

The Belgravia Dispatch by Gregory Djerejian



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May 17, 2005

A FORGOTTEN VILLAIN OF L'AFFAIRE NEWSWEEK

No, not Mike "Gotcha" (or not!) [Isikoff](#). But re: the Newsweek *scandale*, and before a more thorough analysis (hopefully, as stated, tomorrow), can I just point out one villain in all this that has so far escaped criticism in the blogosphere? That's Imran Khan, darling of a certain London social set that the likes of Taki tend to go a bit gaga for. Recall that it is our hero Imran--nobly upholding the honor of the Islamic Holy Book--who jumped on the erroneous (or should I say instead too, er, prematurely penned?) Newsweek report to helpfully fan the waves of initial discontent in Pakistan. As the [NYT details](#):

The outcry over the Newsweek article apparently began in Pakistan, when Imran Khan, the legendary cricketer turned opposition politician, summoned reporters to a press conference on May 6 to draw attention to it. Once close to the Pakistani president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and a onetime crusader against corruption, Mr. Khan has been vocal in recent years against United States strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Islam is under attack in the name of the war on terror," Mr. Khan, now one of General Musharraf's most stalwart critics, told reporters. He pressed the Musharraf regime to demand an apology from Washington.

For the next several days, the report dominated the front pages of English and Urdu-language newspapers in Pakistan and became the center of debate in the Pakistan Parliament. Predictably, a coalition of Islamist parties seized on the Newsweek report to excoriate General Musharraf's government for colluding with the West against Islam. But the criticism was not limited to the religious right. Legislators from across the political spectrum denounced the reported desecration, and by Friday, May 13, Parliament had passed a unanimous resolution condemning it.

All this brings to mind a few old memories. Quite a few moons back I was in New Delhi having breakfast with a senior U.S. diplomat. An impressionable FSO, who had spent time at the U.S. Consulate in Lahore (Imran's home base), was waxing rhapsodic about just how smashing and dandy Imran the Great Cricketeer, Great Humanitarian, Great Ladies Man (and so on and on) was. The much more experienced diplomat cut this smitten junior down at the knees mighty quickly. With Imran, he intoned (and I paraphrase) it's always about the cult of self. I am the best cricket player! The best with the girls! The most noble humanitarian! A budding politician of note! But there are no core convictions or beliefs behind the man, or so this American diplomat opined quite persuasively.

Yes, it was a harsh judgment indeed that was passed on. But, truth be told, I suspected he was right. Not least, I found his too frequent appearances in society pages bespoke a certain shallowness of character. And really, save a sorry solipsism, did Mr. Khan have any core beliefs of note? No, I suspected, he merely shifts ever so easily with the

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prevailing winds, and always ostensibly with one concern in the main, namely: what's in it for Imran?

All this said, I'd never planned on recounting this little vignette from a long ago trip to Delhi. Personal *epingles* and jabs, despite the few I spew out at the Atrios' and Kos' now and again, are not really B.D.'s thing. But Khan's rank opportunism in leaping on this thinly sourced Newsweek piece, his taking advantage of the poverty and frustration and ignorance of easily riled Islamists in the streets of inflammable Pakistan--and this only to benefit himself politically--it was all too nauseatingly opportunistic and smacking so deeply of *faux* outrage. And, it bears mentioning of course, people died partly as a result of his hyperbolic fanning of the flames. So yes, all this pushed me to scribble down these hasty reminiscences and thoughts, though I would have preferred not to frankly.

Regardless of all the above, this last episode standing alone has certainly not been a proud one for Khan and, I think it's more than fair to say, it will not have won him many friends in the places that count in Washington. And, lest we forget, Islamabad power brokers know well that a good relationship with Washington (even in the pre-9/11 days) is imperative for many strategic Pakistani reasons and will continue to be so for quite a few years to come. So it wasn't even a smart move politically (he will be taken less seriously by the Pakistani Army, for one, as well as other key players in the Pakistani capital)--putting aside the hypocrisy, the loss of life, the disingenuousness of it all. Not only morally defunct, but tactically stupid. Which is another way of saying: I'm quite sure he's not ready for prime time (outside of the cricket fields, that is).

Posted by Gregory at May 17, 2005 04:21 AM | [TrackBack \(2\)](#)

Comments

I find it odd that commentators on the left and right all ignore that the Newsweek piece was provided to the Pentagon for review, and they said nothing about the Koran portion of the story. Why not? Who reviewed the article? Was it a standard source approved by the Pentagon?

Posted by: [tom](#) at May 17, 2005 06:59 AM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ☺

What I find most interesting is the specificity of the "retraction." Newsweek has apparently been forced to retract a highly *specific* charge (that a report from the Southern Command had confirmed the allegations of Koran desecration) leaving open the question of whether the desecration had occurred.

What we KNOW is that a senior official had read a report of such desecration --- but apparently it was not part of an "official investigation report."

But we also know that the US government has deliberately engaged in psychological warfare directed at breaking down Islamic fundamentalists by assaulting their religious identity. We also know that numerous witness have independently verified that Koran desecration has occurred.

And, as Tom points out, when provided the opportunity to comment on the story, the Pentagon raised no objection to the "desecration" report.

Finally, we know that the US government is willing to "play act" as part of their psychological warfare methods ---- including smearing devout Muslims with what they are lead to believe is menstrual blood.

In other words, there is a whole lot of smoke here, and something is producing it. SOMETHING happened, but like the "smearing detainees with fake menstrual blood"

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techniques we may be looking at some "harmless" action designed specifically to do psychological damage --- such as creating a fascimile of a Koran, and "desecrating" it. Since its not a real Koran, the US government can deny the act of desecration while maintaining the full psycological "value" of desecration.

We may also be looking at an instance of psychological warfare directed toward Muslims (and Americans.) We know that the Bush regime had an overt plan to manipulate the Muslim press through disinformation --- and that when the controversy erupted over the overt plan, it was cancelled. But the Bush regime's record of dishonesty makes it necessary to assume that a covert disinformation/manipulation plan is operational.


Remember, the numerous reports of Koran desecration were being treated credibly by the foreign (especially, Islamic) press, although no special emphasis had been placed on them. By "leaking" the story of "confirmation of desecration" to Newsweek, not denying the story when offered the opportunity, then having the source "revise" his statement and force Newsweek into a retraction of the report, the US government can effectively call into question all the reporting of abuses of prisoners and detainees worldwide.

The fact is that such a campaign, although ostensibly aimed at the Muslim media, will have its greatest impact on the American media. Newsweek's "retraction" of its story will have little impact, because in the rest of the world it was merely official confirmation of what was already "known." But one can state with absolutely certainty that the Newsweek story will be cited by wingnuts every time we see a report based on anonymous sources that makes the Bush regime look bad --- and indeed the story is likely to put a chill on the reporting of the covert actions of the Bush regime.

(One sees a parellel here with what happened with the Killian memos. The White House was provided the opportunity to deny that they were accurate --- instead, the White House virtually confirmed the accuracy of the memos, stating that there was "no reason to doubt their authenticity" and that "[t]he memorandum in [CBS 's] possession shows that he spoke to the commander who made that order to talk about his personal situation and the fact that he is going to Alabama. So at every step of the way, President Bush was meeting his requirement. Granted permission to meet his requirement. And that's why President Bush was honorably discharged." By confirming the accuracy of the memos, then allowing questions to be raised with regard to their authenticity, the White House ensured that the overwhelming evidence of Bush's dereliction of duty that was emerging was ignored by the media. Indeed, the wingnut press has treated the questions about the memos as if they were "proof" that Bush fulfilled his duty --- when the contents of the memos themselves merely provided a few additional details in the narrative of dereliction that could be ascertained by a close examination of the records released by the White House in February 2000.)

Posted by: [p.lukasiak](#) at May 17, 2005 12:53 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

Imran Khan was the one who married the shiksa, right?

Posted by: [praktike](#) at May 17, 2005 01:58 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

It should come as no surprise that for some, any attempt to persuade the American (at least) media to behave a bit more responsibly (i.e., report more truthfully, or at least with less overt dissembling) must necessarily be viewed as a heavyhanded exercise to clamp down on the media's inalienable freedom of expression---especially when everything seems to boil down to the question of how much one can bash Bush and America, no matter what the cost.

More surprising, perhaps, given that the media has for several good years now been increasingly prone to shameless spinning and innuendo, and relentless sins of omission as well as commission, not to mention the unfortunately more than occasional outright fabrication---all the while proclaiming its essential objectivity and commitment to truth---is that anyone is really surprised.

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Skewering Bush and America is now "virtue"; and anything that can be used to effect the skewering must to be exploited by the virtuous. With creativity and determination.

(On the other hand, only when the Democrats can convince most American voters that it is indeed virtue will they have a shot at returning to power at the national level. So maybe they're doing all of us a favor.)

Posted by: [Barry Meislin](#) at May 17, 2005 02:09 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

p --

The location of the charge matters. If it's included in the final report, the investigators probably believe its authentic. If senior dude sees it some draft of something, or some written summary of an interview with someone, it means that the charge has not been necessarily accepted as true by those producing a report. In other words -- it's an unverified allegation.

If the Newsweek report had been accurate, they would have been doing a service by reporting it. (The missing outrage over torture by most of the GOP genuinely upsets me.) Unfortunately, they sourced the story thinly, and ended up passing along rumors who's credibility had not been established. And people died as a result.

Posted by: [Appalled Moderate](#) at May 17, 2005 02:16 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

When will all the Republicans just take over the MSM so we can stop listen to them whining about the MSM? Or is that the point? They need it to whine about? They're starting to sound like whiny Democrats. And around it goes...

Posted by: [TG](#) at May 17, 2005 03:20 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

He was married to one of Sir James Goldsmith's daughters, Jemima Goldsmith.

Posted by: [sofia](#) at May 17, 2005 04:23 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

My brother David is West Coast editor for Newsweek. He's appalled by what happened. He used to be features editor for the WSJ. They used the Three sources rule. The AQ people have been peddling this kind of stuff on their websites for some time now.

I'm sorry, if I have to choose to believe the Army or former Gitmo detainees, I'm believing our guys before released Jihadi who've been put back into circulation.

Newsweek merely ran it by two Pentagon officials who failed to comment on the story. IT DOES NOT FOLLOW FROM THAT THAT THE STORIES ARE TRUE. Indeed, I suspect that the stories are probably false, given that it has been Army policy to treat the Koran with kid gloves for a couple of years now.

Newsweek ran the story the way it did to embarrass the Chimperor. Period. End of story. Dumb bastards.

Posted by: [Section9](#) at May 17, 2005 04:24 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

The funny thing about the Pentagon's lack of comment is that the guys they showed the claim to probably had no idea if it was true or not, but thought it sounded plausible.

In other words, Gitmo is not the kind of place about which a Pentagon official would say "My God! We would *never* do such a thing!"

Posted by: [Anderson](#) at May 17, 2005 05:22 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

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If the Newsweek report had been accurate, they would have been doing a service by reporting it. (The missing outrage over torture by most of the GOP genuinely upsets me.) Unfortunately, they sourced the story thinly, and ended up passing along rumors who's credibility had not been established. And people died as a result.

I disagree that the story was sourced "thinly". We already knew that that US personnel routine desecrated the Koran, and used acted in a manner specifically designed to denigrate devout Muslims.


Last month, a former American interrogator confirmed to The New York Times an account given in an interview by a former Kuwaiti detainee, Nasser Nijer Naser al-Mutairi, who said that mishandling of the Koran once led to a major hunger strike. The strike ended only after a senior officer expressed regret over the camp's loudspeaker system, which was simultaneously translated by linguists at the end of each cell block, the former interrogator said. In that case, the accusations were of copies of the Koran being tossed on the floor in a pile and treated roughly...

<http://tinyurl.com/b9xwk>

all that the Newsweek story did was say that reports of a specific form of desecration that had been claimed by numerous former detainees --- including in affidavits submitted under oath --- were being confirmed in a Pentagon report.

As our host has pointed out, the Newsweek report was exploited by a Pakistani politician who is opposed to Musharrif's military dictatorship in that nation. And it was only AFTER rioting began, and people started dying, that the Pentagon made any objection to the "Koran desecration" story.

Given this administration's record of non-credibility on virtually all aspects of the war on terror, especially as it concerns detainees, a rational person would assume that the desecration did occur as described by Newsweek, and the Bush regime is desperately trying to cover it up right now.....

Posted by: [p.lukasiak](#) at May 17, 2005 05:41 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

I disagree that the story was sourced "thinly". We already knew that that US personnel routine desecrated the Koran, and used acted in a manner specifically designed to denigrate devout Muslims.

A little bit of shameless reprinting of Jay Rosen's article here:

http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2005/05/17/nwsk_err.html

If Jay is correct there is 6 levels of sources between the May 9th article and from the actual event. Jay lists them as such

S1 (Newsweek) Who we know are the following Michael Isikoff, Mark Whitaker, John Barry who got their reports from...

S2 Newsweeks sources for who we do not have names who got thier information from...

S3 Who are investigators for the government looking into the allegations who got their information from...

S4 The investigators sources who are also unamed preparing a report for Southern Command who got their info from...

S5 the actual unnamed interrogators who supposedly performed said actions on...

S6 The Gitmo detained "victim".

Sounds thinner them my moms mashed potatoes at Thanksgiving, but for sake of argument we wont call it thin. How about not fat, or maybe the anti-thesis of thick?

Plus we throw into the mix the AQ training manual instructs Jihadies to make claims of abuse & torture. Not saying that this is made up but in light of this the "instructional tidbit" had better be rock solid.

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But then again who am I fooling, Mr Lusasiak? If it provides you with a method to worship at the altar of Anti-Americanism and Bush-Hate you bite regardless of how thin the sourcing.

Posted by: [m.harn](#) at May 17, 2005 06:09 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

As an aside Mr. D, I think the time off recharged your writing acumen. There was a discernible flare for the poetic in the latter half of the post. Not that there's anything wrong with that....


Posted by: [Eric Martin](#) at May 17, 2005 08:38 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

TG: *When will all the Republicans just take over the MSM ...*

Might be that 'freedom of the press' mention in that Constitution thingy.

... so we can stop listen to them whining about the MSM?


So, 'villification of grotesque abrogations of journalistic ethics' translates to 'whining' in TGese. Good to know. It's so much fun learning exotic languages.

Posted by: [Achillea](#) at May 17, 2005 10:34 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

Achillea:

I love learning new languages too. I kind of think endless "villification of grotesque abrogations of journalistic ethics" without seemingly doing much to change it is kind of like whining. Like Democrats are often accused of [often justifiably] for complaining about Republican programs without proposing their own solutions.

Do I think this should have been published? No. But the constant blaming of (seemingly) all ills on the MSM is tedious. This info has been out in various shaky forms for a long time. Someone in Pakistan decided to use it to start (this week's) fire. Or maybe not according to US military in Afghanistan. I guess I'm just waiting for the "not MSM" side to balance things out so everyone can stop lamenting the "liberal MSM". It's like a sporting event with one team. Or a monopolist. Where's the competition? If the combined "non-MSM" is so much more virtuous and better at all this why isn't it yet a bigger, visible presence in the media landscape?

Posted by: [TG](#) at May 17, 2005 10:47 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

If Jay is correct there is 6 levels of sources between the May 9th article and from the actual event. Jay lists them as such

rosen is an idiot --- there were four "levels" including Newsweek.

- 1) Newsweek, which spoke to an
- 2) Official who said that he had read containing information about Koran desecration written by
- 3) Investigators who spoke to
- 4) witness and/or participants

More importantly, we also have sworn statements from witnesses who saw the desecration taking place (in other words, two levels -- the witness, and the reporters who have written about the affidavits) , as well as numerous other "unsworn" witness accounts. Newsweek was not reporting on a NEW allegation, but on a confirmation of that allegation in a "yet to be released" government report.

The idea that the level of "sourcing" is somehow relevant is completely ridiculous, of

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course. Unless one wishes to claim that the military is either incompetent or full of liars, there are only three levels of source -- the media, the person who read the report, and the investigators who wrote it. No doubt there are levels upon levels below the investigators, but it is the job of the investigators to be THE authoritative source, and to glean fact from fiction.


Posted by: [p.lukasiak](#) at May 17, 2005 11:06 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

"The idea that the level of "sourcing" is somehow relevant is completely ridiculous, of course."

Of course its important. It shows just how many people were skipped, not interviewed, not consulted on an information chain that goes from the Witness/participant which can be either the 5th person or the 6th person in the chain of events. It demonstrates exactly how much fact checking and groundwork was skipped by Newsweek.

More importantly it shows that Newsweek either has never heard or completely ignored a very important ethical rule that journalists should apply (at least that's what I was taught in college), which is if the story you print is going to be potential damaging to the subject you obtain accounts from 2 separate people, but you also make sure you can trace the information back to the original source.

Also is Jay Rosen an idiot because you catagorized the people in 4 groups, or just enjoy attacking people you with who you disagree?


Posted by: [m.harn](#) at May 17, 2005 11:57 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

"If the Newsweek report had been accurate, they would have been doing a service by reporting it."

You seem to imply that somehow the act itself was scandalous. Sorry, but I disagree vehemently.

I'm not upset nor apologetic that we're using religion against religious fanatics during interrogation.

The only part of it that's scandalous is the possible faulty news reporting, and the now typical overreaction from excitable elements in the Muslim world.

Posted by: [Cutler](#) at May 18, 2005 01:39 AM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

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Newsweek did all the necessary fact checking. There were various reports -- including sworn affidavits -- detailing the desecration of the Koran. (And it should be noted that the Pentagon did not deny that the desecration had occurred as described --- rather it claimed that the sources of the desecration stories were unreliable.) Newsweek was told by a reliable source that the information was to appear in a report, and Newsweek submitted the allegation to the Pentagon for comment --- and none was forthcoming. And when Newsweek's source equivocated (under extreme pressure?) about where he had read the confirmation, Newsweek immediately acknowledged it.

The real outrage here is not Newsweek's methods, but that a story about desecration of the Koran by American personnel that was getting considerable play in the Muslim media was virtually ignored by the American media. Where where all the correspondents from the mainstream media who should have been asking the White House and the Pentagon about the desecration once the Newsweek story was released? And given that the US government monitors the Muslim media, where the the denial --- or even the expression of concern --- with regard to the accuracy of the story before the rioting and deaths occurred?

And why now is the mainstream media full of red herrings about stuff like the handbook put out by the Army for handling the Koran, when the issue is what was done by interrogators (presumably for the CIA) at a base controlled by the US Navy?

The real scandal here is that the mainstream media finds tales of torture and abuse by the Bush regime so unremarkable. Its that we have grown to expect so little from the Bush regime that no one bothers to follow-up on a major story until people start getting killed (instead, we are given wall-to-wall coverage of the Runaway Bride.)

The real scandal here is that unless someone gets access to pictures, the Bush regime will deny, deny, deny that anything untoward has occurred --- Abu Ghraib is a perfect case in point --- the military was covering it up as much as possible, until CBS and Hersh broke the story.

Posted by: [p.lukasiak](#) at May 18, 2005 09:28 AM | [Permalink to this comment](#) 

Bush-hating lukasiak using Abu as a stick. Again. (and again, and again, and again ... until Bush resigns; Nixon did). Like a 2-year old.

Actually kinda admirable that the worst the US military has done in the last year, er, 18 months, is still Abu. Less bad than Nick Berg being executed, or any of the car bombs the terrorists use.

Less bad.

Bad -- because the US soldiers are not perfect. Oh yeah, the Left wants Unreal Perfection, and will whine and lie about Bush, and show the one-sided biased anti-American "truth" that the US is not perfect.

oops, neo-troll feeding. (Or am I the troll here?)

Get real on Abu -- most US states have prisons with worse records, and less excuses for them.

In a war, innocents will be killed by both sides -- the reason Iraqis are dying now is because the terrorists have "lost" but haven't stopped killing.

Oh yeah, Gen. Karpinski was relieved in Jan. 2004, before the pictures; she's now Colonel Karpinski. The Mil. Intel Colonel is also in for some demotion, I think.

That seems the right level of response.

A heck of a lot better than supporting the Clinton Rwanda strategy -- do nothing now

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and apologize later. (Those who voted Clinton in 96 voted YES to genocide.)

Thanks for the note on the Paki villian -- it looks like they're getting closer to real populist, opportunistic democracy. Mostly good, but increasing anti-Americanism is likely bad, but inevitable.

Posted by: [Tom Grey - Liberty Dad](#) at May 18, 2005 01:43 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

P.Lukasiak thinks that Newsweek's alleged source may have recanted "under extreme pressure". From whom? Are we to suppose that if the Bush administration knew the name of the source they would just go to him and insist that he call up Newsweek and retract his story? I would think they would fire his sorry ass and indict him.

Assuming the source even exists, a more likely cause of retraction is shock at the lethal effect of his ill-considered words. He thought he could just flatter a famous reporter by feeding him some rumors he vaguely remembered reading somewhere as if they were facts, and realized only too late that that could and would get people killed. Of course, I'm just guessing here, but my guess is at least plausible, while PL's version is impossible.

Posted by: [Dr. Weevil](#) at May 18, 2005 03:54 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

There were various reports -- including sworn affidavits -- detailing the desecration of the Koran.

Does it come as any surprise that the extreme left wing like lukasiak believes the extremist Islamist detainees rather than our military?

Posted by: [Al](#) at May 18, 2005 06:08 PM | [Permalink to this comment](#) ↴

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