

Mainstream Media Assaults on Freedom of Speech. “The Truth” is No Longer “Important”

Alternative news sources have come under sustained attacks.

By [Shane Quinn](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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*The New York Times unveiled a new slogan early in 2017 titled, “The truth is more important now than ever.” It has acquired a seemingly noble motto but a perhaps contentious one if we examine the Times’ recent history. Two international law specialists, Howard Friel and Richard Falk, published a book after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq called *The Record of the Paper*, which has scarcely been reviewed.*

Friel and Falk focused on the Times due to the newspaper’s importance. The authors point out that in 70 Times editorials on Iraq – from September 11, 2001 to March 20, 2003 – the words “international law” and “UN Charter” were never mentioned. The “truth” did not seem terribly “important” as the Times stood idly by in the destruction of Iraq.

Such was the barrage of propaganda directed at the American public [that 69%](#) believed Saddam Hussein was “personally involved” in the September 11 attacks. That is a significant achievement in manipulation. The poll results must have been news to the Iraqi dictator himself, a forgotten one-time American ally.

Why Hussein would take it upon himself to orchestrate a surprise attack on the United States, of all nations, is anyone’s guess. Perhaps if he had a death wish but as later events proved he was not the suicidal type.

The Times was not alone in its position of selling the Iraq war to the American people, as television networks from Fox News to CBS and CNN were overwhelmingly pro-war. Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch – who strongly backed the illegal conflict – placed a permanent US flag in the corner of the screen. Fox employees were compelled to describe the invasion as “Operation Iraqi Freedom”, with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis later being killed.

The pattern continues into other illegitimate interventions as the liberal Guardian newspaper championed the demolition of Libya in 2011, with [editorials imploring](#), “The quicker Muammar Gaddafi falls, the better.” The Guardian encouraged NATO “to tip the military balance further against Gaddafi”, while later that year summarising that “it has turned out, so far, reasonably well” – by that point thousands had been killed.

In 2015 Ian Birrell, then deputy editor of the Independent, [still assured](#) his readers, “I would argue that Britain and France were right to step in [in Libya]. The failures came later on.” Apparently it was fine for two old imperial powers to “step in” to shatter a sovereign nation, then afterwards absolve the invaders of blame with “the failures” only coming “later on”.

With hindsight, was it wrong for the West to support the overthrow of Gaddafi?



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It's a rare thing indeed to hear a prominent commentator question the balance of Western mainstream coverage. The same voices can be heard piping up when alternative news sources take a different line not so palatable to their tastes.

Nick Cohen, writing in the Guardian, [accused](#) the network Russia Today (RT) of being a "propaganda channel" and that Russia was "prostituting journalism". In the following sentence, Cohen describes the BBC and New York Times as being "reputable news organisations".

Cohen firmly supported the Iraq war, writing at the time that "the Left betrays the Iraqi people by opposing war", and "an American invasion offers the possibility of salvation". He was deemed not to be "prostituting journalism" in backing this violation of international law, nor when later supporting other interventions in Libya and Syria.

The BBC's reputation, which Cohen previously claimed to be "reputable", was dealt a blow when it was revealed by Cardiff University that the network "displayed the most 'pro-war' agenda of any broadcaster" with its coverage on the Iraq invasion.

Steven Erlanger of the New York Times described RT as "an agent of Kremlin policy" used to "undermine Western democracies" and to "destabilise the West" - failing to back up the claims with any evidence. To gain perspective on these attacks, it may be worth pointing out a key excerpt from the First Amendment of the US Constitution: "Congress shall make no law... abridging [curtailing] the freedom of speech, or of the press."

This law does not exist in Western democracies but attempts at limiting freedom of expression continue apace, while attacks on alternative media outlets by institutions of

power grow. It has reached a point whereby the French president Emmanuel Macron, shortly after assuming office, publicly attacked legitimate news sources of “behaving like deceitful propaganda”.

Perhaps the hidden concern about RT, for example, is its continued increase in both popularity and scope – with the channel enjoying a total weekly viewership of 70 million people and rising. RT is available to viewers in Western heartlands such as Britain and the US, with eight million Americans watching the station each week. It represents quite an achievement that a channel with the word “Russia”, featured in its title, can attract viewers in their millions, despite the growing anti-Russian sentiment espoused by the powers-that-be.

It is revealing that elite figures like Hillary Clinton have lamented in the past, “We are in an information war and we are losing that war.” For the first time in history, populations have broad access to alternative news angles – points of view that they likely find of a more balanced nature. Gone is the unchallenged monopoly on the public mind.

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