.F. “Izzy” Stone award](#) “for outstanding achievement in independent media.” at Ithaca College’s Park Center for Independent Media. Kouddous won the recognition through his series of 2011 dispatches from the Tahir Square demonstrations against Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak. Sharing the award with corporate public relations watchdog Center for Media and Democracy, Kouddous is the third Democracy Now! staffer to receive the honor in the Izzy’s four year history.

“With breathtaking bravery,” the award judges observed, “Sharif’s unflinching on-the-street reporting simultaneously brought us the voices and faces of Egyptians, the drama of the moment and big-picture analysis — sometimes while tear gas or live rounds exploded in the background.” Yet whether the often scathing “Izzy” Stone would have actually found Kouddous’s coverage of the demonstrations distinguished is another matter entirely.

When I.F. Stone passed in 1989 the *Los Angeles Times* referred to him as “the conscience of investigative journalism.” On being asked for advice for approaching his profession he famously told a group of journalism students to remember how “all governments lie.” A scrupulous researcher and surveyor of the political landscape, Stone sought to reveal the underlying motives and dynamics of political institutions and developments, contributing to a variety of outlets, including his own *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, begun in the early 1950s at the height of the anticommunist McCarthy era. During his time he was often derided or ignored by mainstream media because of his typically forthright and accurate appraisal of significant issues and events. With these things in mind it is doubtful that Izzy would have approved of Democracy Now’s often misleading coverage of the “Arab Spring” and its specific Tahir Square genesis.

The basic protocols of investigative journalism call for the fundamental social and political setting of an event to be explained in detail. The underlying political relationship between Mubarak’s Egypt, the broader Middle East and the US role therein during the Obama administration was far more complex than a series of reports and interviews with Tahir Square malcontents could begin to reveal. Despite the self-hyped claim of fearless independence and in contrast to Stone’s legacy, Democracy Now! and Kouddous repeatedly failed to provide a deeper basis for better understanding their Tahir Square reports.

For a start, a historical context situating the function and purpose of US-backed “color revolutions” would be necessary to more cogently interpret the events preceding Mubarak’s

overthrow. As [Russia Today reported on the eve of the “Arab Spring”](#), Washington’s well known program of “‘democracy promotion’ is simple: finance, train, and politically back local opposition forces around the world that support the American agenda.” Such analysis goes a long way in understanding the formidable presence of American-backed NGOs in Egypt including the National Endowment for Democracy and the US Agency for International Development in the period leading up to Tahir Square.

It was also no secret in non-Anglo-American news media that [Hosni Mubarak was becoming a nuisance to the West because of his objection to a US-UK-Israel attack on Iran](#). The Egyptian leader’s well known stubbornness in this regard provided the basis for other Sunni-Muslim nations such as Saudi Arabia to register their unease with such plans. In July 2009 Mubarak objected to a US-UK-proposed “defense umbrella” over Sunni states in the event of a confrontation with a nuclear-armed Iran. The plan would have involved the stationing of US military personnel in Egypt, to which Mubarak was strongly opposed. In a pronouncement that likely angered US and British officials, Mubarak went so far as to argue that Iran should be brought in to the diplomatic fold for potential negotiation.

On July 23 2009 Democracy Now! provided [a cursory report of the advised “defense umbrella”](#) but never revisited the story or, more importantly, used it as an explanatory backdrop for Kouddous’ reportage on Mubarak’s ouster. 4

By recognizing the US’s favored tactic of regime change alongside broader geopolitical concerns the glut of coverage on an Egyptian “people’s revolution” might have been looked upon as especially suspect. Yet in keeping with Democracy Now’s tradition of highlighting the pageantry of social protest shorn of broader circumstances, Kouddous’ Tahir Square reports fit comfortably alongside the more notoriously deceptive efforts of Al Jazeera and CNN, perpetuating the belief that the demonstrations were a principal cause of Mubarak’s overthrow.

In contrast, as the takeover reached its final phases it took journalist Webster Tarpley a mere thirty seconds to provide [a wider framework for Tahir Square on another popular alternative news program](#).

This is a CIA-military coup. It was announced in Washington this morning by Leon Panetta, the head of the CIA in testimony to the House Intelligence Committee. He said Mubarak is going to be out today. So, it’s all organized behind the scenes. The people in the foreground, this gaggle of anarchists and dupes in the square, these people are the walk-ons—they’re the props if you will. They’re what makes this plausible to the average person. But what’s going on is a good old-fashioned military coup. (emphasis added)

As a growing corpus of research suggests, the careful coordination of color revolutions is designed to provide a false impression of US-backed popular political enfranchisement while overlooking the multitude of more complex political and geopolitical factors. In this way Kouddous’ acclaimed reportage served as an intoxicating obfuscation that pre-empts a deeper public awareness of the Middle East’s long and difficult existence under Anglo-American hegemony.

Either Kouddous and Democracy Now! are inept at putting their objects of reportage into meaningful contexts or they are intentionally misleading their viewers and listeners. Honoring Kouddous is an unfortunate and confused commemoration of Izzy Stone since in

the end Democracy Now's celebrated reportage has performed the integral function of solidifying the progressive left's uncritical acceptance of the "Arab Spring" propaganda operation, thus abetting Western imperialism and paving the way for a regional or even global conflagration.

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James F. Tracy was a tenured Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Florida Atlantic University from 2002 to 2016. He was fired by FAU ostensibly for violating the university's policies imposed on the free speech rights of faculty. Tracy has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the university, with trial set to begin November 27, 2017. Tracy received his PhD from University of Iowa. His work on media history, politics and culture has appeared in a wide variety of academic journals, edited volumes, and alternative news and opinion outlets. Additional information is available at MemoryHoleBlog.com, TracyLegalDefense.org, and jamesftracy.wordpress.com.

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