

All the News the CIA Sees Fit to Print

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John Kiriakou looked up from his desk at CIA headquarters and was stunned to see The Washington Post investigative reporter, Bob Woodward, walking through the secure area without an agency escort. On another occasion, Kiriakou—who rose at the CIA to become executive assistant to the deputy in charge of operations, the spy agency's dark activities—saw CNN host Wolf Blitzer wandering unattended through the same area, despite the CIA's ban on communicating with the media.

"We like to think there's a Chinese wall between the CIA, especially senior CIA officials, and the American media," Kiriakou recently told the London Real podcast. "In fact, they're in bed together."

Kiriakou later became a well-known whistleblower. He was the only CIA employee who went to prison for the agency's torture program, sentenced in 2013 to 30 months behind bars—not because he himself tortured anyone, but because he told an ABC News reporter about the waterboarding to which the agency subjected a war on terror captive.

These days, Kiriakou is outraged for a different reason: the tight connection between the CIA and the media elite. All too often, he says, the national security journalists who are granted access by Langley can be trusted to see world affairs—and the U.S. empire's dominant role in them—the way the CIA wants them to. Whether it's the war in Ukraine, tensions with Russia and China, or U.S. military exploits in the Middle East and Africa, coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and on television reflects the slanted view of the national security establishment.

When Kiriakou was a CIA official, he says, the agency leaked regularly to *The Washington Post* correspondents Woodward, David Ignatius and Joby Warrick—as well as "a half-dozen reporters" at *The New York Times*—because Langley spymasters knew they "will carry your water."

Washington journalists who contradict the U.S. national security line—even legendary ones

like Seymour Hersh, who enjoyed CIA access for many years—soon find themselves in the cold, according to Kiriakou. Hersh once worked for *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, but was forced to publish his exposé on the lethal U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's compound, which tied the alleged 9/11 mastermind's execution more to clandestine collaboration with Pakistani intelligence than to American heroics, in the low-circulation *London Review of Books*. Last year, Hersh was relegated to Substack to publish his investigative report on the explosion of Russia's Nord Stream pipeline, which blamed the act of war on U.S. Navy divers in a secret CIA operation ordered by President Joe Biden. (*The New York Times* still finds the sabotage a "mystery.")

Hersh forced to self-publish? "That's how bad it's gotten in the United States," Kiriakou says.

"Back in the good old days, when things were more innocent and simple, the psychopathic Central Intelligence Agency had to covertly infiltrate the news media to manipulate the information Americans were consuming about their nation and the world," observed Caitlin A. Johnstone in MR (*Monthly Review*) Online. Now the CIA *is* the media, she ruefully concluded.

In 1977, Johnstone reminded her readers, Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame exposed the fact that the CIA supervised 400 reporters as agency "assets." (Bernstein conveniently overlooked *The Washington Post*, which has a long history of coziness with intelligence. The newspaper's current owner, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, is a major CIA contractor.) When Bernstein's article ran in *Rolling Stone*, it caused a tempest. Nowadays, nobody blinks an eye when "liberal" TV channels like CNN and MSNBC openly employ veterans of the CIA, FBI, NSA and other security agencies, such as commentators John Brennan, Jeremy Bash, Michael Hayden, James Clapper and Malcolm Nance.

Even *Rolling Stone*, once the voice of 1960s counterculture, which published radical and progressive writers like Tom Hayden, David Harris, Dick Goodwin and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.—can no longer be trusted by free-thinking readers. RS is one of the publications vacuumed up by the upstart empire, Penske Media, which also purchased *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter* and most of the entertainment industry media as well as *New York Magazine*.

Under Penske Media—run by Jay Penske, the 44-year-old known for his floppy hair, model-like looks and not much else save the fact that his father is trucking mogul Roger Penske—*Rolling Stone* has taken a sharp turn to the right. When not attacking Kennedy as an "anti-vaxxer" and "conspiracy"-obsessed lunatic, RS touts the bloody stalemate in Ukraine and the presidency of "boring" Biden.

Jay Penske went on his media buying spree courtesy of investment from Saudi Arabian royalty and New York hedge fund billionaire Daniel Loeb, who reportedly used former CIA agents to teach his staff deception techniques. (For the first time, Penske Media even brought CIA recruiters to the SXSW festival, the annual lollapalooza of indie music and technology which the media juggernaut also snapped up. The CIA's message to young festival-goers: it's cool to be a spy!)

In 2021, Penske Media hired 50-year-old Noah Shachtman to be the editor-in-chief of *Rolling Stone*. It was a strange choice to run the iconic music magazine. Shachtman was known mainly as an entrepreneurial national security journalist whose publications were avidly

read by generals and weapons manufacturers. He uses military lingo to describe his editorial targets at *Rolling Stone*, referring to them as “bad actors” like Eric Clapton and Kennedy. Although he worked for the 1992 Bill Clinton presidential campaign, Shachtman says we need more leaders like Clinton’s opponent, former President George H. W. Bush—a man who was “a coalition-builder, someone who talked sense and had a bit of decency to him... an old-school internationalist.” And a former CIA director—but definitely not a “bad actor.”

The view that the world is a dangerous place, filled with bad actors—and must be dominated by the U.S. militarily—now prevails not only at *Rolling Stone*, but throughout our mainstream media.

Social media also has been colonized by the national security ideology. Last December, after buying Twitter, Elon Musk stated that internal documents revealed the company had taken money from the FBI to censor tweets the bureau considered objectionable.

Last week, Glenn Greenwald interviewed Wikipedia cofounder Larry Sanger, who charged that government security agencies have imposed an “over-the-top biased view” on the online encyclopedia since 2008.

“We do have evidence that as early as 2008 CIA and FBI computers were used to edit Wikipedia,” Sanger told Greenwald. “Do you think they stopped doing that? No. We know that a great part of intelligence now, information wars, is conducted online. And where if not on websites like Wikipedia? So, they pay off the most influential people, to push their agendas—which they’re mostly already in line with. Or they just develop their own talent within the community, learn the Wikipedia game, and then push what they want to say with their own people.”

Kennedy recently sued YouTube and its parent company Google, charging the social media giant with censorship. Among the RFK Jr. videos taken down by YouTube are his interviews with Joe Rogan and Jordan Peterson and his speech at Saint Anselm’s College, all from this year.

“This complaint concerns the freedom of speech and the extraordinary steps the United States government has taken under the leadership of Joe Biden to silence people it does not want Americans to hear,” the lawsuit reads. “Mr. Kennedy is not the only victim of this censorship campaign, which is unprecedented in American history. But he is a high-profile victim, especially since he is now challenging President Biden for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination.”

Democracy can’t function without a free press. But there is no such thing as unfettered journalism when secretive agencies control the media. Spooks have no place in the newsroom. And yet most of our reporting comes from closely supervised news outlets or even subsidiaries of the permanent government.

It’s time to reject the brainwashing and think for ourselves.

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