

What does Trump's war on the media mean for the future of political journalism?

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Donald Trump has been highly critical of the American media since taking office as President.

George Kassimeris suggests that the media establishment were partly responsible for this reaction given their critical coverage of Trump's campaign, but that the President's continued attacks on the media are now a core part of his survival strategy.



The on-going toxic vendetta between President Trump and the American media establishment (including the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, and NBC) regarding fake news, alternative facts, lies and hypocrisy has to do with one thing and one thing only: political survival.

For better or worse, the election of Trump as President provoked a violent shift in the US media landscape, dealing in the process a heavy blow to the confidence, prestige and gravitas of the American media establishment. A media establishment which, it has to be said, went to great lengths during the election campaign to belittle, ridicule and stigmatise Trump's political image.

There were times during the campaign, particularly after each television debate, when the spectacle of Trump's total and destructive humiliation by the mainstream media outlets resembled clips from the recent BBC Planet Earth documentary: leopards hunting in the city and stalking through the undergrowth to grab piglets in the dead of night.

It was somewhat inevitable that such an over-the-top demonisation, even by American presidential election standards, would backfire, as demonstrated by the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump on 8 November 2016. If the ordinary American voters, those who live in the Midwest or Oklahoma, were sceptical before the election campaign of what they regarded as a distant, snobbish, Washington and New York political and media elite, they became contemptuous after the vicious treatment Trump received from the media outlets after each televised debate with Hilary Clinton.

There are serious doubts whether Trump would be in the White House right now if the US media establishment had not been so grossly overzealous in their attempts to demonise him and subsequently victimise him. And it seems that the same doubts existed among both the Publisher and Executive Editor of the New York Times, who soon after the election penned – to their credit – an open letter to their readers, essentially a self-critical reflection on the paper's coverage and reporting which promised “to rededicate ourselves to the fundamental mission of Times journalism”.

Sadly, I feel that it is rather late for journalistic rededications with the White House being occupied by a belligerent, despotic and vindictive President, who in the age of social media, feels no need to make peace with the media establishment as he does not depend on them in order to reach his audience. He can do that easily enough through his Twitter feed, framing his own messages on his own terms, as he did recently when he tweeted from Florida to his 25 million followers calling the US news media “the enemy of the American People.”

Donald Trump is for the American intelligentsia what Brexit is for the UK's intelligentsia: the worst thing that could have happened to the country. But, his presidency is a fact of life, whether one likes it or not. At least, the Americans have the option to remove Trump from the White House, should they decide that he is not suitable. This is not an option available to the UK once it leaves the European Union.

As things stand, there is little doubt that after Trump's surprising electoral victory, the genie is firmly and irrevocably

out of the bottle and the almost daily war of words currently being played out shows the intention of the White House to pursue an all-out confrontation against the media establishment. The reasoning behind this, I think, is a simple one. For Trump and his strategists, having come out of the election campaign media onslaught both alive and victorious, their only option is to keep the upper the hand and continue to raise doubts about the media's motivation, veracity and wisdom.

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