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**Putting lives in danger? Tinker, tailor, journalist, spy: the use of journalistic cover.**

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**Abstract**

The Anglo-American intelligence agencies' use of journalists as spies or propagandists and the practice of providing intelligence agents in the field with journalistic cover have been a source of controversy for many decades. This paper examines the extent to which these covert practices have taken place and whether they have put journalists' lives in danger. This paper, drawing on various methodologies, examines a number of cases where the arrest, murder or kidnap of journalists was justified on the grounds that the journalist was a 'spy'. This has been followed through with research using a range of sources that shows there have been many occasions when the distinction between spies and journalists has been opaque. The paper concludes that widespread use of journalistic cover by spies has put lives in danger but the extent is unquantifiable.

Keywords: journalism, intelligence, spies, undercover, kidnap, murder

## Introduction

There is a widely held belief in the news media that intelligence agencies' use of journalists as spies and journalistic cover for their agents in the field has put the lives of *bone fide* journalists in danger (see Houghton 1997, Madson 2014, Burrell 2015). The purpose of this paper is to investigate those claims. The Pike Report spelt out why journalistic cover is so attractive:

Intelligence agencies have long prized journalists as informant and identify-covers. Newsmen generally enjoy great mobility, and are often admitted to areas denied to ordinary businessmen or to suspected intelligence types. Not expected to work in one fixed location, both *bona fide* journalists and masquerading intelligence officers can move about without arousing suspicions. They also have extraordinary access to important foreign leaders and diplomats (Pike 1977, 223).

## The Problem

In March 2014 Nils Horner, a 51 year old British-Swedish radio reporter, was assassinated in a Kabul street by two men. A Taliban splinter group, the Fidai Mahaz group, said it had killed Horner and accused him of being a spy for the UK government. In a statement posted on its website, the group said: '[Horner] was not a journalist, he was a spy of MI6, he was a special worker of MI6. He was targeted by Fidai movement'. The group provided no proof that they had played a part in the assassination or evidence of any espionage activities by Horner, who had been the South Asia correspondent for the Swedish radio station, Sveriges Radio (Graham-Harrison 2014). In another assassination, James Foley, an American photo-journalist, was beheaded by ISIS in Syria in August 2014. ISIS said that they knew Foley was a journalist, but also accused him of being a spy and said he had 'espionage equipment' with him at the time of his kidnapping. Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in 2002 while working as the South Asia Bureau Chief of *The Wall Street Journal*. He was in Pakistan investigating alleged links between 'the shoe bomber' Richard Reid and Al-Qaeda. Pearl was held hostage, accused of being a spy, and then killed by his captors when the United States government refused to meet their demands for his release (Fonda 2003). Farzad Bazoft an *Observer* correspondent was executed on Saddam Hussein's orders in 1990 after being accused of espionage. Bazoft was an Iranian-born journalist who worked frequently as a freelance reporter and was arrested by Iraqi authorities while on a reporting trip and hung after being 'convicted' of spying for Israel.

## Taken

There is a long history of arrested or kidnapped journalists being accused of spying by their protagonists. In 1985, while a foreign correspondent for *Associated Press*, Terry Anderson was taken hostage and held for almost eight years by Hezbollah in Lebanon, accused of information-gathering for the CIA. In 1951 another *Associated Press* correspondent William Oatis had been jailed in communist Czechoslovakia accused of

being a spy. John Hohenberg, an administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, wrote at the time that Oatis was a victim of a ‘trumped-up trial’ (Alwood, 2010, 264). In 1986 Nicholas Daniloff, a correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report* was arrested by Soviet security and accused of spying for the CIA. A major diplomatic incident then ensued and Daniloff was eventually released. As is common with wider public perceptions of the world of spies, fiction plays a part; some films have specifically linked journalists with spying. The Sony Pictures film *The Interview* released in 2014 portrayed journalists acting as spies. This Hollywood spy spoof film caused an international incident between the United States and North Korea as the plot has two US TV journalists going to North Korea to interview Kim Jong-Un and being suborned by the CIA to assassinate him.

While there have been a considerable number of cases where journalists have been murdered, kidnapped and arrested by groups that have accused them of spying, it does not occur in every case. ISIS prisoner Stephen Sotloff was later killed were not accused of spying, nor has UK photographer John Cantlie who was still a hostage at time of writing. This suggests that it is not an automatic claim and that ISIS, for example, uses the allegation as a justification intermittently. However, that terrorists and others, who are so aware of the potential of propaganda, sometimes frame their captives as western spies does indicate that they think the claim resonates with their potential support base. It also suggests also that there is a wider public that think it possible that a journalist can also be a spy. While alleging a journalist is a spy is not unique to conflicts in the Middle East it has been a recurrent feature of the region that has developed since the 1970s. It is also apparent these groups are far more ready to kidnap or murder journalists. One experienced respondent, a freelance foreign correspondent, who still operates in these hostile areas and wanted to remain anonymous, told the author: ‘As for being accused of being a spy? ALOT. In Libya, in Afghanistan, in Yemen... collecting information leads people to be very wary unless the right introductions as you know. I definitely get worried if I don't have the right fixer...’

## Habitas

The identification of journalists as spies is a serious issue for the news media. The author recalled that at *The Observer* from 1978-1989 the issue was discussed from time to time especially by the post 1960s generation of journalists. In these informal conversations journalists speculated about which current or former colleagues worked for SIS (also known as MI6) and posed the question as to whether they had continued to do so while employed as *Observer* journalists. (For a more detailed account of *Observer* journalists’ links with intelligence see Lashmar 2015b). These conversations would likely occur in every major news organisation or wherever news journalists gathered. In the author’s experience whenever journalists discussed this issue it was considered an absolute that journalists should not work for intelligence nor should intelligence officers use journalistic cover. Following the revelations that journalists had been working for the CIA and that US news organisations had provided cover to CIA agents during the Cold War, Stuart Loory, a former *Los Angeles Times* correspondent, condemned the practice in the *Columbia Journalism Review*: ‘If even one

American overseas carrying a press card is a paid informer for the CIA, then all Americans with those credentials are suspect .... If the crisis of confidence faced by the news business—along with the government—is to be overcome, journalists must be willing to focus on themselves the same spotlight they so relentlessly train on others!’ (Bernstein 1977). After more evidence emerged in the late 1990s the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) condemned the practice. ‘If spies pose as journalists some people will see journalists as legitimate targets,’ said the union's then general secretary, John Foster. ‘Every year hundreds of proper journalists put their lives at risk while reporting and many are killed. Using falsified documents would make journalism even more dangerous’ he continued (Lashmar, 1999).

### A Dangerous profession

The work of frontline journalists is becoming more dangerous. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an organisation that advocate press freedom around the world, stated 73 journalists had been killed globally in connection with their work in 2015. CPJ research shows 44 journalists were killed in 1992, down to 22 in 2002 then gradually increasing to the 2015 figure. According to the CPJ report some 27 journalists and media workers had been killed by ISIS since 2013. A further 10 were missing believed dead. (CPJ 2016). Why is journalism becoming more dangerous? There are clearly a number of factors including the publicity value of killing journalists, potential economic gain of ransoming journalists, the increase in the number of reporters on the frontline, the increasing number of conflicts and the increasing number of murders by crime gangs of inconvenient journalists. In 2015, the author attended a panel where the former Director of Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), Sir David Omand, made a very significant but unreported admission that intelligence agencies had used journalistic cover and that ‘used to be the case in Britain’ but that it ‘stopped some years ago because it put the whole journalistic profession at risk’ (Omand, 2015). The author knows of no other statement by a senior UK intelligence chief on this controversial issue. As there is no official statement on the policy the existence of such a ban relies entirely on Sir David’s evidence. Given the recent spate of murders of journalists in the Middle East the author suggests that the history and current status of the relationship between intelligence agencies and journalists needs to be studied. The former investigations editor of the Guardian, David Leigh, has said an open discussion of the relationship between intelligence and journalism is important:

Our first task as practitioners is to document what goes on in this very furtive field. Our second task ought to be to hold an open debate on what the proper relations between the intelligence agencies and the media ought to be. And our final task must then be to find ways of actually behaving more sensibly (Leigh, 2000).

### Methodology

To develop to such an open discussion, methods and practices of Anglo-American intelligence agencies need to be identified. Three questions are central to the research problem:

- 1) What is the evidence that intelligence agencies send officers into the field using false or actual journalistic cover?
- 2) What is the evidence that intelligence agencies recruit journalists to act as spies?
- 3) If 1) and/or 2) are true, to what extent does that put the lives of journalists in danger?

Obtaining evidence about intelligence agencies' working practice is exceptionally difficult. Gill and Phythian question whether social science empirical methods can work well when researching intelligence agencies because of unique features of secrecy in the intelligence world: 'any attempt to devise a theory of intelligence is doomed if we can theorise only on the basis of what we can observe, whether or not it is from "official sources",' (2006: 22). There is a recognised problem in intelligence studies of obtaining robust data. Instead, for this paper, the author uses the critical realist approach where data is gathered where possible, but the analysis is also based on extensive experience, what is observed while the author recognises his own subjectivity. The research incorporated into this paper involves several methodologies or approaches:

- The historic record.
- My own prior original research as a journalist.
- Use of primary sources and related secondary source material
- An extensive literature review of journalism and intelligence studies texts.
- Unstructured interviews and email exchanges with foreign correspondents, authors and academics.

### Limitations

This research focuses on the Anglo-American experience because they are two democratic nations with well-established if controversial intelligence communities with histories of covert and undercover operations. Choosing two allowed for comparison of approach and change over time. There are numerous allegations and documented cases of other democratic and non-democratic nations with intelligence agencies that have utilised journalism as a cover and journalists as spies. The author has not chosen to extend the research for space reasons.

The author engaged in reflexive practice based on personal experience as an investigative reporter, who has reported extensively on intelligence over several decades. The use of reflexive, reflective or transformative practice as a pedagogic tool to improve academic practice has developed since the 1970s (see: Schön 1983, Kolb, 1984, Prpic 2005). Prpic outlines a model for reflexive practice designed specifically for the academic practitioner's environment (2005). The author's research since 1976 has, on many occasions, revealed cases of the close links between intelligence agencies and some journalists. The author uses a deductive approach to assemble as much evidence as possible to resolve the research questions. A literature review was undertaken encompassing texts from primary sources, secondary sources and academic texts from Journalism Studies, Intelligence Studies,

Government archives, inquiry reports, opinion articles and journalistic texts from authoritative commentators. This literature review began, in effect, with the contemporary reading in 1976 of CIA dissident Philip Agee's biographical account of his work in 'Inside the Company: CIA Diary' (Agee 1975). Since, with one text leading to the next, in a 'snowball' approach, the author had considered many of the texts published that feature in some regard, in full or in part, the intelligence world and also its relationship with the media. The author used a personal archive of intelligence related material collected since 1976 and amounting to some 40 lever arch files including a great deal of unique documentation especially on the work of the UK Information Research Department (IRD) (referred to below). The newspaper database Nexis was used as a source for articles.

## **Findings**

As part of the research exercise a number of identified cases were examined in depth by the author to consider whether there was any truth in the allegations that those cited in the introduction were working for intelligence. The author notes that the difficulties of conclusively proving or disproving such allegations are demonstrated by Edward Alwood's paper on William Oatis (2010). By examining the public record and speaking to those who knew the deceased, the author found no evidence of spying by Horner, Foley, Pearl, Bazoft or other cases mentioned. Within the media there has been a running debate as to what is an acceptable level of contact between an intelligence officer and a journalist and under what circumstances? When does one become the tool of the other? Where is the line between the two occupations drawn? Purvis has stated that the ITN correspondent Sandy Gall's recollections of briefing senior MI6 officers in Stone's Chop House in Piccadilly in the early 1980s about what he had discovered in Afghanistan stayed just the right side of the line (Purvis and Hulbert 2013, 321).

The second element of the research programme was to examine the historic record, consider prior journalistic research, and primary and secondary sources.

### *The UK experience*

#### The Old Boys Network

The spy author John le Carré stated, of his time in SIS from 1960 to 1964, in a 1989 biographical article: 'And since the British secret service controlled large sections of the press, just as they may do today,' (Dorril 1993, 281). This dramatic claim is not evidenced by le Carré, but the documentary record shows that as early as the First World War covert links between intelligence and journalism were commonplace (see Smith 2010). One early recruitment by British Intelligence of a foreign journalist was that of Benito Mussolini, later the Italian fascist dictator. In 2009 archive documents revealed that Mussolini got his start in politics in 1917 with the help of a £100 weekly wage from MI5. In return, Mussolini, then an editor, published propaganda in his paper encouraging Italians to remain in the war alongside the Allies. As part of his arrangement with MI5 he also had his henchmen attack peace protesters (Kington, 2009).



By the Second World War British intelligence officers and agents used a wide range of covers in the field. There were also networks of news agencies engaged in covert propaganda primarily to move American public opinion in favour of entering the war (Stevenson, 1976). Early on, Sir William Stephenson, a British intelligence representative in New York, persuaded the New York based Overseas News Agency to provide cover for British agents abroad (Lashmar and Oliver, 1998: 13). During the war a global network of news agencies were set up and run by SIS. Many of these continued on during the Cold War with the aim of keeping a British voice in many parts of the world during the Cold War, to disseminate grey propaganda (see IRD below) and if necessary, to support a range of SIS operations (1998: 72). One of those agencies was the Cairo based Arab News Agency (ANA) which provides a rare detailed example of a documented SIS undercover operation that used journalistic cover. During the Suez Crisis of 1956, ANA provided a convenient base for British anti-Nasser undercover operations and extra staff were sent by Whitehall into the agency to help. In August the Egyptian authorities arrested thirty people including four Britons. All were accused of being members of a spy ring of which James Swinburne, the secretary of the ANA, was said to be the head. According to Reuters reports of the trial, Swinburne confessed, for which he received a lighter five year jail sentence, while others were given ten year sentences. Swinburne had been in possession of secret Egyptian naval papers including an assessment of naval defences around Alexandria (Dorril, 2000: 632). The Egyptian said to be the main British agent was executed and a number of other Egyptians given long prison sentences (Lashmar and Oliver, 1998: 70). Details of the Cairo spy ring that emerged painted SIS as barely competent, allowing agents to run networks of fictitious informants so they could claim their pay.

At the start of the Cold War, a new body had been launched to specialise in covert propaganda on an international basis. The Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD) was set up under the Labour Government in 1948 and clandestinely financed from the same budget as the intelligence services. A large organisation with close links to SIS (with whom it shared personnel), IRD waged a vigorous covert propaganda campaign against Communism for nearly thirty years covertly using and supplying carefully selected journalists, politicians, academics and trade unionists (1998: cover). Entirely separately, Knightley detailed how Ian Fleming, then an intelligence officer and later the author of the James Bond books, ran a news agency in the early 1950s that he used as cover for a network for journalists who also spied for SIS. Some of the agency's staff went onto become famous Fleet Street figures including Antony Terry (*Sunday Times*), Henry Brandon (*Sunday Times*), Donald McCormick (*Sunday Times*) and Cedric Salter (Knightley 1998a and 1998b). The most well-known and infamous case of an SIS officer working as a journalist is that of Kim Philby in the early 1960s. Sacked from SIS as a suspected Soviet agent, he was employed by the *Observer* and the *Economist* in the Middle East. The Philby case remains fascinating to this day but atypical.

More typically the historian and biographer Sir Alistair Horne admitted, sixty years after the event, that he had run three agents for SIS while working for the *Daily Telegraph* in Germany in the 1950s (Duns 2013). *Observer* foreign correspondent Mark Frankland commented in his autobiography of his time in SIS in the late 1950s: 'Journalists working abroad were natural

candidates for agents and particularly useful in places such as Africa where British intelligence was hurrying to establish itself' (Frankland, 1990: 92).

The most detailed revelation of British 'Fleet Street' journalists working for MI6 came in December 1968 but was derided or ignored at the time by the UK news media. The Russian newspaper *Izvestia* and its weekly review *Nedelya* ran a series of articles accusing a long list of high-profile British journalists of being spies, disclosing their names and alleged codenames. The Russians claimed journalists and editors at the *Sunday Times*, the *Observer*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and the *BBC* worked directly with SIS. The Soviets had a cache of documents they claimed were SIS memos, apparently photographed with a miniature spy camera. One table listed each publication, the journalist or editor SIS had as its contact there, their codename and the codename of their SIS 'handler'. These included Henry Brandon of the *Sunday Times*, David Astor of the *Observer* and Roy Pawley of the *Daily Telegraph*. Nearly fifty years on, the intelligence historian Stephen Dorril suggested that the Soviet stories were accurate (Dorril 2015).

In 2015 the British author, Frederick Forsyth, after many years of denial, admitted on the publication of his autobiography (2015) that he had worked for SIS for two decades. He had perceived it to be his patriotic duty. He was a correspondent for the *BBC* and *Reuters* news agency, covering some highly sensitive areas, including postcolonial Nigeria, apartheid South Africa and East Germany during the Cold War. Forsyth was keen to make the distinction: he was not a spy for SIS, but an asset. 'There was nothing weird about it; it was the Cold War' he claimed.

An awful lot of the strength of British intelligence came from the number of volunteers. A businessman might be going to a trade fair in a difficult to enter city and he'd be approached, quite gently, with a courteous 'If you would be so kind to accept an envelope under your hotel door and bring it home...' so that was what I did. I ran errands.

Forsyth said that he was not paid for the work but observed. 'If someone asked: "Can you see your way clear to do us a favour?" it was very hard to say no.' (Flood, 2015).

SIS frequently approached other journalists for recruitment as officers, agents and assets. Christopher Roper was the Peru correspondent for the Reuters news agency in the late 1960s based in Lima where he knew the then SIS station chief John White. After his return to London, he received a letter offering the possibility of working for the Government. He accepted an invitation to a meeting at Carlton House Terrace in London where he was offered the opportunity to work as an officer for SIS. He declined. He told the author that journalists 'certainly shouldn't work for intelligence' (Roper, 2015).

### Using journalistic cover

During 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s extensive use was made of forged NUJ press cards and international press identity cards by undercover intelligence

officers in their campaign against the IRA. A dissident security forces officer, Captain Fred Holroyd, detailed forgery operations to produce Press credentials some years later (Campbell, 1984: 11). Another whistle-blower from the security forces, Colin Wallace, confirmed to the author the allegations of misuse: ‘Yes there were two types of cards in circulation in NI, one was from the phantom organisation called “Interpress” and the other was the standard NUJ one’ (Wallace 2015). The use of journalistic identity continued. During the Soviet-Afghan War four Britons were killed in the Panjshir Valley by troops of the Afghan government, which was then pro-Soviet. They were undercover operating as military trainers to the mujahedin. Forged documents including a passport and letters from a news agency were found on the bodies. One man was using the name Stuart Bodmin. The real Stuart Bodmin had never left Britain (Lashmar, 2001).

In 1999 the author investigated the use of forged NUJ press cards by SIS officers in the field and wrote an article in *The Independent* citing sources who said that SIS used journalistic cover (Lashmar, 1999 and 2015a). Sources close to the intelligence services had said that SIS officers had long posed as reporters, a disguise more popular than that of businessmen or academics. SIS’s Directorate of Special Support was credited with forging the NUJ cards. The sources also said several newspaper and magazine editors provided full journalist cover for SIS officers. One SIS officer who posed as a magazine journalist abroad even had a letter of introduction from the editor. In 2001 the author followed up the story after the dissident SIS officer Richard Tomlinson published his book, *The Big Breach: from Top Secret to Maximum Security*. Tomlinson claimed he and other officers frequently posed as journalists while on difficult spying missions (Tomlinson, 2001: 9). Tomlinson, who was assigned to Yugoslavia at the height of the Balkans War to recruit agents, posed as a journalist and used a forged NUJ card to get access to high-level Serbian contacts. Tomlinson claimed that SIS officers use journalistic cover on about four out of every ten missions (Lashmar 2001 and Tomlinson 2001: 134).

## **The US experience**

### The Mighty Wurlitzer

The first major expose of CIA intervention in journalism began in the Californian based radical magazine *Ramparts* in 1967 (Jeffrey-Jones 1998, 153-55). In a later major article in *Rolling Stone* on the CIA in 1977, Carl Bernstein (of Watergate fame) stated that many journalists who covered World War II were close to people in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor of the CIA. Bernstein wrote that when the war ended and many OSS officials went into the CIA, it was only natural that these relationships would continue.

Meanwhile, the first post-war generation of journalists entered the profession; they shared the same political and professional values as their mentors. ‘You had a gang of people who worked together during World War II and never got over it,’ said one Agency official (1977).

After Watergate and revelations of CIA systemic excesses, in 1975 the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities was established under Senator Frank Church and became known as the Church Committee. The committee investigated abuses by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The House of Representatives set up a similar investigation which was headed by Representative Otis Pike and thus became known as the Pike Commission. Both the Church and Pike reports were cursory in this regard but indicated that there had been extensive use of the news media in many different ways by the CIA. The Church report on the intelligence agencies and the media did conclude:

In examining the CIA's past and present use of the U.S. media, the Committee finds two reasons for concern. The first is the potential, inherent in covert media operations, for manipulating or incidentally misleading the American public. The second is the damage to the credibility and independence of a free press which may be caused by covert relationships with the U.S. journalists and media organizations (1976, 197).

But it was not until late 1977 that the sheer scale of involvement was revealed through major pieces of journalism on the CIA and the media. The first, by Joe Trento and Dave Roman, in *Penthouse* magazine revealed the connections between the news agency, the Copley Press and the CIA. Trento and Roman showed that the agency owner James S. Copley cooperated with the CIA for over 30 years. Some twenty three news service employees were also working for the CIA (1997). The second was a 28,000 word article by Bernstein, in *Rolling Stone*, where he claimed that as many as 400 American journalists had worked for the CIA over the previous 25 years. Bernstein detailed the close relationship of many of the American's top journalists of the period with the CIA. The CIA also used British journalists though to this day we do not know who they were, as the CIA has protected their assets (1997). The third came two months later, the *New York Times* published the results of an investigation revealing that in the preceding twenty years, the CIA had owned or subsidized more than fifty newspapers, news services, radio stations, periodicals and other communications facilities, most of them overseas. The *Times* series concluded that at its peak, the CIA's network, 'embraced more than 800 news and public information organisations and individuals' (Brandt, 1997) (see also Jeffrey-Jones 1989, 133; Ranelagh, 1986, 471). In late 1977, the American Society of Newspaper Editors passed a resolution calling upon the agency to include a ban on the use of foreign journalists (E&P, Jan. 14, 1978: 14.) Frank Wisner, the CIA's first chief of political warfare, had liked to describe the CIA propaganda machine as 'the Mighty Wurlitzer' organ able to play any tune he wanted at any time. It took 25 years for the Wurlitzer to play its last number (Wilford 2006).

After further concern over CIA involvement with the news media the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence convened a hearing on July 17 1997. The former hostage Terry Anderson opposed the use of journalists in CIA operations and demanded a ban:

I have been accused of being a spy, not just on the occasion of my captivity, but on other occasions in various places. I was told by a number of people that I was on a list of CIA agents kept by the fundamentalist Shiites who captured me. That is a perception that is very difficult to disprove. It's hard to argue with them. They are very suspicious people (Houghton, 1997).

Since there has been much rumour but little evidence of US Intelligence using journalistic cover. One piece of evidence that the CIA still runs extensive field operations with agents working undercover comes from the 2011 CIA briefing documents, leaked to and published by WikiLeaks (Wikileaks 2014). These detail advice to officers, clearly working undercover, how to avoid attracting attention and being picked up at border controls in Europe. One of the leaked documents, 'Screening at Airports While Maintaining Cover' is dated 2010. It is a secret document produced by the CIA's CHECKPOINT Identity and Travel Intelligence Program to advise CIA operatives on how to deal with secondary screening at airports, as they travel to and from covert CIA operations using false ID, including into and out of Europe. The document's overarching advice is to maintain cover, 'no matter what' (WikiLeaks 2014). Much about the use of journalistic cover by US Intelligence remains secret.

### **Interviews and correspondence with journalists**

For a third element of the research, the author made substantial efforts to contact journalists who were likely to have knowledge during their careers of the issues relevant to this paper's research questions. The author messaged through a closed social media site 'Vulture Club' some 6500 journalists and NGO personnel who have experience of working in war zones, disaster zones and authoritarian countries, requesting any personal experience. The author contacted a further twenty plus journalists directly by email for their experiences. The correspondence was mostly by email and follow through messages as the respondents were mostly abroad or on assignment. Most were UK and US journalists but some well-known reporters from other western nations were approached. Some of the journalists had knowledge or experience of the questions raised, some had suspicions and others had no knowledge. Some respondents noted it is commonplace for foreign correspondents to be accused of being spies, usually for western intelligence agencies, by terror groups, militias and the security forces of authoritarian regimes across the world.

Respondents recognised that the use of journalism as a cover was a problem for journalists and especially those who work in certain hostile environments. Further examples of journalists from the UK and US who had worked for intelligence in the past were proffered. Some were evidenced and some were speculative. There were a number of examples where 'journalists' had raised suspicions that they were working for intelligence undercover. Jon Lee Anderson, foreign correspondent of the New Yorker recalled:

In the 80s I did run across America journos whom I suspected were close to the Agency [CIA], in that old boy network sort of way, but only in a very few cases did I run across spooks posing as journos (including one very specific time I can recount in

El Salvador) but it seems that for a time, the 80s and 90s, anyway, the agency tended more towards businessman covers, in addition to their traditional embassy/official one ie, station chiefs usually were the political attaches. I think this changed again after 9/11 and the big security ramping-up we have seen, ie, that once again the agency has used journalists directly as cover (Anderson 2015).

Another foreign correspondent, Benjamin Hall, stated he believed British intelligence had used journalistic cover up to recent times: ‘I spoke to a former SIS officer, who admitted it and laughed. Claimed he'd done it a few times, including Homs at the start of the uprising’ (2016). Respondents pointed to cases not only relating to the US, UK but also Germany (both East and West), Italy, Russia, China, France, South Africa and Israel. One respondent was concerned about the ‘widespread’ use of journalistic cover by corporate intelligence agencies.

### **Analysis**

The *raison d'être* of intelligence services is to provide the information that maintains the security of the state. This function, in part, enables the state to fulfil a social contract where the citizen surrenders certain rights to government in return for security. The concept for such a contract has evolved from the Enlightenment and philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and more recently Rawls and others have contributed to the discourse. In the liberal democratic model the state provides security while maintaining liberties. Protecting the state is an important role but the methods employed have raised ethical questions. In 1995, Perry noted:

The sources and methods of espionage, the goals and tactics of covert action, and the professional conduct of intelligence officers are matters typically hidden from public scrutiny, yet clearly worthy of public debate and philosophical attention.

Perry said that while the ethical questions had been raised they were mostly procedural.

But what is often missed in such examinations is substantive ethical analysis of intelligence operations themselves (Perry, 1995:1).

The very nature of successful covert operations and spying elicits the problem of illegal or immoral activity. Indeed the *modus operandi* of intelligence agencies, fuelled by popular fictional representation, is tactical illegality and unethical behaviour undertaken in the over-arching interest of the greater good. Oliver Cromwell succinctly summed up the idea: ‘There are great occasions in which some men are called to great services, in the doing of which they are excused from the common rule of morality’ (Paul, 1955, 217). By the very nature of their work some intelligence officers and agents need to operate covertly without revealing their true identity or occupation. They have used a range of covers to enable them to go about their operations. Greville Wynne an SIS agent who worked in the Soviet Union used the cover of a businessman (Wynne 1967). In the early 1990s British and American intelligence put officers under cover into the UNSCOM weapons inspection teams monitoring for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Lashmar and Osborne 1999). Other covers known to be used include aid workers, NGO workers and even missionaries. There can be little doubt that in the massively

expanded post-9/11 intelligence community many officers are using false identities when on field operations.

At the heart of the discussion in this paper is the tension between two fundamental right to life (security) and right to free speech. If the freedom of the press is an extension of the right to free speech and is meant to be vital to the maintenance of democracy, the misuse of journalism raises ethical questions for the intelligence community who have to justify any diminution of that freedom. As can be seen by the cases of Forsyth, Horne and Tomlinson above there have been journalists who have taken the view that their responsibility to their nation's security is greater than their responsibility to journalistic freedom. While some journalists have always valued their independence the author suggests that attitudes have changed over time. The legacy of two world wars, the Cold War and in the case of the British – The Empire - rendered many journalists prone to seeing patriotism as *the* most important value. Vaughan Smith, a founder of the Frontline Club, a London-based venue dedicated to quality war reporting, said those who do agree to do such work were putting their fellow reporters at risk: 'It's a bit like carrying weapons as a journalist. When you make those compromises, you endanger other journalists,' he commented. 'It's most unfortunate and undermines trust in journalism at a time when we can barely afford it' (Burrell 2015). David Omand's admission over the use of journalistic cover does demonstrate that intelligence chiefs know there is an ethical issue. David Leigh has said that reporters are routinely approached by intelligence agents: 'I think the cause of honest journalism is best served by candour. We all ought to come clean about these approaches and devise some ethics to deal with them. In our vanity, we imagine that we control these sources. But the truth is that they are very deliberately seeking to control us' (Keeble 2008). (For a more detailed discussion on the need for an ethical framework for resolving issues between the intelligence community and the news media see Lashmar 2015c)

## Conclusions

Despite the lack of data, there is enough to draw some patterns and conclusions. The answer to the first two research questions is yes - intelligence agencies do use journalistic cover for their spies and use journalists as spies but there are caveats. The interchange between intelligence and news organisations has been complex and often fraught. Some intelligence agents use false journalistic cover in the field, others have had cover provided by news organisations, some have actually worked for news organisations, staff journalists have been known to work for intelligence as well and intelligence agencies have run world-wide news networks for propaganda purposes. There is virtually no contemporary evidence that the UK or US agencies currently engage in the practices outlined in the first two research questions. However, evaluating the evidence it is hard not to conclude that the wholesale intervention over a long period of western intelligence agencies into journalism and the willingness of 'patriotic' or corruptible journalists to work as spies make the accusations of kidnapped journalists being spies, when made by malign groups, more plausible.

The third research question is harder to answer as the impact on the safety of journalists is difficult to quantify. There are enough instances of journalists working for US and UK news

organisations being murdered for ‘being a spy’ to ascertain there is a real and tangible danger. Given the frequency of the justification by terrorist groups, militias and authoritarian regimes that they have arrested, kidnapped, deported, tortured or murdered journalists because they were ‘spies’, the abuse of journalism by intelligence agencies is a significant factor in endangering the lives of journalists who operate in hostile environments. The sheer number of examples of US and UK Intelligence using journalists over the years is so widely known that when terrorists, militias and authoritarian security forces make claims that a journalist is a spy it does not stretch the imagination of their supporters and leaves a real question mark for the wider public. The historic use of journalism cover by spies places news organisations on the defensive when counterclaiming that their people were only pursuing legitimate journalism. But other factors can play out including straightforward anti-Western attitudes, religious schisms and belief that all western journalists are biased. Wars in the Middle East have been covered by a growing number of soldiers turned journalists or cameramen. All this helps blur the distinctions between soldiers, spies and journalists. Jon Lee Anderson noted some of those murdered in the Middle East had previously served in the armed forces:

Peter Kassig [an aid worker] and James Foley both had military backgrounds, which made them more likely to be suspected of being more than journos or aid workers, no doubt. Ditto with Austin Tice the (a former Marine), the first American reporter to have vanished inside Syria, in 2012, and whose whereabouts are still unknown (Anderson 2015).

Andy Weir, the deputy editor of Africa Confidential observed:

Being a foreign correspondent is so much riskier these days than 20 years ago in so many ways it would be hard to isolate spooks using journo cover as increasing the risk any higher than it already is. If you are Brit or US, any developing country militia - Russians and Chinese too, I should think - will assume you are a spy whatever you say or do. I have come across bona fide journalists being asked to report for intelligence, which I would have thought is a far better use of an intelligence service’s resources (2015).

This paper proposes that the following points should be adopted: 1) that news organisations need to be more transparent in explaining their affiliations and financial sources to prevent their journalists coming under suspicion. 2) Foreign correspondents should look to a more rigorous form of accreditation with clear ethical guidelines, declarations of interest and peer oversight with the right to remove the accreditation. 3) Intelligence agencies need to place ethics as a core mission objective. 4) Intelligence agencies should not use journalistic cover or journalists as operatives (and in the US this should not extend only to US nationals but journalists).

In a globalised world such accreditation needs a set of agreed standards. Eugene Patterson made the case succinctly while giving evidence before the House Intelligence Committee in early January 1978, criticising the CIA policy of suborning journalists. ‘On the one hand, our government and our press stand for a belief in expression free of government influence



everywhere,' Patterson testified. 'On the other, the intelligence agency of the United States government reserves the right to subvert journalists anywhere abroad, and its former agents express pride at having done so.' He continued: 'If that is not unilateral disarmament in the war of ideas, the American eagle flies backward' (Hernandez, 1996).

In a globalised world journalists should be exceedingly careful about 'patriotic' motives as their audience is global and engaging in covert intelligence activities have put their innocent colleagues in danger. Regardless of whether contemporary spies are using journalistic cover much damage has already been done and some journalists have paid for that with their lives.

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