

Reading Surveillance in Hollywood Film *Behind Enemy Lines*

Dr. Nancy S Rethinam, Ph.D., M.A., B.Ed., PGDEPMA, PGDCJ

Independent Researcher, Institute of English, Kerala University

nancy.sr40@yahoo.co.in

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Abstract

Hollywood films since antiquity consistently enjoyed undeterred popularity among the spectators around the world. The knowledge that reached the audience through films brought to front, plural views, imaginings and representations at the individual and the collective level. It is not different in the case of technological innovations like surveillance and monitoring systems as well. This article tries to critically analyze the representation of surveillance in Hollywood film, *Behind Enemy Lines* from the perspectives of culture studies. It also focuses on the process of intermeshing of representation of meanings mediated through the film and the manipulation of audience to favour such techniques which disrupts one's privacy and freedom. The proposed article encapsulates how the select film explains away the plural views and imaginings paving way for surveillance.

Keywords: Hollywood Film *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), Surveillance, knowledge, ideology

Surveillance, an act of watching, is an intervention. The English word, 'surveillance' is derived from the combination of a Latin word 'vigilare' (keep watch) and a French word 'sur' (over). According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Surveillance means "the act of carefully watching a person suspected of a crime" (1578). Surveillance is a nonviolent means of intervention in which a party or country carefully watches another party or country and collects necessary information with or without the permission of the other person or country with which intervention takes place. It is an intervention into the freedom or privacy or secret of others. To quote:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constrains. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost. (Foucault 155)

A continuous vigilance on the society and its citizens is a mark of surveillance tactics. The process of stimulating a need for surveillance through Hollywood entertainments can be understood clearly from the perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory formulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson opined that “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). Lakoff and Johnson also posited that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of other” (5). To put it more clearly, our intellect (cognitive) mixes the concrete and abstract as well as real and imaginary. This mixing up of the concrete and the abstract ideas enable the people who watch the films to favour surveillance mechanisms.

The film selected for the analysis 2001 American big screen with a box office collection of about 100 million dollars, *Behind Enemy Lines*. It belongs to the genre of Hollywood action adventure films. The starring personalities include Owen Wilson as Lieutenant Burnett (Longhorn), Gene Hackman as Admiral Leslie McMahon Reigart and Gabriel Macht as Lieutenant Jeremy Stackhouse (Smoke). *Behind Enemy Lines* is directed by John Moore and produced by John Davis under the company Davis Entertainment. It is a film which is distributed by 20th Century Fox Corporation, a company which undertakes big projects. The film covers the story of the American fighter pilots Longhorn and Smoke shot down in Bosnia and their further adventurous struggle for life.

Behind Enemy Lines imparts knowledge as well as seemingly real experience of surveillance or intervention techniques and mechanisms with a humanitarian purpose attached. There is a chain of reasons also which follows such mechanisms or techniques that add legitimacy to the American humanitarian surveillance discussed in this Hollywood entertainment. The very situation of turning of pleasure events like parties, celebrations etc into a sight of horror, danger and pity because of a terrorist attack will of course shake the foundations of morality, codes and conducts of even a person of strong character. This will trigger an urgent need and a favourable attitude in the audience for the application of various modes of surveillance and monitoring systems to avoid such horrors and collateral damages. The fundamental intention behind such episodes and discussions about the threats and conflicts through Hollywood entertainments is to imbibe in the mind of the people an unavoidable need for surveillance.

The images and narrative of the US film *Behind Enemy Lines* breed a powerful urge in the minds of people to favour ‘American’ surveillance. The process of internalization of a particular idea can be clarified with the help of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus explained by the leading Structuralist and Marxist philosopher from France, Louis Althusser. It is through this state apparatus, an imaginary relationship of individuals with their real conditions of existence is established. It is not reality, but its correspondence to reality which makes internalization possible. Same process continues in the internalization of an urgent need for American surveillance

mechanisms also. The events and incidents which are propounded through the select Hollywood film have an imaginary transposition to the real situations of life.

To put it in a slightly modified manner, Hollywood incorporates the real world incidents and events in the missions undertaken by the action adventure heroes of the film. This overlapping and merging bring about a justifiable blurring of real and unreal as well as fake and truth which enables a fertile land to sprout, spread, flourish and also condition the minds of subjects who watch the movies. In short, Hollywood evolves the minds of the spectators by transposing their imaginations.

With the media created supranational government image, the self-proclaimed authoritarian government of America dares to police the whole world, on behalf of the self-ordained missions. The select film has something to testify the world concerning the American surveillance. It explains cases of surveillance and security mechanisms adopted by America on how they aid for humanitarian purpose and the project is termed as American humanitarian surveillance. Media have the capability to project that all the surveillance interventions have certain precipitating reasons and the rationale, and it follows a chain of correlatives which adjoins strength to their claim.

On the basis of the aforesaid theories and concepts, the select film is carefully analyzed in order to open our eyes to perceive the nuances through which Hollywood prompts the process of internalization of American humanitarian surveillance. *Behind Enemy Lines* covers Bosnia and Herzegovina between the time period 1992 and 1996. The international armed conflict, Bosnian war was intervened by NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization) because of the increasing rate of war crimes. To give a halt to the war crimes against civilians, NATO has brought into existence a code, 'No Fly Zone' which is known as Operation Deny Flight where any variety of military bustle is prohibited.

Because of his eagerness to tussle and do adventure, Chris Burnett, the fighter pilot moves a paper to his officials about his life without adventure in the US aircraft carrier in the Adriatic Sea. To recompense boring, Lt. Chris Burnett, a Marine fighter pilot, and Lt. Jeremy Stackhouse another pilot with same position are sent for a reconnaissance mission. During the mission, they dare to police a demilitarized area or 'no fly area'. According to the chapter four of *US Army Field Manual* of 1992:

Reconnaissance is a mission to obtain information by visual observation or other detection methods, about the activities and resources of an enemy or potential enemy, or about the meteorologic, hydrographic or geographic characteristics of a particular area. (7)

The camera progresses with Chris Burnett and Jeremy Stackhouse in their Mc Donnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet, the twin engine supersonic, all weather carrier capable multirole combat jet designed as both a fighter (F) and attack (A) aircraft ready for a mission. This analogous kind of fighter plane's targeted missions include fighter escort (a second world war concept of escorting bombers to and from their targets to achieve an objective), aerial reconnaissance, air defence, air interdiction (AI) or deep air support (DAS- the employment of preventive attacks against the targets to hinder a future attack), close air support to friendly forces etc.

Aerial reconnaissance undertaken in this film is a surveillance method as well as an intervention assignment into the war free area or demilitarized zone of Bosnia. Unfortunately, this intrusion is identified by the Bosnian forces under the local Bosnian (Serb) paramilitary leader, Miroslav Lokar. Fearing the result of publishing his secret genocidal campaign against the Bosnian civilians, the F/A-18 Hornet of the American pilots' is shot down. The Bosnian army kills one of the pilots and the rest of the discourse centres on the life of the other pilot who is caught behind enemy lines and his attempt to stay alive to testify the dreadfulness he victimized. The mass graveyard discovered in the demilitarized zones of Bosnia testifies the cruelties that occurred during the civil war in Bosnia. This is followed by a series of inhuman activities uncovered by the pilot caught behind the boundary who continues his journey through the tundra forests of Bosnia till the very end of the film.

The mass grave and the pathetic life of the natives of Bosnia unfasten a new prospect for the audience to rationalize such surveillance and interference initiated by America. All the counter attacks or resistances are tactfully solved in this particular manner. This film caught the attention of the media as it is based on the real story of an American pilot caught behind the enemy lines. Even though the mission is planned exclusively for Chris Burnett, later it emerges as a genuine mission that facilitates the world to open eyes against the inhuman activities taking place in the demilitarized zones.

The reconnaissance mission undertaken by Burnett testifies the genocide during the Bosnian civil war epoch. Chris Burnett's version of this reconnaissance mission, to quote:

They killed my pilot...Because we took pictures of the graves.
And I know where they are And I'm gonna get in,
So he didn't die for no reason (*Behind Enemy Lines*).

The truth discovered about the demilitarized zone generates a positive attitude and a public consent for such photo reconnaissance undertakings further too. Thereby, the humanitarian surveillance mission into the demilitarized sector and the further sore state of affairs faced by the pilot behind the enemy lines to save his life as well as to reach the reality to the world, condition

the minds of the audience to favour such actions without any confrontation. Thus, the unquenchable craving for adventure felt by the American pilot paves favourable attitude towards an American humanitarian surveillance mission.

Later the hurdles which the American soldier undergoes and the unfair acts and paths which the Serbs pursue accelerate the generation of support for an American intrusion. The scene in which Bazda (Serbian soldier) who steps on a landmine and the cruelty in Sasha to abandon his soul mate to fate adds fuel to the fire of revenge against Sasha who shot the hurt US pilot at the beginning of the plot. This chain of events that harm others, from the part of Serbians, maintains a positive status for fierce or peaceful American humanitarian surveillance missions.

The reason behind the delay in rescue attempt as explained by NATO Naval Commander, Admiral Juan Miguel Piquet is that the lost pilot is in a military activity prohibited area and a violation of this may ground grave hostility and war which will distress and devastate countless civilians in that area. This assessment highlights a great American care for world peace. Also, it gives us a false patience image that they are willing to compromise the death of two American soldiers for world peace.

The Hollywood film *Behind Enemy Lines* draws America a new identity, an identity of patience and forgiveness when the fighter pilots desperately evade the deadly missiles pursuing them and serves to uncover the Serbian horrors. The involvement of America in the military action prohibited area of Bosnia is justified by the photographs and videos which the NATO reconnaissance mission captured. At last, the surviving US fighter pilot Burnett confers the native Bosnians, an American promise and hope for a serene life. Following this promise, the rescue mission commences from USS Carl Vinson, to liberate Burnett as well as the Bosnian civilians from the brutal clutches of their paramilitary commander, Admiral Miroslav Lokar.

The liberation of Chris Burnett as a living soul by the American navigators is a blow to the Serbian authorities because he is a living testimony against all their cruelties in Bosnia against American pilot, Muslim guerrillas and Serbian civilians. With great complexity Chris Burnett pays a tribute to his co-pilot, Jeremy Stackhouse who has lost his life in the reconnaissance mission by fetching the digital record of the photographs of the mass graveyard from the enemy lines.

The film incorporates many scenes from satellite and also actual shots that are caught in the sight of the lost US fighter pilot Burnett sporadically. The satellite provides the outlook of an individual running through the tundra forest of Bosnia and at a particular moment the spectators locate him lying down without any further movement of life. The US officials suspect the death of the individual who is identified as Burnett. This prospect merges into the enemy quest for Burnett.

Enemy soldiers searching for Burnett stop just near where he is lying and go back leaving Burnett unnoticed. To the wonder of the audience, this scene fades out to what has happened to Burnett in reality. He has fallen into a mass grave where he protected himself under a dead body. The Serbians who hunt for Burnett could not locate him because he was hiding under the nasty environment.

Added to these horrors, a real life like experience is inculcated where US militia seeks the help of satellites to spot the lost Burnett as mentioned earlier. This strategy of satellite is not as effective as portrayed in the film. Otherwise the authorities could have found out what has happened to the Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 which disappeared on 8th March 2014 on the way to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur. If such methods existed, they could have found the secret places of Dictator Saddam Hussein and the terrorist Osama bin Laden effortlessly.

While technology fails in reality, the film confirms that the satellite images are smart to detect the location of Burnett who is lying underneath a corpse in the mass grave. The intermixing of fake and real by means of technologies blur the boundaries of possible and impossible and creates a very massive impact on the audience about the effectiveness of the US technology and their militia. This prompts the audience to assume that the American technologies are effective even behind the enemy lines.

The investigatory views and judgments gained by such surveillance tactics, mediated through the US made film, *Behind Enemy Lines*, impart the audience risk, uncertainty, insecurity, suspicion etc. This in turn, turns on a positive attitude and need for such techniques, where blurring of public and private and a wilful surrendering to such surveillance techniques occur. To put it another way, the inhuman human activities identified by the surveillance tactics serve to generate a favourable attitude in the audience towards such security measures. This leads to the manipulation of social control with minimum expenditure of force. When things become internalized, control functions naturally.

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