

# Three CNN journalists resign amid false anti-Russia reporting controversy

Evan Blake  
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Three CNN journalists resigned Monday night after the outlet retracted an article published Thursday containing false allegations of connections between Donald Trump associate Anthony Scaramucci and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF).

Over the past year, and in particular since the election of Trump, CNN, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and other outlets have been engaged in a hysterical campaign of anti-Russia propaganda, repeatedly releasing sensationalist “breaking news” stories citing anonymous intelligence officials alleging ties between Trump and Russia. Unsubstantiated media allegations have become a central mechanism in the bitter factional conflict within the ruling class, pitting the Trump administration against its critics in the Democratic Party and intelligence agencies, centered on issues of foreign policy.

The campaign over Russian “hacking” of the election and alleged collusion between Trump and Russia has been aimed at pressuring the administration to shift its foreign policy orientation toward confrontation with the Putin government.

There have been numerous similar retractions made over the course of the past year involving many of the major news outlets, but this is the first instance in which journalists have lost their jobs as fallout for their abandonment of basic journalistic principles.

The article, which was entirely removed from CNN’s website Friday, was written by Thomas Frank and edited by Pulitzer-Prize winning reporter Eric Lichtblau. Lex Harris, the executive editor overseeing the investigative unit that produced the article, resigned alongside Frank and Lichtblau.

CNN’s president Jeffrey Zucker personally intervened in the company’s internal inquiry, which found that the story was published despite concerns

from CNN’s editorial standards team. After a series of embarrassing anti-Trump incidents involving Kathy Griffin, Reza Aslan and others who work for CNN, Zucker likely exerted pressure on the three journalists to resign to prevent further damaging controversies.

The central falsehood of the article was that Scaramucci and RDIF were under investigation by the US Senate Intelligence Committee. The article wrote provocatively that RDIF’s “chief executive met with a member of President Donald Trump’s transition team four days before Trump’s inauguration,” and asserted that they discussed the possibility of lifting US sanctions against Russia.

On Friday, Scaramucci disputed Frank’s reporting.

The article also falsely claimed that RDIF is owned by the Russian bank Vnesheconombank, which is under investigation by the Senate and has been targeted by US sanctions against Russia.

*Sputnik News* first reported that RDIF wrote directly to CNN, asking them to amend numerous elements of the article. The RDIF told *Sputnik News* that it “became an independent sovereign fund in 2016, [and is therefore] not a part of Vnesheconombank and its operations are wholly independent of the bank.”

In an article on the reporters’ resignations, CNN wrote that “standard editorial processes were not followed when the article was published.” The outlet has implemented a new policy regarding Russia-related articles, which must now be approved by two top editors prior to being published.

As has been the case with similar articles, Frank’s piece relied solely upon a single, anonymous source who claimed to be close to the nonexistent investigation.

The article was published under conditions in which charges of Russian involvement in “hacking” the

elections and otherwise engaging in “cyberwarfare” have been repeated *ad nauseam*, despite no solid factional foundation. Whatever the circumstances behind the decision to pressure the CNN reporters to resign, the fact is that their method of reporting differs little from innumerable articles published in the media.

Among the most prominent examples of other false reporting came last December, with a *Washington Post* article initially headlined, “Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, U.S. officials say.” When every aspect of the article proved to be false, the *Post* had to tone down the alarmist headline and issue an editorial note that nullified the central claim of the initial article, that Russian hackers had penetrated the US electrical grid.

In tandem with the eruption of American imperialism in recent decades, the mainstream media has lost any semblance of journalistic or democratic principles. CNN, founded in 1980 as the first 24-hour news channel, has facilitated and benefited from this process of the media becoming cheerleaders for imperialism. The Wikipedia entry for “CNN controversies” details dozens of journalistic travesties by the news agency since its founding.



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