

Special Report

Bush administration's "Ministry of Truth" attacks American journalists who fail to adhere to the official line

By Wayne Madsen

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April 18, 2005—After revelations that the Bush White House cleared a gay male prostitute as a daily credentialed member of the White House press corps and that the administration was paying journalistic skills like Armstrong Williams, Maggie Gallagher, Michael McManus, and Karen Ryan to pump out pro-Bush propaganda to the media, nothing should come as any surprise when it comes to the Fourth Estate's buckling under to political pressure from the right-wing regime that rules America.

What is surprising is that, in addition to using the media to concoct favorable propaganda, the Bush administration maintains an office in the State Department that keeps an eye on American and other journalists and does not hesitate to attack them for straying from the party line.

To show how much censorship exists in America today, this journalist would have likely never known about the existence of a one-man office in the State Department that acts to debunk and attack anything the Bush administration deems is false. Thanks to a recent report by veteran America watcher and journalist Jyri Raivio in Finland's *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper, it can now be reported in the United States that the State Department uses taxpayers' money to attack American journalists who refuse to parrot the Bush administration's disinformation and propaganda.

The head of the State Department's "Counter Mis-Information 'Team'" is Todd Leventhal, a long-time neoconservative propaganda operative who once worked for the U.S. Information Agency's (USIA) Bureau of Information to counter Soviet and other disinformation with his own Brand X of American disinformation. Raivio reports that Leventhal was part of the Bush administration's effort to convince the world that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Leventhal also contends in the *Helsingin Sanomat* report that any suggestion that false WMD intelligence was cooked up by the Bush administration is merely a conspiracy theory and that the faulty intelligence on Iraqi WMD was merely a huge "mistake."

It should not have come as any surprise that I was singled out by Leventhal for an attack over a story written for [Online Journal](#) about the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the involvement in the assassination's planning of two neoconservative Bush administration officials—namely, Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams and White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl C. Rove—with whom Leventhal is ideologically aligned. Leventhal's operation is part of the State Department's International Information Programs Bureau, now headed by former Bush White House Communications Director and long time gal pal Karen Hughes.

Leventhal's barb appears at <http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive/2005/Apr/01-220547.html> and states, "self-described investigative journalist Wayne Madsen claimed that the Hariri assassination was 'authorized' by the United States because Mr. Hariri was known to adamantly oppose the construction of a major U.S. air base in the north of Lebanon."

Leventhal continues, "These claims are false. U.S. policy has expressly forbidden assassination since 1976, when President Ford signed [Executive Order 11905](#). The prohibition against assassination was

reaffirmed by President Carter and President Reagan, the latter in [Executive Order 12333](#), which remains in force. Executive Order 12333 states, 'No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination' . . . Moreover, the U.S. military has confirmed that it has no plans for an air base in Lebanon.

"Mr. Madsen has made unreliable claims in the past. On [October 20, 2004](#), he claimed that, in order to win reelection, the Bush administration 'has initiated plans to launch a military strike on Iran's top Islamic leadership, its nuclear reactor at Bushehr on the Persian Gulf, and key nuclear targets throughout the country.' Needless to say, no such events occurred."

Leventhal is obviously concerned that on numerous occasions this journalist's articles are picked up by media outlets around the world, including papers in Pakistan, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Egypt and serve to debunk the cacophony of propaganda emanating from Washington and its embassies abroad. Leventhal citing two Executive Orders that prohibit assassinations is laughable in light of recent well-documented disclosures that U.S. interrogators killed at least one Iraqi general in custody. Since September 11, 2001, and adoption of George Tenet's Worldwide Attack Matrix—a carte blanche for political assassinations around the world—both Executive Orders cited by Leventhal are not worth the paper they are printed on.

As to the "October Surprise" story about a pre-election attack on Iran, I stand by my sources—which, since the original article's appearance—have multiplied in number. In fact, I will stand my sources—including crew aboard the *USS John F. Kennedy*, then on station in the Persian Gulf—against Leventhal's trite disinformation machine. Similarly, the sources on the Hariri assassination and the plans for the U.S. air base are well connected and trusted. The firm promised the air base construction contract by the Pentagon, Jacobs Engineering, is a major player in U.S. military and intelligence projects. The company was started by the late Dr. Joseph Jacobs, a Lebanese-American who served on the advisory board of the Rand Corporation's Center for Middle East Public Policy. The co-chair of that group during Jacobs's tenure was none other than Frank Carlucci, the chairman emeritus of The Carlyle Group—an organization that has criminal conspiracy written all over it.

Perhaps, if Leventhal and his neocon friends used such trusted sources as the many I have developed over some twenty years, rather than using deluded and alcoholic disinformation scoundrels like Iraq's "Curveball," this country would not be in the mess it is in today in Iraq and the entire Middle East. As a matter of fact, foreign ministries around the world could use their own Ministries of Truth for the sole purpose of wading through all the disinformation pumped out by the Bush administration: Iraq's WMD, Saddam's links to al Qaeda, Iraq's shopping for yellowcake uranium in Niger, and the many other lies and distortions.

First of all, some housekeeping is in order. Leventhal refers to this journalist as "self described." True, I use the term "investigative journalist" in tag lines. However, it is not "self described" that my articles have been cited by Project Censored, famed author Gore Vidal, keen investigative journalist Greg Palast, and newspapers from Austria to Zimbabwe. In addition, it was not self-aggrandizement that resulted in my investigative book on genocide in Africa being cited in a French government counter-terrorism judicial investigation, a UN War Crimes Tribunal, U.S. House of Representatives testimony, and respected periodicals in Africa and Europe.

Although he is basically a one-man show (he does have a full-time assistant and one part-timer), Leventhal does not seem to produce much for his work at the State Department. Leventhal was actually laid off by the State Department in 1996 after his Cold War-era counter-disinformation office was disestablished, but he was rehired in October 2003 after the White House decided to resurrect its propaganda effort under the rubric of "strategic influence operations." Leventhal's attacks are narrowly focused on particular stories, sources, and journalists. His web site has an explanation of how to spot disinformation—Leventhal contends that most conspiracy theories are rarely true and that they are spread by ideological extremists, that is liberals, because right-wingers like Leventhal would never be willing to address right-wing extremism (such as Fox News, the *National Review*, and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page) in the media. Leventhal's dismissing conspiracies as often untrue will,

nevertheless, come as a great shock to the Criminal Division of the Justice Department, which has put away many a criminal based on violation of criminal conspiracy laws.

Another one of Leventhal's government-funded attack pieces flays ex-U.S. soldier Nadim Abou Rabeh, an Iraqi war veteran who had taken part in Saddam Hussein's capture. Leventhal pillories Rabeh for suggesting Saddam's capture in a "spider hole" was faked. Leventhal also calls fanciful reports that the United States used mustard gas in the siege of Fallujah, contends that the use of depleted uranium weapons by U.S. forces in Iraq is safe, and derides it as a "conspiracy theory" that the United States helped create Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda via its support of the Afghan mujaheddin through Saudi and Pakistani facilitators.

In addition, Leventhal criticizes reports that the United States could have done more to warn Indian Ocean nations of the tsunami event last December. Astonishingly, Leventhal claims that the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii did not possess the capability to figure out that the 9.0 magnitude earthquake would produce a devastating tsunami. Leventhal also criticized by name Canadian journalist Michel Chossudovsky, who first reported on the failure of America to adequately warn Asian and African nations of the impending disaster.

Having never heard of Mr. Leventhal, I decided to do a bit of checking on him as only a "self described investigative journalist" can do.

First, there is Leventhal's association with apartheid South Africa's infamous "Project Babushka." According to a July 16, 1995 story in *Newsday*, during the 1980s, South Africa's military established a dummy front called the International Freedom Foundation (IFF). The IFF was an influence-peddling organization used to counter critics of the apartheid regime and buy off right-wing American politicians to campaign against economic and military sanctions against the apartheid regime.

According to former South African top spy Craig Williamson, IFF and Project Babushka enrolled such right-wing Republicans as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, Henry Kissinger, California Republican Representative Robert Dornan, Indiana Republican Representative Dan Burton, Illinois Republican Representative Phil Crane, and right-wing GOP kook Alan Keyes. Helms even served as chairman of the editorial advisory board for the IFF's publication branch—a group that pumped out all sorts of propaganda claiming that the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela were Communists.

Helping to run the IFF's Washington, DC, office at 200 G Street, SE (and next door to the right-wing Free Congress Foundation) was none other than Jack Abramoff, who is now embroiled in a series of kickback and payola allegations involving House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

Abramoff, a former Hollywood movie producer, helped the IFF to produce the movie "Red Scorpion," a film about an anti-Communist African guerrilla leader battling Marxist forces with the assistance of South African military advisers. Of course, the film was a propaganda piece aimed at extolling Angolan anti-Communist UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, who was fighting Angola's Marxist government with the overt assistance of South Africa and the covert (and illegal) assistance of the Reagan-Bush administration. As late as 1990 and after Mandela's release from prison, the IFF was running anti-ANC and Mandela ads in American newspapers.

Abramoff's involvement in Reagan era propaganda coincided with the appointment of longtime Reagan chum, Charles Z. Wick, as the head of the USIA. Wick, also a former movie producer, was most remembered for his famous Hollywood epic, "Snow White and The Three Stooges."

One of the senior South African intelligence agents who used IFF cover was Wim Booysel. When Booysel visited Washington in 1987 to attend IFF seminars, which were no more than covers for South African intelligence operations, he said he received specialized disinformation training from an expert at the U.S. Information Agency. And who was this expert on official government lying and distortion of the truth? Well, according to Booysel, it was none other than Todd Leventhal.

In a 1996 letter to *The Washington Post*, representing himself as an official of the USIA, Leventhal attacked former USIA official Alvin Snyder, who exposed U.S. government propaganda and lies in his excellent book on Reagan administration information warfare, *Warriors of Disinformation*. Leventhal dismisses Snyder's claims in a previous *Post* op-ed piece that the Reagan administration faked results of Star Wars tests, that the Soviets actually did mistake the downed Korean Air Lines 007 for a U.S. espionage aircraft, and that the U.S. engaged in blatant propaganda in Chile to support the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship.

In 1995, Leventhal attacked documentary producer Allan Francovich for his film, *The Maltese Double Cross*, which provided evidence that Iran and Syria, rather than Libya, were behind the downing of PanAm Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Francovich, who later died while being questioned by U.S. customs and immigration agents at Houston's international airport, determined that the PanAm bombing was the result of a botched U.S. intelligence operation involving drugs and hostages in Lebanon. Leventhal's smears against Francovich resulted in the latter's May 12, 1995 letter to Britain's *Guardian* newspaper in which Leventhal's job as Program Officer for Countering Disinformation and Misinformation for the USIA is described as "Orwellian."

In 1994, Leventhal took on the *Los Angeles Times* over its story about the kidnapping of poor children from poverty-ravished Latin American barrios for the purpose of organ harvesting.

Leventhal's small propaganda operation at the State Department is remarkably similar to an aggressive media operation that scans newspapers, television, and radio for stories critical of Israel. CAMERA, or the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, identifies and targets Israeli, American, and other journalists who question or provide alternatives to Israeli government propaganda.

In what is frightening and amusing at the same time, Leventhal makes an offer to those who have questions about the news stories they are reading: "If you wish, ask us. We can't respond to all requests for information, but if a request is reasonable and we have the time, we will do our best to provide accurate, authoritative information." The State Department's website provides Leventhal's phone number for those who wish to have him interpret the news for them: 202-203-7492. Just another friendly service from your taxpayer-funded Ministry of Truth!

Wayne Madsen is an investigative journalist (described by others as such) and a nationally distributed columnist.