NYT OMBUD CALLS FOR MORE UNPROVEN FEARMONGERING

In an overly dramatic (and in key areas, fluff) piece promising voting related hacks long into the future, David Sanger includes this passage.

> The steady drumbeat of allegations of Russian troublemaking — leaks from stolen emails and probes of election-system defenses — has continued through the campaign's last days. These intrusions, current and former administration officials agree, will embolden other American adversaries, which have been given a vivid demonstration that, when used with some subtlety, their growing digital arsenals can be particularly damaging in the frenzy of a democratic election.
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> "Most of the biggest stories of this election cycle have had a cyber component to them — or the use of information warfare techniques that the Russians, in particular, honed over decades," said David Rothkopf, the chief executive and editor of Foreign Policy, who has written two histories of the National Security Council. "From stolen emails, to WikiLeaks, to the hacking of the N.S.A.'s tools, and even the debate about how much of this the Russians are responsible for, it's dominated in a way that we haven't seen in any prior election."
>
> The magnitude of this shift has gone largely unrecognized in the cacophony of a campaign dominated by charges of groping and pay-for-play access.

On a day when results from North Carolina strongly suggest that efforts to suppress the

African American vote have thus far worked, the NYT frames a story by arguing that cyber — not racism and voter suppression — accounts for "most of the biggest stories of the election cycle" (the story goes on to include Hillary's email investigation in with the Russian hacks dealt with in the story).

It does so even while insintuating that the "probes of election-system defenses" are a Russian state-led effort, which the Intelligence Community pointedly did not say. Indeed, a DHS assessment dated September 20 — before that Intelligence Statement — (and publicly posted Saturday) attributes such probes to "cybercriminals and criminal hackers."

> (U//FOUO) We judge cybercriminals and criminal hackers are likely to continue to target personally identifiable information (PII), such as that available in voter registration databases. We have no indication, however, that criminals are planning theft of voter information to disrupt or alter US computer-enabled election infrastructure.

Sanger posted his piece, claiming that cyber is the most important part of this election, in the wake of NYT's ombud, Liz Spayd, posting her own piece judging — partly based off Sanger's assessment — that the NYT should put someone on the Russian hacking story full time.

> [W]hile several reporters have periodically contributed to the coverage, no one was dedicated to it full time. That's too bad. In my view, The Times should have assembled a strike force and given it a mandate to make this story its top priority.
>
> [snip]
>
> I asked Sanger, a highly knowledgeable and seasoned hand on matters of cyberwarfare, about the challenges in

> covering information hacks. "American
> drone strikes and Russians bombing a
> hospital in Syria are immediate,
> gripping, tragic human stories," he
> said. "A cyberstrike, by nature, is
> subtle, its effects often hidden for
> months, its importance usually a
> mystery. The bigger story here is that a
> foreign power has inserted itself in the
> fundamental underpinnings of American
> democracy using cybertechniques. We've
> never seen that before."
>
> That sounds like a pretty powerful
> argument for all-hands-on-deck coverage.
> After all, Trump's treatment of women,
> Clinton's email servers, the foundations
> of each candidate — all of it will soon
> fade out. The cyberwar, on the other
> hand, is only getting started.

Spayd makes a number of unproven or even false
claims in her piece. Not only does she (like
Sanger) claim that those probing voter poll
sites are Russian (implying they are state
hackers), she also implies the Shadow Brokers
hack was done by Russia (which may be true but
is far from proven).

> So was the National Security Agency.
> Now, hackers are meddling with the
> voting systems in several states,
> leaving local officials on high alert.

She asks a question — were the Russians running
Trump — she answers in her own piece.

> And most critically, what has it done to
> try to establish whether Donald Trump
> was colluding with Russian intelligence,
> as Clinton suggests?
>
> [snip]
>
> The Times finally weighed in on this
> question last week, concluding that
> there is no compelling evidence linking

> Trump to the hackers. The piece, which
> ran on A21 and down page on the website,
> appeared to have been in the works for
> some time. Yet it was published just
> seven days before the election, and was
> unsatisfying in exploring the back story
> that led to its conclusions.

In a piece that notes there is no evidence the
Russians are behind the poll probes, she
suggests a Sanger piece suggesting they might
have been should have been somewhere more
prominent than page A15.

> A piece laying out evidence that the
> Russians may be trying to falsify voting
> results in state databases ran on A15
> and got minimal play digitally.

And she applauds a highly problematic piece
claiming Julian Assange and Wikileaks always
side with the Russians.

> Led by David Sanger, The Times was first
> to link the Russians to the hacks, to
> examine the baffling role of Julian
> Assange and WikiLeaks and to smartly
> explore the options that the Obama
> administration could use to retaliate. I
> have no substantive complaints about the
> stories The Times has done.

In short, she points to a lot of problematic,
hasty fearmongering the NYT has done on this
front (as well as the one debunking much of that
fearmongering, though she complains that doesn't
offer enough detail). And then says NYT should
do more of it.

From the sounds of things, what she really wants
is more cloak and dagger on the front pages of
the NYT. Even if NYT has to invent a Russian tie
to get it there.

Update: Egads.

The NYT just decided to tweet out its crappy

Assange only does things Putin likes piece again.