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FBI Misrepresentation of Orlando Killer's Alleged « 911 Call » and Allegiance to the « Islamic State »

Ignores U.S. Foreign Policy Motivation

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*In the aftermath of the horrific mass murder at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando over the weekend in which 50 people were killed, media including CNN, USA Today, NPR,NBC News, and CBS News, all reported that the gunman called 911 during his murderous rampage and pledged allegiance to ISIS. None of the journalists writing for any of these news outlets heard the call themselves; they all cite the FBI as their source.*The U.S. government has been engaged in a war against the self-professed Islamic State for the last two years.
Their military intervention consists of a bombing campaign against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria. Hyping the threat members connected to the terror group – or spiritually loyal to it – pose to American citizens is supportive of U.S. foreign policy. If ISIS, or people claiming to act on behalf of ISIS, are a real danger to Americans, it bolsters the notion that the group is a threat to national security and helps justifies the government's military response.

The FBI seems eager to show itself as disrupting ISIS plots in the States. As Adam Johnson has written in *FAIR*, the FBI has put Americans in contact with informants who claim to represent ISIS and then led the targets to believe they would help the targets join the terrorist organization. The media have then conflated this with an « ISIS Plot » and « ISIS Support, » when no members of ISIS were ever involved in any way.

The FBI's motivation to portray events in a way that supports U.S. foreign policy, and its history of portraying its actions in a way that has served to hype an ISIS threat should make journalists cautious about taking officials' words at face value. Especially in the case of a 911 call, which is a public record in Florida, proper journalistic due diligence would be to consult the actual source of the claims being disseminated.

Instead, not a single journalist appears to have done this with Orlando killer Omar Mateen's 911 call.

On Tuesday, CNN aired interviews of eyewitnesses to the shooting spree who described their harrowing encounters with the gunman inside the club. Patience Carter, who was inside a bathroom stall feet from the gunman when he called 911, said he told the dispatcher that « the reason why he was doing this is because he wants America to stop bombing his country. » (Mateen is a native of the United States, but he was presumably referring to Afghanistan, where both of his parents are from.) She said he then declared that « from now on he pledges his loyalty to ISIS. »

This demonstrates that his primary motive for his terror attack was retaliation for the U.S.

aggression in Afghanistan, where nearly 100,000 people have been killed since the illegal U.S. invasion in 2001. His mention of ISIS seems merely adjunct to what he admits was his justification for the attack. His motivation precedes his ideological alignment with ISIS, not the other way around.

Anti-war activists have long argued that overseas military operations endanger not only the populations whose countries are invaded, occupied and bombed, but Americans in the United States who are at risk of terrorist retaliation from people outraged by the death and destruction war inevitably produces to the point of being willing to resort to violence themselves.

Carter's version of the 911 call reveals a very different picture than the partial one revealed by the FBI and reprinted by each of the largest news organizations. The complete conversation depicts Mateen as indicating that he considered his actions a response to U.S. foreign policy. Of course, the murder of innocent civilians is always reprehensible and can never be justified by claiming they are a response to a state's military aggression, regardless of how deadly and devastating such military operations are. But it should be predictable that some people will use this rationalization regardless and seek out soft targets in the country whose government they claim to be retaliating against.

The FBI chose to omit Mateen's professed motive entirely when recounting the 911 call to the media, and merely state that he professed allegiance to ISIS. Perhaps they recognized how putting Mateen's call in context may lead people to question whether U.S. wars in Afghanistan (and Iraq) raise the terrorist threat at home.

After all, this is not the first time this has happened. The surviving Boston Marathon bomber cited the U.S. wars abroad as his motivation for committing the attack that killed three people and maimed dozens more.

It is not clear whether any journalist even asked to hear the 911 call themselves. But it is clear that they chose to disseminate second-hand information when the primary source should have been easily accessible. If it was not made available (as required by law), the public deserves to know that it was suppressed and be given an explanation why.

Media stenographers parroted government officials' descriptions of the call, which left out the killer's professed motivation for his politically motivated attack and failed to put the ISIS claim in any context. Unsurprisingly, their misrepresentation served the government's policy agenda and avoided having the incident serve as an example of a negative consequence of U.S. foreign policy – one that anti-war dissenters have used in arguing against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since the War on Terror was launched more than a decade and a half ago.

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