

## Owner of Pentagon's Propaganda Firm Admits to Attacks on Journalists

The former president said he acted alone, independent of the contractor

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The co-owner of a major Pentagon propaganda contractor publicly admitted Thursday that he was behind a series of coordinated misinformation campaigns targeting two USA Today journalists who had scrutinized the contractor in their reporting.

Camille Chidiac is the former president and still the minority owner of Leonie Industries, which USA Today exposed as contracting with the Pentagon to employ “the modern equivalent of psychological warfare,” said he alone was responsible for the attacks on the journalists and was operating independent of the company or the Pentagon.

The reports published by USA Today exposed the dubious nature and exorbitant costs of the Pentagon’s “Information Operations,” (IO) or war propaganda, used abroad in places where the U.S. intervenes.

Subsequent reports exposed Leonie Industries for failing to pay up to \$4 million in federal taxes, even as they were receiving government contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Just days after these reports came to light, the USA Today reporters were targeted in a coordinated misinformation campaign, with false Facebook and Twitter accounts created in their names and Wikipedia entries and dozens of message board postings about them. The reporters suspected the IO contractors were involved, and became even more suspicious when the sites disappeared as soon as the Pentagon made formal inquiries.

“I take full responsibility for having some of the discussion forums opened and reproducing their previously published USA TODAY articles on them,” he said a statement released by his attorney.

“I recognize and deeply regret that my actions have caused concerns for Leonie and the U.S. military. This was never my intention. As an immediate corrective action, I am in the process of completely divesting my remaining minority ownership from Leonie,” Chidiac said.

The Defense Department acknowledged Chidiac’s admission in a statement. “We were deeply disappointed to read this disclosure from Leonie Industries. Smear campaigns — online or anywhere else — are intolerable, and we reject this kind of behavior,” said Pentagon press secretary George Little.

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