

# Online news comparison



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BUSTER**

On February 28, 2005, Weissman in his article discussed the Jordan's controversial declaration at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland on February 11, 2005. The former CNN's news chief tackled upon the painful issue of many journalists having been killed in Iraq. In regard to Jordan's accusation of US military forces having been killing and targeting journalists, Weissman cited several authorities to identify those responsible for journalists being so unreasonably vulnerable.

The whole story was published in Project Censored that exposures burning facts to provide the broad and critical access to information. The fact that the discussion was published online within the Project Censored framework reveals the atmosphere of partisanship and secrecy in regard to journalism as the mission in pursuit of truth and information and military affairs in pursuit of political and economic gains. Since the story was listed in Project Censored, it received wider coverage in the press within Canadian and American audience. Jordan declared about the point on the Forum with hundreds of people participating, so the precedent became too public to be concealed.

However, despite the wider coverage, the issue was reframed to hide all the initial implications. Just to remind the readers, Jordan's report about 12 journalists having been murdered in Iraq acquired a scandalous taste, when the former CNN's news chief pointed out that those media employees having been targeted and killed by U. S. troops in Iraq. There are six more reports on the topic of journalists functioning in Iraq analyzed in the present essay. None of the aforesaid recent reports mentions that media workers have fallen victims to US militant politics. Why is it so? It is argued here that the

theme of journalists facing unprecedented perils when performing professional and public duties has been reframed because it jeopardizes the political consensus maintained on the issue of Iraq. It makes sense to analyze the six articles on the topic of journalists working in Iraq to understand how the burning theme has been evolving since its coverage in Project Censored. Let us consider the supposed reasons for the possible reasons for reframing.

On November 18, 2004, Jamail in his article under the title “ Media Repression in 'Liberated' Land” stated that the journalists continued to being killed on the Iraqi land. It was also the leitmotif of the Weissman analysis of 2005. To continue the sad call-list, The New York Times referred to The Committee to Protect Journalists, headquartered in New York, in naming 52 journalists who have been murdered while reporting from Iraq (Wong, 2005, para. 9). The same source emphasized that 19 of those 52 have lost lives “ in attacks in which they were the apparent targets” (ibid.). To add, The Fox News Channel (2005, August 03) also cited The Committee to Protect Journalists, adding that “ 21 media support workers have been killed as a result of hostile action while covering the war in Iraq since March 2003” (para. 21).

In 2006, the IFJ (February 23) revealed the number of 109 journalists and media staff has been slaughtered in Iraq since the beginning of American-Iraqi militant confrontation in 2003. Just to remind, by 2005-2006, when all the aforesaid sources cried out the great number of journalists having been victimized, it was almost two years since the President Bush had declared the end of the war in Iraq. The thing that non-combatant civilians, journalists,

have been murdered after the official “close-day” of the Iraqi war on the 1st of May in 2003 could be one of the reasons why the topic have received so dimmed coverage in the broader press. It is interesting to trace the new overtones of the story to be revealed in the later reports on the issue. Besides murders and targeting, in 2006, the IFJ started speaking about the cases of kidnapping and intimidation of the journalists regardless of nationality.

The death of Steven Vincent, an American freelance journalist from New York who worked for New York Times and The Wall Street Journal (also was famous as an art critic, the author of the Internet blog and of the book “In the Red Zone: A Journey into the Soul of Iraq”), on August 03, 2005, was widely covered in the online press (The CNN. com; The Fox News Channel; Phelps; and Wong). The precedent became known for the Canadian and American audience which has been already disturbed by the Jordan’s narrative. The mournful event is tragic in its results of death (Mr. Vincent) and serious injury (Ms. Nooriya Tuaiz, 30, also known as Noor al-Khal, Vincent’s close friend and interpreter).

However, it reveals the intrigue that is interesting within the broad discussion about journalists’ deaths in Iraq. Once Mr. Weissman wrote that, “Yes, U. S. commanders encourage hostility toward the media and fail to do what they should to protect journalists, especially those who choose not to embed themselves under military control” (2005, February 24, para. 9). The same year, seven months later, Mr. Wong told the audience of the NYT about Steven Vincent, a freelance reporter who used to live in the Marbid Hotel in

downtown Basra “ often tapping away on his white Apple laptop in its dining room” (para. 14).

What an excellent example of a journalist seeking no protection from any military or political authorities! Vincent’s colleagues recalled that he “ traveled without guards” and “ often took taxis to interviews” (Wong, 2005, February 24, para. 14). Phelps, Newsday Washington Bureau Chief, added new details to the description of the tragedy when he compared his own experience of being in Iraq to the Vincent’s habits. The latter, as Phelps acknowledged, “ did not have access to bodyguards and full-time cars and drivers” (2006, para. 3), preferring to be dressed as an Iraqi and to be talked out of any trouble by a young native interpreter. Wong, though, once added that Vincent “ was reluctant to spend too much time in public areas and almost never ate in restaurants other than the one in his hotel” (Wong, 2005, February 24, para. 14).

In spite of such reluctance, Vincent was captivated in a public place by several unidentified people dressed in police uniforms on a police sedan (Wong, 2005, February 24, para. 5) after he had just left a moneychanger's shop in downtown Basra. In several hours, Vincent’s corpse was found in the street with the chest having three mortal wounds and his hands being tied in front of the body with plastic wire (Wong, 2005, February 24, para. 3). The question is, whether he has become a prey for hostility because of non-protection or targeting? And who should take responsibility for the aforesaid targeting?

Canadian and American readers are provided with many facts but given no ready solutions on the point of journalists’ victimization in Iraq. Vincent was

an American. He was killed in Iraq after the official end of the Iraqi conflict. He did not want to integrate into the official protectorate scheme hosted by the American or other controlling group. To compare, Atwar Bahjat, a reporter for Al Arabiya television, was an Iraqi, having been killed also after the official end of the Iraqi conflict. She was even more cautious than her American colleague after she had been death threatened for her working for the rival network al-Jazeera (The IFJ, 2006). Nevertheless, despite of all her caution, Bahjat was murdered when she and her crew were covering the aftermath of the bombing of a Shi'ite shrine in Samarra. According to the IFJ, the case was the outcome of “sectarian violence” (2006, para. 3). To add even more food for Canadian and American readers’ thought, the Associated Press agency mentioned recently Rafed Mahmoud al-Rubai, an Iraqi television journalist, as “the 67th journalist to die in the Iraq war” (The USAToday. com, 2005, August 31, para. 1).

The USAToday. com spoke about the Iraqi journalist having been victimized while he had been reporting from a demonstration in Baghdad in the same tone as The CNN. com informed about Jill Carroll, a freelance writer working for The Christian Science Monitor and other American, Jordanian, Italian and other news organizations, having been kidnapped in Baghdad on January 9, 2006. Besides, the IFJ (2006, February 23) reported lately about the two Iraqi journalists, Rim Zeid and Marwan Khazaal of Sumariya TV, having been kidnapped. What implications for Canadian and American readers do these facts bring?

In relating to Project Censored archive, it is evident that the issue of journalists being victimized in Iraq due to the apathy (intended or not?) of US

(or other?) controlling forces has received extended coverage in the media headlines. However, there are several new implications to be pointed out after the initial intrigue has been revealed. These new implications aim at reframing the whole story and putting new accents to shift blame. First, judging from the aforesaid reports, the American press started to include the non-Iraqi journalists to the pantheon of “ dead messengers.”

Whereas in the earlier Jordan’s declaration (e. g., Weissman, Project Censored, Feb. 28, 2005) the murdered journalists had been conceptualized as the faceless conglomerate mass, in the later statements (starting from 2005, Aug. 03 in the current sample) media victims received more unique voices and faces. Second, the shift in the audience’s attention has been made from US military forces targeting and killing journalists to some unnamed and anonymous political parties doing the same. Let us remember the Steven Vincent’s and Jill Carroll’s cases. The latter case is even more interesting because of the details given by the Carroll’s driver. He referred to the perpetrators as “ a group of people coming as if they had come from the sky” (The CNN. com, 2006, January 9, para. 6). Was he speaking about some revengeful angels or terrorists? Hardly had Jill been translated to Heaven. Almost two months later she is still unfound.

The point is that her abductors were not dressed in the US military uniform. The readers are taken to the point that US authorities can take no responsibility for the cases of murders and kidnapping. To put it in a nutshell, the story of journalists being targeted, abducted and victimized on the Iraqi land has received wide coverage, since the first accounts on the issue were published in Project Censored (Weissman, Jamail). There are at least six

stories (the number is restricted due to the reasons of time and space) on the point of media people having suffered on the spot. Sure Canadians and American know more about the story now. It is asked here what they know.

First, they know that there is not only American and European media staff who is suffering from hardships in the zone of Iraqi conflict. As Hayet Zeghiche, IFJ Project Officer, emphasized, “ The kidnapping or murder of low profile Iraqi journalists never makes the headlines of international news” (IFJ, 2006, February 23, para. 4). The ratio of media victims is far higher than we are let to know. Second, Canadian and American audience has been brought to acute suspicions around the cause for the victimization of journalists.

Almost a year after Weissman after the others had mentioned US militaries as those who killed media people in Iraq, the IFJ muttered that, “ Insurgents were responsible for most of the deaths [of journalists], though some were hit by American fire” (2006, February 23, para. 9). Wong was even more enigmatic in his mourning over Vincent: “ The incident was the first time an American journalist has been attacked and killed during the war. A handful of American journalists have died in vehicle accidents or from illness” (2005, August 03, para. 2). A number of explosive questions are immediately arising on the point.

First, if the President has pronounced the end of the war in Iraq, what sort of war we are talking about now? Second, what vehicle accidents and illness are referred to, if the other media sources yell out about the journalists being killed on intention? Still, now insurgents are more likely to victimize journalists than US soldiers. The six stories were written in seven months after the Jordan’s invectives addressing US military authorities victimizing



journalists had been published. They prove that though the story has received wider coverage since its initial discussion in Project Censored, it was reframed in regard to the sides found guilty. The shift has been made in order not to violate the political balance on the world-wide scene.