

## ZNET MAINSTREAM MEDIA CENSORED

A New Pentagon System of 'Script Approval' Suggests The Pentagon Will Have Nothing To Worry About

By Robert Fisk; THE INDEPENDENT (UK); February 25, 2003

Already, the American press is expressing its approval of the coverage of American forces, which the US military intends to allow its reporters in the next Gulf war. The boys from CNN, CBS, ABC and *The New York Times* will be "embedded" among the US marines and infantry. The degree of censorship hasn't quite been worked out. But it doesn't matter how much the Pentagon cuts from the reporters' dispatches. A new CNN system of "script approval" – the iniquitous instruction to reporters that they have to send all their copy to anonymous officials in Atlanta to ensure it is suitably sanitized – suggests that the Pentagon and the Department of State have nothing to worry about. Nor do the Israelis.

**Indeed, reading a new CNN document, "Reminder of Script Approval Policy," fairly takes the breath away.** "All reporters preparing package scripts must submit the scripts for approval," it says. "Packages may not be edited until the scripts are approved... All packages originating outside Washington, LA (Los Angeles) or NY (New York), including all international bureaus, must come to the ROW in Atlanta for approval." The date of this extraordinary message is 27 January. The "ROW" is the row of script editors in Atlanta who can insist on changes or "balances" in the reporter's dispatch. "A script is not approved for air unless it is properly marked approved by an authorized manager and duped (duplicated) to burcopy (bureau copy)... When a script is updated it must be re-approved, preferably by the originating approving authority."

Note the key words here: "approved" and "authorized." CNN's man or woman in Kuwait or Baghdad – or Jerusalem or Ramallah – may know the background to his or her story; indeed, they will know far more about it than the "authorities" in Atlanta. But CNN's chiefs will decide the spin of the story.

CNN, of course, is not alone in this paranoid form of reporting. Other U.S. networks operate equally anti-journalistic systems. And it's not the fault of the reporters. CNN's teams may use clichés and don military costumes – you will see them do this in the next war – but they try to get something of the truth out. Next time, though, they're going to have even less chance. But the system of "script approval" that has so marred CNN's coverage has got worse. In a further and even more sinister message dated 31 January this year, CNN staff are told that a new computerized system of script approval

will allow “authorized script approvers to mark scripts (i.e. Reports) in a clear and standard manner. Script Eps (executive producers) will click on the coloured APPROVED button to turn it from red (unapproved) to green (approved). When someone makes a change in the script after approval, the button will turn yellow.” Someone? Who is this someone? CNN’s reporters aren’t told.

But when we recall that CNN revealed after the 1991 Gulf War that it had allowed Pentagon “trainees” in to the CNN newsroom in Atlanta, I have my suspicions.