

New York Times: Our crime was telling the truth

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A new argument has been introduced into the editorial pages of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*: that the American media, by reporting true information about presidential candidate Hillary Clinton during the 2016 election, was promoting “Russian propaganda.”

Over the past two years, major US technology companies, under the pretext of fighting “Russian meddling” in American politics, have created a regime of internet censorship, in which left-wing, anti-war, and socialist viewpoints are routinely deleted or secretly restricted.

Now, the leading architects of this censorship regime are demanding its expansion to the mainstream newspapers not targeted by Silicon Valley’s crackdown.

On November 17, the *Washington Post* published an op-ed column by Alex Stamos, Facebook’s former head of security, arguing that the US media should not have reported the WikiLeaks revelations about Hillary Clinton’s corrupt relations with Wall Street and the theft of the Democratic primary in 2016.

Stamos writes that Facebook executives “weren’t the only ones” responsible for Russian “meddling ... We must also remember that in the summer of 2016, every major media outlet rewarded the hackers of the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) with thousands of collective stories drawn from the stolen emails of prominent Democrats. The sad truth is that blocking Russian propaganda would have required Facebook to ban stories from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and cable news—not to mention this very paper.”

He concludes, these newspapers “have never adequately grappled with their culpability in empowering Russia’s election interference.”

Stamos is arguing, in other words, that by publishing true information about political corruption, the American press committed what amounts to treason. His claim is a frontal attack on the American political tradition of free speech going back to the Zenger case of 1734, which set the precedent that true statements cannot be a crime.

The *Post*’s decision to publish Stamos’s arguments is an expression of sympathy for this totalitarian argument.

The publication of Stamos’s column came just two days after the *New York Times* published a front-page lead article pillorying Facebook executives for initially rejecting Stamos’s claims about “Russian meddling” on Facebook. That article presents Stamos as an embattled warrior waging a heroic struggle to expose the Russian menace within Facebook, and amounts to the *Times*’ endorsement of his views.

Stamos has long been one of the foremost advocates of internet censorship. In a talk at a military conference in Estonia, Stamos told the assembled generals that Facebook was selectively choosing what posts it displays to users because “not all information is created equal.”

An even more direct endorsement of this view came in the form of a November 23 column by *Times* editorial page hack Nicholas Kristof, titled “Trying to Fight, Not Spread, Fear and Lies.”

Kristof declares, “Alex Stamos, formerly at Facebook and now at Stanford, noted that much of the public discussion has been about how Russia used profiles of fake Americans to sow discord and falsehood. There has been less focus, he noted, on how Russia used news organizations to publicize stolen Democratic emails to hurt Hillary Clinton.”

The columnist continues, “There has not been a great

deal of soul searching in the traditional media on their role in this,” Stamos told me. “There is no easy answer for what legitimate journalists should do when newsworthy information is strategically leaked, but there might be some options to cover these stories without providing massive amplification.”

Kristof adds, “I thought that we in the media (especially cable television) fumbled 2016.”

Over the second half of 2016, WikiLeaks released information provided to it by an unknown whistleblower documenting massive corruption on the part of Hillary Clinton, her campaign, and the Democratic National Committee. The emails showed that, in exchange for six-figure speaking fees, Clinton would tell Wall Street bankers that wealthy people should have more influence in American politics.

They also documented how Clinton received debate questions in advance that her opponent did not have access to, and how the Democratic National Committee leadership had been bought by the Clinton campaign and worked to ensure the defeat of her opponent. These revelations were reported throughout the print and broadcast media.

According to Stamos and Kristof, the major newspapers should have simply censored themselves and refused to cover WikiLeaks’ revelations.

These allegations mark a new stage in the campaign against freedom of expression in the United States.

An effective censorship regime has been created online. Now, the leading architects of internet censorship are calling for major newspapers to practice self-censorship. With oppositional news outlets censored, and mainstream outlets gagging themselves, Stamos, Kristof, and their ilk hope the public will have no way to learn what the political establishment does not want them to know.



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