

# Wikipedia and the Intelligence Services: Is the Net's popular encyclopedia marred by disinformation?

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

While researching my next article about the Lockerbie bombing, I witnessed an incident that made me wonder whether intelligence agents had infiltrated Wikipedia.

Anyone who knows the universal success of Wikipedia will immediately grasp the importance of the issue. The fact that most Internet search engines, such as Google, give Wikipedia articles top ranking only raises the stakes to a higher level.

## The Incident

In the aftermath of the Lockerbie bombing in 1988, the finger of suspicion quickly pointed to a Syria-based Palestinian organization — the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, General Command (PFLP-GC) — hired by Iran. The terrorist group was created by a former Syrian army captain, Ahmed Jibril, who broke away from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1968.

I had learned from a recently released U.S. National Archives file that Shin Bet, the Israeli Security Agency, had infiltrated the PFLP and helped the Entebbe hijackers (Israeli commandos rescued the hostages in Uganda in 1976), so I wanted to learn more about the link between the PFLP and the PFLP-GC. I also wanted to learn more about allegations made by David Colvin, the first secretary of the British Embassy in Paris, concerning the rather bizarre collaboration between the PFLP and the Shin Bet.

As I could not locate the article in which I had learned about the allegations, I consulted the article on the Entebbe Operation on Wikipedia, where I knew the story had been noted. To my surprise, I found that all references to the alleged collaboration between the PFLP and the Shin Bet had been suppressed. Moreover, it is no longer possible to edit the page.

## A Long, Undistinguished History

Conducting false flag operations and planting disinformation in the mainstream media have long belonged to the craft of the spies. In the months preceding the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies used both techniques abundantly.

A copy of the CIA's secret history of the coup surfaced in 2000. Written in 1954 by the Princeton professor who oversaw the operation, the story reveals that agents from the CIA and SIS (the American and British intelligence services) "directed a campaign of bombings by Iranians posing as members of the Communist Party, and planted articles and editorial cartoons in newspapers."

The section of the report concerning the media speaks volumes: "The CIA was apparently able to use contacts at the Associated Press to put on the newswire a statement from Tehran about royal decrees that the CIA itself had written. But mostly, the agency relied on less direct means to exploit the media.

"The Iran desk of the State Department was able to place a CIA study in Newsweek, using the normal channel of desk officer to journalist. The article was one of several planted press reports that, when reprinted in Tehran, fed the war of nerves against Iran's prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh," the document said.

Half a century later, the technique of disinformation is as important as ever to intelligence agencies. In the aftermath of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the Pentagon set up the Defense Department's Office of Strategic Influence with a mission "to provide news items and false information directly to foreign journalists and others to bolster U.S. policy and the war on terrorism."

The new office attracted so much criticism that the Bush administration eventually shut it down in February 2002. Even defense officials publicly denounced the dangers of such a program, which could have left the department without a shred of credibility.

"We shouldn't be in that business. Leave the propaganda leaks to the CIA, the spooks [secret agents]," a defense official said.

Is Wikipedia Harboring a Secret Agent?

According to clues accumulated by ordinary citizens around the world, it could be that the CIA and other intelligence agencies are riding the information wave and planting disinformation on Wikipedia. If so, tens of thousands of innocent and unwitting citizens around the world are translating and propagating their lies, providing these agencies with a universal news network.

The Salinger Investigation of the Pan Am 103 Bombing

Pierre Salinger was White House press secretary to Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Salinger also served as U.S. Senator from California and a campaign manager for Robert Kennedy.

But Salinger is also famous for his investigative journalism. Hired by ABC News as its Paris bureau chief in 1978, he became the network's chief European correspondent in 1983.

During his distinguished career, Salinger broke important stories, such as the secret negotiations by the U.S. government with Iran to free American hostages in 1979-80 and the last meeting between U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie and Saddam Hussein in 1990, during which she led the Iraqi president to believe that the U.S. would not react to an invasion of Kuwait.

Salinger, who was based in London, spent a considerable amount of time and energy investigating the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. He and his collaborator, John Cooley, hired a young graduate, Linda Mack, to help in the investigation.

"I know that these two Libyans had nothing to do with it. I know who did it and I know

exactly why it was done,” Salinger said during his testimony at the Zeist trial, where one of the Libyans was convicted of murdering the 270 victims.

“That’s all? You’re not letting me tell the truth. Wait a minute; I know exactly who did it. I know how it was done,” Salinger replied to the trial judge, Lord Sutherland, who simply asked him to leave the witness box.

“If you wish to make a point you may do so elsewhere, but I’m afraid you may not do so in this court,” Lord Sutherland interrupted.

#### Searching for the True Identity of ‘Slim Virgin’

Slim Virgin had been voted the most abusive administrator of Wikipedia. She upset so many editors that some of them decided to team up to research her real life identity.

Attempts to track her through Internet technology failed. This is suspicious in itself as the location of normal Internet users can easily be tracked. According to a team member, Slim Virgin “knows her way around the Internet and covered her tracks with care.”

Daniel Brandt of the Wikipedia Review and founder of Wikipedia-Watch.org patiently assembled tiny clues about Slim Virgin and posted them on these Web sites. Eventually, two readers identified her. Slim Virgin was no other than Linda Mack, the young graduate Salinger hired.

John K. Cooley, the collaborator of Salinger in the Lockerbie investigation, posted the following letter to Brandt on Wikipedia Review, which has been set up to discuss specific editors and editing patterns and general efforts by editors to influence or direct content in ways that might not be in keeping with Wikipedia policy:

She claimed to have lost a friend/lover on pan103 and so was anxious to clear up the mystery. ABC News paid for her travel and expenses as well as a salary’

Once the two Libyan suspects were indicted, she seemed to try to point the investigation in the direction of Qaddafi [Libyan President Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi], although there was plenty of evidence, both before and after the trials of Megrahi and Fhimah in the Netherlands, that others were involved, probably with Iran the commissioning power. [In 2001, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison; Lamin Khalifah Fhimah was acquitted.]

Salinger came to believe that [first name redacted but known to be Linda] was working for [name of intelligence agency redacted but known to be Britain’s MI5] and had been from the beginning; assigned genuinely to investigate Pan Am 103, but also to infiltrate and monitor us. Soon after Cooley wrote to Brandt, Linda Mack contacted him and asked him not to help Brandt in his efforts to expose her. All doubts about Slim Virgin’s true identity had vanished. Today, Linda Mack is rumored to reside in Alberta, Canada, under the name of Sarah McEwan.

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