
'Another phony hit job': Trump slams NYT for 'made up' story about alleged Russian bounties in Afghanistan

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A sensational New York Times report which alleged that Russia paid the Taliban to target US forces in Afghanistan was pure fabrication, Donald Trump has claimed after the Pentagon and intel agencies dismissed the story.

The claim that Moscow had placed bounties on US and coalition troops operating in Afghanistan, first reported by the Times last month, has been widely discredited by senior military and intelligence officials. Defense Secretary Mark Esper testified earlier this week that "all the defense intelligence agencies have been unable to corroborate that report."

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley echoed his assessment, telling the House Armed Services Committee that there was no evidence to support the theory that Moscow offered cash rewards to the Taliban.

Responding to their testimony, the US president accused the Times of publishing "another phony hit job" without a real source.

In several subsequent pieces, the Times and other outlets have labored to give the unverified story an air of credibility – always relying on unnamed sources.

Earlier in July, General Kenneth McKenzie, who oversees military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia as the head of US Central Command, said the bounty theory has yet to be substantiated. There are similar misgivings in the intelligence community. An assessment by the National Intelligence Council (NIC) stated that the CIA and the National Counterterrorism Center had "medium confidence" in the reports, while the National Security Agency (NSA) and other spy agencies expressed "lower confidence."

Trump argued on July 1 that the Times' "hoax" had completely "discredited" the paper, and challenged the outlet

to reveal its anonymous source.

"The secret source probably does not even exist, just like the story itself," he tweeted. "This is all a made up Fake News Media Hoax started to slander me & the Republican Party."

The Times itself has quietly acknowledged that its bombshell revelation wasn't based on hard facts. The newspaper conceded in a follow-up article that there was no "explicit evidence" of bounty payments by Russia.
