

Trump Is Right. It Is the Amazon Washington Post Being Used By Bezos For Political Manipulation

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By **JACK SHAFER**

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President Donald Trump's insistence on calling the *Washington Post* the "*Amazon Washington Post*" riles the newspaper's executive editor, Martin Baron, to no end. He wants one and all to know that the online retailer and the newspaper are distinct corporate entities.

"There isn't anybody here who is paid by Amazon,"

Baron **told** the *New York Times* on Monday. “Not one penny.”

Further distancing Amazon from the *Washington Post*, Baron said that the *Post*’s owner, Jeff Bezos, who founded Amazon, involves himself only in the paper’s business doings, not its news coverage. “He’s never suggested a story to anybody here, he’s never critiqued a story, he’s never suppressed a story,” Baron said.

I have little doubt that this is true, but Baron’s argument is a distinction without a difference. Bezos became the world’s **richest** person through his labors at Amazon, which he still controls.

He **purchased** the *Post* in 2013 with \$250 million of his Amazon pin money. While it might be more accurate to

call the newspaper the “Bezos *Washington Post*,” seeing as Bezos and Amazon are joined at the hip, it’s not ridiculous to speak of the paper—at least in the vernacular—as the *Amazon Washington Post*. If Amazon didn’t exist, it’s unlikely the *Washington Post* would exist in its current form.

Of course, Trump doesn’t delight in calling the paper the *Amazon Washington Post* for these reasons. He has long viewed himself as a “[counterpuncher](#)” who must hurt anybody who hurts him. And boy, has the *Post* hurt him. Ordinarily, Trump attacks reporters and outlets by name when a news outlet offends him. In availing himself of a compound name for the paper, he gives himself an additional target to pummel. Bloomberg View

columnist [Timothy L. O'Brien](#) points out in a column Tuesday that Trump first fused the paper and online company into a single enemy with a tweet in [December 2015](#), immediately after the paper reported his campaign call for a ban of Muslim immigrants. That tweet included Bezos' Twitter handle, too. Trump tweeted more of the [same](#) in July 2017, after the *Post* published a scathing story on his attorney general, Jeff Sessions. Trump's current crusade against Amazon, [falsely calling](#) the *Post* a lobbyist for the company and deceitfully [claiming](#) that the U.S. Postal Service loses money delivering Amazon packages is only more of the usual Trump tit-for-tat.

Why drag Amazon into his grudge against the *Post*? To

do media organizations real harm, Trump understands that he must threaten some aspect of their business not protected by the penumbra of the First Amendment. This helps explain his administration's opposition to the AT&T merger with Time Warner, which owns his media bête noire CNN. By jawboning against Amazon, Trump has deliberately caused its stock to dip. The company has lost **8 percent** of its market since Axios first reported Trump's full ire against it last week—that's a \$60 billion reduction of its market value and several billion off Bezos' net worth.

Regulatory powers also allow Trump some latitude in rewarding media organizations loyal to him. For instance, former FCC Commissioner Michael Copps calls Trump's recent pro-

Sinclair tweets a “green light“ designed to spur FCC approval of the chain’s \$3.9 billion purchase of Tribune Media’s TV stations.

I suspect that Trump doesn’t fully appreciate the downside of his anti-media strategy. Every denunciation of the *Post*, the *New York Times*, NBC News, CBS News, CNN and other outlets serves to boost those outlets’ audiences and their corresponding revenues. Newsrooms glow with appreciation whenever he pounces on them, and the reporters singled out for abuse preen. Whenever Trump lays the strap on Jim Acosta and CNN, the competition pouts, “Why not us?!” As I wrote more than a year ago, Trump has made journalism **great** again.

Trump's bullying works best against flawed or weak adversaries like Hillary Clinton and Mexico. But when rumbling against the strong and confident, his record ain't so good. In Business Insider, [Josh Barro](#) predicts that Trump will lose his stupid fight with Amazon, which is far too [popular](#) with consumers for him to successfully demonize it. People delight too much in Amazon's convenience, selection, low prices and cheap delivery. They willingly deserted the shopping malls Trump says he wants to "save," and they don't want to go back. If Trump can't demonize Amazon, he won't be able to demonize Bezos. And that means he will fail to demonize the *Post*, too.

A month from now, after the market finally comprehends

that Trump lacks the dictatorial powers required to break Amazon, its stock price will recover. Learning his lesson, Trump will find some weakling he can whup.