

The New York Times and “disinformation”

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Anyone who reads the *New York Times*, America’s so-called “newspaper of record,” will have observed that, with increasing regularity, the paper’s front-page lead has far more in common with a propaganda dispatch than a news report.

Taking the editions published over the past six weeks as a sample, one finds again and again that the *Times*’ lead articles are not only contentious, if not fabricated, but are virtually devoid of actual news, consisting instead of claims made by US government and other official sources, who are usually unnamed. Bearing headlines such as “More Enemies Of the Kremlin End Up Dead,” “Russian Spies Said to Hack Systems Used in Clinton’s Run,” “Spy Agency Consensus Grows That Russia Hacked DNC,” and “Seeing in Email Breach a Trump-Putin Alliance,” these articles make sweeping and unsubstantiated assertions in order to present a slanted narrative aimed at justifying the reactionary foreign policy machinations cooked up by the US intelligence agencies and the State Department. A particular focus is the preparations for war against Russia.

The front-page lead of Monday’s edition breaks new ground for state propaganda in the guise of “news.” The print edition bears the headline “Russia’s Powerful Weapon To Hurt Rivals: Falsehoods,” with an underline reading “Spreading Disinformation to Sow Discord, Fear and Doubt in Europe and US.”

The article, by Neil MacFarquhar, the *Times*’ Middle East correspondent during the Iraq war, begins by alleging that efforts to forge closer military links between Sweden and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been stymied by what it calls a “flood of distorted and outright false information on social media.”

This “false information” includes claims that “If Sweden, a non-NATO member, signed the deal, the alliance would stockpile secret nuclear weapons on Swedish soil,” and that “NATO could attack Russia from Sweden without government approval.” Not so outlandish, given the devious and increasingly reckless policies of the US-dominated military alliance.

This example becomes the rather thin reed for the allegation that the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin is carrying out a systematic campaign of “dezinformatsiya,” or disinformation, to “undermine the official version of events” and “foster a kind of policy paralysis.”

What follows is a string of somewhat disparate instances of alleged Russian aggression, deception and generally sinister activities. The entire premise, however, is absurd. That a government should engage in disinformation as part of its foreign policy is presented as something unheard of and beyond the pale.

One feels compelled to ask Mr. MacFarquhar and his superiors at the *Times* if they really think they are addressing fools and idiots. “Disinformation,” as the *Times* well knows from long and direct experience, is practiced by every capitalist government, none more so than the American. As Winston Churchill declared, “In war, truth is so precious that it must be surrounded by a bodyguard of lies.”

The US government oversees a massive network of media outlets and well-paid hacks, along with an army of academics and think tank propagandists, to manipulate public opinion and turn reality on its head in the furtherance of its aggressive geopolitical aims. When it comes to disinformation, the Kremlin is small potatoes compared to Washington.

Does the *Times* think the people of America and the world have forgotten the brazen lies about weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi-Al Qaeda ties that were used to justify the illegal and unprovoked invasion of Iraq, the overthrow and eventual murder of the country’s president, and the mass killing and destruction over years of military occupation that turned one of the most advanced societies in the Middle East into a bleeding and impoverished staging ground for sectarian conflict?

Or the lies about an imminent massacre in Benghazi that were used as the pretext for the war for regime change in Libya that killed 40,000 people, toppled and murdered Muammar Gaddafi and left the country in a state of permanent chaos and anarchy? Or the false claims of Syrian government chemical weapons attacks that were promoted in 2013 to justify an all-out war to overthrow that country’s ruler and install a US puppet government, until the Obama administration pulled back at the last minute to buy more time for the regime-change operation? Or the grotesque presentation of the armed protests by anti-Russian fascists in Kiev and subsequent putsch against a pro-Russian government as a “democratic revolution”?

Of course, one could go further back, at least to the blowing up of the Maine, which became the *casus belli* for the Spanish American War, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident, used to justify

the rapid escalation of the US war in Vietnam.

The *Times* has played and continues to play a central part in these operations, the most notorious being its leading role in promoting the lies used to justify the invasion of Iraq. Has Mr. MacFarquhar not heard of Judith Miller, the top *Times* reporter who was caught in Iraq war lies so spectacular the newspaper had to disavow and sack her?

This did not prevent the *Times* from publishing a front-page lead article in 2014 shortly after the coup in Ukraine, replete with fabricated photographs, claiming to prove that Russian troops had invaded eastern Ukraine. Within 24 hours of publication, the newspaper was forced to retract this piece of state propaganda as well.

Since then, the *Times* has only intensified its role as a clearinghouse for lies hatched by the US military/intelligence apparatus. In his article on alleged Russian disinformation, MacFarquhar does not hesitate to include some gross distortions and lies of his own. Thus he categorically asserts a Russian role in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July of 2014, which resulted in the deaths of 298 passengers and crew.

He denounces the Kremlin for “a dizzying array of theories about the destruction of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine, blaming the CIA and, most outlandishly, Ukrainian fighter pilots who had mistaken the airliner for the Russian presidential aircraft.”

He continues, “The cloud of stories helped veil the simple truth that poorly trained insurgents had accidentally downed the plane with a missile supplied by Russia.”

This “simple truth” is presented without any factual justification. The official Dutch report on the MH17 crash made no assertions about who bore responsibility for downing the jet, while a July 24 exchange between State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf and Associated Press reporter Matt Lee made clear that the US had no evidence to back up its claims that Russian-backed separatists were responsible.

He speaks of the Kremlin “deploying Russian forces to seize Crimea.” Whether or not Russian forces were on the ground in Crimea is a matter of dispute, but it is a fact that a large majority of the population, hostile to the right-wing anti-Russian regime in Kiev, voted in a plebiscite to separate from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation.

In recent weeks, the *Times* has been publishing articles, commentaries and editorials accusing Russia, again without any substantiation, of hacking into the computer system of the Democratic National Committee to leak emails damaging to the election campaign of Democrat Hillary Clinton so as to promote the “Siberian candidate,” in the words of *Times* columnist Paul Krugman, Donald Trump.

Monday’s article marks a continuation and deepening of this propaganda offensive. This time, a central aim is to implicate the English-language television channel “Russia Today” in the spread of “disinformation.” MacFarquhar writes, “The Kremlin

uses both conventional media—Sputnik, a news agency, and RT, a television outlet—and covert channels...”

He continues, “RT often seems obsessed with the United States, portraying life there as hellish. Its coverage of the Democratic National Convention, for example, skipped the speeches and focused instead on scattered demonstrations.”

The aim of such “disinformation” is to “undermine the official version of events,” according to the *Times*. MacFarquhar does not, however, document a single instance in which RT has published false information.

The *Times* is attacking RT not for publishing false stories, but because it presents a version of events that has not been massaged and vetted by US intelligence. The *Times* brands as “disinformation” reporting that does not confirm to the credo spelled out in 2014 by its then-Executive Editor Bill Keller, who declared that “transparency is not an absolute good,” and that “freedom of the press includes freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity.”

The attempts of RT to put a pro-Russian spin on events pale in comparison to the vast propaganda leviathan that is the US media, with its 24-hour news programs, headed by hacks like CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, the Rupert Murdoch-controlled Fox News, and the nightly news programs aimed at duping, deceiving and pacifying the population.

Ultimately, the target of the *New York Times*’ ire is not only the Russian government and RT, but domestic opposition to war. In seeking to present any questioning of the official pro-war narrative as the result of Russian propaganda, the *Times* is seeking to bully, intimidate and discredit opposition to provocative and reckless policies in the Middle East and against Russia and China that are leading inexorably to a third world war.



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