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Cross border solidarity in journalist protection and the American paradox

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Abstract

United States governments (including those of states) have a paradoxical record in facilitating press protection. The US, with its middle-eastern allies, imprisoned and killed more media workers than any other nation from 1999 to 2007 but there were few effective collaborative responses from the news industry and considerable media commentary undermining efforts toward accountability. Since then, the encouragement of violence against media, and high profile confinements of journalists, have been domesticated, bringing the struggle for media freedom home to US media as never before. But the US has simultaneously invested heavily in media protection and speech rights outside its borders, and is home to globally prominent press defenders. This chapter examines how an internal industry discourse of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' reporters and the politicization of news production has derailed cross-border solidarity and collaboration among journalists and advocacy groups in the context of this 'American paradox'.

Keywords

Conflict, international journalism, policy, political economy, war

In this critical essay, I draw the attention of readers of this Special Issue to the role of cross-border solidarity as both a protective and a threatening force for journalists. In the context of over one hundred journalists killed in Gaza in just a few months, it is vital to engage with issues of journalist safety and the persistent impunity of states.

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The United States and media freedom

The United States has an unusual and contradictory record: it invests more in promoting press freedom than any other country but has also recently been a leader among nations in harming and imprisoning journalists. In the mid-2000s, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ ranked the US as one of the worst threats to press freedom. This was because the US had imprisoned more journalists in the previous year than all but five other countries. If the CPJ had included a more comprehensive list of temporary detentions of journalists and their supporters, the US would likely ranked highest.

In a notable essay addressing this pattern until late 2003, former ITN editor Nik Gowing (2003) wrote that evidence, "suggests at best a culture of military indifference and inefficiency to the business of explaining the deaths of media personnel. At worst it suggests a policy of endorsing and covering up firstly the targeting, then either the maiming or killing, of media personnel". Two decades after the US invasion of Iraq and some of the most severe attacks on the media, it is reasonable to assert a precedent has been established. The practice of removing journalists and media workers by violence when they are seen as obstructing the objectives of the US government and its allies in the Middle East has become commonplace. This phenomena is, of course, at odds with the US ideals (and Constitutional mandates) of free speech and due process, as well as with that country's global advocacy of press freedom, which is why this essay focusses on this 'American paradox'.

Through analysis of an extensive range of reports of many types (including media, NGO, activist and military), the author determined that at least 46 journalists and media workers were killed by the US military between 1999 and 2007. There is uncertainty in some cases and a lack of standard definitions for 'media worker' or 'journalist', leading to some approximation. About 24 were killed despite substantial evidence that US military command structures were aware that targeted locations housed civilian media workers; in these cases, multiple witnesses confirmed media activities were visible to the attackers. Of the 12 attacks on media facilities since 1999 which resulted in 20 civilian deaths, on three occasions senior US government representatives directly or indirectly acknowledged these attacks occurred despite awareness of ongoing civilian media operations (Paterson, 2014). This represents a new and insufficiently recognized issue: it is neither merely the euphemistically termed "friendly fire" that has harmed journalists in the past, nor clear hostility from a defined enemy. This is a new form of extreme coercion faced by journalists covering wars, coming from the very institutions they once relied on for protection.

The (un)collaborative response to press attacks

Despite these attacks on the media, from 1999 to 2007, by the US and its closest allies, there were few effective collaborative responses from the media industry. Indeed, media commentary often undermined efforts toward accountability. Internal industry debates about 'worthy' versus 'unworthy' journalism and the politicization of news production have hindered cross-border solidarity and cooperation. The media's own tendency to be

dismissive of most attacks on media workers and facilities is, on the surface, difficult to understand.

What makes this dismissal possible is the easy division by the most well-resourced media professionals of all other media organisations into two camps, the "objective" and the "unobjective". Mainstream commercial media routinely engages in "paradigm repair" (Berkowitz, 2000; Reese, 1990). Berkowitz explains that:

> when journalists stray from correctly enacting their professional ideology in a way that is visible to both their peers and to society, ritual news work in the form of paradigm repair is begun to demonstrate that while individuals might have strayed, the institution itself has remained intact. (Berkowitz, 2000)

Berkowitz (ibid) quotes Bishop's (1999) analysis of cases of paradigm repair, in which "'objective' journalists responded by engaging in the ritual of building barriers that would divide objective and unobjective journalists, simultaneously reasserting the objectivity paradigm and redefining which journalists deserved membership within its interpretive community." While the process of news paradigm repair kept criticism of the US military presence in the Middle East, generally, and US actions toward journalists, specifically, generally free of critique in mainstream US and UK news coverage, it is that process of building barriers within the media industry that is salient. Once these barriers are erected, the "unobjective" become, simply, unworthy of defence. Sometimes it is easy to dismiss a set of media workers as "unobjective" and therefore treat their assassination lightly – the US bombing of Serbian public television (1999) or Al Jazeera (2003-2007) are prominent examples.

It is of little consequence that these were professional peers—often trained similarly and sometimes by the same institutions—with whom European and US media organizations frequently collaborated. What matters most is the Western public's perception: outlets from other regions are viewed as propagandistic (or "unobjective"), while mainstream US and European media are seen as non-propagandistic (and therefore "objective"). The idea that a different kind of journalism—whether non-US-centric, pro-government, or nationalist—might be as credible or worthy as Western commercial journalism is not widely accepted in the Western media industry.

An illustration of this dichotomy is the way the highly nationalistic and ethnocentric – often inflammatory – Fox News channel in the US has been simultaneously held in distain by many in US and UK based media, and vehemently defended by them as part of the established, Western, "objective" order, unlike the propaganda organs America has bombed. In October 2009, the Obama administration tried to exclude Fox News from White House press pool briefings, on the grounds that Fox News did not behave like a mainstream news organisation but "almost as either the research arm or the communications arm of the Republican party." But following protests from the other networks in the White House pool (ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC), threatening that if Fox News were excluded they would not participate either, the White House agreed to allow Fox to continue to participate (Greenfield, 2009; Rutenberg, 2009).

In this case, US media could not accept the government deciding what qualifies as legitimate journalism, yet it did not similarly object when the government determined the legitimacy of non-US news organizations and targeted them. This contradiction was evident again as the focus shifted from Iraq to the US itself. WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange, along with prominent international whistleblowers Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and Edward Snowden, faced criticism from US media for disclosing information of public interest. Instead of reporting, expanding on, and analysing the information, many US journalists and commentators concentrated on demonizing and discrediting the sources of these revelations (for analysis, see Brevini et al., 2013). New York Times columnist David Carr (2013) pointed out, in something of an overdue rebuke to his colleagues in US journalism, these weren't unimportant stories:

> we have learned that in the name of tracking terrorists, the N.S.A. has been logging phone calls and e-mails for years, recorded the metadata of correspondence between Americans, and in some instances, dived right into the content of e-mails. The Wiki Leaks documents revealed that the United States turned a blind eye on the use of torture by its Iraqi allies, and that an airstrike was ordered to cover up the execution of civilians. Wiki Leaks also published a video showing a United States Army helicopter opening fire on a group of civilians, including two Reuters journalists.

Carr cautioned that:

> by dwelling on who precisely deserves to be called a journalist and legally protected as such, critics within the press are giving the current administration a justification for their focus on the ethics of disclosure rather than the morality of government behaviour […] the journalists and organizations who did that work find themselves under attack, not just from a government bent on keeping its secrets, but from friendly fire by fellow journalists. What are we thinking?

After 9/11, the patterns of information control, propaganda dissemination, and violence against journalists by the US military became evident, sparking discussions within the international news industry. However, these issues remained largely unaddressed in news coverage, and, unsurprisingly (in accordance with agenda-setting theory), were also largely ignored by the public and most scholars. US government efforts to intimidate the press would likely have been far less effective over the past two decades without support from both commercial and non-commercial online and broadcast media. While right-wing talk radio and Fox News are the most visible examples, it is possible that a large number of right-wing bloggers have had the greatest impact. In 2005, CNN senior executive Eason Jordan mentioned on a panel at the exclusive World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that journalists had been killed not only by "insurgents" but also by the US military. When these remarks were leaked, violating the Forum's rules, conservative bloggers erupted in outrage. Major conservative media outlets like the Wall Street Journal supported calls for Jordan's resignation, leading to a departure settlement with CNN.

One of the few senior media executives who spoke out in support of Jordon was the BBC's head of news (and later, academic) Richard Sambrook, who was also on the panel at Davos. Sambrook told media commentator Jay Rosen:

> Eason's comments were a reaction to a statement that journalists killed in Iraq amounted to 'collateral damage'. His point was that many of these journalists (and indeed civilians) killed in Iraq were not accidental victims—as suggested by the terms 'collateral damage'—but had been 'targeted', for example by snipers […] He clarified this comment to say he did not believe they were targeted because they were journalists, although there are others in the media community who do hold that view (personally, I don't).

Although he hasn't elaborated, Sambrook might have referred to staff at the news agency Reuters, and almost certainly to staff – including senior editors – at Al Jazeera. Both organisations had ample reason to believe they were being targeted, and journalist Ron Suskind's interviews would ultimately provide collaboration that, at least in the case of Al Jazeera, they were (Paterson, 2014). Sambrook recognized that journalists worldwide were both furious and alarmed by US actions, and that a growing movement within the industry was pushing for increased pressure on governments to end the culture of impunity (Sambrook, 2013). His role in founding the International News Safety Institute was part of these efforts. This concern was voiced at the Newsworld gathering of senior television news managers in late 2003, where this author witnessed CNN's senior news manager, along with a senior BBC correspondent and others, expressing alarm over the apparent targeting of journalists by combatants, including those associated with the US military.

Military perceptions of journalism

An ideological hostility to journalists – and disregard for their witnessing role – is not enough to justify the various forms of surveillance, intimidation and violence which have been routinely employed by democratic states. Those have required quasi-legal justification, something which could fit the loosely interpreted and variously constructed "Rules of War". Three myths have circulated widely within the US military, despite a lack of empirical support. These are:

1. The myth of incitement
2. The myth of involvement
3. The myth of the phoney journalist

The myth of incitement is based on the flawed belief that television (which is almost exclusively the focus) portrays military actions in a way that incites enemies to retaliate: that television provokes people to fight. This belief has driven extensive and costly efforts by the US, Israel, Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, other governments to restrict TV coverage of military actions.

The myth of involvement denies the possibility of neutrality, asserting that any media worker is aligned with a side in the conflict. Specifically, it holds that media workers of Middle Eastern descent must support the enemies of the US, or similarly, that journalists of Palestinian origin are presumed to support violent Palestinian resistance groups, as widely understood by the Israeli military. In 2006 the BBC's Richard Sambrook declared "Many US and Israeli troops believe Iraqi and Palestinian journalists are in league with the insurgents […] Journalists and armed forces have made fatal assumptions, unfounded in fact or even practical expectation" (Sambrook, 2006).

The myth of the phoney journalist posits that any media worker could be a disguised enemy combatant and should be treated as a threat. There is no evidence to suggest, within the operational logic of professional electronic media, these situations are common. Despite this, these myths are widely accepted, and formally and informally promoted within governments. They have provided internal justification for the frequent abuse and intimidation of media workers who attempt to operate outside the embedding systems which allow governments control over media coverage.

An example of how such myths spread was a secret message circulating within the US military in Afghanistan in 2004, revealed in WikiLeaks-published "Afghan War logs":

> Three well-trained terrorists (NFI) have been assigned by Osama Bin LADEN to conduct a suicidal attack against [Afghan President] KARZAI. According to the source, the three terrorists will pass Afghanistan border in ten days with counterfeit journalist passports, obtained from an Arab country, potentially PAKISTAN (NFI). They are planning to conduct the attack during a press conference or a meeting held by KARZAI. …They will use their cameras or recorders as RCIED's or IED's [improvised explosive device] in this attack. (Guardian, 2010)

Such reports will have served to confirm to foreign soldiers that anyone with a Middle Eastern appearance, claiming to be a journalist, and carrying a journalist's equipment, may be a combatant on the verge of committing an act of carnage. Plots for insurgents to pose as journalists may or may not have existed, but there appears to be only one such case in the decade of conflict in Afghanistan, when a leader of the Northern Alliance, allied with the US, was allegedly assassinated by suicide bombers posing as journalists.

Bouts of cross-border news industry solidarity

The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to problem of the threat to media workers in conflict zones from the US and other free-expression advocates not being met with outrage, but with silence from global media. There is a superficial logic suggesting that media organizations, which have the capacity to reach thousands, millions, or even billions with their words and images, would react by publicizing these attacks. This reaction would be justified to protect their own personnel and sources and to safeguard their future ability to gather and disseminate information. At the least, there seems to be an economic incentive for such a response.

Nevertheless, for various reasons, attention to journalist casualties rarely occurs. There have been exceptions, suggesting it is not unacceptable for a Western news organisation to focus some reporting on its own people. An example was the well-publicised kidnapping in 2007 of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston in Gaza, which became the focus of a campaign by the BBC to publicise his plight and pressure anyone with influence over the kidnappers. The BBC organised a half hour global broadcast to publicise the kidnapping, which was aired simultaneously by BBC World, BBC News 24, and – remarkably - global competitors Al Jazeera English and Sky News, and the BBC aired frequent stories about the abduction. Johnston was released after 4 months. A similar campaign was waged by French media in an effort to free French journalists kidnapped in Syria. The value of the BBC's effort and commendable nature of interorganizational cooperation when a journalist is in danger is undeniable. However, this incident highlights the striking silence of media organizations regarding the numerous other attacks on journalists from both Western and Arab media outlets.

When Al Jazeera conducted a campaign over several years to draw attention to the plight of one of its cameramen, detained and tortured by the US military and held without charge, other outlets showed scant interest (Campagna, 2006). The New York Times, for example, waited until 2009, well after Sami Al Hajj was released from Guantánamo Bay, to write about his case. While his newspaper and other US media were not making it a prominent story, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof used his online column to advocate examination of the case, and observed in 2006 that when "Sudan detained an American journalist, Paul Salopek, in August in Darfur, journalists and human rights groups reacted with outrage until he was freed a month later. We should be just as offended when it is our own government that is sinking to Sudanese standards of justice" (Kristof, 2006). Similarly, when Telecinco in Spain produced a compelling and meticulously researched documentary about the US military attack on Baghdad's Palestine Hotel, which killed one of their own, the programme received minimal international exposure, despite being produced with an English language version.[1]

The bloody civil war in Algeria (1991-2002) demonstrated that when all sides in a conflict intimidate and target reporters—regardless of their ideology or origin (with at least 70 media staff killed)—the story often vanishes from headlines. However, events in Syria since 2011 suggest a shift: widespread access to mobile phones, video, and Internet technology—sometimes supported by external groups assisting anti-regime activists in sharing their stories—implies that the brutal and mostly asymmetrical nature of the war can be maintained in the public eye, despite a dangerous environment that keeps professional journalists away. This scenario is unfolding in Gaza as of this writing. Sadly, such developments risk reinforcing the notion that the presence of professional journalists is unnecessary.

But we know that media outlets have rarely made significant efforts to publicize attacks on their journalists as news. For instance, Reuters Iraq correspondent Andrew Marshall noted that despite providing substantial information, few US media organizations reported the arrest and torture of Reuters and NBC personnel by US forces in 2004, and none conducted an independent investigation into the incident (Wolper, 2004). After a series of fatal attacks in March and April 2003, where many media workers were killed by

US government actions, veteran war correspondent Robert Fisk tried to initiate debate about the situation. The Independent published an analysis by Fisk under the provocative headline "Is There Some Element in the US Military That Wants to Take Out Journalists?" (Fisk, 2003).

Ultimately though, only a small number of press stories have covered these incidents, and few framed them as part of a broader pattern, as Fisk and Gowing tried to do early on. Media organizations involved have had their editors and senior executives make formal requests for investigations to the Pentagon, the US military, the White House, and Congress. Similarly, press freedom advocacy groups like CPJ and RSF have also demanded transparency. However, these calls for thorough investigations have had minimal impact. The BBC was one of several major organizations that sought direct and repeated explanations from the Pentagon, along with Reuters, Al Jazeera, and CNN. For instance, after a US missile attack in 2001, NiK Gowing (then with the BBC) travelled to Washington to investigate why the BBC's Kabul bureau had been destroyed and its correspondent nearly killed (Knightley, 2003).

Historian Phillip Knightley, after speaking with media managers early in the Iraq war, observed that following Pentagon meetings by the BBC, Al Jazeera, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, "all three organisations concluded that the Pentagon was determined to deter Western correspondents from reporting any war from the 'enemy' side, would view such journalism in Iraq as activity of 'military significance', and might well bomb the area." The BBC did not express that view at the time even if they were convinced of it internally (ibid). The global news agency Reuters has consistently pressed for investigations into the deaths and torture of its staff, despite intimidation and obfuscation from the US, and despite few other major media organizations taking a public stance in condemning attacks on their staff. After the deaths of six of their journalists, the torture of three others, and frequent harassment and detentions, Reuters had reason to be outraged. The organization lodged complaints with the highest levels of the Pentagon.

Their Global Managing Editor complained that US military conduct was spiralling "out of control" (Regan, 2005). The US military's only response to Reuters' requests for investigation following the abduction and torture of their journalists was a threatening demand that they drop their complaint (Harding, 2004). In 2003, 30 news organisations collaborated to write to the US Assistant Secretary of Defence for Public Affairs to say they had, "documented numerous examples of US troops physically harassing journalists and, in some cases, confiscating or ruining equipment, digital camera disks, and videotapes." The letter noted that US military rules stipulate that "media products will not be confiscated or otherwise impounded." A separate letter was sent by Associated Press stating that US troops had been harassing and detaining journalists (Jurkowitz, 2003). There was no immediate indication of any change in US military actions following these complaints. Another high-level approach to the US government might have been more effective. In 2005, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) enlisted Paul Steiger, their board chairman and the Managing Editor of the Wall Street Journal, to reach out to senior Republican Senator John Warner. Steiger's call, along with other communications from CPJ and Reuters, led Warner to question Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld about the detentions and shootings of journalists during a Congressional hearing.

Rumsfeld committed to investigate these, and General George Casey, the top US military commander in Iraq, promised to meet with journalists in Iraq and address their concerns (Regan, 2005). Reuters was encouraged in 2006, when the US military announced new policies to protect journalists in Iraq, including committing to treat detainees claiming to be journalists as "unique" cases to be referred up the chain of command, and a commitment to investigate allegations of abuse of detainees, including, according to Reuters, "a beating in custody that left a Reuters cameraman unconscious." Whether these procedures were the result of Warner's intervention is unclear. US Major General Jack Gardner told Reuters that "watching or filming combat or meeting insurgents were not in themselves grounds for arrest", despite that appearing to have been the basis for numerous arrests in the preceding years (Macdonald, 2006).

One sustained news industry response to the threat outlined in this essay was the creation of the International News Safety Institute (INSI) in 2003. INSI was established to act as a hub for information and to coordinate lobbying efforts with governments. Its formation reflected the belief among news managers that a more collaborative, focused, and proactive approach was needed to address rising violence against the press. Additionally, several non-governmental organizations dedicated to defending freedom of expression and journalists' rights have long been active. Although often funded by media companies, these organizations, such as Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation of Journalists, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, maintain independence from specific media entities and are at the forefront of supporting journalists in distress and investigating attacks on the media.

Such positive trends in protecting cross border journalism are offset by continuing ideological divisions concerning the perception of reporting risks, and these differences were highlighted following the Palestine Hotel attack in 2003. Some conservative commentary, particularly from US and Canadian outlets, rejected the notion of a military responsibility to protect the media and were quick to place blame on journalists for their own situations. Such reporting and comment have done much to diminish collective media response to the "friendly threat." A Canadian reporter, having observed some reporters question military briefers about the deaths of their colleagues, opined "Who cares what else is happening in the war: Journalists are being shot! How naive" (Gunter, 2003).

With little sign of a media industry unified in defence of all media workers, a final example illustrates the extent of disagreement about the nature of the problem. Sambrook has suggested as a means of reducing attacks on journalists "a media murder index which could be built into country profiles that would be used as a basis for determining international aid." He noted that the World Bank froze $250 million in loans to the Kenyan government as a response to a violent raid on Kenyan media outlets. This recommendation unfortunately reinforces assumptions that it is for the West to police the rest, and the self-appointed policeman is above reproach.

By one accounting, the position generally (though not consistently) espoused by the US government and echoed by the US media, is that only a few legitimate journalists were killed by the US military and in every case, these were unavoidable accidents of war. A contrasting, though no less valid, perspective is that every death of a journalist or media

worker is a deliberate act, whether ordered by the military hierarchy or not, given that it takes a rational person to operate the technology of warfare, and given that every military has a legal and moral obligation to ensure that non-combatants are not on the receiving end of that technology.

The domestication of anti-press violence

Since the early 2000s, the encouragement of violence against media, and confinements of journalists, have been domesticated, bringing the struggle for media freedom home to US media as never before. In 2024, the US moved from the 42nd to 45th position in the Reporters with Borders media freedom index (RSF, 2004). One reason for that decline is the continuing US attempts to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange (a threat which ended in 2024). RSF note that in addition to violence against the press which has been escalating since the 2016 accension of Donald Trump to the presidency, the US became an environment where "journalists have had to work in dangerous conditions and have faced an unprecedented climate of animosity and aggression during protests, where unprovoked physical attacks have occurred on clearly identified reporters." They add "more than a dozen states and communities in the US have proposed or enacted laws to limit journalists' access to public spaces, including barring them from legislative meetings and preventing them from recording the police." The problem in the US extends well beyond rhetorical and physical attacks on the media to patterns of state obstruction. Index on Censorship (2021) quotes Thomas Hughes, executive director of Article 19, stating "The reality of shrinking newsrooms and financial resources for news media makes the adherence of authorities to both the letter and spirit of the Sunshine Law ever more important. The disregard being shown poses the question whether the current legal structure is fit for purpose".

They conclude that after the capital riot in 2021, the United States "has been seen, rightly or not, as the epicentre of the Free World, the defender of democratic values and most importantly a beacon of hope for those that have none. This has been undermined by Donald Trump's leadership nearly every day since he took office 4 years ago." They went on to warn "Repressive regimes around the world have already and will continue to use these events to undermine the concept of America and American values in their own countries" (ibid).

The paradox of US investment in international journalism

The United States has done much to exacerbate the divisions within professional media which mitigate effective collaborative responses to anti-press violence, while simultaneously increasing danger to media workers. Whether through accident or design, they've accomplished both through investment of US public funds in propaganda broadcasting, especially in Iraq. While some propaganda efforts are conducted by the US military and broadly recognised as such, the most ambitious and costly efforts mimic commercial news broadcasters, only with a tightly controlled pro-US agenda. The Washington based Iraqi

television broadcaster al-Hurra was funded by Congress in 2003 and went on the air in 2004. A Statewatch and International Federation of Journalists report wrote,

> They claim to be editorially independent. But the explicit intention is to provide an alternative to broadcasters such as Al-Jazeera or Al-Arabiya and the station struggles for credibility when it luxuriates in funding from US Congress worth $62m for its first year. It is by far the largest single international media development project ever funded. Not surprisingly, al-Hurra provokes distrust and scepticism from Arab critics (White, 2005).

Given the widespread view of al-Hurra journalists as representatives of the occupying power, many faced attacks from insurgent groups. Interestingly, though, there were few accounts of US troops targeting or harassing al-Hurra journalists. By supporting journalists to fulfil a clearly propagandistic role, the US heightened public distrust and animosity towards the media, pulling more civilian media workers into the conflict. Additionally, the creation of competing media factions hindered efforts for domestic and international journalists to collaborate in Iraq, impacting both daily newsgathering and initiatives for improved protection and recognition of journalistic work. Although rare, short-lived partnerships between rival news organizations were seen as crucial in saving many journalists during the Yugoslav civil war (Paterson, 2011).

The US has also made significant investments in protecting media and speech rights globally and is home to leading press advocacy groups like the CPJ, referenced here. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a quasi-autonomous NGO funded by the US government, runs democracy-building programs worldwide, notably through the Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA), established in 2004. According to one of its former directors, NED was founded in 1983 to openly pursue objectives that the CIA had secretly worked on for decades (ProPublica, 2010).

While primarily a research organisation, CIMA advocate for Western media development efforts and work alongside the US State Department and development agency, US AID, to evaluate funded media and journalism projects around the world. CIMA found in a recent report that the US government spent $667 million on media development around the world between 2010 and 2019, but they argue that despite the American financial commitment, "Out of the more than $200 billion of development aid spent each year, just $317 million on average is committed to support media freedom, pluralism, and independence" (CIMA, 2024). The report identifies six donors providing most media development foreign aid: the United States, Germany, Sweden, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom.

The ongoing US government commitment to investing in what they regard as independent media around the world (especially in the global South) brings us back to what I have termed "the American paradox". With a poor track record of press protection by its own military forces, and those of its allies, internationally, and with an increasingly threatened press domestically, the United States has a paradoxical record in facilitating press protection given their global promotion of independent and unfettered press reporting. A crucial and problematic component of this paradox is the tendency by media itself to divide media victims of violence into worthy and unworthy victims instead of

loudly advocating for all media and using their economic might to pressure for effective media protection. This tendency unfortunately and starkly contrasts with the increasing practice of collaborative risk sharing, highlighted in other parts of this special issue.

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Note

1. This author has presented the Telecinco film at screenings in the US and UK; the only US broadcast was in the current affairs programme Democracy Now, which had a limited viewership online and via community access channels in some US cities.

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