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The Pentagon leaks and the US media



Pentagon spokesman U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder speaks during a media briefing at the Pentagon, Thursday, April 13, 2023, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

The response of the US media to a series of leaked Pentagon documents revealing US involvement in the Ukraine war raises far-reaching issues of democratic rights.

On Thursday, the *New York Times* publicly identified the individual who allegedly leaked Pentagon documents exposing US government lies about the Ukraine war, leading to his arrest.

The *Times*, working with the state-funded propaganda clearinghouse Bellingcat, publicly revealed the identity of Jack Teixeira, a 21-year-old Air National Guard member. Teixeira was arrested just hours later.

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There are indications that Teixeira holds repulsive fascist and antisemitic views. But Teixeira's motivations do not change the fact that the documents he released caught the US government red-handed in systematically lying to the public in waging an undeclared war against Russia in Ukraine.

The documents showed that, contrary to false claims by the Biden administration, NATO troops are on the ground in Ukraine, NATO is directly involved in the war, and the Ukrainian military is in a far worse position than presented by news reports.

These documents have exposed not only the US government, but the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, as liars.

In turn, the major US media outlets have responded by upholding, in principle, the right of the US government to lie to the public.

On Thursday, the *Washington Post* published an editorial headlined, "The Discord leaks show our nation's secrets at risk."

Nowhere in the editorial is there any criticism of the Biden administration for having lied to the American public. Instead, the editorial upholds government secrecy, and vowed to assist the government to keep the public from knowing what the government wishes to keep secret.

The editorial declared, "Keeping secrets is essential to a functioning government."

In making this statement the *Post*, owned by the oligarch Jeff Bezos, has declared war on a fundamental precept of democratic rule.

In his first inaugural address, Thomas Jefferson asserted, "The diffusion of information and the arraignment of all abuses at the bar of public reason, I deem [one of] the essential principles of our government." This is because, as Jefferson later explained, "Though [the people] may acquiesce, they cannot approve what they do not understand."

In verbal deference to this principle, in order to give the United States' entry into World War I a democratic veneer, the first of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points declared, "There shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."

The "state secrets" exposed by the documents were secrets not from Russia, but from the American people.

The documents show that the government is fundamentally misleading the public about a foreign policy that threatens nuclear war and the destruction of human civilization.

By upholding the principle of "state secrets" with regard to US conduct in the Ukraine war, the *Post* upholds the right of the government to lie to the public with total impunity.

This takes the complicity of the US media in the crimes of US imperialism to an entirely new level: it has become an active co-partner with the government in preventing the development of an informed public opinion that could place restraints on the preparation, conduct and escalation of war.

In other words, the creation of a police state in America would not require a change in policy, much less a change in personnel, at the *Washington Post*.

The editorial did not explain the strange contrast between this sweeping assertion of government power over the public with the slogan on its masthead, “democracy dies in darkness.”

A “national secret” is in fact a secret kept by one part of the “nation” from another. One part of the “nation”—the government and the financial oligarchy whose affairs they manage—is fully in on the secret. But the great mass of the population is only allowed to hear lies.

The fact that a 21-year-old National Guard airman had access to these supposedly highly secret and sensitive documents points to how widespread knowledge of US involvement in Ukraine is within the state, military, and media. In fact, the *Washington Post* has publicly admitted to having viewed hundreds of documents from the leak that the public has no access to.

The crime, in other words, is to inform the broader public about the lies of the US government. It is for this crime that Chelsea Manning spent seven years in prison, and for which Julian Assange is imprisoned to this day.

The US media, and the *Times* in particular, have long collaborated with the US government in promoting and justifying the crimes of US imperialism. But for the *Times* to publicly take actions that led directly to the arrest of a source of information vital to the public interest marks a milestone in the degeneration of the American press into an appendage of the state.

Anyone with information exposing criminal wrongdoing by the government cannot go to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or other major US media outlet for fear of simply being handed over to the police or FBI. Conversely, the actions of the *New York Times* endanger all American journalists, who will now be accused of being nothing more than government spies.

Over 50 years ago, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published the Pentagon Papers, exposing a systematic conspiracy by the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon

administrations to wage an aggressive war in Vietnam, involving widespread war crimes by US troops, while misleading the public about the aims and extent of the war.

Under the standards now championed by the *Times* and the *Post*, not only Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers, but the *Times* editors, journalists and publishers who printed them, would be liable to prosecution.

On Tuesday, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby called on the US media to stop publishing information contained in the documents, declaring, “It has no business ... on the front pages of newspapers, or on television. It is not intended for public consumption, and it should not be out there.”

While the White House may wish the public to have no knowledge of its lies and crimes, and the mainstream media may oblige this request, the rise of the internet has made it impossible for the state to control public discourse.

In 2017, former Obama administration official Samantha Power lamented the waning of control by media corporations of the public discourse. She wrote, “During the Cold War, most Americans received their news and information via mediated platforms. Reporters and editors serving in the role of professional gatekeepers had almost full control over what appeared in the media.” The fact that “two-thirds of Americans are getting at least some of their news through social media” is, she wrote, dangerous.

This is why, when Julian Assange was seized from the Ecuadorian embassy, the *Washington Post* cheered the Trump administration’s arrest of the principled journalist, declaring in an editorial that “Mr. Assange is not a free-press hero,” and that he is “overdue for personal accountability.”

The contents of the leaked Pentagon documents point to the vital role played by the *World Socialist Web Site*. While the lies of the *Times* and the *Post* were exposed by the documents, the WSWS’s reporting has been confirmed. This is because, while the *Times* and *Post* sought to delude and lie to the working class, the WSWS fought to inform the public about the immense dangers posed by the escalation of the war.

The rallying by the media in defense of government lies is a desperate effort on the part of the financial oligarchy to head off a rising tide of social opposition. They believe that through the combination of lies and propaganda, they will be able to embroil the world in a war that will create the conditions for outlawing strikes and protests and guaranteeing the profits of the financial oligarchy.

But as Abraham Lincoln once said, “You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” What

the oligarchy most fears—the building of an international, socialist movement of the working class against imperialist war—is on the agenda.

May Day 2023 will be a vital step in the building of this movement. On Sunday, April 30, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the *World Socialist Web Site* will hold an online global May Day rally to mobilize workers and young people around the world against the war in Ukraine. We urge all of those who seek to oppose the war to register today.

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