

The Battle Over Redaction in Key U.S. Military and Intelligence Memoirs

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In recent years, a number of high-profile books by former U.S. military and intelligence personnel have faced extensive redactions, sparking debates about the balance between national security and public transparency. *Silenced Truths: The Battle Over Redaction in Key U.S. Military and Intelligence Memoirs* delves into the experiences of authors like Dennis Fritz, Anthony Shaffer, and Mark Fallon, each of whom sought to offer insights on pivotal U.S. policies and covert actions. From Fritz's *Deadly Betrayal* and Shaffer's *Operation Dark Heart* to Fallon's *Unjustifiable Means*, these memoirs reveal critical perspectives on the Iraq War, post-9/11 interrogation tactics, and intelligence strategies. Yet, government-imposed redactions have left significant gaps in these narratives, often obscuring details about controversial decisions and ethical dilemmas. This article examines the implications of these redactions, asking whether pre-publication review policies, originally intended to protect security, may sometimes serve as a tool to control the narrative of American military history.

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Section 1: Redaction and Pre-Publication Review in the U.S.

Pre-publication review is a process that requires former military and intelligence personnel to submit any writings or materials related to their official duties to their respective agencies for review before publication. This process is primarily intended to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of classified information that could harm national security. Agencies like the Department of Defense (DoD), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other parts of the intelligence community conduct these reviews. Officials who held positions with access to sensitive information, even if retired or no longer active, must ensure their publications comply with security guidelines before their works are released to the public.

Legal Basis and Historical Roots

The legal foundation for pre-publication review is rooted in national security law, especially as it pertains to safeguarding classified information from unauthorized disclosure. This process became a legal standard following the landmark case of former CIA officer Frank Snepp. Snepp's memoir, *Decent Interval*, published in 1977, detailed his experiences during the fall of Saigon in the Vietnam War. Snepp did not submit his book for review, and the CIA sued him, resulting in a U.S. Supreme Court ruling against him. The court upheld that government employees who had access to sensitive information have a fiduciary obligation to seek agency clearance before publication, and it enforced a "constructive trust" over his book's royalties to prevent him from profiting from it. This case established that pre-publication review is legally enforceable and necessary for national security protection.

The Snepp case underscored the U.S. government's right to enforce pre-publication review for those with access to classified information, even after their official service ends. This requirement has since expanded and is routinely applied across agencies where employees handle sensitive intelligence or military information. Many agencies, such as the CIA and DoD, now require former employees to sign lifetime nondisclosure agreements as a condition of employment. These agreements obligate individuals to comply with the pre-publication review process indefinitely, regardless of their career stage or location.

Key Criticisms of Redaction and Pre-Publication Review

While intended to protect sensitive information, the pre-publication review process has drawn criticism for what some see as overreach, selective enforcement, or even political motivations. Critics argue that the redaction process often extends beyond the legitimate need to protect classified information, effectively censoring opinions or facts that might be unfavorable to government narratives. This has led to allegations that the review process can be used to stifle whistleblowers or critics, especially those aiming to shed light on controversial policies or actions, such as intelligence practices, military interventions, or government malfeasance.

One of the main critiques is the inconsistency in enforcement. For instance, former officials like Frank Snepp and Anthony Shaffer (author of *Operation Dark Heart*) encountered heavy redactions or legal repercussions, while others, such as Douglas Feith, were allowed to publish without similar levels of scrutiny despite discussing comparable topics. Critics also argue that excessive redactions compromise the integrity of memoirs, distorting the author's narrative and ultimately hindering the public's understanding of critical historical events and policies. Authors like Jose Rodriguez, former head of the CIA's National Clandestine Service, have argued that the redactions imposed on his work diluted his account, leading to an incomplete or even misleading portrayal of events.

Further, some question whether the pre-publication review process strikes a fair balance between security and transparency, especially in cases where the redacted information is widely known or has been previously disclosed. This debate emphasizes the need for potential reform to ensure that redactions serve legitimate security concerns rather than unduly censoring public information and discourse.

Section 2: Dennis Fritz and *Deadly Betrayal*

Deadly Betrayal: The Truth About Why the United States Invaded Iraq by Dennis Fritz, published by OR Books and supported by the Eisenhower Media Network, examines the inner workings of the Bush administration's decisions leading up to the Iraq War. As a retired Marine Corps Command Chief Master Sergeant, Fritz

provides an insider's view of the alleged manipulation of intelligence to support the case for war. Through his work within the Pentagon and proximity to senior officials, including General Richard Myers (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, Fritz observed firsthand the pressure placed on intelligence agencies to present information justifying the invasion. The book offers a critical perspective on how intelligence was reportedly shaped and filtered to align with policy goals, bringing to light what Fritz describes as a systematic effort to craft public and congressional support for an invasion many Pentagon insiders were hesitant about.

Redaction and Its Impact on Fritz's Message

Fritz's book faced substantial redactions due to his access to sensitive documents from his role on the Declassification Review Team (DRT) at the Pentagon. The DRT was responsible for reviewing and preparing pre-war planning documents for declassification, many of which Fritz claims revealed the fabricated intelligence justifications for the invasion of Iraq. However, during the review of his manuscript, the Pentagon enforced heavy redactions, removing large portions of the book that detailed specific intelligence practices and internal discussions. These redactions, enforced without court intervention but rather through internal warnings and the mandatory pre-publication review, limited Fritz's ability to fully document his allegations and left readers with an incomplete view of the mechanisms that led to the war.

The redactions not only obscured key aspects of Fritz's account but also impacted the reception of *Deadly Betrayal*. While readers and reviewers found his narrative compelling, the gaps created by redactions fueled skepticism among some critics, who felt that Fritz's message was hampered by the missing information needed to substantiate his claims fully. For instance, although Fritz aimed to provide evidence of what he saw as an intentional deception, many of the records he reviewed were redacted, leading some to perceive his critique as lacking sufficient documentary support. These limitations reduced the book's effectiveness in painting a detailed picture of the motives behind the Iraq invasion, which Fritz claimed involved not only U.S. interests but also geopolitical calculations aimed at weakening the influence of groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

The Impact of Redactions on Public Understanding

The redactions imposed on *Deadly Betrayal* highlight the challenges that former military and intelligence officials face when attempting to share insider perspectives on controversial government actions. By removing substantial parts of Fritz's account, the review process arguably diluted the book's narrative power, making it harder for readers to grasp the full scope of his allegations against senior officials in the Bush administration. Critics and supporters alike point out that these omissions weaken public understanding of how intelligence might have been selectively used or manipulated to support predetermined policy decisions. Furthermore, the redacted content left out crucial context, potentially skewing the public's perception of the Iraq War's origins and motivations.

Despite these limitations, *Deadly Betrayal* adds an essential voice to the discourse on the Iraq War, particularly as it comes from a senior non-commissioned officer rather than a high-ranking political appointee. By shedding light on his observations, even in a restricted form, Fritz contributes to the ongoing conversation about transparency in government decision-making and the ethical obligations of military and intelligence leaders to the public. His work, bolstered by OR Books and the Eisenhower Media Network's support, underlines the complexities and controversies surrounding the pre-publication review process, especially when authors seek to critique government policies directly tied to national security.

Section 3: Anthony Shaffer and *Operation Dark Heart*

Anthony Shaffer, a former Army intelligence officer with over two decades of experience, held key roles in military intelligence, particularly in Afghanistan, where he served with the Defense Intelligence Agency. His work involved high-stakes counterintelligence operations targeting Taliban forces and Al-Qaeda networks. Shaffer's expertise in intelligence led him to manage crucial missions in Operation Dark Heart, an effort that included field operations aiming to track and dismantle terrorist cells. His memoir, *Operation Dark Heart*, was intended to offer a detailed account of these experiences and insights into counterterrorism efforts during the early years of the War on Terror.

The Controversy Surrounding *Operation Dark Heart*

Operation Dark Heart became highly controversial due to the Department of Defense's response to its initial publication. Shaffer submitted his manuscript for pre-publication review, and the DoD granted preliminary approval. However, after the first print run, DoD officials reconsidered, claiming the book contained classified information. The Pentagon subsequently intervened and took the unprecedented step of purchasing and destroying the entire initial print run—some 9,500 copies. This move was justified by the claim that it was necessary to protect national security. After this, Shaffer was required to make extensive redactions in the second print run, covering information on military intelligence tactics, operations, and personnel involved in Afghanistan.

This episode raised significant concerns about the pre-publication review process and whether it was being used consistently. Initially approved, *Operation Dark Heart* only faced censorship after production had begun, which was unusual given that most redactions occur during the initial review. Critics pointed to this reversal as a sign of the DoD's fluctuating standards, as well as the potential for political motivations to override initial clearance decisions. Shaffer and his supporters argued that the government's move went beyond protecting classified information, potentially censoring information embarrassing to certain government agencies or officials involved in early counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan.

Complexity and Inconsistency in the Pre-Publication Process

The DoD's handling of *Operation Dark Heart* exemplifies the complexities and inconsistencies of the pre-publication review process. Shaffer's book faced sudden, dramatic intervention from the DoD, which not only contradicted its initial approval but led to the destruction of thousands of books—a rare occurrence that underscored the lengths to which the government would go to prevent the dissemination of information it deemed sensitive. This incident highlights several issues within the review process, including:

1. **Inconsistency in Approvals:** Shaffer's experience shows that pre-publication approval can be reversed, even after a manuscript has been cleared. This inconsistency not only undermines authors' confidence in the

process but also raises questions about whether approval standards are applied uniformly.

2. **Potential for Political Influence:** Some observers have argued that the timing of the reversal on *Operation Dark Heart* suggests the possibility of political motivations. Although the Pentagon cited security concerns, critics argue that the intervention may have been prompted by the book's critique of early military intelligence practices, which could cast certain agencies or officials in a negative light.
3. **Chilling Effect on Insider Accounts:** The incident with *Operation Dark Heart* serves as a warning to other military and intelligence professionals considering publication. The drastic step of purchasing and pulping an entire print run illustrates the lengths to which agencies may go to control narratives about sensitive operations, potentially discouraging others from sharing important insights or critiques of U.S. foreign policy.

Ultimately, the case of *Operation Dark Heart* illustrates how the pre-publication review system, while intended to protect national security, can at times seem unpredictable and overly restrictive, especially for authors aiming to offer transparency into military and intelligence operations. The episode underscores the tension between legitimate security needs and the public's right to know, as well as the challenge of balancing these priorities within the pre-publication review framework.

Section 4: Gary Schroen and *First In*

Gary Schroen, a seasoned CIA operative, authored *First In* to give readers a behind-the-scenes look at the CIA's critical role in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Schroen, who had a 35-year tenure in the CIA, was among the first to be deployed to Afghanistan, leading a team tasked with forming alliances with anti-Taliban Afghan factions. His mission was to establish a foothold against Taliban forces and support the Northern Alliance, laying the groundwork for the broader U.S. military intervention that followed. *First In* recounts these early days of the CIA's covert operations, providing insights into the agency's strategies and challenges in navigating Afghan tribal politics.

Significant Redactions and Their Impact

While *First In* offered rare insights into the CIA's operational strategies, it faced extensive redactions, particularly in passages discussing alliances with Afghan factions and specific details on counterterrorism tactics. The CIA enforced these redactions to maintain secrecy over its methods of operation and the identities of allied factions and agents on the ground. These omissions were primarily intended to protect Afghan contacts and ensure operational integrity. However, some critics argue that the redactions went beyond necessary security measures, potentially obscuring the complexity and difficulty of the CIA's work in Afghanistan during this volatile period.

The redactions had a notable impact on Schroen's narrative, as they left significant gaps in the book, particularly in describing how alliances were forged and the specifics of intelligence-gathering tactics in the field. By omitting these details, the CIA limited the book's capacity to provide a comprehensive view of the agency's early counterterrorism strategies and its reliance on Afghan partners. These alliances were pivotal, as they represented the foundation of the U.S. strategy in the region, influencing not only the early phase of the Afghanistan War but also the broader War on Terror. However, with details redacted, readers are left with an incomplete understanding of the exact nature and risks involved in these operations.

The Effect on Public Perception of U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

The redactions in *First In* ultimately diminished the book's ability to fully illuminate the CIA's strategic approach in Afghanistan, impacting readers' understanding of how the U.S. initially engaged with local allies against the Taliban. This selective censorship presents a challenge in comprehending the realities of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, as critical elements of the mission remain classified or obscured. Schroen's account, while still influential, could have provided a more in-depth perspective on the ethical and strategic dilemmas faced by the CIA, particularly regarding cooperation with local militias and the complexities of Afghan politics.

Despite the redactions, *First In* remains a valuable record of the CIA's early role in Afghanistan and Schroen's firsthand account of a mission that shaped U.S. foreign policy in the region. The omissions also underscore ongoing debates about the

need for transparency versus security in documenting government actions, especially in complex war environments where local alliances are crucial but sensitive. Schroen's work highlights the limitations imposed by pre-publication review, illustrating how vital details can be redacted to the extent that they inhibit a full understanding of critical historical events in U.S. counterterrorism.

Section 5: James Risen's *State of War*

James Risen, an investigative journalist with *The New York Times*, is widely recognized for his work on national security and intelligence matters. In his 2006 book *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, Risen delved into controversial CIA operations, including the agency's involvement in Iran's nuclear program, warrantless wiretapping within the United States, and covert actions during the War on Terror. Unlike other authors in this article, Risen was not a former intelligence official bound by pre-publication agreements. However, his investigative work drew heavily on classified information from intelligence sources, sparking fierce government pushback and legal action.

Controversies Surrounding Risen's Revelations on CIA Operations

One of the most controversial revelations in *State of War* was the CIA's botched operation aimed at sabotaging Iran's nuclear program. Risen exposed a CIA operation, dubbed "Operation Merlin," in which the agency attempted to funnel flawed nuclear weapon blueprints to Iran as a way to derail its nuclear ambitions. The operation backfired, however, as Iran allegedly detected and corrected the flaws in the blueprints, potentially advancing rather than hindering its nuclear development. Risen's report on this covert mission not only embarrassed the CIA but also raised alarms about the efficacy and ethical implications of such covert strategies.

Another major topic in *State of War* was Risen's reporting on the NSA's warrantless wiretapping program, which revealed the Bush administration's authorization for the NSA to conduct domestic surveillance without court approval. This program, initiated after 9/11, allowed intelligence agencies to monitor U.S. citizens' communications if suspected of terrorist affiliations. Risen's

reporting on this program was groundbreaking, exposing a clandestine practice that many civil liberties advocates saw as a violation of constitutional rights. The revelations spurred public outcry and significant debate over the boundaries of government surveillance, bringing renewed scrutiny to the Bush administration's counterterrorism tactics and expanding discourse on privacy rights versus national security.

Implications for Government Transparency and Journalistic Freedom

The U.S. government's response to *State of War* was swift and intense. The Justice Department pursued legal action to identify Risen's sources for the Operation Merlin story, resulting in years of litigation aimed at compelling him to reveal his confidential sources. Risen faced the possibility of jail time for refusing to comply, which he resisted to protect journalistic freedom and the principle of source confidentiality. This legal battle became a landmark case, illustrating the complex and often contentious relationship between the press and the intelligence community, particularly concerning national security reporting.

Risen's case underscored the risks faced by journalists who report on government operations that officials wish to keep hidden. His refusal to reveal his sources highlighted the critical role of investigative journalism in maintaining government accountability, especially regarding secretive or controversial policies. The government's effort to silence Risen's disclosures raised serious questions about transparency and freedom of the press, with many viewing the Justice Department's actions as an attempt to dissuade reporters from investigating intelligence operations.

State of War has since been regarded as a pivotal work in both journalism and national security discourse, as it exposed controversial CIA actions and challenged the limits of press freedom. Risen's stand against government pressure was widely supported by advocates for journalistic freedom, who argued that his work was essential for public oversight and that attempts to censor it threatened the democratic principle of an informed citizenry. His case exemplifies the vital, yet often perilous, role of investigative journalism in bringing transparency to U.S. policy and intelligence practices.

Section 6: Jose Rodriguez and *Hard Measures*

Jose Rodriguez, the former head of the CIA's National Clandestine Service, held a key role in the agency's counterterrorism operations post-9/11. Rodriguez oversaw the CIA's Counterterrorism Center during a critical period in which controversial "enhanced interrogation techniques" (EITs) were developed and deployed on high-value detainees. In his 2012 memoir, *Hard Measures: How Aggressive CIA Actions After 9/11 Saved American Lives*, Rodriguez offers an unapologetic defense of these methods, including tactics such as waterboarding, which he argues were necessary to prevent future attacks and protect American lives. His memoir provides a detailed, firsthand account of the CIA's use of these techniques, as well as Rodriguez's own role in authorizing and implementing them.

Rodriguez's Critiques of Redactions

Rodriguez's memoir faced extensive redactions enforced through the CIA's pre-publication review process, particularly concerning the operational details of EITs and the agency's internal assessments of their efficacy. Rodriguez argued that these redactions distorted the record by omitting critical information about how the techniques were vetted and evaluated by intelligence officials. He contended that the review process selectively removed passages that presented a nuanced view of EITs, leaving behind an overly negative portrayal driven by later political criticism rather than operational realities. These redactions, Rodriguez asserted, ultimately weakened his argument that EITs were effective in securing actionable intelligence, thereby obscuring the CIA's rationale for their use during the early years of the War on Terror.

Rodriguez's experience with the redaction process highlights a recurring issue in memoirs by intelligence officials who have worked in controversial areas. While the CIA claimed that redactions were necessary to protect classified information and intelligence methods, Rodriguez argued that these omissions misrepresented the agency's post-9/11 counterterrorism strategy. He maintained that the redactions removed vital context, such as the safeguards and legal reviews that accompanied the interrogation program, as well as internal debates over its ethical implications. These omissions, he believed, played into an already

polarized public discourse that often portrayed the CIA's counterterrorism tactics as reckless and unregulated.

Distorting the Record of Post-9/11 CIA Tactics

The selective redactions in *Hard Measures* have impacted public understanding of the CIA's role in the War on Terror, particularly regarding the contentious issue of torture and detainee treatment. Rodriguez's account, while controversial, aimed to present what he saw as a more balanced perspective on the use of EITs, describing them as both necessary and carefully monitored under strict oversight. By redacting significant portions of his explanations, the CIA effectively curtailed his defense of these actions, leaving only a partial narrative that could be interpreted as endorsing unrestrained interrogation methods.

Rodriguez's experience exemplifies the tension between transparency and secrecy in intelligence-related publications, especially when former officials attempt to defend or explain actions that have become widely condemned. His frustrations with the review process also echo broader criticisms that the CIA may be using redactions to control the historical narrative surrounding its most controversial practices, potentially limiting balanced discussions of their intended outcomes and ethical boundaries.

Overall, *Hard Measures* serves as a critical case study on how the pre-publication review process can affect the memoirs of intelligence officials and, more broadly, influence public perception of the post-9/11 CIA tactics that Rodriguez insists were crucial to national security. His criticisms of redactions underscore the challenges faced by officials who seek to justify or clarify past actions when those narratives conflict with evolving public and political sentiments.

Section 7: Mark Fallon and *Unjustifiable Means*

Mark Fallon, a senior counterintelligence officer and former Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) official, had a distinguished career overseeing counterterrorism and counterintelligence operations for the U.S. government. He played a critical role in interrogations of high-value detainees at Guantanamo Bay and other sites, during which he grew increasingly concerned about the ethics and effectiveness of enhanced interrogation techniques (EITs). In *Unjustifiable*

Means: The Inside Story of How the CIA, Pentagon, and U.S. Government Conspired to Torture, Fallon sought to expose the ethical and legal issues surrounding these controversial tactics. He argued that the adoption of harsh interrogation methods following 9/11 was not only morally wrong but also counterproductive to intelligence gathering and the broader goals of national security.

Heavy Redactions Imposed on *Unjustifiable Means*

Upon submitting his manuscript for *Unjustifiable Means* to the pre-publication review process, Fallon faced extensive redactions, particularly around specific interrogation practices and government policies he criticized. These redactions significantly limited his ability to detail the development, authorization, and execution of these tactics by the CIA and the Department of Defense. Much of the information Fallon provided on the rationale and internal debates around EITs was removed, which he argued weakened the book's overall message and left readers without critical context on how and why these practices were implemented. Fallon was especially frustrated by the limitations placed on his ability to fully critique practices he believed were in violation of U.S. values and international law.

Fallon's experience with redactions in *Unjustifiable Means* underscores the difficulties faced by officials who seek to shed light on government actions that they believe to be unethical or harmful. While the stated purpose of the redactions was to protect national security, Fallon argued that the deletions were excessive and suppressed a necessary conversation about the morality and legality of post-9/11 interrogation methods. According to Fallon, the redactions prevented him from providing a transparent account of the inner workings of the CIA's and Pentagon's interrogation programs, obstructing efforts to hold these institutions accountable for decisions that have been widely criticized both domestically and internationally.

Advocacy for Greater Transparency and Ethical Standards

Following the publication of *Unjustifiable Means*, Fallon became an outspoken advocate for increased transparency in U.S. military and intelligence practices. He has actively campaigned for reforms to the pre-publication review process, arguing that it should be refined to balance genuine security concerns with the

public's right to know. Fallon's advocacy emphasizes the need for accountability and ethical clarity in national security operations, asserting that overly restrictive redactions can undermine the integrity of government institutions by preventing important debates on U.S. policy and ethics.

As a result, Fallon has called for greater openness regarding the U.S. government's approach to detainee treatment, arguing that increased transparency can help restore trust in military and intelligence agencies. His stance highlights the role that whistleblowers and insider accounts play in shedding light on controversial practices and in promoting ethical reform within the government. Through his book and subsequent advocacy, Fallon's work underscores the belief that the ethical conduct of the U.S. in military operations is not only a moral obligation but also essential to sustaining the country's reputation and effectiveness in the global arena.

In summary, *Unjustifiable Means* serves as both a testament to the ethical dilemmas inherent in post-9/11 counterterrorism strategies and as a case study on the challenges of navigating government censorship. Fallon's critiques of the redactions imposed on his book underscore broader concerns about the limits of the pre-publication review process and its potential to restrict vital discussions on national security ethics.

Conclusion: The Impact of Redaction on Public Understanding

The challenges faced by authors like Dennis Fritz, Anthony Shaffer, Gary Schroen, James Risen, Jose Rodriguez, and Mark Fallon illustrate the complex dynamics between government transparency and national security. Each author attempted to provide critical insights into U.S. military and intelligence operations, hoping to shed light on policies and practices that have shaped recent history, particularly in the post-9/11 era. However, extensive redactions imposed by the government limited their ability to share their full narratives, leaving significant gaps in the public record. These omissions have a profound impact on the public's understanding of U.S. foreign policy, intelligence strategies, and the ethical considerations involved in counterterrorism efforts. By censoring detailed accounts of these pivotal events, redactions can inadvertently obscure lessons learned, thereby hindering public discourse and historical accountability.

The cases of *Deadly Betrayal*, *Operation Dark Heart*, *First In*, *State of War*, *Hard Measures*, and *Unjustifiable Means* underscore the need for a balance between protecting genuine security concerns and upholding the public's right to know about government actions conducted in its name. Critics argue that current pre-publication review policies may overly prioritize secrecy, sometimes for political or bureaucratic reasons rather than purely national security. This selective enforcement, evident in cases like Shaffer's and Risen's, raises questions about whether the redaction process is sometimes used as a tool to control narrative and shield government institutions from scrutiny.

As public demand for transparency grows, there is increasing support for re-evaluating redaction policies. Many advocates suggest that the pre-publication review process could be refined to more consistently protect both sensitive information and authors' ability to provide the public with accurate accounts. Instituting clearer guidelines on what qualifies as genuinely sensitive information, as well as implementing an independent oversight mechanism, could help mitigate excessive censorship. Such reforms might allow critical voices to emerge without undue silencing, providing the public with essential perspectives on U.S. policy decisions and fostering a more informed citizenry capable of understanding and engaging with the ethical dimensions of national security practices.

In essence, balancing security and transparency is vital for a healthy democracy. Ensuring that future authors can contribute meaningfully to public knowledge without unwarranted redaction could empower citizens, reinforce accountability, and enhance historical understanding of complex events that continue to shape global politics and the role of the United States on the world stage.

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These references highlight the various books and reviews discussed, as well as the themes of redaction, pre-publication review, and the challenges of balancing government secrecy with the public's right to know.

