

Shooting the Messenger: Targeting Journalists

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A funny thing happened to me as I prepared to leave for Rome today to participate in the citizens-initiated World Tribunal on Iraq session on the role of the media in covering the conflict. Last night I got another summons from the evil empire. I was invited again to appear on the nightly Hannity and Colmes wrestling match on Fox News Channel. - **Danny Schechter**

All Roads Lead to Rome (Again)

Posted by Danny Schechter

Feb. 9th, 2005

WERE JOURNALISTS TARGETED IN IRAQ? MY TESTIMONY FOR THE TRIBUNAL WHEN FOX VIEWERS ATTACK

As most readers know, the media war issue is one I have been following with religious intensity, I wrote the book, Embedded, about it and followed up with the film, WMD. I have also written up a storm about even as some jaded reviewers and columnists insist the issue is moribund, over. I can't tell you how many times I have heard that WMD was released too late even though it was not about the election and deals with a series of ongoing issues.

And yet it keeps coming back, perhaps because the war hasn't gone away. As I reported in recent days, CNN executive Eason Jordan stirred a hornets nest by telling an off-the-record panel at the World Economic Forum that 12 journalists were killed by the US military in Iraq.

The reaction, to read Howard Kurtz's account in the Washington Post, was SHOCK and denial by people like Senator Chris Dodd and even Congressman Barney Frank. After a blogger broke the confidentiality of the session, Jordan was besieged with attacks from the right with angry demands for proof . Conservative bloggers went into action by criticizing the rest of the media for not covering the story. Their assumption: Jordan is lying.

As viewers of WMD know, there is a section in the film that asks: "Were Journalists Targeted in Iraq?" It points out that BBC's Kate Adie was told by the Pentagon that independent journalists would be targeted. It shows how the Al Jazeera office whose coordinates were given to the

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Pentagon was bombed and its bureau chief Tariq Ayoub was killed. It shows what happened to the Palestine Hotel where two journalists were killed by a tank shell. It interviews one of the journalists who were wounded who asks "why did they target us; what did we do to them?" It reports that press freedom groups and Reuters demanded an investigation that was not forthcoming. It concludes with a quote by veteran war correspondent Phillip Knightly, author of "the First Casualty," a book on the history of censorship in war who says that he believed that occasional shots at media sites are "not accidental."

I heard about this statement from a friend who was at the panel. I thought that some new information was on the verge of coming out. So I reached out to Jordan who I once worked around at CNN to ask if he could help me get on CNN to discuss and debate the issue. Our PR wizard Gary Kenton wrote to him thusly:

In WMD Danny asks whether independent journalists might have been targeted by the U.S. military, an issue you addressed at Davos, and setting off a firestorm. We wanted to talk to you about two things:

1) *We are uncomfortable, as we assume you are, talking about the possible targeting of reporters, but it is too important to ignore. Allowing it to "go away" seems like an abdication of journalistic responsibility. Would you consider scheduling some on-air discussion on some program? The clip from the film deals with the Palestine Hotel incident with original interviews*

2) *WMD is currently in theaters in New York and elsewhere. As you know, it is difficult to make a documentary such as this, no less get a theatrical release. Any assistance you might provide in getting Danny interviews on any CNN outlets would be greatly appreciated. He's a great interview and, as you know, he was part of the start-up team in Atlanta "back in the day" before he went on to ABC News.*

Eason, seemingly shaken by all the heat coming down on him for discussing something that many journalists and press freedom groups like the International Federation of Journalists has been discussing, began to withdraw from the controversy he stirred. He wrote back to Gary:

I was not as clear as I should have been during the Davos panel discussion. I was trying to make a distinction between journalists killed being the victims of collateral damage and

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journalists being killed under different circumstances. No doubt most of the 63 journalist deaths in Iraq fall outside the collateral damage category. I have never felt and never intended to suggest, however, that anyone in the U.S. military meant to kill anyone known to be a journalist. As you will see in the Howard Kurtz Washington Post today, my comments were controversial. While I am pleased the spotlight is on the issue of journalist safety in Iraq, I intend to let others do the talking for a while after I gave several interviews and statements on the subject. I will let my colleagues know of Danny's availability as an on-air guest. I thank you and wish you well.- Eason.

I was hoping CNN might call and we reached out to Lou Dobbs and Aaron Brown to no avail.

I guess CNN was not interested in taking on this fight.

But Fox News was. Fox is always at war with CNN which it brands as a liberal network, a label CNN does not want or like. And so Fox scheduled a segment and asked if I was interested. When I told them I had a film documenting the attack on the Palestine Hotel, they were doubly interested. Frozen out by CNN and most TV networks who we bombarded with info on WMD (save Court TV) I entered the Fox arena the way Christians were fed to the lions.

Needless to say Fox wanted to trash Eason, not the killing of journalists. They showed a very clip of my film with the sound muted but I did get to make a few points and plug the movie the best I could expect in circumstances of hostility..

Sean Hannity took some predictable whacks along with Brent Bozell but I held my ground and was still standing at the bell. I would score the round as a draw.

It was hard to shift the conversation back to the real issue ? the killing of journalists and not what Eason Jordan said or didn't say ? no one there seemed to know or really care in what was really a bash CNN exercise. You can read what some Fox regulars thought of my performance in today's [letters](#) section.