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Children's show is propaganda for Putin, say critics

Mark Bridge, Technology Correspondent

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Europe Russia



THE TOP 10 FAKE

NEWS OF 2018

2018 was certainly another great year for mainstream media, because in spite of an increasing number of people questioning the motives of large mediatic institutions, their power was effectually unchallenged, and they kept disparaging alternative news sources as “fake news”. And they certainly know a thing or two about fake news, as we show in our collection of the top fake news of 2018.

Read on page 5

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BITCOIN MANIA?

Read in the section *Money*

Trump's troop withdrawal from Syria and the liberal realpolitik

Across the Western world the decision of Donald Trump to withdraw a couple of thousand troops from the Middle East has as with all his decisions been met with yet another bout of contrived consternation.

In unison the mainstream media has once more toed the line presented by the deep state, that is to say, the US security and military complex, and denounced the President's decision. What is more, the press rather than acting as the fourth estate, have merely and unabashedly guided its reader-viewership into accepting the “virtuous line” and in doing so have once more failed to live up to the standards expected of a genuinely free and impartial press.

This “virtuous line” has been framed by declaring Trump's troop withdrawal as a victory for the ever malevolent Russian leader Putin and the monstrous Assad, while to a lesser extent they claim it will

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pose an existential threat to the Kurds. As an example of Western embellishment on the subject we can point to, for example, to the Dallas News that ran the headline “Trump’s hasty withdrawal means it’s a Merry Christmas for Putin”.

Naturally Putin’s words on the matter have been paraphrased and cut this way and another, until they could be framed into a NATO approved soundbite. What Putin actually said at his end of year press conference was of little consequence, the press preferring instead to misrepresent his words, which in fact sounded an altogether more cautious note. The Russian leader reminded those present that the US has been stating every year for the past 17 years that they would be leaving Afghanistan and there are more troops present than previously. It’s a situation that is mirrored in Iraq.

Caution has been key to Kremlin policy since Trump

took office in the White House. The Russians prefer to see how events unfold in real terms before being caught up in the white noise integral to the contemporary Western media circus. Such policy appears wise, especially when trying to

The Russians prefer to see how events unfold in real terms before being caught up in the white noise integral to the contemporary Western media circus. Such policy appears wise, especially when trying to assess US strategy in the Middle East.

assess US strategy in the Middle East. After all Trump had stated he was ready to bring back troops from Syria as far back as March before being swiftly persuaded to do otherwise. With pressure building once more on the President of the United States, it’s not hard to imagine that many of us could be struck by a sense of *deja-vu*.

The second moot point being promoted by the Washington

hawks and their sycophants is the plight of the Kurds. The fact that the Kurds suddenly are evoking such great sympathy and concern across the Western media scape appears to be nothing more than a spurious display of empathy. After all it is the very US state that has scuppered Kurdish

calls for independence on numerous occasions.

That the press once more fail to shine an honest torch upon the Kurdish question is a theme that remains consistent with the lacunas in the reporting of institutions such as the BBC, CNN or The Times, much to the chagrin of those who live beyond the confines of the Western world. And while we can say that relationships between Damascus and the Kurds have not always run entirely smoothly, it is essential to reiterate that the Kurdish nation has a symbiotic relationship with the Syrian state, one that has been mutually beneficial in combating the existential threats posed by Islamic radicals.

As such it comes as no surprise that the Kurdish led Syrian Democratic Forces (closely linked with the YPG or *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, the “People’s Protection Units”) have been repeatedly engaged with the Assad regime in order to safe guard their autonomy once stability ensues. Indeed,

Ilham Ahmed, co-chair of the SDF, emphasised the very nature of their relationship with Damascus when admitting that “We have a conviction that channels must be open, the constitution, the political process, here will not be solved without the regime” and that “the regime is not going anywhere”

That the Kurds for their part are understandably wary of US intentions comes as no surprise, given that across the border in Northern Iraq the US position was not to recognise their referendum for independence. And in Syria itself the US simply watched on as the Turks took the Kurdish controlled Afrin region by force, begging the question: who and exactly what are we then protecting the Kurds from?

Ahmed refers to the Turkish attack as being met by an “American silence”, which not for the first time left them feeling let down.

In juxtaposition, it was the Syrian regime which allied itself to the SDF/YPG in their battle against the Turks, aiding them with logistics and the recruitment of troops for the battlefield, not to mention allowing Kurdish reinforcements to travel across government controlled territory. Thus, proclamations echoing a need to “protect” the Kurds are relegated to nothing more than an instrument by which the hawks can justify occupying one third of Syrian territory. In short, it’s an attempt to legitimise their geopolitical interests.

And here we find the crux of the matter. The reason Trump above all is correct in withdrawing the troops is that they are currently occupying Syrian territory illegally. Even the apocryphal presentation of the Kurdish question is subordinate to legal realities and as such must be framed against the backdrop of Syrian

Who and exactly what are we then protecting the Kurds from? The Turkish attack was met by an “American silence”, which not for the first time left them feeling let down. It was the Syrian regime which allied itself to them against the Turks

sovereignty. Syria and its borders are recognised by the ultimate body of international law, that is to say, the United Nations, and in its convention Syria’s territorial integrity is assured.

The presence of US troops within the confines of a sovereign state can only be sanctioned by a UN resolution or on invitation by the Syrian state: both conditions have not been met.

This occupation does not merely infringe international law but also the US constitution, which demands congressional approval for US military engagement overseas. How exactly the entire free Western liberal press has managed by and large to avert reporting on this fact is disquieting and highly suspicious. Yet more abhorrent is the subtle manner by which they unquestionably promote geopolitical goals and garner

public acquiescence for illegal military operations.

The press not once questioned Obama when he contravened international law by deploying the troops to Syria, but when Trump removes them in accordance with these asserted legal norms there is outcry. The paradox within the paradox is that Trump, who

campaigns to end the US presence overseas, a fact which again appropriates his decision by lending it the weight of democracy, is now coming under fire from those sectors of the liberal press who seem to enjoy bedevilling him as a liar. Those who criticise him therefore reveal themselves

as nothing less than partisan, subjective and churlish.

So where exactly does all of this leave the cosmopolitan institutionalists, the liberals and the moral guardians who inhabit our free press and who together refer to themselves as “the defenders” of our way of life? Are not the courts and rule of law the cornerstone of the liberal world? And yet here they see no need to comply, hence they subvert the legal underpinnings designed by their own theoreticians to ameliorate the inherent anarchy of the global system. States bereft of any functioning rule of law are alone and dependent on nobody but themselves for survival.

Neither law, nor democracy neither a free liberal press must interfere with the strategic, realist imperatives of the military and security state. What exactly happened to liberalism?

The top 10 fake news of 2018 by mainstream media

Mainstream media appear to enjoy scaring people into thinking that fake news is everywhere. Established media are the only ones who can tell “the truth”. What if they were lying?

We live in an age of fear. An age where some immensely powerful institutions relentlessly try to make political use of fear, because, when people are scared, they lose their ability to think. No, we are not talking about Donald Trump or the ghost of a return of fascist populism. We are talking once again, about the utterly cynical business of media management, because the people in the media are the ones who really excel at the business of scaring people – compared to Donald Trump, they just play in a different league.

Yes, free media is probably a very important thing in a society, ideally vital for the society to reach its best potential. But free media does not have to mean that the media can get a free hand for loose and selective handling of facts. Free media does not mean that whenever somebody criticize them, journalists have to start crying hysterically about oppressive regimes wanting to silence them as if it was 1933 over and over again. People at large may not be perfectly informed, they may have short memories and be too busy to pay attention to every single small change in the political life of their society, but they are rarely as stupid and gullible as professional media managers probably think they must be.

The fake news scare, which exploded two years ago after the US election, is one of the scare tactics preferred by the embedded corporate establishment media. The gist of the story was that Trump won because of all the fake news people saw on Facebook and Twitter, as if seeing a single post “anti-liberal” post on your mobile would permanently brainwash people and leave them in a state of stupor that would lead them to vote for Trump. There certainly might have been some social media activity from Russia, but the scale of this activity appears to be very modest if compared to the

sort of “interference” the US and other Western countries employed for many years in many countries across the world. Moreover, the scale of the threat posed by the Russian social media efforts appears to have been slightly exaggerated. The “fake news scare” has helped create a nervous climate where every angle that does not suit the standard safe narrative is reflexively dismissed as “Putin’s propaganda”. One Polish magazine this year ran a cover story with the title: “Putin stole the internet”. This opinion has become almost common place even among otherwise intelligent people and certainly not only in “exotic” places like Poland.

The truth is that fake news (or at least not entirely true news, that it is to say manipulative news) has always been an integral part of journalism, in spite of the many professional media workers protesting, with large dose of affected offended pride, that the mainstream established media only deals in “facts”. The disturbing thing, however, is that because of their reputation, their vast means and their reach, the largest establishment media organisations, regardless of political inclination, often tend to display a rather ambitious claim in having the monopoly on truth and facts and the people working in these organisations often start to believe their own myths. The line between fake and not entirely true news is often a very blurred one. Most of the time, the established media simply get away with fake or slanted or not entirely true news for the simple reason that people are not too worried about the news of the day before or last week, and because, even in the age of Twitter, Facebook, and all the rest, alternative media is often intentionally discredited by the media giants. We have gathered here our (entirely subjective) list of the 10 best fake news

loaded with imagined meanings that pictures continued to be used even a few weeks ago. **Once the fake is out there, there is little you can do to stop it from running wild sometimes.** The meaning of a story like this one? Never lose any opportunity to make Russia and Putin look bad.

MASHA AND THE BEAR IS RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA FOR CHILDREN

(The Times)

THE TIMES

Children's show is propaganda for Putin, say critics

Mark Bridge, Technology Correspondent
November 17 2018, 12:01am,
The Times

Europe Russia



Masha and the Bear is produced by a studio in Moscow

A programme about a mischievous girl and a bear watched by millions of British children is accused of being a "soft propaganda" tool for the Kremlin (Mark Bridge writes). The English-language *Masha and the Bear* has more than 4.18

"the Bear symbolised Russia and was designed to replace a negative image of the country with a positive one in children's minds."

Because, yes, of course, we should naturally have expected that a cartoon produced in Russia, aimed at children, would have to portray the country as a place of horrors.

"in one episode, Masha, wearing a Soviet border guard's cap, patrols the Bear's garden and chases out a hare that tries to steal carrots. Critics have seen this as a statement about Russia's defence of its borders."

Critics see in a girl chasing a rabbit a form of Russian aggression. What drugs do they take?

"Masha is feisty, even rather nasty, but also plucky. She punches above her slight weight. It's not far-fetched to see her as Putinesque."

said Prof. Glee of the University of Buckingham, an "intelligence expert", as quoted by the Times.

The meaning of a story like this one? No story is too absurd if your task is to slander Russia. Another similar story, again by The Times

THE TIMES

Surfer girl was behind wave of Russian propaganda

Riys Blakely
October 6 2018, 12:01am,
The Times

Europe United States
Russia Social media



OrganicErica appears to be one of Russia's "bikini trolls", a social media account posing as an attractive woman and posting pro-Kremlin messages

At first glance "OrganicErica" appears to have an enviable lifestyle. Her Twitter page says that she lives in San Jose, California. Her profile depicts a young woman with a beaming smile and images of her surfing an azure-blue wave.

The proof? Organic Erica, as she is called on Twitter, has a regular pattern of tweeting, so she must most likely be a bot, and as everyone in the know knows, all bots come from Russia, especially when they happen to say anything slightly critical of, well, anything, like in the case Erica, who does not appear to like genetically modified food and promoted a healthy lifestyle.

THE RUSSIANS STOLE THE ITALIAN ELECTION

It looks like no election will have happen again in Europe or anywhere in the world without the nefarious influence of Russia literally altering the minds of the voters. The Italian election in March 2018 was no exception.

We focused here on a study quoted by the Spanish daily "El Pais". The problem with this "analysis"? First the data is from February to October 2017, whereas the election took place in March 2018. Second, it is not Sputnik Italia and Russia Today who were disseminating potentially divisive content on the subject of immigration on Twitter but it is Twitter users who were referring to the content of Sputnik and Russia Today.

There is also another problem with this, in spite of many reporters thinking they are doing incredible investigative work: the Italian secret services think it is bulls**t.

OPPOSITION JOURNALIST BABCHENKO IS KILLED BY PUTIN IN UKRAINE

This is more an example of staged news rather than purely fake news. In May, Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko, was killed in his apartment in Kiev, where he had taken refuge

after fleeing Russia. Babchenko had to leave Russia, fearing for his personal safety, after an “unpatriotic” post where he had displayed a good dose of schadenfreude when a Russian plane with artists and dancers flying to Syria to perform for the Russian army personnel fell and all those on board died.

Only he was not killed. The killing turned out to be a mock show, organised by the Ukrainian secret services, and not even Babchenko’s wife, present at the moment of the assassination, had been informed. The day after, Babchenko was resurrected and brought to a press conference by the SBU, the Ukrainian secret services.

THE INSANE FEMINIST FROM THE COLD

(EUvsDisinfo)



Viral video of woman pouring bleach onto manspreaders is staged Kremlin propaganda

CARA CURTIS — 1 MONTH AGO



In September a video featuring a Russian feminist activist throwing bleach on male passengers in the Saint Petersburg metro went viral. The EU unit in charge of counteracting Russian propaganda labelled the video as a stunt to destabilise Western society. Much of the media simply reported the news without doing much questioning. There are only two questions that arose: a) if the video is Russian propaganda aimed at destabilising Western societies, then why on Earth would the action

have to take place in Saint Petersburg? b) if the video was a propaganda stunt by the Kremlin, why on Earth this was labelled as a likely stunt by Russia’s own federal news agency? More on the story on our website.

TRUMP CAMPAIGN MANAGER MANAFORT MET ASSANGE IN ECUADORIAN EMBASSY (The Guardian)

One month ago the Guardian came up with what could have been the scoop of the year. Manafort, Trump’s campaign manager, had met Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy in London several times, according to the two sources of the Guardian story.

Only, the bombshell failed to detonate, as reported by the Washington Post. No other news organisation, other than the Guardian, has been able to confirm the story. Wikileaks vehemently denied it, demanding the resignation of the Guardian editor-in-chief and as a result the Guardian toned down the language a bit, without denying the story altogether though. Most tellingly, the Guardian journalist Luke Harding, no stranger to controversy and one of the authors of the story, went on a very uncharacteristical period of silence and contemplation in the days immediately after the publication.

” A denial from Manafort, meanwhile, landed in reporters’ inboxes a little before 3:30 P.M. “This story is totally false and deliberately libelous,” the statement reads. “I have never met Julian Assange or anyone connected to him. I have never been contacted by anyone connected to WikiLeaks, either directly or indirectly. I have never reached out to Assange or WikiLeaks on any matter. We are considering all legal options against The Guardian who proceeded with this story even after being notified by my representatives that it was false.” “

PUTIN THREATENS THE WEST WITH NUCLEAR MISSILES

(Euronews)

Another nice example of how you don’t need to radically alter the facts to create a fake story, – you just need to twist the language a bit.

Here the malicious Putin is at it again, threatening the civilized world with nuclear weapons. But is Putin the one who is “threatening” to do something here?

“Vladimir Putin has said Russia will develop new missiles banned by a nuclear arms pact if the US withdraws from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty and builds its own weapons. Putin’s comments follow an ultimatum set by the US on Tuesday to declare its missile capabilities in 60 days.”

The irony was not missed on some readers, luckily, who pointed out that you cannot “threaten” anything when you are merely responding to somebody else’s actions.

THE GILETS JAUNES ARE “TOURISTS” FROM RUSSIA

(StopFake)

STOP FAKE.ORG

La Lotta contro i fake riguardanti gli eventi in Ucraina

HOME CHI SIAMO EDITORIALI CRONACA VIDEO GUIDE INDAGINE TEST

Gilets Jaunes e la guerra ibrida

Questo articolo rappresenta opinioni personali dell'autore. StopFake potrebbe non condividere queste opinioni

dicembre 05, 2018 - 10:25 Editoriali



This incredible piece of investigative journalism comes from the Italian version of StopFake, a Ukrainian project to counter the omnipresent spectre of Russian propaganda, earns a very much deserved spot in our list of the top fake news of the year. StopFake is not really a mainstream media, but it is mainstream enough to have received US funds. To be fair here, StopFake, whose Italian operation appears to be run almost exclusively by a rather dubious figure, does not seem to be putting its full trust behind the author, since almost every piece is preceded by the disclaimer: “This article solely represents the opinion of its author. StopFake might not share these opinions”. It reads like a licence to bullshit.

Gerasimov in the exposition of the new Russian military doctrine explained that the new “hybrid wars” [...] Gerasimov explained to us that the first phase involved a massive use of

disinformation and then the next step (in case a friendly government had not been established in the target country) was meant to be internal destabilization thanks to demonstrations supported by those who in jargon are called “tourists”.

Let’s leave for a moment the fact aside that the whole concept of a Gerasimov doctrine has turned out to be a fantasy that was dismissed by its own creator. Is the author of the article here arguing that the demonstrators in France are in reality “tourists” from Russia? Or what is he alluding to?

“We have no proof of all this, but many clues. First of all, the phenomenon “Yellow vests” is born and expands in countries that oppose the Kremlin policy. They do not have a clear social identification, neither the organizers nor the financial helpers are known. They have been compared to the Maidan protesters but have no contact point with them because in Kiev the people did not fight for economic reasons (really? note of the author) and in three months of demonstrations (with more than 100 dead) there was not even one shop window broken or a single damaged car for pure vandalism. These groups (not numerous) act in cities in a military way, it is not a crowd that vent its rage at random, but choose where and how to hit in small groups by putting a strain on the police. Russia Today immediately gave full coverage of the incidents from inside the parade without any kind of problem unlike the other media.”

Once again, the proof of the gilets jaunes being Russian creation is the fact that RT was covering the protests. The impression is that the author of the article has access to higher levels of consciousness that are not achievable to common people, – because his logic is from out of this world.

This is our list of the top 10 fake news stories of 2018 by mainstream media. Will this change anything? Will the media change its ways? Will they stop feeding into an atmosphere where independent media is almost automatically labelled “fake news” or accused of having Russian ties? The answer is no, of course. But hopefully our list will help critically-minded readers once again realise that mainstream media by definition cannot have a monopoly on the truth.

What happened to the Bitcoin mania?

Interview with cryptocurrency trader Chandler Smith

East & West: There was much excitement about cryptocurrencies just one year ago. What has happened to all that? Is what somebody called “The Bitcoin Revolution” already over? Was Bitcoin a bubble?

Chandler Smith: Blockchain technology is very much alive and well, with many companies and governments bringing their own version of the blockchain into fruition.

The excitement and hype were driven by bitcoin’s price which skyrocketed to beyond \$20k* in some markets. Eventually the market corrected, and the focus shifted to exchange price manipulation, scams and government regulation clamping down on cryptocurrency markets and its participants, which likely drove down the price further and scared away new investors.

Right now, some analysts are suggesting the Bitcoin price has “bottomed-out” and that there will be a resurgence of interest in cryptocurrencies. We can only speculate at this point.

E&W: Why should people put their trust in Bitcoin or cryptocurrency in general? What are the advantages that Bitcoin and other currency can offer to people? Why should people put their trust into something they cannot see or for which there is no regulator? If your bank goes bankrupt in most countries a portion of your money will be safe, if your country is affected by

a wave of inflation, the central bank will do something to keep prices manageable, but if Bitcoin loses value, it’s only bad luck.

CS: Good questions! The primary driving force for the popularity of Bitcoin is that you don’t need to trust anyone in order for the underlying technology to work. This is one of Bitcoin’s key features, it is decentralised, meaning there is no single authority controlling the users’ funds. Other important features of Bitcoin include its immutability, meaning that the ledger cannot be altered or deleted and that it is secure and highly available, so no one can shut it down, censor or change it.

E&W: Why is this decentralization supposed to be a good thing?

CS: Removing a “middleman” from the financial transaction is a viable solution to dealing with current issues faced by individuals when sending money to others around the world. This is especially true in the case of remittance in developing countries. Foreign workers sending money back to their families are often faced with high transactions fees and long processing times. Cryptocurrencies offer a payment method that is almost instantaneous with little or no fees.

There are also political and socio-economic benefits to reducing the ability of a single person or entity to gaining a major financial

control in a particular nation or industry.

E&W: Mining is the process that allows people to inject new bitcoins in the system. And it looks like mining, which involves solving complex mathematical problems, is almost exclusively carried out by very powerful computers rather than by skilful lonely math wizards. Doesn’t this translate into the fact that who has the largest computers will be able to mine most bitcoins?

CS: Yes. The introduction of ASIC mining hardware accelerated the ability of those with more resources to out compete those with inferior mining rigs. Today the computing power of most personal computers would make mining Bitcoin unfeasible for the average person. However, as we draw closer to the supply limit of Bitcoin, and the injection of new Bitcoin slows, the current distribution will be sufficient to ensure that we don’t result in a single dominant mining entity.

E&W: The bank J P Morgan and the financial guru Warren Buffett, among others, have expressed their scepticism of Bitcoin. How are large governments and financial institution reacting to the emergence of cryptocurrencies? Is it true that some governments and some banks are already creating to their own cryptocurrencies? Does this mean cryptocurrencies will stop being a form of investment for a few

idealistic and brave financial pioneers?

CS: While Warren Buffet has enjoyed much success in the investing world, his key investing strategy is to not invest in anything he doesn't understand, which included not investing in major technology companies like Amazon and Google. J P Morgan has changed their stance on cryptocurrencies and along with the tax haven scandals have lost their credibility in the process.

There is widespread divergence in the reaction of governments and banks to blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies. The U.S. government is looking to clamp down on tax evaders, while other governments are trying to create their own blockchain, such as Venezuela and the "Petro".

The cryptocurrency market has received a massive inflow of capital and mass media attention, the real question is whether it is a sound investment and if the underlying technology will be there to back-up the current valuation price. Many cryptocurrencies are nothing more than a whitepaper or road map making promises to develop the technology in the future, with almost nothing having actually been done to develop the technological infrastructure.

Please be very careful with your funds and do your own research before investing longer term. There are short term gains to be had with day trading and swing trading, but please be aware that this is mostly market noise and bears little relevance to the actual worth of the coin or token.

E&W: Won't it be a problem for example that Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies could be increasingly becoming a preferred means of payment for criminal organizations or by individuals wanting to hide the true measure of their wealth and to avoid paying taxes?

CS: It is a problem absolutely. It is also difficult to say what the actual percentage of cryptocurrency users are involved in criminal activity. However, large corporations have been involved in tax evasion since their corporation and government officials have been the most corrupt.

E&W: There are hundreds of cryptocurrencies on the market. How do you as an investor distinguish a good currency from a Ponzi scheme?

CS: Simple. By understanding the fundamental indicators that suggest the business structure is a pyramid scheme. While affiliate programs are a reasonable

portion of a business marketing strategy, when an entire company profit relies on the participants to generate income by recruiting others, usually through friends and family members, this should be a warning sign that the business model is flawed and illegal! Common Ponzi scheme marketing ploys would offer "1% guaranteed return per day" or "sign up for X amount, invite 7 friends and get a portion of their fee too".

E&W: Do you need a lot of capital to earn money with Bitcoin etc?

It depends on how you intend to invest and your investment period. You can buy a portion of Bitcoin for a few dollars. Mining rigs start at \$1k+ and some invest funds are asking for thousands of dollars minimum for buying shares into a cryptocurrency index managed by the firm.

However, probably the most important thing to learn first investing in cryptocurrencies, is how to secure your funds and keep them safe. If you someone prone to losing your car keys on a regular basis or forgetting your password, then maybe crypto investment is not right for you.

E&W: Thank you for the interview.

CS: Thank you, anytime

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