

Homeland Security ‘Pauses’ Disinformation Board Three Weeks After Creating It

The group's leader was the target of harassment and threats.

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*The Biden administration may be struggling in its efforts to fight [security-related misinformation](#). The Washington Post [sources](#) claim the Department of Homeland Security has “paused” a Disinformation Governance Board just three weeks after its April 27th announcement. Officials reportedly decided to shut down the board May 16th, but that decision appears to be on hold after a last-minute effort to retain board leader **Nina Jankowicz**. She [resigned](#) from the board and the DHS today (May 18th).*

While the leakers didn’t directly explain why the Disinformation Governance Board was frozen, they claim the White House neither had clear messaging nor a defense against misinformation and threats levelled against Jankowicz. The board was meant to examine approaches for fighting viral lies and had no power over content, but far-right influencers and outlets misrepresented it as a censorship tool and villainized Jankowicz. The campaigns led to harassment and threats against the board leader — in other words, the board was the victim of the very sort of attack it was supposed to prevent.

We’ve asked the DHS for comment. In a statement to the *Post*, the department said the board’s role had been “grossly mischaracterized” and that Jankowicz had been targeted by “unjustified and vile personal attacks and threats.” Previously, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and White House press secretary Jen Psaki have respectively tried to clarify the board’s objectives and debunk falsehoods with little effect.

There is a chance the board could survive depending on a Homeland Security Advisory Council review. If the reports are true, though, the US government may have to rethink its anti-disinformation efforts if they’re going to survive both criticism and internal scrutiny.

Update 5/18 2:20PM ET: Homeland Security provided its full statement to Engadget. The department defended both the board and Jankowicz, and noted that its Advisory Council will

conduct a “thorough” review to improve its anti-disinformation efforts as well as increase transparency. Final recommendations are due within 75 days. You can read the full statement below.

“DHS created an internal working group called the Disinformation Governance Board to ensure the Department’s disinformation-related work protects free speech, civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy. It was intended to ensure coordination across the Department’s component agencies as they protect Americans from disinformation that threatens the homeland - including malicious efforts spread by foreign adversaries, human traffickers, and transnational criminal organizations. The Board has been grossly and intentionally mischaracterized: it was never about censorship or policing speech in any manner. It was designed to ensure we fulfill our mission to protect the homeland, while protecting core Constitutional rights. However, false attacks have become a significant distraction from the Department’s vitally important work to combat disinformation that threatens the safety and security of the American people.

“To help instill trust in our work, Secretary Mayorkas has asked former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff and former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick to lead a thorough review and assessment, conducted through the bipartisan Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC). This assessment will focus on answering two pivotal questions. First, how can the Department most effectively and appropriately address disinformation that poses a threat to our country, while protecting free speech, civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy. Second, how can DHS achieve greater transparency across our disinformation-related work and increase trust with the public and other key stakeholders. The Secretary has requested the HSAC’s final recommendations within 75 days. During the HSAC’s review, the Board will not convene and its work will be paused, but the Department’s critical work across several administrations to address disinformation that threatens the security of our country will continue.”

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