

Official Washington's 'Info-Wars'

Organs of Official Washington, such as the State Department and The Washington Post, are becoming unhinged over their weakening grip on the narratives that the people are supposed to believe, as William Blum explains.

By William Blum

On November 16, at a State Department press briefing, department spokesperson John Kirby was having one of his frequent adversarial dialogues with Gayane Chichakyan, a reporter for RT (Russia Today); this time concerning U.S. charges of Russia bombing hospitals in Syria and blocking the U.N. from delivering aid to the trapped population.

When Chichakyan asked for some detail about these charges, Kirby replied: "Why don't you ask your defense ministry?"

GC: Do you – can you give any specific information on when Russia or the Syrian Government blocked the UN from delivering aid? Just any specific information.

KIRBY: There hasn't been any aid delivered in the last month.

GC: And you believe it was blocked exclusively by Russia and the Syrian Government?

KIRBY: There's no question in our mind that the obstruction is coming from the regime and from Russia. No question at all.

...

MATTHEW LEE (Associated Press): Let me -- hold on, just let me say: Please be careful about saying "your defense minister" and things like that. I mean, she's a journalist just like the rest of us are, so it's -- she's asking pointed questions, but they're not –

KIRBY: From a state-owned -- from a state-owned –

LEE: But they're not –

KIRBY: From a state-owned outlet, Matt.

LEE: But they're not –

KIRBY: From a state-owned outlet that's not independent.

LEE: The questions that she's asking are not out of line.

KIRBY: I didn't say the questions were out of line.

.....

KIRBY: I'm sorry, but I'm not going to put Russia Today on the same level with the rest of you who are representing independent media outlets.

One has to wonder if State Department spokesperson Kirby knows that in 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking about RT, declared: "The Russians have opened an English-language network. I've seen it in a few countries, and it is quite instructive."

I also wonder how Mr. Kirby deals with reporters from the BBC, a STATE-OWNED television and radio entity in the U.K., broadcasting in the U.S. and all around the world.

Or the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation, described by Wikipedia as follows: "The corporation provides television, radio, online and mobile services throughout metropolitan and regional Australia, as well as overseas ... and is well regarded for quality and reliability as well as for offering educational and cultural programming that the commercial sector would be unlikely to supply on its own."

There's also Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, Radio Liberty (Central/Eastern Europe), and Radio Marti (Cuba); all (U.S.) state-owned, none "independent", but all deemed worthy enough by the United States to feed to the world.

And let's not forget what Americans have at home: PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) and NPR (National Public Radio), which would have a near-impossible time surviving without large federal government grants. How independent does this leave them? Has either broadcaster ever unequivocally opposed a modern American war? There's good reason NPR has long been known as National Pentagon Radio. But it's part of American media's ideology to pretend that it doesn't have any ideology.

As to the non-state American media ... There are about 1,400 daily newspapers in the United States. Can you name a single paper, or a single TV network, that was unequivocally opposed to the American wars carried out against Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam while they were happening, or shortly thereafter? Or even opposed to any two of these seven wars? How about one?

In 1968, six years into the Vietnam War, the *Boston Globe* (Feb. 18, 1968) surveyed the editorial positions of 39 leading U.S. papers concerning the war and found that "none advocated a pull-out." Has the phrase "invasion of Vietnam"

ever appeared in the U.S. mainstream media?

In 2003, leading cable station MSNBC took the much-admired Phil Donahue off the air because of his opposition to the calls for war in Iraq. Mr. Kirby would undoubtedly call MSNBC “independent.”

If the American mainstream media were officially state-controlled, would they look or sound significantly different when it comes to U.S. foreign policy?

New Cold War Propaganda

On Nov. 25, the *Washington Post* ran an article entitled: “Research ties ‘fake news’ to Russia.” It’s all about how sources in Russia are flooding American media and the Internet with phony stories designed as “part of a broadly effective strategy of sowing distrust in U.S. democracy and its leaders.”

“The sophistication of the Russian tactics,” the article says, “may complicate efforts by Facebook and Google to crack down on ‘fake news’.”

The *Post* states that the Russian tactics included “penetrating the computers of election officials in several states and releasing troves of hacked emails that embarrassed Clinton in the final months of her campaign.” (Heretofore this had been credited to Wikileaks.)

The story is simply bursting with anti-Russian references:

- –An online magazine header – “Trolling for Trump: How Russia Is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy.”
- –“the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.”
- –“more than 200 websites as routine peddlers of Russian propaganda during the election season.”
- –“stories planted or promoted by the disinformation campaign were viewed more than 213 million times.”
- –“The Russian campaign during this election season ... worked by harnessing the online world’s fascination with ‘buzzy’ content that is surprising and emotionally potent, and tracks with popular conspiracy theories about how secret forces dictate world events.”
- –“Russian-backed phony news to outcompete traditional news organizations for audience”
- –“They use our technologies and values against us to sow doubt. It’s starting to undermine our democratic system.”
- –“Russian propaganda operations also worked to promote the ‘Brexit’ departure of Britain from the European Union.”
- –“Some of these stories originated with RT and Sputnik, state-funded Russian information services that mimic the style and tone of independent

news organizations yet sometimes include false and misleading stories in their reports.”

- –“a variety of other false stories – fake reports of a coup launched at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey and stories about how the United States was going to conduct a military attack and blame it on Russia”

A former U.S. ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, is quoted saying he was “struck by the overt support that Sputnik expressed for Trump during the campaign, even using the #CrookedHillary hashtag pushed by the candidate.” McFaul said Russian propaganda typically is aimed at weakening opponents and critics.

“They don’t try to win the argument. It’s to make everything seem relative. It’s kind of an appeal to cynicism.” [Cynicism? Heavens! What will those Moscow fascists/communists think of next?]

The *Post* did, however, include the following: “RT disputed the findings of the researchers in an e-mail on Friday, saying it played no role in producing or amplifying any fake news stories related to the U.S. election.” RT was quoted: “It is the height of irony that an article about ‘fake news’ is built on false, unsubstantiated claims. RT adamantly rejects any and all claims and insinuations that the network has originated even a single ‘fake story’ related to the US election.”

It must be noted that the *Washington Post* article fails to provide a single example showing how the actual facts of a specific news event were rewritten or distorted by a Russian agency to produce a news event with a contrary political message.

What then lies behind such blatant anti-Russian propaganda? In the new Cold War such a question requires no answer. The new Cold War by definition exists to discredit Russia simply because it stands in the way of American world domination. In the new Cold War, the political spectrum in the mainstream media runs the gamut from A to B.

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/> .]
