

News Fixing

By [Dimitri Diamant](#)

Global Research, December 26, 2005

26 December 2005

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Many know that price fixing by the largest competitors in any industry is against the law. Stories have been told of top execs meeting in hotel rooms in order to fix such industry-wide prices, nothing written down, not even on slips of paper.

Lately, there seems to be an ominous trend towards something similar that could be described as News Fixing.

Proper journalistic standards require that the most authoritative sources that are available be referred to, and there should be confirmation; but are there an increasing number of circumstances where such proper journalistic standards are not being followed? This situation suffers from even more aggravation due to the well known concentration of major news source outlets into fewer and fewer hands, so that now, only a handful of media CEOs can make it clear to all journalists that the quality and reliability of news sources can be fudged.

One serious example of this practice would be an alleged massacre that all journalists dutifully always describe as the worst since World War II. This would be the alleged massacre that may have taken place in Srebrenica, Bosnia in July, 1995.

What are the sources for this story? When News Fixing takes place, we see that all journalists, for example, from television, whether presenting the news or conducting interviews with pre-selected guests, always rigidly preach from exactly the same hymn book, News Fixing, almost as though the top level CEO is always looking over their shoulder. Is this the free press?

Whenever any noted journalist is constrained to provide a source for the Srebrenica story, they always immediately refer to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the ICRC, Geneva, Switzerland, but without any further elaboration whatsoever. Is this their only source, as vaguely as it is presented, for a story as singularly important as this?

It is possible to delve into the statements made by the ICRC at that time with regard to Srebrenica. The most authoritative source would be an interview granted to Junge Welt (Young World), a Berlin newspaper, www.jungewelt.de. This newspaper was founded at the time of the DDR, continues to publish during the subsequent fifteen years of the Federal Republic, and their editorial policy would continue to be critical of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a country that was founded in 1920 by Woodrow Wilson. This authoritative interview was granted to Junge Welt on August 30, 1995 by an official spokesperson from the ICRC headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland. A pertinent excerpt from this interview, granted by a Mr. Pierre Gaultier of the ICRC, would be as follows:

“All together we arrived at the number of approximately 10,000 [missing from Srebrenica]. But there may be some double counting... Before we have finished [weeding out the double counting] we cannot give any exact information. Our work is made even more complicated by the fact that the Bosnian government has informed us that several thousand refugees have broken through enemy lines and have been reintegrated into the Bosnian Muslim army. These persons are therefore not missing, but they cannot be removed from the lists of the missing (...) because we have not received their names.”

Other sources, including the original ICTY indictment issued by Richard Goldstone, accurately describe these thousands of men as armed fighters, which is why Mr. Gaultier refers to them as “refugees” reintegrated into the “army”. Some of these armed fighters, eighteen or nineteen years of age, are now described by all journalists as boys.

Thus, from this interview, we see that thousands did reach, on foot, essentially the town of Tuzla. The remaining thousands are said to be missing, not massacred. However, instead of relying on this authoritative source, all journalists, if pressed, will refer instead to an idle speculation by a Red Cross field worker, with the last name of Barry, who once said that “5,000 have simply disappeared”. Now, one has to think cleverly for a moment to see that the word “disappeared” is not the same as “massacred”, and the disappearances of thousands more or less took place in the direction of the town of Tuzla, and then on from there into the Muslim, Islamic army. Today, in 2005, ten years later, six thousand such bodies have yet to be found by zealous, well funded professional gravediggers hired by the ICTY, and that would be because missing, and even disappearing, is not the same as massacred.

Returning to the subject of news source reliability, why do all journalists, at the direction of their CEO's, always refer to Barry instead of Mr. Gaultier? The ruminations of a lone, low-level ICRC field worker are a far cry from an authoritative interview granted by an official spokesperson from the ICRC headquarters at Geneva, Switzerland.

What has been the position of the ICRC since then? No doubt, from national contributors, they have eventually felt the need to conform with the uniform Srebrenica story. However, on July 26, 1995, about a month before the Junge Welt interview, and some days after the alleged massacre of July, 1995, the ICRC issued the following news release, four paragraphs altogether, only the fourth and last paragraph presented in its entirety:

26-07-1995 ICRC News 30
Bosnia-Herzegovina: ICRC action in enclaves crisis

“More than 1,000 civilians – most of them women and children – have fled the fighting that is now raging in the north of the Bihac enclave to seek refuge with relatives in the town of Cazin. ...

“At the start of the crisis affecting the enclaves, the ICRC set up a special tracing service in Kladanj, on the Tuzla air base and in the various places where displaced persons have gathered, to try and locate people separated from their families or reported missing. ...

“Emergency teams of medical personnel and water supply experts, stationed by the ICRC at the Kladanj checkpoint and in the Tuzla area, stand ready to take action in the event of a fresh influx of displaced people from Zepa and its surroundings. ...

“Since the fall of the Srebrenica enclave, the ICRC has not succeeded in gaining access to individuals detained by the Bosnian Serb forces. It is relentlessly pursuing its approaches to the authorities in charge, which have publicly pledged, on several occasions, to respect the Geneva Conventions. So far they have not honoured their commitments, and the ICRC is deeply concerned about the plight of all those whom it is unable to protect.”

The Srebrenica enclave is mentioned last, and there is no mention of a major massacre.

Concluding, price fixing is supposed to be against the law, and News Fixing ought to be seriously frowned upon, if only this were possible.

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Articles by: [Dimitri Diamant](#)

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