

The Shame of US Journalism Is the Destruction of Iraq, Not Fake Helicopter Stories

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Global Research, February 07, 2015

[Common Dreams](#) 5 February 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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Screenshot of NBC News coverage during initial wave of U.S. bombing of Iraq in 2003.

The news that NBC's Brian Williams [was not](#), in fact, on a helicopter in 2003 that came under fire from an Iraqi Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG) should come as a surprise to no one. Williams had repeated the lie on several occasions over the course of a decade until a veteran, who was on the actual helicopter that was attacked, had enough of Williams' war porn and [called the TV host out on Facebook](#). In a quite pathetic effort to cover his tracks, the anchor—who makes in excess of [\\$10 million per year](#)—claimed that his fairy tale was, in fact, “a bungled attempt by me to thank one special veteran and by extension our brave military men and women” who had served in Iraq. Twelve years, it seems, is enough time for Williams to confuse being on a helicopter that came under fire from an RPG with being on a helicopter that did not.

Given that Williams works for NBC, his participation in the construction of a piece of fiction during the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq is apt. US network news, together with outlets such as CNN, [aggressively cheer-led an invasion](#) predicated on a massive falsehood: the Iraqi possession of WMD. What is jarring, however, is the fact that Williams' sad attempt to inject himself into the fabric of the violence is getting more ink and airplay than the [non-existence of WMD](#) did back in the early-to-mid 2000s: a lie that provided the justification for a military action that has taken the lives of [hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians](#).

From embedded journalists to ultra-militaristic news logos and music, U.S. television news media were more than willing to throw gas on the invasion fire. “Experts” in the studio [were invariably ex-generals](#) looking to pad their pensions, while anti-war activists (who spoke for sizable portions of the US and UK populations back in 2003) were avoided like the plague. After all, what news organization wants to be [tarred with the “peace” brush](#) when flag-waving jingoism sells so incredibly well? The one-sidedness of coverage, particularly in the US, bordered on the morally criminal.

Despite some [limited soul-searching](#) by journalists a decade after 9/11 and the [invasion of Iraq](#) about the abject failure of the U.S. news to engage, in a truly critical fashion, with the falsehoods peddled by the Bush administration, the current focus on an inane untruth told by one celebrity news anchor has overshadowed the bigger picture about the US media and Iraq. And I don't think that's a coincidence.

In the post-9/11, pre-invasion period, U.S. citizens proved to be [spectacularly misinformed](#) about the 9/11 attacks, Iraq, Al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and WMD. When the invasion began, many in the U.S. simply had no clue about what was going on. Was that all

the fault of the US media? No, but it's fair to say a pretty large chunk of the responsibility lay at their feet. Then, once the bombing and street fighting became banal and lost its attractiveness to audiences and advertisers, most U.S. media outlets simply abandoned an Iraq left to fend for itself in a vortex of violence, political instability and corruption. And, who wants to talk about that when you can write about Williams upping his War Zone Reporter street cred? But, if you do want to hear about violence in Iraq, you can rely on Fox News to suggest that this particular hell might also be a liberal conspiracy...

The number of Iraqi citizens who have died as a direct and indirect by-product of the U.S. invasion is enough to populate a mid-sized U.S. city, and thousands continue to die on a monthly basis in non-imaginary attacks.

Yet, here we are, over a decade later, still discussing celebrity fantasies. That isn't just bad journalism, it's an affront to all who lost their lives in a brutal and bloody deception. Williams is just sorry about the wrong thing.

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