

# Intimidation and Censorship Campaign against Online Independent Media

## Analysis

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*The heated debate within Western governments about the best way to fight what they regard as “propaganda” has recently taken a disturbing turn towards intimidation of the outlets accused of peddling such information products and even discussions about their possible censorship, but if they were really sincere in combating this menace while staying true to their “democratic” principles, then they’d work on improving their citizens’ media literacy so that they could make up their own minds about the veracity of the various articles that they come across expressing non-mainstream views on contentious topics.*

One of the cornerstones of Western soft power is the notion that people within this part of the world have the “freedom” to live as they like so long as they do so responsibly in ways that don’t endanger others, yet this idea is being discredited by Western governments themselves in their fight against what they regard as “propaganda”. The outlets accused of peddling such vaguely defined information products have recently been victimized by a coordinated intimidation campaign that disturbingly hints at their possible censorship after they’ve been defamed as allegedly participating in a far-reaching Russian military intelligence operation across cyberspace. Even though no charges have been filed against the individuals supposedly connected to this plot, that hasn’t stopped the Western governments from trying to ruin their lives.

### Shadowy Investigations

OneWorld was one such target of these efforts, the first of which was launched against it and the author personally in December 2019 by the website “[EU vs Disinfo](#)”, described on its page as “the flagship project of the European External Action Service’s [East StratCom Task Force](#)”, in its defamatory hit piece titled “[One World, One Author, One Chain Of Command](#)”. This was followed up by a BBC investigation in early June of this year that was never published after OneWorld released its response to the provocative questions that it received by email under the title “[OneWorld’s Response To The BBC: It’s Shameful To Try To Intimidate Our Contributors!](#)” The next attack came later that month from a shadowy “NGO” called “EU Disinfo Lab”, which published a report about “[How Two Information Portals Hide Their Ties To The Russian News Agency InfoRos](#)”.

It was then cited by a Dutch MEP at the [European Parliament](#) in mid-June and also by the Associated Press (AP) and the New York Times (NYT) in their coordinated attack against OneWorld late last month that quoted unnamed US officials. OneWorld responded to them in an article titled “[OneWorld’s Response To Media Defamation: Sharing One’s Opinion Doesn’t](#)

## [Make Them A GRU Agent!](#)

### From OneWorld To The Rest Of Alt-Media

On Wednesday afternoon, however, the intimidation campaign was expanded to include several other sites after the US State Department's "Global Engagement Center" released a special report about "[Russia's Pillars Of Disinformation And Propaganda](#)". OneWorld, InfoRos, InfoBRICS, and Observateur Continental weren't mentioned in this one like in the previous reports, but this time the Strategic Culture Foundation, New Eastern Outlook, Global Research, News Front, South Front, Geopolitica.Ru, and Katehon were defamed as part of the same general plot. The report also explicitly claimed that "The Kremlin bears direct responsibility for cultivating these tactics and platforms as part of its approach to using information as a weapon." It's worth noting that all of this is taking place against the backdrop of increased social media shadow blocking of Alt-Media and calls to outright censor such sites, as well as the European Commission's proposed "[European Democracy Action Plan](#)" for "countering disinformation and at adapting to evolving threats and manipulations", which could be abused for the same purposes. Unmistakably, the trend of Western governments is to intimidate all of Alt-Media.

### Dangerous Defamation

Not only does this go against their self-professed value of "free speech", but it also embodies the same thuggish tactics that they often accuse their geopolitical rivals of employing against dissident voices considering that some of the contributors that were defamed whether directly or indirectly as part of this alleged Russian military intelligence scheme are Western nationals. In other words, Western governments are launching a worldwide intimidation campaign against some of their dissident nationals at home and abroad, one that's being actively propagated across the entire world in the highest profile way possible by their Mainstream Media surrogates such as the AP and NYT. The defamatory allegations that they're connected to a foreign intelligence agency are extremely dangerous too since they might incite misguided "patriots" to harm those individuals, to say nothing of the ominous suggestion that they're under investigation by their own governments simply for sharing their personal views about contentious topics. As such, some of them might fear being hit with false criminal charges as a last-ditch effort to revive the debunked Russiagate narrative.

### The Media Literacy Solution

It certainly seems like Western governments are intent on manufacturing the false pretexts upon which they can impose the censorship of the Alt-Media sites in question, but if they were truly sincere about simply "protecting" their people from what they regard as "propaganda", then they'd focus on improving their media literacy instead. What's meant by this is educating the populace about the different types of information products freely available to them on the internet so that they can then make up their own minds about the veracity of the various articles that they come across expressing non-mainstream views on whatever controversial issue it may be. This solution would help safeguard the West's soft power notion that people within this part of the world have the "freedom" to live as they like so long as they do so responsibly in ways that don't endanger others. After all, what someone voluntarily chooses to read in their free time and most often in the privacy of their homes is their own business, not the government's, except of course if it's child pornography, material published by officially designated terrorist organizations, or an

entirely made-up fake news event that could incite the reader to violence, for example.

## Discerning The Various Information Products

What follows is a brief overview of the most common information products available on the internet and a brief description thereof. It's by no means exhaustive, nor is it meant to be, since the purpose is simply to help others discern the sometimes subtle differences between these materials, which occasionally overlap into hybrid ones depending on the article in question. No value judgement is being made about these information products, and it should be understood that they can be created and disseminated by both state (governments, government-organized NGOs or GONGOs, etc) and non-state actors (regular people, civil society organizations, etc.) alike, the latter category of which might not even be conscious of the specific products that they're creating nor aware that they're sharing something which might not be exactly what they think it is (e.g. sharing propaganda that they mistakenly believe is journalism). Without further ado, here are the most common information products that casual readers most often come across online, in order of assumed objectivity:

### *Journalism:*

In its theoretically purest sense, journalism is supposed to restrict itself to solely reporting the facts without any interpretation or innuendo. Regrettably, pure journalism is extremely rare nowadays, but the average person's unawareness of this allows those who are pushing other information products to disguise their works as such considering the fact that many people are subconsciously more receptive to the message being put forth by anything affiliated with that label. In short, most products calling themselves journalism aren't real journalism.

### *Investigations:*

Closely related to journalism, investigations attempt to dive deep into a particular topic and are supposed to be as objective as possible, hence why many people are subconsciously receptive to anything that uses this label. Nevertheless, just like journalism, investigations have also started to employ interpretation and innuendo, the most tell-tale signs of which are whenever an adjective or narrative is introduced that's meant to provoke an emotional reaction from the reader or renders a value judgement that's meant to influence them.

### *Analysis:*

The interpretation of facts is what constitutes analysis, and it's among the most common information products nowadays alongside activism and propaganda. Many readers don't have the background knowledge required to confidently form conclusions about complex topics (especially those related to foreign policy) without some sort of guidance, hence this product's popularity. That said, disguising analysis as journalism is a deception on the part of the author or outlet involved, even if it's done so out of ignorance.

### *Op-Eds:*

Opinion-editorials are located between analysis and activism, and they explicitly inform the reader that what they're coming across is someone's personal opinion. Usually, op-eds aren't too sophisticated and tend to incorporate a lot of rhetoric and even sometimes demagoguery. The difference between op-eds, activism, and propaganda is that there's no

question about the first-mentioned's intentions while the latter's might be more ambiguous and difficult to discern depending on how well they're disguised.

#### *Activism:*

Many people feel very strongly about something and therefore want to promote whatever their cause may be, which is activism. It differs from analysis since it's less objective (the extent to which is entirely subjective though, paradoxically enough) and is intended to guide the reader towards a certain conclusion. When successful, the reader then supports or opposes something either actively or passively. This is usually associated with animal, environmental, and human rights but increasingly involves international politics too.

#### *Propaganda:*

Propaganda is very similar to activism but it's even less objective and usually contains a consistent narrative thread throughout the product in question and every other one associated with it. It also commonly disguises itself as journalism or an investigation, but sometimes even analysis nowadays as well. Unlike the other five aforementioned information products, it's generally "cruder", more "direct", and often "lies by omission" by leaving out key facts that could make all the difference in influencing the reader.

#### *Fake News:*

This term is just as commonly misused as journalism is nowadays, and it refers to the assertion of an entirely fabricated news event as true, such as a political or military development, or an individual's reported words. Modern-day activist and propaganda products tend to eschew fake news since it's usually easily — or at least eventually — detected and thus discredits both the author and outlet that shared it. It should also go without saying that analyses (interpretations) and/or conclusions that someone disagrees with are not fake news.

#### Useful Tips To Keep In Mind

It's not enough for one to only be able to discern the various information products available since they should also keep a few tips in mind when determining the aforesaid's veracity and whether it's worth taking anything mentioned within it seriously. For starters, the author should ideally be a real person who shares their face on the internet unless they're using a pseudonym for security reasons related to the sensitivity of whatever they're writing about. Secondly, it should raise a red flag if the reader determines that an information product has been mislabeled, for example, if the Mainstream Media pushes propaganda under the cover of journalism like the AP and NYT's earlier cited pieces did. It's also extremely suspicious whenever someone cites unnamed sources since there's no way of confirming whether they really exist. Finally, the financing of the outlet and/or author in question is also relevant since it might influence the purpose of an information product, though one shouldn't automatically be suspicious of an article just because of that. As a case in point, the author himself has a [history of constructively critiquing Russian foreign policy](#) despite earlier being employed by publicly financed [Sputnik](#).

#### Disagreements Over Designation Are Proof Of Democracy

Having said all of that, it's perfectly normal for there to be disagreements over which designation a certain information product should have. That's actually very healthy for a

democratic civil society to debate, though so long as this is being done by members of the said society instead of having a designation imposed upon them by their governments. It is against Western countries' democratic traditions and soft power notions for their authorities to intimidate those who express dissident views — especially if they're their nationals — and push to censor their work. As earlier explained, it's also very dangerous for the government to directly state or imply that those who contribute to platforms that have been designated by the authorities as "propaganda" are involved in a foreign intelligence influence operation. Considering the fact that none of the individuals connected to these claims have been charged with a crime, it is the definition of defamation by most Western countries' own legal standards to to accuse them of such, though it wouldn't be surprising if many lawyers are reluctant to take up their possible cases out of fear of getting on their government's bad side.

### The Alt-Media Action Plan

Faced with unprecedentedly intense pressure from Western governments for the very fact that their information products don't conform with Mainstream Media narratives, the members and outlets that constitute the Alt-Media Community must urgently band together to survive this dangerous anti-democratic onslaught against them. There's nothing wrong with networking more closely with one another and sharing their work on an even more frequent basis in response as a sign of solidarity with each other, which is a normal thing to do despite such cross-platform cooperation being defamed by Western governments as so-called "proof" of a Russian military intelligence operation. They should also actively encourage more of their readers to contribute to their platforms if they're so inclined, with these new writers possibly following the author's advice that he shared with aspiring analysts in his May 2018 piece for Global Research titled "[Political Analysis In Today's Interconnected Globalized Society: Seven Steps](#)". No matter what, however, nobody should get demoralized or give up since the newfound attention being given to the Alt-Media Community by Western governments and their Mainstream Media surrogates proves just how effective everyone's work has been.

### Concluding Thoughts

Western governments have stepped out of line after recently launching their latest campaign of intimidation against the dissident voices that share their work in the Alt-Media Community. It's extremely dangerous to either allege or imply that these individuals and their sites are cooperating with a foreign intelligence agency such as Russia's. Just as disturbing are the steps that those governments are progressively taking towards the seemingly inevitable conclusion of censoring their work, which goes against the "freedom of speech" that those countries and their societies claim to support. It's also patronizing to deprive their people of the right to read non-mainstream views "for their own protection". The solution should be to improve media literacy, but it's unlikely to happen since people might then realize how much propaganda their own governments spread.

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