

Media ignores US war crimes hypocrisy

By Peter Phillips

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During the first week of December 03, US corporate media reported that American forensic teams are working to document some 41 mass graves in Iraq to support future war crime tribunals in that country. Broadly covered in the media, as well, was the conviction of General Stanislav Galic by a UN tribunal for war crimes committed by Bosnian Serb troops under his command during the siege of Sarajevo in 1992-94.

These stories show how corporate media likes to give the impression that the US government is working diligently to root out evil doers around the world and to build democracy and freedom. This theme is part of a core ideological message in support of our recent wars on Panama, Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Governmental spin transmitted by a willing US media establishes simplistic mythologies of good vs. evil often leaving out historical context, special transnational corporate interests, and prior strategic relationships with the dreaded evil ones.

The hypocrisy of US policy and corporate media complicity is evident in the coverage of Donald Rumsfeld's stop over in Mazar-e Sharif Afghanistan December 4 to meet with regional warlord and mass killer General Abdul Rashid Dostum and his rival General Ustad Atta Mohammed. Rumsfeld was there to finalize a deal with the warlords to begin the decommissioning of their military forces in exchange for millions of dollars in international aid and increased power in the central Afghan government.

Few people in the US know that General Abdul Rashid Dostum fought alongside the Russians in the 1980s, commanding a 20,000-man army. He switched sides in 1992 and joined the Mujahidin when they took power in Kabul. For over a decade, Dostum was a regional warlord in charge of six northern provinces, which he ran like a private fiefdom, making millions, by collecting taxes on regional trade and international drug sales. Forced into exile in Turkey by the Taliban in 1998, he came back into power as a military proxy of the US during the invasion of Afghanistan.

Charged with mass murder of prisoners of war in the mid-90s by the UN, Dostum is known to use torture and assassinations to retain power. Described by the Chicago Sun

Media ignores US war crimes hypocrisy | 2

Times (10/21/01) as a “cruel and cunning warlord,” he is reported to use tanks to rip apart political opponents or crush them to death. Dostum, a seventh grade dropout, likes to put up huge pictures of himself in the regions he controls, drinks Johnnie Walker Blue Label, and rides in an armor-plated black Cadillac.

A documentary entitled *Massacre at Mazar* released in 2002 by Scottish film producer, Jamie Doran, exposes how Dostum, in cooperation with U.S. special forces, was responsible for the torturing and deaths of approximately 3,000 Taliban prisoners-of-war in November of 2001. In Doran’s documentary, two witnesses report on camera how they were forced to drive into the desert with hundreds of Taliban prisoners held in sealed cargo containers. Most of the prisoners suffocated to death in the vans and Dostum’s soldiers shot the few prisoners left alive. One witness told the London Guardian that a US Special Forces vehicle was parked at the scene as bulldozers buried the dead. A soldier told Doran that U.S. troops masterminded a cover-up. He said the Americans ordered Dostum’s people to get rid of the bodies before satellite pictures could be taken.

Dostum admits that a few hundred prisoners died, but asserts that it was a mistake or that they died from previous wounds. He has kept thousands of Taliban as prisoners-of-war since 2001 and continues to ransom them to their families for ten to twenty thousand dollars each.

Doran’s documentary was shown widely in Europe, prompting an attempt by the UN to investigate, but Dostum has prevented any inspection by saying that he could not guarantee safety for forensic teams in the area.

During the recent meeting with Dostum, Donald Rumsfeld is quote as saying, “I spent many weeks in the Pentagon following closely your activities, I should say your successful activities.” (Washington Post 12/5/03) The Post wrote how General Dostum was instrumental in routing Taliban forces from Northern Afghanistan in the early weeks of the war two years ago, but said nothing about General Dostum’s brutal past. Nor has US broadcast media aired Doran’s documentary.

It seems that the US government’s interest in addressing mass graves and war crimes extends only to our opponents and that we tolerate such inhuman behavior among those who support our political agendas. The corporate media’s complicity in this hypocrisy is a glaring example of the need for widespread media reform in the US.

Peter Phillips is Department Chair and Professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University and director of Project Censored; a media research organization.