

# Mainstream Media's 'Victimhood'

**Exclusive:** Just weeks ago, mainstream U.S. media decried “fake news” and backed a blacklist of independent news sites over “Russian propaganda.” Now, under fire from President Trump, the MSM loves a free press, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's heartwarming that The New York Times and The Washington Post are troubled that President Trump is loosely throwing around accusations of “fake news.” It's nice that they now realize that truth does not reliably come from the mouth of every senior government official or from every official report.

The Times is even taking out full-page ads in its own pages to offer truisms about truth: “The truth is hard. The truth is hidden. The truth must be pursued. The truth is hard to hear. The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ...” On Sunday, those truth truisms ran opposite an alarmist column by Jim Rutenberg entitled, “Will the Real Democracy Lovers Please Stand Up?” Meanwhile, The Washington Post launched its own melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

Yet, it was only weeks ago when the Post and Times were eagerly promoting plans for silencing or blacklisting independent news sites that didn't toe the line on what the U.S. government and its allies were claiming was true.

On Nov. 20, the Times published a lead editorial calling on Facebook and other technology giants to devise algorithms that could eliminate stories that the Times deemed to be “fake.” The Times and other mainstream news outlets – along with a few favored Internet sites – joined a special Google-sponsored task force, called the First Draft Coalition, to decide what is true and what is not. If the Times' editorial recommendations were followed, the disfavored stories and the sites publishing them would no longer be accessible through popular search engines and platforms, essentially blocking the public's access to them. [See Consortiumnews.com's “What to Do About 'Fake News.'”]

On Thanksgiving Day, the Post ran a front-page story citing an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, blacklisting 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other important sources of independent journalism, because we supposedly promoted “Russian propaganda.”

Although PropOrNot and the Post didn't bother to cite any actual examples or to ask the accused for comment, the point was clear: If you didn't march in lockstep behind the Official Narrative on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria, you were to be isolated, demonized and effectively silenced. In the

article, the Post blurred the lines between “fake news” – stories that are simply made up – and what was deemed “propaganda,” in effect, information that didn’t jibe with what the U.S. State Department was saying.

Back then, in November, the big newspapers believed that the truth was easy, simple, obvious, requiring only access to some well-placed government official or a quick reading of the executive summary from some official report. Over the last quarter century or so, the Times, in particular, has made a fetish out of embracing pretty much whatever Officialdom declared to be true. After all, such well-

dressed folks with those important-sounding titles couldn’t possibly be lying.

That gullibility went from the serious, such as rejecting overwhelming evidence that Ronald Reagan’s Nicaraguan Contra rebels were deeply involved in drug trafficking, to the silly, trusting the NFL’s absurd Deflategate allegations against Tom Brady. In those “old” days, which apparently ended a few weeks ago, the Times could have run full-page ads, saying “Truth is whatever those in authority say it is.”

In 2002, when the George W. Bush administration was vouching for a motley crew of Iraqi “defectors” describing Saddam Hussein’s hidden WMDs, Iraq’s purchase of some “aluminum tubes” must have been for building nuclear bombs. In 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell showed some artist drawings of “mobile chemical weapons labs,” they must really exist – and anyone who doubted Powell’s “slam-dunk” testimony deserved only contempt and ridicule.

When the Obama administration issued a “government assessment” blaming the Syrian military for the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, there was no need to scrutinize its dubious assertions or ask for actual proof. To do so made you an “Assad apologist.”

When a bunch of U.S. allies under the effective control of Ukraine’s unsavory SBU intelligence service presented some videos with computer-generated graphics showing Russians supplying the Buk missile that shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, there was no need to examine the holes in the evidence or note that the realistic-looking graphics were fictional and based on dubious assumptions. To do so made you a “Moscow stooge.”

In other words, when the U.S. government was gluing black hats on an “enemy” and white hats on a U.S. “ally,” the Times never seemed to object. Nor did pretty much anyone else in the mainstream media. No one seemed to note that both sides usually deserved gray hats. With very few exceptions – when the State Department or other U.S. agencies were making the charges – the Times and its cohorts

simply stopped applying responsible journalistic skepticism.

Of course, there is a problem with “fake news,” i.e., stories that are consciously made up for the purpose of making money from lots of clicks. There are also fact-free conspiracy theories that operate without evidence or in defiance of it. No one hates such bogus stories more than I do – and they have long been a bane of serious journalism, dating back centuries, not just to the last election.

But what the Times, the Post and the rest of the mainstream media have typically ignored is that there are many situations in which the facts are not clear or when there are alternative explanations that could reasonably explain a set of facts. There are even times when the evidence goes firmly against what the U.S. government is claiming. At those moments, skepticism and courage are necessary to challenge false or dubious Official Narratives. You might even say, “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn’t so obvious...”

### **A Tough Transition**

During the transition from the Obama administration to the Trump team, the Times, the Post and other mainstream media outlets got caught in their own transition from trusting whatever the outgoing officials said to distrusting whatever the incoming officials said. In those final days, big media accepted what President Obama’s intelligence agencies asserted about Russia supposedly interfering in the U.S. election despite the lack of publicly available evidence that could be scrutinized and tested.

Even something as squirrely as the attack on Trump’s National Security Adviser Michael Flynn – with Obama holdovers citing the never-prosecuted Logan Act from 1799 as the pretext for ginning up some kind of criminal-sounding case that scared Trump into firing Flynn – was treated as legitimate, without serious questions asked. Since Obama officials were doing the feeding, the no-skepticism rule applied to the eating. But whatever statements came from Trump, even his few lucid moments explaining why war with nuclear-armed Russia wasn’t such a great idea, were treated as dangerous nonsense.

When Trump scolded the mainstream press for engaging in “fake news” and then applied the phrase “enemy of the people,” the Times, the Post and the rest went into full victimization-mode. When a few news companies were excluded from a White House news briefing, they all rushed to the barricades to defend freedom of the press. Then, Trump went even further – he rejected his invitation to the White House Correspondents Dinner, the black-tie/evening-gown event where mainstream media stars compete to attract the hottest celebrity guests and hobnob with important government officials, a walking-talking conflict-of-

interest-filled evening, an orgy of self-importance.

So, the Times, the Post and their mainstream-media friends now feel under attack. Whereas just weeks ago they were demanding that Google, Facebook and other powerful information platforms throttle those of us who showed professional skepticism toward dubious claims from the U.S. government, now the Times, the Post and the others are insisting that we all rally around them, to defend their journalistic freedom. In another full-page ad on Sunday, the Times wrote: "Truth. It's more important now than ever."

I would argue that truth is always important, but especially so when government officials are leading countries toward war, when lives are at stake, whether in Iraq or Syria or Ukraine or the many other global hotspots. At those moments in the recent past, the Times did not treat truth – in all its subtlety and nuance – as important at all.

I would argue, too, that the stakes are raised even higher when propagandists and ideologues are risking the prospect of nuclear war that could kill billions and effectively end human civilization. However, in that case, the American people have seen little truly professional journalism nor a real commitment to the truth. Instead, it's been much more fun to demonize Russian President Vladimir Putin and paint black-and-white pictures of the evil Russians.

At such moments, those New York Times' truisms about truth are forgotten: "The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ..."

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

---