

Exhibit 44

Nov 08, 2018 13:20:51

White House Shares Doctored Video to Support Punishment of Journalist Jim Acosta

By Drew Harwell

(Washington Post) -- White House press secretary Sarah Sanders on Wednesday night shared a video of CNN reporter Jim Acosta that appeared to have been altered to make his actions at a news conference look more aggressive toward a White House intern.

The edited video looks authentic: Acosta appeared to swiftly chop down on the arm of an aide as he held onto a microphone while questioning President Trump. But in the original video, Acosta's arm appears to move only as a response to a tussle for the microphone. His statement, "Pardon me, ma'am," is not included in the video Sanders shared.

Critics said that video – which sped up the movement of Acosta's arms in a way that dramatically changed the journalist's response – was deceptively edited to score political points. That edited video was first shared by Paul Joseph Watson, known for his conspiracy-theory videos on the far-right website Infowars.

Watson said he did not change the speed of the video and that claims he had altered it were a "brazen lie." Watson, who did not immediately respond to requests for comment, told BuzzFeed he created the video by downloading an animated image from conservative news site Daily Wire, zooming in and saving it as a video – a conversion he says could have made it "look a tiny bit different."

Side-by-side comparisons support claims from fact-checkers and experts such as Jonathan Albright, research director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, who argued that crucial parts of the video appear to have been altered so as to distort the action.

The video has quickly become a flashpoint in the battle over viral misinformation, turning a live interaction watched by thousands in real time into just another ideological tug-of-war. But it has also highlighted how video content – long seen as an unassailable verification tool for truth and confirmation – has become as vulnerable to political distortion as anything else.

Albright said videos like this pose an even greater risk of perpetuating misinformation than completely faked news videos, because they contain a grain of truth and will likely be given the assumption of accuracy.

"The most dangerous type of fake news and reporting and evidence is when you get into the fine details, the nuanced things that are shaped to present a certain viewpoint or decision or news a certain way," he said. "It's not AI-generated or completely false. It's something that's real but has been literally stretched ... and molded into weaponized evidence."

Sanders's tweet of the edited video, in which she said the White House would "not tolerate the inappropriate behavior clearly documented in this video," has at least 20,000 retweets and more than 2 million views. Watson's video, posted two hours before, has been seen at least 740,000 times.

Matt Dornic, a CNN communications executive, tweeted that Sanders's sharing of the video was "absolutely shameful." "You released a doctored video - actual fake news. History will not be kind to you," he wrote.

On Thursday, Sanders said, "The question is: did the reporter make contact or not? The video is clear, he did. We stand by our statement."

During Wednesday's White House news conference, Acosta and Trump sparred over a question of whether Trump had "demonized immigrants" by calling a caravan of Central American migrants "an invasion." Following a lengthy back-and-forth, a White House intern tried to take the microphone from Acosta, who held onto it. "Pardon me, ma'am," Acosta said in the original video, though the audio was stripped from the edited version.

On Wednesday night, Sanders accused Acosta of "placing his hands on a young woman" and said his press credentials would be suspended "until further notice." Press advocates called the move an unprecedented retaliation against a journalist.

The seconds-long interaction has been analyzed in excruciating detail and likened to a 21st-century "Zapruder film," the closely scrutinized amateur video of late President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. On social media, it has quickly become an object of massive ideological division, in which the same scene is open to very different interpretations.

Watson wrote on Infowars that Acosta "clearly uses his left arm to physically resist/restrain the woman," and that he "overpowered her." Infowars, whose conspiracy theories include the baseless claim that the Sandy Hook school shooting was a hoax, was banned this year by Facebook, Google and Twitter for sharing offensive or threatening content.

In another video of the encounter tweeted by Sarah Burris, an editor at the left-leaning political blog Raw Story, the footage has been slowed down and annotated to show the four times the White House intern touches Acosta while trying to take the microphone. It has been viewed more than 1 million times.

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