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ISRANET DAILY BRIEFING

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Thursday Jan. 16, 2014 Volume XI, No. 3,224 Yom Chamishi, 15 Shevat 5774

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THE "MAJOR" MEDIA: CONTEXT VS. FACTS

UNWITTING MOMENT OF TRUTH FOR NYT , "BRIDGEGATE" DWARFS IRS SCANDAL, SHARON DEMONIZED BY WORLD MEDIA

*N.B.: The Latest Issue of Israzine is now on our website and can be viewed by following the link:
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THE NEW YORK TIMES DESTROYS OBAMA

Caroline Glick

[Frontpage](#), Jan. 3, 2014

The *New York Times* just delivered a mortal blow to the Obama administration and its Middle East policy. Call it fratricide. It was clearly unintentional. Indeed, is far from clear that the paper realizes what it has done. Last Saturday the *Times* published an 8,000-word account by David Kirkpatrick detailing the terrorist strike against the US Consulate and the CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012. In it, Kirkpatrick tore to shreds the foundations of President Barack Obama's counterterrorism strategy and his overall policy in the Middle East.

Obama first enunciated those foundations in his June 4, 2009, speech to the Muslim world at Cairo University. Ever since, they have been the rationale behind US counterterror strategy and US Middle East policy. Obama's first assertion is that radical Islam is not inherently hostile to the US. As a consequence, America can appease radical Islamists. Moreover, once radical Muslims are appeased, they will become US allies, (replacing the allies the US abandons to appease the radical Muslims).

Obama's second strategic guidepost is his claim that the only Islamic group that is a bona fide terrorist organization is the faction of al-Qaida directly subordinate to Osama bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Only this group cannot be appeased and must be destroyed through force. The administration has dubbed the Zawahiri faction of al-Qaida "core al-Qaida." And anyone who operates in the name of al-Qaida, or any other group that does not have courtroom-certified operational links to Zawahiri, is not really al-Qaida, and therefore, not really a terrorist group or a US enemy. These foundations have led the US to negotiate with the Taliban in Afghanistan. They are the rationale for the US's embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood worldwide. They are the basis for Obama's allegiance to Turkey's Islamist government, and his early support for the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Syrian opposition. They are the basis for the administration's kneejerk support for the PLO against Israel. Obama's insistent bid to appease Iran, and so enable the mullocracy to complete its nuclear weapons program. is similarly a product of his strategic assumptions. So, too, the US's current diplomatic engagement of Hezbollah in Lebanon owes to the administration's conviction that any terror group not directly connected to Zawahiri is a potential US ally.

From the outset of the 2011 revolt against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, it was clear that a significant part of the opposition was composed of jihadists aligned if not affiliated with al-Qaida. Benghazi was specifically identified by documents seized by US forces in Iraq as a hotbed of al-Qaida recruitment. Obama and his advisers dismissed and ignored the evidence. The core of al-Qaida, they claimed, was not involved in the anti-Gaddafi revolt. And to the extent jihadists were fighting Gaddafi, they were doing so as allies of the US. In other words, the two core foundations of Obama's understanding of terrorism and of the Muslim world were central to US support for the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi. With Kirkpatrick's report, the *Times* exposed the utter falsity of both. Kirkpatrick showed the mindset of the US-supported rebels and through it, the ridiculousness of the administration's belief that you can't be a terrorist if you aren't directly subordinate to Zawahiri. One US-supported Islamist militia commander recalled to him that at the outset of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion, "Teenagers came running around... [asking] 'Sheikh, sheikh, did you know al-Qaida? Did you know Osama bin Laden? How do we fight?'" In the days and weeks following the September 11, 2012, attack on the US installations in Benghazi in which US ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed, the administration claimed that the attacks were not carried out by terrorists. Rather they were the unfortunate consequence of a spontaneous protest by otherwise innocent Libyans.

According to the administration's version of events, these guileless, otherwise friendly demonstrators, who killed the US ambassador and three other Americans, were simply angered by a *Youtube* video of a movie trailer which jihadist clerics in Egypt had proclaimed was blasphemous. In an attempt to appease the mob after the fact, Obama and then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton were filmed in commercials run on Pakistani television apologizing for the video and siding with the mob against the movie-maker, who is the only person the US has imprisoned following the attack. Then-ambassador to the UN and current National Security Adviser Susan Rice gave multiple television interviews placing the blame for the attacks on the video.

According to Kirkpatrick's account of the assault against the US installations in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, the administration's description of the assaults was a fabrication. Far from spontaneous political protests spurred by rage at a *YouTube* video, the attack was premeditated. US officials spotted Libyans conducting surveillance of the consulate nearly 15 hours before the attack began. Libyan militia warned US officials "of rising threats against Americans from extremists in Benghazi," two days before the attack. From his account, the initial attack – in which the consulate was first stormed – was carried out not by a mob, but by a few dozen fighters. They were armed with assault rifles. They acted in a coordinated, professional manner with apparent awareness of US security procedures. During the initial assault, the attackers shot down the lights around the compound, stormed the gates, and swarmed around the security personnel who ran to get their weapons, making it impossible for them to defend the ambassador and other personnel trapped inside...

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WHY BRIDGEGATE MADE HEADLINES BUT OBAMA’S IRS SCANDAL DIDN’T

John Podhoretz

[New York Post](#), Jan. 11, 2014

Most government scandals involve the manipulation of the system in obscure ways by people no one has ever heard of. That is why George Washington Bridgegate is nearly a perfect scandal — because it is comprehensible and (as they say in Hollywood) “relatable” to everyone who has ever been in a car. This is the reason this one is not going to go away so easily, even if one accepts the contention that Gov. Chris Christie had nothing whatsoever to do with it. Government officials and political operatives working for Christie, for weird and petty reasons, chose to make traffic worse. That’s the takeaway. When they are reminded of the fact that people working on Christie’s behalf thought it was a good political game to mire tens of thousands of their fellow Americans in the nightmarish gridlock that is a daily dreaded prospect for tens of millions, they will be discomfited by that and by the politician in whose name it was done.

And yet, you know what is also something everybody would find “relatable”? Politicians who sic the tax man on others for political gain. Everybody has to deal with the IRS and fears it. Last year, we learned from the Internal Revenue Service itself that it had targeted ideological opponents of the president for special scrutiny and investigation — because they were ideological opponents. That’s juicy, just as Bridgegate is juicy. It’s something we can all understand, it speaks to our greatest fears, and it’s the sort of thing TV newspeople could gab about for days on end without needing a fresh piece of news to keep it going.

And yet, according to Scott Whitlock of the Media Research Center, “In less than 24 hours, the three networks have devoted 17 times more coverage to a traffic scandal involving Chris Christie than they’ve allowed in the last six months to Barack Obama’s Internal Revenue Service controversy.” Why? Oh, come on, you know why. Christie belongs to one political party. Obama belongs to the other. You know which ones they belong to. And you know which ones the people at the three networks belong to, too: In surveys going back decades, anywhere from 80% to 90% of Washington’s journalists say they vote Democratic.

Scandals are not just about themselves; they are about the media atmosphere that surrounds them. They are perpetuated and deepened by the attention of journalists, whose relentless pursuit of every angle keeps the story going. That is exactly what has been missing from the IRS scandal from its outset; Republicans in Congress have been the dogged pursuers, not the press. There was plenty of material. Just as journalists remain skeptical today about who exactly might have gotten the idea for the lane closures, they could have been asking without letup who got the idea to dig into conservative tax-status applications. Several officials at the IRS resigned, retired and took the Fifth, just as was the case with Christie-aligned Port Authority officials. It’s pretty clear the questions about how high up Bridgegate went are going to be pursued far more diligently than they have been in the IRS case. What gives?

There is a fundamental misunderstanding among conservatives about the causes of partisan media bias — the reason there is unequal coverage of scandals of this kind. It exists not because there is a conscious effort to soft-pedal bad news for politicians you like and to push hard on bad news for politicians you don’t. It’s actually more personal — more relatable, shall we say—than that. Journalists know the Obamans. Intimately. They know them from college, they know them from work, they know them from kids’ soccer. They’re literally married to them. To the journalists, the Obamans don’t look like crooks and cheats. Far from it. For them, it’s like looking in a mirror.

In September, Elspeth Reeve of *The Atlantic Wire* took note of 24 major journalists who have taken posts at senior levels in the Obama administration. All of them have worked for decades in various news organizations, thus creating personal ties and bonds of affection with literally hundreds of working reporters and editors. The journalists are not covering up for their friends and their spouses. They just believe the people they know could not be responsible for behaving badly, or cravenly, or for crass political advantage—and the tone they strike when such things are discussed is often one of offense, as though it is a sign of low character to believe otherwise. It would be, well, like believing the journalists themselves were crooks.

It's fair to say that most conservatives don't know people in the Obama administration, and they dislike and disagree with its policies. When they look at it, their dislike and lack of any personal connection make it easier for them to see officials mired in scandal and tush-covering cover-up. This is a direct analogue to the way liberals — of whom journalists comprise a central cohort — viewed the George W. Bush and Reagan administrations. They saw people with whom they disagreed and who they thought were bad for the country and so found it much easier to believe they were acting out of malign motive and doing evil. Christie may be entirely innocent of all wrongdoing. Or there may be some connection, even a very tenuous and suggestive one. But there will be little let-up now. For in the end, because Christie is a Republican. Christie isn't them.

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IT'S ALL IN THE CONTEXT

Yisrael Medad, Eli Pollak, Yisrael Medad

[Jerusalem Post](#), Jan. 8, 2014

Last week, Melissa Harris-Perry had to apologize for her *MSNBC* show which included a comic “year in review” program. In one segment, a photo displayed Governor Mitt Romney’s grandchildren, including his adopted grandson, who is African-American. Some of the captions of the photos were nasty. She admitted that ground rules were broken and then declared, “We’re generally appreciative of everyone who offered serious criticisms of last Sunday’s program, and I am reminded that our fiercest critics can sometimes be our best teachers.”

Here in Israel, not only are critics of the media not appreciated by the media, in most cases they are ignored, too often becoming objects of ridicule. At best, the response most often heard by those criticized is usually, “Since we’re criticized both from the Left and the Right, we must be doing something right.” Of course, the possibility theoretically exists that they may be doing everything wrong. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to ask if the media really is biased and/or unethical or is the problem with the perceptions of biased viewers and listeners? Is bias just a matter of a chronic sloppiness, or is there something more intrinsic? What can we in Israel learn from media ethics studies from abroad? Katherine Fink and Michael Schudson of Columbia University point to a major development, whereby journalism has turned itself into a news manager and a political power player. Their article in January 2014’s *Journalism* labels as “contextual journalism” the new style in reporting. Whereas journalism used to be, at least theoretically, all about facts, it has metamorphosized into interpretation. What today’s journalists do is provide meaning and narrative, while facts are left far behind.

Ala Fink and Schudson, there are four categories of reporting: (a) straightforward conventional reporting; (b) contextual reporting, which includes a considerable analysis component; (c) watchdog reporting, usually involving government or big business; and (d) social empathy reporting, usually dealing with the lives of people with whom the readers are unfamiliar. Their findings are that the frequency of classic “straight” news items has fallen, and contextual journalism has increased to nearly half of all articles they reviewed. They quote Stephen Hess, who called this type of writing “social science journalism,” which has “a clear intention of focusing on causes, not on events as such.” An obvious problematic outgrowth of these tendencies is that the professional value of “objectivity” is becoming virtually non-existent. Objectivity,

which means “truth-seeking, neutrality, ethics and credibility,” as Noel Sheppard, associate editor of *NewsBusters*, writes, becomes a very different thing “when the journalist’s job moves from describing events to creating interpretations.” The most potent element discovered by polls and academic studies, consistently over a long period of time, is liberal bias in the media. A 2005 UCLA study, led by Tim Groseclose, termed it a “systematic tendency...[of] media outlets to slant the news to the Left.” This is reflected in negative vs. positive content coverage, as well as the framing of developments. Bias manifests itself in two major ways: structural (bias in individual stories that favors one side in a conflict) and partisan (aggregate news coverage that systematically favors the liberal or conservative side in a political conflict).

Why is there perceived bias? One explanation offered by a 1999 study by Watts et al. attributes it to “media self-coverage and elite cue-taking.” Citizens might perceive the media as liberally biased because conservative political elites often focus their media relationship on these allegations. A classic example is Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s famous (or infamous) May 1999 remark about the media: “They are afraid, a-f-r-a-i-d.” That speech provided his critics within the media milieu with much ammunition. On December 28, 2012, Anat Balint, writing in *Ha’aretz*, recalled his words and asserted that “Netanyahu is one of the most hostile prime ministers to a free press that Israel has ever known... [his is] a silent yet consistent policy that can only be understood as intended to strip Israel’s media outlets of any significant power to stand up to the government and its current elected leader.”

Last time we turned a page, scrolled a screen or turned on the television or radio, it was our distinct impression that all is well with our media’s freedom. The power it has in dictating the agenda and framing stories has not diminished appreciatively, if at all. Some would think it has only increased. In contrast to Balint, we believe that the real problem with our media is its bias, not its freedom...

An example of contextual bias in Israel was when a certain newspaper persisted in interviewing for background and commentary only those legal experts whose opinion was that Avigdor Liberman would be found guilty. They were quite surprised to find out how wrong they were when Liberman was declared innocent. In the same context, consider some of our media’s reaction to Liberman’s suggestion that while no Arab need be removed from his home, Israel’s border could be redrawn so that Umm el-Fahm residents would be in the new State of Palestine. We’ll ignore some of the more extreme responses suggesting that he is preparing the ground for a “new Nakba,” but if the context is a citizenship issue, is any reporter dealing with the fact that in 1949, none of the Arabs in Israel were asked if they wished to be Israeli or not, and that perhaps this is also part of the current issue? Media surrounds us. It is in our homes and cars. More often than not, the television is on in our homes for hours. Many news websites are free. The media, more often than not, is providing us with context, sometimes at the expense of facts. This makes it all the more difficult for the public to decide what is important and what is not, what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable social behavior and what is not. The result is a muddled society, whose trust in the media is low. Media context harms the media itself but also our democratic society, which desperately needs a context-free media to uphold it.

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ARIEL SHARON: DEBUNKING THE MEDIA MYTHS

Simon Plosker

[Honest Reporting](#), Jan. 12, 2014

With the death of former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, the media have produced a huge number of obituaries. Sharon has been a controversial figure and elicits a wide range of emotions from supporters and detractors alike. This, however, is no excuse for inaccurate profiles or deliberate demonization of one of the founding fathers of the modern Israeli state. Throughout the years, and particularly since his 2001 election as prime minister, the international media has treated Ariel Sharon with more vitriol and abuse than any other democratically elected leader in the civilized world. Sharon has been depicted in less than flattering

terms by many media outlets who have labeled him as a “war criminal” and a “butcher,” a trend we are once again seeing in today’s media coverage.

In the past, much coverage of Ariel Sharon in the European and Arab media has been accompanied by blatant anti-Semitism. In Spain, for example, on June 4, 2001 (three days after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed 21 young Israelis at a Tel Aviv disco, in the midst of a unilateral Israeli ceasefire), the liberal magazine *Cambio 16* published a cartoon of Sharon (with a hook nose he does not have), wearing a skull cap (which he did not usually wear), sporting a swastika inside a star of David on his chest, and proclaiming: “At least Hitler taught me how to invade a country and destroy every living insect.” A week earlier, *El Pais*, Spain’s equivalent of *The New York Times*, published a cartoon of an allegorical figure carrying a small rectangular-shaped black moustache, flying through the air towards Sharon’s upper lip. The caption read: “Clio, the muse of history, puts Hitler’s moustache on Ariel Sharon”. Cartoons in the Greek press in 2004 showed Sharon as a Nazi officer. One of Italy’s leading papers, *Corriere Della Sera*, ran a cartoon on March 31, 2002, showing Sharon killing Jesus. (The cartoon, which was timed to coincide with Easter that year, was published as Israelis lay dying from the Netanya Passover massacre three days earlier.) Hundreds of similar anti-Semitic motifs have been applied to Sharon in recent years. *The Economist* magazine in London compared him to Charles Dickens’s infamous anti-Semitic stereotype, Fagin. In today’s obituaries, there are three common examples of bias where missing context or incorrect information are being employed to present Sharon as a “butcher” or “war criminal”:

A charge commonly leveled at Sharon is that he is responsible for the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps during the 1982 Lebanon War. In fact, as detailed by Mitchell Bard’s *Myths & Facts*, the killings were carried out by the Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia (whose members have still not been held accountable). Israel’s own Kahan Commission found that Israel and Ariel Sharon were indirectly responsible for not anticipating the possibility of Phalangist violence. Sharon thus resigned his position as Defense Minister. *Myths and Facts* states: The Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia was responsible for the massacres that occurred at the two Beirut-area refugee camps on September 16–17, 1982. Israeli troops allowed the Phalangists to enter Sabra and Shatila to root out terrorist cells believed to be located there. It had been estimated that there may have been up to 200 armed men in the camps working out of the countless bunkers built by the PLO over the years, and stocked with generous reserves of ammunition. When Israeli soldiers ordered the Phalangists out, they found hundreds dead (estimates range from 460 according to the Lebanese police, to 700–800 calculated by Israeli intelligence). The dead, according to the Lebanese account, included 35 women and children. The rest were men: Palestinians, Lebanese, Pakistanis, Iranians, Syrians and Algerians. The killings were perpetrated to avenge the murders of Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel and 25 of his followers, killed in a bomb attack earlier that week. *[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#) –ed.]*

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[A Year of Biased Reporting: Why the New York Times Won](#): Pesach Benson, *Honest Reporting*, Dec. 26, 2013 — When HonestReporting readers were asked to choose the “winner” of the 2013 Dishonest Reporting Award, the prevailing displeasure was best summed up in a one-line email: “*The NY Times bludgeoned Israel all year.*”

[All NSA News Fit to Print?](#): Max Boot, *Commentary*, Jan. 15, 2014 —It seems to be open season on the NSA.

[A Deadly Mix in Benghazi](#): David D. Kirkpatrick, *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 2013 —A boyish-looking American diplomat was meeting for the first time with the Islamist leaders of eastern Libya’s most formidable militias.