



The NY Times: The Newspaper of Wreckage

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When is a "secret" not a secret?

When The [New York](#) Times decides, in the interest of saving its old gray hide, that it is not.

On June 22, the paper trumpeted its expose of "a secret Bush administration program" to track terror finances. The banking program, reporters Eric Lichtblau and James Risen made unmistakably clear, was a "closely held secret." The [front-page](#) story referred to the secret nature of the program no less than eight times. A Times-produced Web video featuring Lichtblau promoted a brief interview in which he "reveal(ed) a secret Bush administration program to access financial records."

But by July 2, smarting from the public backlash against its blabbermouth coverage, the Times crew was backpedaling faster than circus monkeys on barrels hurtling over

[Niagara Falls](#). Suddenly, the "secret" was no secret at all.

Everybody who's anybody has known about the secret program all along, silly. New York Times ombudsman Byron Calame's belated defense of the Times' expose of the monitoring of the SWIFT banking program contained this revealing passage:

"There was a significant question as to how secret the (monitoring of the SWIFT banking program) was after five years. 'Hundreds, if not thousands, of people know about this,' (Executive Editor Bill) Keller claimed he was told by an official who talked to him on condition of anonymity."

"Hundreds, if not thousands, of people" have known about the program before the Times blabbed about it. Well, there's a scoop. So, why wasn't this reported in the

original story and reflected in the original, front-page headline?

There was no printed follow-up from lapdog Calame about Keller's assertion, which goes a good bit further than the claim by Times' apologists Richard Clarke and Roger Cressey. That mind-[reading](#) duo wrote in a Times op-ed that terrorists already assumed their financial transactions were being monitored. Calame curiously neglected to note that Keller's claim contradicted both the tone and facts presented in the Times' initial coverage by reporters Lichtblau and Risen.

Which is just as well, since Lichtblau himself is now contradicting his own story, too. On CNN's "Reliable Sources," facing withering criticism from talk radio host Hugh Hewitt, Lichtblau blustered:

"When you have senior Treasury Department officials going before Congress, publicly talking about how they are tracing and cutting off money to terrorists, weeks and weeks before our story ran. USA Today, the biggest circulation in the country, the lead story on their front page four days before our story ran was the terrorists know their money is being traced, and they are moving

it into -- outside of the banking system into unconventional means. *It is by no means a secret.*" (emphasis added).

Hmm. What was that headline over Lichtblau's story again? Oh, yeah: "Bank Data Sifted in Secret by U.S. to block terror." Meanwhile, finance regulators and top government officials in Belgium (who apparently aren't among the "hundreds, if not thousands" who knew about the program) have ordered a probe into SWIFT, which is regulated by the Belgian [central bank](#) and answers to Belgian law. Bush-undermining Eurowehndlers are launching a debate in parliament over the program next week, and a private human rights lobbying group has filed formal complaints against the SWIFT banking consortium in 32 countries.

Lesson No. 1: Never trust the Times' headlines.

Lesson No. 2: Never trust what's printed under the Times' headlines.

Lesson No. 3: Never trust what comes out of the mouths of the Times' editors and reporters.

Avoid the newspaper of wreckage, and help keep American safe.

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