

Fake News, “Human Rights” and “Free Speech” in the USA: State-Sponsored Intimidation, or When FARA Goes Too Far

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The US government is blatantly violating the most basic tenets of its purportedly “sacred” ideology of “human rights” and “free speech” by egregiously overstepping the bounds of FARA to engage in the same type of state-sponsored intimidation that it regularly accuses its geopolitical opponents of for far less.

[Yahoo](#) broke the story earlier on Monday that the FBI questioned former Sputnik employee Andrew Feinburg following his public complaints to the media about how the company is supposedly being run, and this reportedly came after another former employee, Joseph John Fionda, allegedly contacted the FBI on his own initiative to share “a big packet” of information accusing Sputnik of breaking the law. The legislation at the center of this scandal is the “[Foreign Agents Registration Act](#)” (FARA), a 1938 law originally passed to expose Nazi influence operations inside of the US. It’s since been used for registering anyone who works as a “foreign agent”, which stereotypically refers to Congressional lobbyists hired by foreign governments but is nowadays being proposed by some US voices to apply to Sputnik and RT as well.

The basis for this move is that both companies are publicly funded by the Russian government, and that this therefore supposedly makes them “propaganda” because it’s assumed by the American authorities that all of their employees lack “editorial independence” from the Kremlin. As could have been expected, the same forces pushing for Sputnik and RT to register as “foreign agents” under FARA aren’t interested in equally applying these expanded “standards” to other publicly financed international media outlets such as Al Jazeera and the BBC.

Using the same criteria as is being applied against these two companies, one could rhetorically question the “independence” of US Congressmen and American government-connected “think tanks” to the “deep state”, which is another word for its permanent military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracies that hold disproportionate influence over policymaking decisions.

In any case, what’s important to focus on is the difference between publicly financed institutions and those which are “government-run”. The first one simply means that taxpayers are paying the bills, whereas the second refers to government employees being the final decision makers on all matters. All government employees work for publicly financed institutions, but not all employees at publicly financed institutions are government

employees. [Sputnik](#), for example, is a publicly financed media platform where the editors always have the final say as decision makers in what is a globally recognized industry-wide hierarchical standard. This doesn't indicate "censorship" or a "cover-up" - it's just plain journalism.

If Washington-funded media platforms happen to accuse Sputnik and RT of being "government-run", then it might possibly be that they're falsely projecting their own unstated but widely assumed internal arrangements onto their Russian counterparts.

Moreover, just because two disgruntled employees seem to have experienced communication issues with their superiors and failed to resolve - or in some cases, even address - them prior to continuing with their given assignments doesn't mean that there's a "Kremlin conspiracy" because their bosses were displeased with their overall work at the company as a result. Outcomes like that happen in those situations. It's life - nothing more, nothing less - and should be used as a personal learning experience, not as someone's "[15 minutes of fame](#)" driven by their desire to more easily land a new job elsewhere, whether in the same industry or the "think tank" one. It's natural for people to have divergent views on any given subject, especially when it's related to politics, but editors always have the final say when it comes to the journalism industry, and employees are supposed to respect that.



One of the more popular fake news claims going around about Sputnik and [RT](#) is that the two outlets were heavily biased in favor of Trump during the 2016 election, but that's frankly not true, as anyone would know by listening to Sputnik's radio programs from that time, watching RT's shows, or reading both of their websites' archives. Both platforms lean closer to the liberal-progressive side of things as opposed to the conservative one. Simply reporting on the many unfavorable stories surrounding Hillary Clinton and not blindly fawning over her candidacy doesn't qualify as "institutional bias", though in largely controlled systems such as the American one where most of the media openly back the Democrats, then the Overton window concept would suggest that Sputnik and RT's balanced reporting and analyses would understandably stand out as attention-grabbing and exemplary.

In addition, it should never be forgotten that it was the on-the-fence population of the Rust Belt who surprisingly turned the election in Trump's favor. One would presume that the liberal-progressive masses in the solidly Democratic states on each coast would be Sputnik and RT's core audiences given how these two outlets' more leftist-leaning stance on many matters overlap with the prevailing preferences there, so it's ridiculous to believe that these Russian companies somehow convinced voters to want to "Make America Great Again" in the more stereotypically nationalistic heartland with their liberal-progressive messaging. In fact, it's uncertain how many people in that part of the US listen to, watch, or read Sputnik and RT in the first place when [Fox News](#), [CNN](#), and [Rush Limbaugh](#) dominate those media markets, and whether these Russian companies are even capable of making any difference at all in those swing states.



Another point that's often brought up in the course of this conversation is that individual

writers, analysts, and presenters might be “biased”, but human beings are unique and have their own way of understanding and relaying information, which in the media field leads to them expressing their individual viewpoints and perspectives in their work. There’s nothing wrong with this, and it should be celebrated that people feel comfortable enough in their professional environment to express themselves as they see fit, though provided that they’re not obnoxiously – and perhaps even deliberately – doing something to cross the line of the editorial standards which vary according to the media outlet. The Sputnik and RT employees that are in the public limelight sometimes have opinions that are just as passionate as their counterparts in [The Washington Post](#) and [The New York Times](#), though the latter two are rarely – if ever – condemned for their zeal by the US government.

The double standard that’s being applied when it comes to Sputnik and RT should be clear for all to see, and it’s that the American “deep state” doesn’t tolerate foreigners having an opinion about the US unless they present it on a US-based media platform or on one of Washington’s allies’. Otherwise, as the witch-hunting “logic” now goes, they’re “foreign agents” possibly “spreading propaganda”, and their outlets need to be registered as such with the intimidating “scarlet letter(s)” of FARA if they’re foreign-funded. Even worse, the hysterical *zeitgeist* has now peaked at such a point that Americans are unable to talk about American-related issues (whether domestic or foreign) on non-American international media outlets publicly funded by a foreign government without potentially having to register as a “foreign agent” in their homelands, whether they still live there or emigrated already.

This is nothing less than state-sponsored intimidation, since Washington is implying that the Americans who work for and comment on these platforms might be “national security threats” because of their supposedly undeclared “foreign agent” status.

If Russia implemented the same media version of FARA that the US is seriously considering and decided to decree that its citizens working for publicly funded American information outlets both in the country and abroad are “foreign agents” that are forced to register with the Kremlin, then the US government would instantly condemn it as state-sponsored intimidation and political oppression, possibly even extending political asylum and an expedited path to citizenship for those said nationals who might be working in the US and are too afraid to ever go home again. Frighteningly, however, it’s not Russians who have to fear the long arm of their government in this respect, but Americans, though it’s “politically incorrect” for anyone to say so.

In the Twilight Zone of the New Cold War, Russia could plausibly – and with full ethical and legal backing behind it – contemplate granting its Russian-based American employees political asylum and potential citizenship because of the state-sponsored intimidation that they might become reasonably subjected to back home just because they decided to “Tell The Untold” and “Question More”. If the US government demands that Sputnik and RT employees register as “foreign agents” under FARA but selectively ignores enforcing this new “standard” against other publicly financed international media companies and their employees, then it’s not unrealistic to imagine that Edward Snowden might end up sharing a toast with some fellow American political refugees in Moscow before too long.

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