Fake News Day: One Day, Three Serious News Stories That Turn Out to be False

By [Moon of Alabama](#)
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It is a fake news day. Three stories are making the rounds through the media that are each based on false or widely exaggerated interpretation of claims. North Korea, Syria and the U.S. President are the targets.

1. The Wall Street Journal asserts with a #fakenews headline that bits of computer-code in the recent WannaCry ransom virus are identical with bits of computer code that was allegedly used in a 2014 hack of Sony. (The Sony attack was [falsely](#) attributed to North Korea.)

[Researchers Identify Clue Connecting Ransomware Assault to Group Tied to North Korea](#)

> Neel Mehta, a security researcher at Alphabet Inc.'s Google unit, on Monday pointed out similarities between that earlier WannaCry variant and code used in a series of attacks that security specialists have attributed to the Lazarus group.

The "Lazarus group" (which probably does not exist at all) was attributed to North Korean state agencies. Six paragraphs later we learn that the "similarities" were found in often reused code:

> The findings don't necessarily demonstrate that Lazarus or North Korea was involved in the WannaCry attack, researchers said. The culprits in the latest attack, who haven't been identified, could have copied the code in question, for example.
> …
> The connection found in the old version lies in software that both programs use to securely connect to other systems over the internet, said Kurt Baumgartner, a Kaspersky Lab researcher.

Common code is found in nearly all software that sets up an internet connection. The reason for that is quite simple. No longer does anyone ever write such code. There are well tested examples of such program snippets widely available in open-source software on Github and elsewhere. "Copy and paste" is done faster than re-inventing the wheel. Even worse – the code snippet in question here [is so trivial](#) that any decent programmer would likely write it the very same way (a call to the *Time()* function to get a seed value for a following call to the *Random()* function). There are only X reasonable ways to add 1 to 1. Two people doing it

| 1

the same way proves nothing at all. People copying publicly available code proves nothing either. It certainly does not prove that code for two different hacks was written by the same people. It does not provided that these bugs have anything at all to do with North Korea. The bits of similarities are of zero factual news value.

2. Back in February Amnesty International (which promotes NATO interventions) issued a sensational report about alleged killings in Syrian prisons. As we wrote at that time:
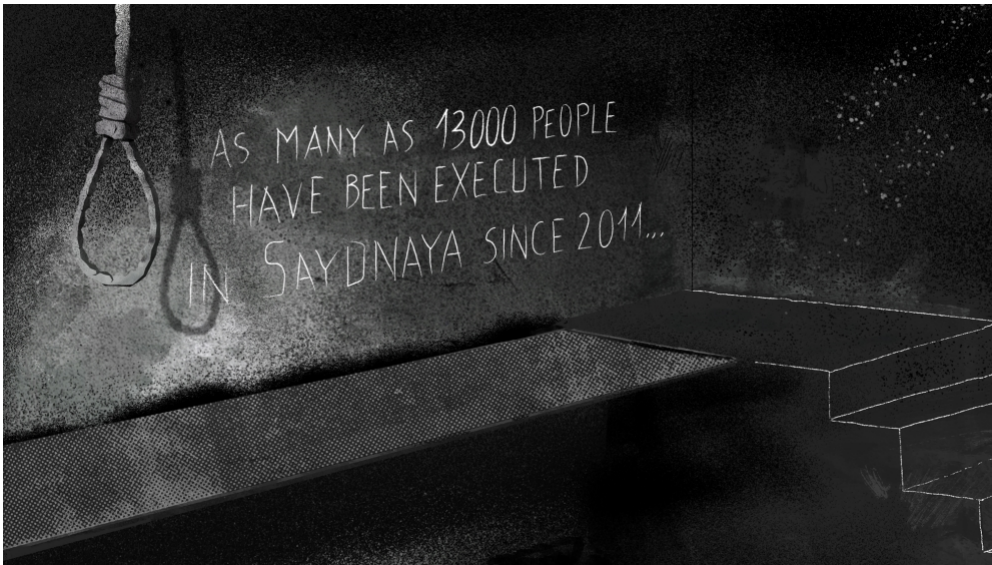
> A new Amnesty International report claims that the Syrian government hanged between 5,000 and 13,000 prisoners in a military prison in Syria. The evidence for that claim is flimsy, based on hearsay of anonymous people outside of Syria. The numbers themselves are extrapolations that no scientist or court would ever accept. It is tabloid reporting and fiction style writing from its title "Human Slaughterhouse" down to the last paragraph.

The U.S. State Department now reused that fake report and adds wrongly interpreted satellite pics to further slander the Syrian government:

US: Syria is burning bodies to hide proof of mass killings

> In its latest accusations of Syrian abuses, the State Department said it believed about 50 detainees each day are being hanged at Saydnaya military prison, about 45 minutes north of Damascus. Many of the bodies are then burned in the crematorium "to cover up the extent of mass murders taking place," said Stuart Jones, the top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East, accusing Assad's government of sinking "to a new level of depravity."The department released commercial satellite photographs showing what it described as a building in the prison complex that was modified to support the crematorium. The photographs, taken over the course of several years, beginning in 2013, do not prove the building is a crematorium, but show construction consistent with such use.

If there was a crematorium being build in the Saydnaya prison how is it that none of the Amnesty witness said so in the recent Amnesty report? These witnesses, Amnesty claims, have been in that prison and observed all kind of details. They claim that any dead were buried in mass graves.

A Dutch military expert looks at the commercial satellite pictures and the interpretation State provided and [asks](#):

> Ian Grant @Gjoene – 6:02 PM – 15 May 2017Is this a joke @StateDept? Even before 27 Aug '13 these "vents" were present. See included Terraserver footage (03 april '13) #Sednaya

Another reconnaissance specialist [expands](#) on that:

> Aldin Abazović @CT_operative – 5:33 PM – 15 May 2017Pictures that allegedly show crematorium of Saidnaya prison, #Damascus #Syria. As much as I hate to get involved into this matter, these #1
> #2 images prove nothing at all. This building could be simple boiler/heating room for the prison compound. Unless you visit there is no
> #3 way to prove anything. Its easy to manipulate with satellite imagery. You just put the right label on thing and there you have it
> #4 I can't confirm what the particular part of prison is nor for what it's used.

The State Department has no evidence for its "crematorium claim" but the Amnesty report which says nothing about a crematorium at the prison and some satellite pictures that do not show what the State Department claims. It is throwing dirt at the Syria government in the hope that some of it will stick. This release of *nothing* will create some headlines in "western" *outrage* publications. It may be in propaganda preparation for a wider war on Syria.

3. The deep state is out to get U.S. President Trump impeached. Yesterday a new, well prepared and coordinated campaign against Trump was launched. Anonymous claims to the Washington Post were "confirmed" by similar claims from (likely) the same sources to Buzzfeed. The claims may have some grounds in reality but the actual facts, even as described in shrill words, are harmless. WaPo:

[Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian foreign minister and ambassador](#)

> President Trump revealed highly classified information to the Russian foreign minister and ambassador in a White House meeting last week, according to

current and former U.S. officials, who said Trump's disclosures jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State.

(Hmm – how would "former U.S. officials" know what was said in the Oval Office and to what consequences?) It takes six paragraphs of such slander to learn what Trump actually disclosed:

Trump went off script and began describing details of an Islamic State terrorist threat related to the use of laptop computers on aircraft.

"Terrorist threat[s] related to the use of laptop computers on aircraft" are a well known method of Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula. If ISIS in Syria has copied that modus operandi it is interesting, but nothing sensational. The details, where ISIS is preparing these operations, may be somewhat relevant, but over how many cites does ISIS actually rule?

National Security Advisor McMaster, who was in the room with Trump and Lavrov, is on the record (down in paragraph eight!) denying that any sources or methods were revealed.

The only real claim here is that Trump gave Lavrov a tip-off with regard to a terrorist threat.

If Putin would learn of a potential ISIS attack on a U.S. passenger jet would you want him to share that secret information with the U.S. government? Of course you would.

But Buzzfeed and other anti-Trump organs blow the claims up to high heavens, The Lawfare writers go off their meds:

If the President gave this information away through carelessness or neglect, he has arguably breached his oath of office.

Utter bullshit. Trump would have offered such intelligence out of courtesy as part of his deal-making with the Russian government. Exchange of threat intelligence is regular business even between parties who otherwise dislike each other. It is in the interests of all to do such. That such an exchange happened is not newsworthy. even it touched some details.

Even worse – it is the publishing about the Oval office talk that can only help the terrorists.

As Emptywheel [says](#):

> these very outraged sources are [..] sharing the information that it is so outrageous to share.

If Trump's information sharing is *outrageous* why did the sources offer that same information to the global media? Why did WaPo and others publish on it?

Trump was elected with the support of the U.S. military. Clinton was supported by the corporate and intelligence sides of the [power triangle](#). Trump won. Now the deep-state intelligence side, together with the moneyed part of the Democratic party, is [out to impeach him](#). The constant sensationalized dribble of false or irrelevant claims against him prepares the ground for that.

The three fake-news examples above contain no *news* at all. The bits exposed in them have no information value. Their only purpose is to influence the readers by exaggerating outlandish claims based on little, if any, real facts of minor importance.

This full-throated propagandizing on all channels, without any critical voices challenging the basic facts, is endangering the functioning of democracy. The fourth estate is now just a tool to influence. It can no longer claim to have any inherent value.

For the average person one way out of this onslaught is to search for, use and foster alternative and discerning sources of news. The other is to give up.

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