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Disarming the U.S. on the “Information Battlefield”

Cliff Kincaid — August 27, 2014

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Paul Goble, a specialist on international broadcasting and the propaganda war being waged over Ukraine, [writes](#) that “...as effective as [Vladimir] Putin’s disinformation campaign has been inside Russia, it has been even more successful beyond that country’s borders.” One problem, he says, is that the Western media treat Putin’s lies as just another point of view.

Another problem is that the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the federal agency that oversees all U.S. civilian international media, seems to be completely clueless as to how to win the information war and make sure truth triumphs over lies.

The BBG just met in Washington, D.C. to hear from Ben Rhodes, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications and Speechwriting. A press release said that Rhodes “reiterated the President’s commitment to U.S. international media,” such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. This sounds good, but what does it mean?

The release quoted Rick Stengel, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, as saying that the expansion of U.S.-sponsored Russian language newscasts are important, and that “Given the information battlefields we are seeing in Russia and Ukraine, this represents a true realization of your mission.”

In fact, the mission is clear, but the U.S. does not have an effective way to counter

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Russian disinformation—here or abroad. Putin takes advantage of the freedom that the U.S. gives his regime and its agents to operate in the U.S., but the U.S. is handicapped by restrictions on the media and non-governmental organizations in Russia.

Concerning the role played by the Western media, Goble contends that “...many Western outlets report what Moscow ‘says,’ while describing any Ukrainian government statement as ‘claims.’ Invariably, doing so is called objectivity but in fact it is anything but. Instead, it gives an opening to governments like Putin’s, which are prepared to lie and to spread their lies widely, confident that what they say, however untrue or outrageous, will be reported.”

This is one reason why the idea that Ukraine shot down the Malaysian plane, thinking it was Putin’s jet, has gotten so much attention in the West. It gets picked up as just another point of view, even though it is a blatant lie and was designed as such. Russia has a propaganda channel, Russia Today (RT), which broadcasts this disinformation inside the U.S. on a regular basis.

Showing his own receptivity to Russian propaganda, former Texas Rep. Ron Paul went on a new conservative news channel, Newsmax TV, to suggest that the government of Ukraine had shot the plane down. The former Republican congressman has been a regular guest on RT, and has wandered far from the days when he claimed to be an anti-communist.

Goble says many in the West fall victim to Moscow’s lies, “either out of a confusion between balance and objectivity, a conviction that all governments lie and that no one should be surprised, or a commitment to maintaining good relations with the Russian government no matter what it does.” It is not clear what motivates Ron Paul, but his acceptance of the Kremlin point of view makes a mockery out of his proclaimed devotion to liberty around the world.

Goble writes that the real challenge is “countering disinformation campaigns,” and that an effective response “requires the development of channels to deliver alternative messages, including international broadcasting.” He goes on to say that “... if the U.S. had a capacity to broadcast to the Russian people directly, Moscow would not have been able to shape Russian public opinion in the way that it has.” This comment reflects Putin’s largely successful effort to ban or restrict international broadcasting inside Russia.

Since there is no level playing field at the present time, would it be proper for the U.S. government to close down the offices of RT in the U.S.?

Goble told this writer, “Closing down RT would be one thing. Expelling Andranik Migranyan and his operation would be an even better bet.”

He is referring to another Russian propaganda operation known as the so-called “[Institute for Democracy and Cooperation](#)” in New York, described by Goble as “responsible for promoting Moscow’s views in the United States.”

The website of this Russian “think tank” says that it “actively creates and develops relationships with leading NGOs, universities, and research centers,” including:

- New York University
- University of California
- Stanford University

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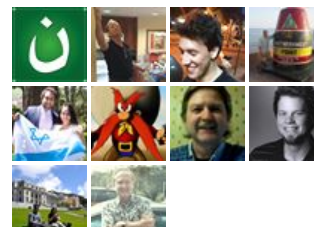
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- The Russian American Cultural Heritage Center
- The Foreign Press Association.

Goble notes that the group’s director, Andranik Migranyan, “gained notoriety earlier this year when he suggested that Adolf Hitler would have gone down in history as the greatest German leader of all time if he had stopped before invading Poland.”

Migranyan had written that “Hitler was gathering German lands,” and that if he had stopped at “uniting, without a single drop of blood,” Germany with these so-called German lands, “he would be remembered in his country’s history as a politician of the highest order.”

Russian activist Vladimir Kara-Murza [commented](#), “Perhaps someone could remind Andranik Migranyan and his Kremlin overseers of the track record of this ‘politician of the highest order’ and ‘gatherer of German lands’ prior to 1939—including the establishment of concentration camps and the public burning of books; the purges of ‘non-Aryans’ and the creation of the Gestapo; the closure of newspapers and political parties and the establishment of a one-man dictatorship; the Nuremberg racial laws and Kristallnacht.”

If the U.S. isn’t going to expel Migranyan and his crew, then why not close down RT? It seems that the Obama administration believes that foreign propaganda channels like RT have the same First Amendment rights that apply to American citizens.

Rick Stengel has [written](#) about RT’s “disinformation campaign” towards Ukraine and has summarized its various disinformation themes.

“Yet, even so,” he goes on, “I would defend the right of RT to broadcast. The First Amendment protects speech that we reject as much as speech that we embrace. The State Department facilitates RT’s coverage by giving them unrestricted access to our briefings. No one is arguing that RT should be taken off the air the way Moscow has abruptly ended the license that allows Voice of America to broadcast to Russians.”

The U.S. didn’t have this attitude toward Nazi propaganda activities before and during World War II. Our attitude then was that Nazi agents operating inside the U.S. should be investigated and exposed by official committees of the U.S. Congress. Our objective then was to thwart aggression and expose our enemies. The [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#) (FARA) was passed in response to Nazi propaganda activities. The U.S. was concerned about the Nazi movement developing on American soil.

FARA is still on the books and could be applied to Russian propaganda activities.

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At the very least, RT could be forced to label its broadcasts as propaganda, as required by this law. Plus, American taxpayers should not be forced to pay to put RT on the air through dozens of public television stations around the country.

In a major scandal that we have covered for several years, taxpayer-supported MHz Networks [distributes RT](#) as well as Al-Jazeera, the voice of the Muslim Brotherhood, on public TV stations under the rubric of “Programming for globally-minded people.”

Florida broadcaster Jerry Kenney notes that the federally-funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funneled \$27,580,113 into MHz Networks and its affiliates in fiscal year 2011.

As we have previously reported, “Kenney hired a lawyer to file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission, arguing that the contracts between the public TV stations affiliated with Commonwealth are being improperly used for the purpose of broadcasting foreign propaganda in the U.S.” Violations of these rules can result in financial fines and revocation of broadcast licenses.

But the rules and regulations are not being enforced, almost as if there are those within the U.S. government who want Russia’s disinformation apparatus to thwart a tough foreign policy response to Russia.

The facts are clear: not only is the U.S. facilitating Russian propaganda operations, but our tax dollars are going to make it all possible.

Is there anyone in Congress willing to expose and stop this insanity?

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About the author



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Saul Alinsky said that if you can separate morality from sex you will create a marxist. The best way to understand Ron Paul and libertarians is to look at their views on morality.

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