

WPost's New 'Fake News' on Russian 'Hack'

Exclusive: The Washington Post's latest folly – falsely reporting a Russian “hack” into Vermont's electric grid – reflects the paper's steep decline from the days of Watergate, reports ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon.

By Annie Machon

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) has been hacked – cue a national American trauma, allegations of dirty tricks, fears that democracy has been subverted, all leading to what the next U.S. president would call “our long national nightmare.”

But, no, I am not talking about the current Russo-phobic hysteria currently engulfing the mainstream U.S. media, replete with claims about “fake news,” expelled Russian diplomats, and a lack of skepticism about the evidence-lite hacking allegations.

Instead, I am dipping back into history – the old Watergate scandal – when Richard Nixon's “plumbers” stole information the old-fashioned way; they broke into the DNC offices, rifled the files and planted listening devices. On June 17, 1972, when police captured five burglars inside the DNC offices at the Watergate building in Washington, the case slowly unfolded over the next two years until President Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974, and was replaced by Vice President Gerald Ford who declared “our long national nightmare is over.”

During those two years, The Washington Post became internationally and justifiably famous for breaking the story about Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up and – since then – generations of cub reporters have dreamed of being the next Woodward and Bernstein. Besides leading to the downfall of the mendacious and paranoid Nixon, the scandal contributed to the reining in of an out-of-control intelligence establishment culminating in the Church Committee hearings of 1975.

What followed was greater, if unfortunately temporary, control of the U.S. intelligence agencies and at least an apparent respect for the rights of American citizens under the terms of the U.S. Constitution. The work of The Washington Post then was indeed relevant and world-changing.

The movie depiction of the Post's investigation, “All the President's Men” celebrated this exposé and confirmed in Western minds that our wonderful free press spoke truth to power. And perhaps, in this case, the press did (although I

have to say that I preferred the meltdown scene in the prophetic movie, “The Network,” which envisioned the slide of the news media into ratings-driven madness).

Lost Credibility

But – regarding The Washington Post – how the mighty have fallen. Over the past couple of months, the Post has blown what was left of its journalistic reputation out of the water.

First it unblushingly reported the PropOrNot “blacklist” of “fake news” Internet sites that were allegedly working at the Kremlin’s command to swing the U.S. election to Donald Trump, except that the list encompassed many of the most reputable independent (i.e., not U.S. corporate-owned) English-language international news sites (including Consortiumnews.com). Threatened with angry writs from some of the sites, the paper quickly printed a disclaimer distancing itself from the anonymous people behind PropOrNot, but still not apologizing for the McCarthyistic smear.

Then, last Friday, the newspaper was at it again – breathlessly reporting that the Vermont energy grid was apparently hacked by the scapegoat du jour, Russia. Although there should have been obvious questions asked: Why Vermont? What has that state ever done to Russia? Well, not much as it turns out; nor Russia to Vermont.

Yet again the Post has revised its reporting down to the fact that a laptop, completely unconnected to the grid, according to the energy provider’s statement, had been infected by malware. In other words, there was no Russian hacking into the Vermont power grid.

And yet, because it’s The Washington Post, this fake breaking “news” was taken seriously and metastasized through the body politic of America and beyond. This Russian hacking became a “post-truth” reality, no matter how fact-free the original story. (I hereby propose a #factfreediet for us all on Twitter for January, so we can highlight this phenomenon.)

Explaining Why

But here are the obvious next questions: Why did this non-story appear in The Washington Post and why now? Has The Washington Post suddenly fallen prey to a revamped Operation Mockingbird, its editorial staff stuffed to the gills with CIA agents of influence?

As I have written before, the CIA and its associates within the Deep State appear to be hell bent on undermining the legitimacy of the Trump election

result and this hyping of Russian hacking is one of the key weapons in this struggle. So perhaps the Deep State players are (re)activating a few agents of influence in the mainstream American media?

But there may possibly be a more tangential explanation for The Washington Post's plunge into fiction: Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com and one of the wealthiest people in the world. Amazon is not only the favorite purveyor of all goods online, but also suspected (at least in the U.K.) of massive tax avoidance scams as well as abusive employment practices in the same country.

Bezos is also, since 2013, the proud owner of The Washington Post, a purchase that heralded his unexpected business swerve into the old mainstream media. The deal to buy the newspaper was reported in the business press to have cost him \$250 million.

Interestingly in the same year Amazon cut a deal to develop a cloud-based service for the CIA – a deal worth a reported \$600 million over ten years. It also appears that this service has expanded across all 17 of America's intelligence agencies, so who can tell what it might be worth to Amazon now and in the future?

It is no doubt just an interesting coincidence that the Bezos-owned Washington Post is the fount of the current stream of CIA assertions that the Russians are hacking key U.S. institutions, starting with the DNC – which then somehow became “hacking the election” – and now the utility grid. Bezos himself has asserted that he exerts no direct control over the editorial decisions of the newspaper, and he has left in place many of the neoconservative editors who preceded his stewardship, so there may not be any need for direct orders.

Of course, all state-level players, including the Russians and certainly the Americans, are going to be probing the basic systems underpinning all our countries for vulnerabilities. That is what intelligence agencies do, and it is also what mercenary spy companies do on behalf of their corporate clients, and what hackers (either of the criminal flavor or the socially-minded hacktivists) do too. The dodgy malware, the code, and the vulnerabilities are all out there, often for sale or squirreled away by the national spy agencies for potential future advantage.

Whatever the truth about the DNC hacking allegations, The Washington Post sadly seems uninterested in properly pursuing it – indeed it seems interested in little beyond pursuing the specific political agenda of fanning a dangerous distrust of Russia and undermining the legitimacy of President-elect Trump.

If such a compliant corporate culture had existed back in 1972 at the time of

the first DNC “hack,” the Watergate scandal would surely never have been exposed. And the old media still wonders why it is no longer trusted?

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