![GlobalResearch - Center for Research on Globalization]

The New York Times' Insidious Ongoing Disinformation Campaign on Russia and Elections

A series of stories loudly proclaim the Russian election meddling narrative but offer no real facts supporting the most sensational claims, writes Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter
Global Research, March 20, 2020
Consortiumnews 17 March 2020

Region: Russia and FSU, USA
Theme: Media Disinformation

For the past three years the new narrative of Russian interference in U.S. elections has bound corporate news media more tightly than ever to the interests of the national security state. And no outlet has pushed that narrative more aggressively – and with more violence to the relevant facts — than The New York Times.

Times reporters have produced a series of stories that loudly proclaim the Russian election meddling narrative but offer no real facts in the body of the story supporting its most sensational claims.

The *Times* service to the narrative was introduced by its February 2017 story headlined, "Trump Campaign Aides Had Repeated Contacts with Russian Intelligence." We now know from Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz's report on the FBI investigation of the Trump campaign that the only campaign aide who had contacts with Russian intelligence officials was Carter Page, and those had taken place years before in the context of Page's reporting them to the CIA. The Horowitz report revealed that FBI officials had hidden that fact from the FISA Court to justify its request for surveillance of Page.

But the *Times* coverage of the Horowitz report in December 2019 failed to acknowledge that the calumny about Page's Russian intelligence contacts, which it had published without question in 2017, had been an FBI deception.

Two more *Times* Russiagate stories in 2018 and 2019 featured spectacular claims that proved on closer examination to be grotesque distortions of fact. In September 2018 a 10,000-word story by Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti sought to convince readers that the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) had successfully swayed U.S. opinion during the 2016 election with 80,000 Facebook posts that they said had reached 126 million Americans.

But that turned to be an outrageously deceptive claim, because Shane and Mazzetti failed to mention the fact that those 80,000 IRA posts (from early 2015 through 2017), had been engulfed in a vast ocean of more than 33 trillion Facebook posts in people's news feeds – 413 million times more than the IRA posts.

In December 2019, senior national security correspondent David Sanger wrote

a [story](#) headlined, "Russia Targeted Election Systems in All 50 States, Report Finds,"and Sanger's lede said the Senate Intelligence Committee had "concluded" that all 50 states had been targeted. But the Committee report actually reaches no such conclusion. It quoted President Barack Obama's cyber-security adviser Michael Daniel as recalling that he had "personally" reached that conclusion, but shows the only basis for his conclusion was remarkably lame: the "randomness of the attempts" and his conviction that Russian intelligence was "thorough."

The Committee reported that some intelligence "developed" in 2018 had "bolstered" the subjective judgment by Daniel. But all but one of the eight paragraphs in the report describing that intelligence were redacted, and the one unredacted paragraph suggests that the redacted paragraphs provided no conclusive evidence that Russian intelligence had scanned any state election websites, much less those of all 50 states. The paragraph said, "However, IP addresses associated with the August 16, 2016 FLASH provided *some* indicators the activity *might be attributable* to the Russian government....[emphasis added]."

The Committee report also contained summary statements from six states that the Department of Homeland Security has continued to include among the 21 states it insists were hacked by the Russians in 2016, [denying](#) any cyber threat to their systems. Another 13 states reported only that there was "scanning and probing" by inconclusive IP addresses the FBI and DHS had sent them. Sanger did not report any of those troublesome details.

In January 2020 the *Times* began its coverage of the theme of Russian interference in the 2020 election with a [story](#) headlined, "Chaos is the Point: Russian Hackers and Trolls Grow Stealthier in 2020." The story, written by Sanger, Matthew Rosenberg and Nicole Perlroth, sought to heighten the existing U.S. climate of paranoia about a Russian attack in regard to the 2020 elections. Once again, however, nothing in the story supports the sinister tone of the headline.

It reported Department of Homeland Security officials' anxiety about the ransom-ware attacks on 100 American towns, cities and federal offices during 2019, which are clearly criminal operations aimed at large-scale payoffs by cities. The story informed readers that DHS was investigating "whether Russian intelligence was involved in any of the attacks," on the apparent theory that the criminals were being used by the Russians.

Since those ransom-ware attacks had been going on for years, the obvious question would have been why DHS would have waited until 2020 to reveal that it was investigating Russian involvement. Thus, the only fact underlying the story was the DHS desire to find evidence to support its accusations of Russian election hacking.

Still at it in 2020

The *Times* continued its advocacy journalism in a Feb. 26 [report](#) that U.S. intelligence officials had "warned" in a briefing for the House Intelligence Committee on Feb. 13 that "Russia was interfering in the 2020 campaign to get President Trump elected," citing five people "familiar with the matter."

The *Times'* team of four writers proceeded to declare, "The Russians have been preparing – and experimenting – for the 2020 election...aware that they needed a new playbook of as-yet undetectable methods, United States officials said." But instead of reporting actual

evidence of any Russian action or decision for action, the *Times* writers again cited what their sources suspected *could* be done.

"Some officials," they wrote, "believe that foreign powers, possibly including Russia, could use ransom-ware attacks…to damage or interfere with voting systems or registration databases." The *Times*' sources thus had no actual intelligence on the question and were merely speculating on what any foreign government *might do* to disrupt the election.

Three days after that report, moreover, the *Times* backed away from its previous lede after intelligence sources disputed its claim that Russia was intervening to reelect Trump, [suggesting](#) that the briefing officer, Shelby Pierson, had overstated the assessment. Sanger sought to limit the damage with a [story](#) labeling the problem one of "dueling narratives" in the intelligence community.

Then Sanger admitted, "It is probably too early for the Russians to begin any significant moves to bolster a specific candidate," which obviously invalidated the *Times'* previous speculation on the subject. But after *The Washington Post* published a [story](#) that the FBI had informed Senator Bernie Sanders that Russia had sought to help his campaign, Sanger quickly returned to the same narrative of Russian interference to advance its favorite candidates.

On the *Times'* podcast "The Daily," Sanger [opined](#) that the Russians were now supporting both Trump *and* Sanders – because Sanders, "like Donald Trump," has "got a real aversion to interventions around the world."

The most recent entry in the *Times*' campaign to create anxiety about Russian interference in the election focused on race relations. On March 10, the *Times* headlined its [story](#), "Russia Trying to Stoke U.S. Racial Tension before Elections, Officials Say." In their lede Julian Barnes and Adam Goldman announced, "The Russian government has stepped up efforts to influence racial tensions in the United States as part of its bid to influence November's presidential election, including trying to incite violence by white supremacist groups and stoke anger among Afro-Americans, according to seven American officials briefed on recent intelligence."

But true to the modus operandi used routinely to push the Russian election threat narrative, the writers did not offer a single fact supporting such a story line. They even admitted that the officials who were making the claims provided "few details" about white supremacists and "did not detail how" blacks were being encouraged to use violence.

It turns out, in fact, that U.S. officials have found nothing indicating Russian support for violent white supremacists in America. The only fact that they could cite — based on a single source — was that the FBI is "scrutinizing any ties" between Russian intelligence and Rinaldo Nazzaro, the American founder of a "neo-Nazi group," who lives with his Russian wife in St. Petersburg, Russia, but owns property in the United States. So, the *Times*' single source had nothing but a suspicion for which the FBI was trying to find evidence.

The final touch in the piece was the accusation that RT had "fanned divisions" on race by running a story about a video of New York policemen attacking and detaining a young black man that Barnes and Goldman write "sparked outrage" and had also "posted tweets aimed at stirring white animosity." But the RT [article](#) on the video merely reported accurately that the video depicted unprovoked police brutality and that it had already gone viral.

The *Times* itself had published a much more detailed Associated Press story on the same incident that went into a discussion of the history of police brutality in New York City. By the *Times'* own criterion, the AP was doing far more to stoke racial animosity than RT.

The opinion pieces that RT published attacking *The New York Times* for its coverage of a video at the University of Wisconsin that offended non-whites and for a *Times* opinion piece critical of the Apu character on "The Simpsons" echoed views on race and culture that most Americans find offensive. The idea that they were part of a Russian plot to generate racial animosity, however, is a very long stretch.

The descent of *The New York Times* into this unprecedented level of propagandizing for the narrative of Russia's threat to U.S. democracy is dramatic evidence of a broader problem of abuses by corporate media of their socio-political power. Greater awareness of the dishonesty at the heart of the *Times'* coverage of that issue is a key to leveraging media reform and political change.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. His latest book, with John Kiriakou, is "The CIA Insider's Guide to the Iran Crisis: From CIA Coup to the Brink of War."

Featured image is from Pixabay

The original source of this article is Consortiumnews
Copyright © Gareth Porter, Consortiumnews, 2020

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Gareth Porter