

# THE COLLECTIVE YAWN AT AMERICA'S "WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION"

You know you're in trouble when Dana Rohrabacher is the voice of reason.

That's what happened in Wednesday's House Foreign Relations Committee hearing on "Russia's Weaponization of Information," which was basically an attempt to claim RT is a tremendous weapon in Putin's efforts to conquer the world. It included Liz Wahl complaining about the "conspiracy theories" tolerated and encouraged at RT.

While some of the theories peddled are outright absurd, there are a surprising amount of people prone to being manipulated that think it's hip to believe in any alternative theory, feeling proud of perceiving themselves to be enlightened and even prouder when they amass sizable social media followers that hang on every misguided and outright false theory that is propagated. Russia is aware of this population of paranoid skeptics and plays them like a fiddle.

Those that challenge any narrative against Russia are branded CIA agents, of being puppets for neo-conservatives intent on reigniting a cold war, and face the ire of seemingly countless online trolls or hecklers on the internet that hijack online discussions.

In response, Rohrabacher suggested the US media has its own limits. (after 1:25) "I would hope that we are honest enough with one another to realize that we have major flaws in our dissemination of facts and information in the

United States as well.” Rohrabacher went on to criticize those seeking to restart the Cold War, suggesting that Putin is Brezhnev or even Hitler. “There’s a little bit of fanaticism on both sides. ... If we’re going to have peace in this world we’ve got to be disciplined in searching for that truth.” He complained that most narratives of Ukraine ignore the violent overthrow of an elected leader.

Wahl pushed back, arguing that in Russia, unlike in the US, “there’s an attempt to manipulate and advocate a war to achieve an authoritarian leader’s objectives, and fabricating facts, twisting truths, making up lies.” Wahl continued, coming close to suggesting that “Look at Brian Williams, he makes some mistakes and he’s assassinated on Twitter.”

Notably, the hearing was led by climate change denier Ed Royce and included climate change denier Scott Perry, both men adhering to fictions that their donors and craziest supporters want to hear, talking about Communists telling people what they wish to hear.

Then, the next day, the NYT caught up to Moon of Alabama, As’ad AbuKahlil, and the Daily Beast’s about Richard Engel’s claim to have been kidnapped by Assad loyalists in 2012. And while the NYT (and the HuffPo) don’t criticize Engel, who was in real danger, the NYT does include damning details about NBC’s own awareness that the story Engel was telling was not true.

NBC executives were informed of [Free Syrian Army tied Sunnis] Mr. Ajouj and Mr. Qassab’s possible involvement during and after Mr. Engels’s captivity, according to current and former NBC employees and others who helped search for Mr. Engel, including political activists and security professionals. Still, the network moved quickly to put Mr. Engel on the air with an account blaming Shiite captors and did not

present the other possible version of events.

[snip]

NBC's own assessment during the kidnapping had focused on Mr. Qassab and Mr. Ajouj, according to a half-dozen people involved in the recovery effort. NBC had received GPS data from the team's emergency beacon that showed it had been held early in the abduction at a chicken farm widely known by local residents and other rebels to be controlled by the Sunni criminal group.

NBC had sent an Arab envoy into Syria to drive past the farm, according to three people involved in the efforts to locate Mr. Engel, and engaged in outreach to local commanders for help in obtaining the team's release. These three people declined to be identified, citing safety considerations.

Ali Bakran, a rebel commander who assisted in the search, said in an interview that when he confronted Mr. Qassab and Mr. Ajouj with the GPS map, "Azzo and Shukri both acknowledged having the NBC reporters."

Several rebels and others with detailed knowledge of the episode said that the safe release of NBC's team was staged after consultation with rebel leaders when it became clear that holding them might imperil the rebel efforts to court Western support.

Perhaps NBC had good reason for reporting a story they had reason to believe was false. Perhaps they agreed to blame Shiites as part of the deal to get Engel back safely. If they do, they would do well to make that clear now.

But then, why would they? Aside from Democracy Now and Glenn Greenwald, this story has not

received that much attention.

In both Syria and Ukraine, the US press has largely been as obedient as the press is forced to be in Russia, telling convenient narratives that justify our armed intervention. The notion that US Congressmen who themselves spew propaganda are squealing about Putin's great power of propaganda is almost pathetic in the face of all that.