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# REDACTED!

*by Miles Mathis*



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In what must be one of the most important stories of the year, the *New York Times* printed [December 22, 2006] what they are calling a “redacted” op-ed piece by Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann. This story is important not for what it says in the non-redacted lines, and not for what it says in the redacted lines (the information is unclassified and therefore may easily be found elsewhere). It is important for what it says between the lines.

Let me begin by circling one of the obvious things here. “Redacted” is just a polite or euphemistic term for CENSORED. Why did the *Times* so conspicuously avoid the obvious word? They were brave enough to point a finger, but not brave enough to use the right word. They were brave enough to give the hint, but not brave enough to sound the alarm.

The *Times* published a companion piece to this redacted op-ed by the authors claiming to explain the story in greater detail. To tell you what it really meant. This backstory is called, “What we wanted to tell you about Iran.” But even there they are being censored.

Although they admit that the lost lines were “blacked out by the Central Intelligence Agency’s Publication Review Board after the White House intervened in the normal prepublication review process,” they do not stop to analyze this sentence. Instead they tell us, “as career civil servants in national security, for both Republican and Democratic administrations, we know firsthand the importance of protecting sensitive information.”

They go on to make a small nod at the Constitution, but they don’t do it with much heat or gusto: “To classify information for reasons other than the safety and security of the United States and its interests is a violation of these principles.”

What principles do the authors mean? They are referring to principles just mentioned in preceding sentences: “National security must be above politics. In a democracy, transparency in government has to be honored and protected.” Those are the two “principles” they are referring to. But a closer reading must show that those two sentences are contradictory. The first says that national security is of primary importance. The second says that transparency in government is an important quality of democracy. Only the second could really be called a principle, and even then it is a pretty mushy wording. But the first sentence trumps that mushy principle anyway. The first sentence, which is a mantra of fascism not a principle of democracy or a principle at all, states a clear priority. National security comes first.

So, despite the authors’ apparently democratic conclusion, what they have really done is underline the mantra of the CIA. Two things are being said simultaneously, but it is clear which one must win.

Actually, the principle violated by censorship is neither of those two. It is the First Amendment of the Constitution, which states, “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press.” That is a direct quote. The First Amendment does not say that it is OK for the Executive or the CIA to make a law abridging the freedom of the press, not for reasons of national security or for any other reason. In fact, the Constitution specifically denies the power to make laws or regulate the press to the Executive or any other branch or organization. If Congress cannot censor the press, the Executive surely cannot.

The fact is, no policy information should be classified at all, ever. There is no good reason that any foreign or domestic policy or policy intention should be kept from the American people. Only information on troop movement, the location of warheads, the launch codes, and things of that nature should be classified. A very large percentage of classified information is classified simply in order to protect government officials from public oversight, and everybody knows that (or should know it, if they are awake). The really important things, like launch codes and troop movements, are not just classified, they are limited to a very small number of people. They couldn’t reach the *New York Times* or even career civil servants. Do you think the launch codes aren’t being published only because the CIA is allowed to pre-read all the major newspapers? The CIA doesn’t know the launch codes, either (or it is to be hoped), so you see there must be other safeguards for real national security questions. Safeguards that predated both the CIA and the Bush administration.

Safeguards that do not require shredding the First Amendment and allowing the Executive Branch to publish the news.

This country has a fairly long history, and much of that history predated the rise of the CIA. In that history, there has not been a major problem with newspapers maliciously printing genuine classified information. The reasons are obvious. We already had and have treason laws which address such a crime, and newspaper editors are not traitors. Newspapers *used to* look for real information, but they were never interested in printing launch codes or troop movements just to be clever. All this misdirection about classified information is just that: misdirection. It is the muzzling of the press under the cloak of national security. It is fascism, pure and simple.

But let us return to the backstory article, the one I have been quoting from. This article has obviously been rewritten as well. Instead of redacting it or censoring it, the CIA has added sentences. That is why that last paragraph doesn't make any sense. The CIA wanted to water it down, to spin it their way. But since they don't know how to write they just added a few sentences willy-nilly, as poor editors often will (and as I know firsthand). That is why you have two sentences right next to each other that say the opposite thing, and why the first sentence contradicts the entire paragraph it claims to lead. That sentence was added by the CIA.

National security must be above politics.

Leverett and Mann didn't write that. That poor pair are probably huddled in their little offices, wishing that the big editors at the *NYT* had never put them in this position. Given what we have left of their backstory, they don't seem too thrilled to have been redacted and thrust into the spotlight. They are a long way from being fighting mad, or even politely incensed, or even deeply offended. You must remember that, "Mr. Leverett has put more than 20 articles through the CIA's prepublication review process." He is used to the censorship. He is fine with it or he would be blogging away freely on the internet, saying whatever he wanted about Iran.

Which brings up another question. If the government doesn't want Leverett publishing these things, why not just take away his security clearance? Where is he getting this information? It is not old. It is not some information leftover from his time as an insider 20 years ago. This is current policy on Iran we are talking about. Leverett claims that this information is not classified. Why then are he and Mann and the *NYT* allowing it to be censored? The CIA is censoring unclassified information and Leverett and Mann and the *NYT* are being "brave" enough to let us know. But how about just take one more step and be brave enough to do what you are legally allowed to do: publish it uncensored and stand up for your Constitutional rights. If the *NYT* can't publish unclassified information, then we are in a police state.

Remember the line above, about the CIA's "normal prepublication review process." **The**

**CIA has a normal prepublication review process.** Most will not even trip over that. In the article it is not underlined or highlighted or commented on, so many will not even soak it up. But think about it. What does that mean? Do you think patriotic writers like Leverett just volunteer to let the CIA proof their hottest papers for typos? “Oh, I mentioned something important here, I better run it by the CIA.” Of course not. It means that the CIA, under cover of the Patriot Act or Homeland Security, is now routinely rubberstamping all news. It is pre-reading everything you see. AOL, Yahoo, MSN, all the newspapers, including the smaller ones, the wire services, the TV stations, everything.

And **that**, my friends, is what is written in between the lines here, in both the redacted op-ed and in the backstory. These authors and their publishers are telling us that they are *afraid* to publish normal, unclassified information. They are legally allowed to do it, but they are not doing it, which must mean they are being coerced into not doing it. Which means they are being threatened. They are not being threatened legally, since the CIA has no legal way to stop newspapers from printing unclassified information. Which means they are being threatened physically.

Please re-read the articles and try to understand what these people are telling you. This is a cry for help from hostages. Leverett and Mann may or may not be fairly willing hostages, but the editors who decided to run this piece redacted are not.

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If this paper was useful to you in any way, please consider donating a dollar (or more) to the SAVE THE ARTISTS FOUNDATION. This will allow me to continue writing these "unpublishable" things. Don't be confused by paying Melisa Smith--that is just one of my many *noms de plume*. If you are a Paypal user, there is no fee; so it might be worth your while to become one. Otherwise they will rob us 33 cents for each transaction.

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