

Meta Platforms and YouTube ban RT worldwide

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Meta Platforms—the owner of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram—announced on Monday that it was banning Russian state media outlets such as Russia Today (RT) from its social media properties, claiming that the organizations have engaged in covert online interference operations.

In a statement, Meta said, “After careful consideration, we expanded our ongoing enforcement against Russian state media outlets. Rossiya Segodnya, RT and other related entities are now banned from our apps globally for foreign interference activity.”

The \$1.36 trillion corporation based in Menlo Park, California did not provide any details or evidence of its allegations. At the time of the Meta ban, RT had 7.2 million followers on Facebook and one million followers on Instagram.

In a news release, RT newsreader Eunan O’Neill said the broadcaster, “and Russia as a whole denies the accusations that have been coming en masse against this channel and others in the past number of days.”

RT (Rossiya Segodnya in Russian), is an international news network funded by the Russian government. It operates as a multilingual service with paid television and free over-the-air channels in five languages and online content in Russian, English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic, Portuguese and Serbian. RT is a brand of TV-Novosti which was founded by the Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti in April 2005.

On Tuesday, YouTube—the video platform owned by Google-parent Alphabet—announced it had removed “over 230 channels affiliated with AVO TV Novosti.” YouTube said it had previously blocked the Russian state-sponsored news channels globally and prevented viewers from watching the 230 channels that it has now terminated. YouTube also stated it deleted the Russian-based channels in compliance with US government

sanctions.

The Meta and YouTube censorship follows the announcement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday of new sanctions against Rossiya Segodnya and TV-Novosti. The sanctions allege that entities such as RT are being deployed by the Kremlin to conduct cyber-intelligence and covert influence operations across the globe and to assist Russia’s war in Ukraine.

In a statement, Blinken claimed that new information showed that the Russian media organizations, “are no longer merely fire hoses of Russian propaganda and disinformation. They are engaged in covert influence activities aimed at undermining American elections and democracies, functioning like a de facto arm of Russia’s intelligence apparatus.”

The State Department said the sanctions, which follow last week’s Treasury Department actions against 10 top RT executives and its designation of RT as a “foreign mission,” are not an action against the state outlet for the content of its reporting but aimed at its “covert influence campaigns.”

A State Department “fact sheet” issued on Friday, which is full of typical hypocritical assertions from representatives of American imperialism, claimed the US “supports the free flow of information,” and “always stands for freedom of expression, including for those with whom we disagree.”

On September 4, the US Justice Department indicted two Russian nationals, Kostiantyn Kalashnikov, 31, and Elena Afanasyeva, 27, on charges of “conspiracy to violate the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and conspiracy to commit money laundering was unsealed today in the Southern District of New York.”

The indictment claims that right-wing social media influencers—such as Lauren Chen, Tim Pool, Benny

Johnson, and Dave Rubin—were duped by a US-based media company, which was later revealed to be Tenet Media, to promote content and “narratives and themes” that were supported by the Kremlin. The charges state that over the past year, “RT and its employees, including Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva, deployed nearly \$10 million to covertly finance and direct a Tennessee-based online content creation company.”

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said, “The Justice Department will not tolerate attempts by an authoritarian regime to exploit our country’s free exchange of ideas in order to covertly further its own propaganda efforts, and our investigation into this matter remains ongoing.”

Of course, the US government itself runs the world’s largest propaganda and covert influence operation through state-sponsored media organizations and NSA and CIA malign activities in countries around the globe.

The stepped up censorship campaign against Russian state media is connected to the intensification of the US-NATO backed war against the Putin regime in Ukraine, which has now been underway for 31 months and caused hundreds of thousands of casualties. It is also part of the crackdown on protests and college campuses aimed at silencing opposition to war and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Central to the censorship drive against RT is the effort to bolster the Biden administration’s narrative about the Russia-Ukraine war. Behind references to RT’s “global malign activities,” including “the use of cyber capabilities for influence and covert activities,” is the US government’s fear of increasing public opposition to the war both within the US and around the world.

The online censorship and crackdown on political speech within the US also takes place within the context of the final two months before the presidential elections. The recent developments concerning Kremlin-based media sources shows that the Democratic Party, in particular, is relaunching the anti-Russian interference campaign that it mounted in the aftermath of the 2016 election, which was won by Donald Trump.

Speaking to Rachel Maddow on MSNBC on Monday, former first lady and Democratic Party nominee for president in 2016, Hillary Clinton, called for the

criminal prosecution of Americans who speak publicly against the US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine.

Clinton applauded the prosecutions by the Justice Department and sanctions by the State Department against Russian media outlets. She said, “They are using Americans, both those who are witting and willing and those who are unwitting, and are just so surprised they’re getting, you know, \$400,000 a week or \$100,000 a podcast to parrot Kremlin propaganda.”

Clinton said that Republican chairs of Congressional Intelligence Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, “and other Republicans who are currently in office have said that Republicans go to the floor of the Congress, and they parrot Russian talking points.”

She went on to say that it was important to indict the Russians, however it is unlikely, except in a very few cases, that they will ever stand trial in the US, “But I also think there are Americans who are engaged in this kind of propaganda. And whether they should be civilly, or even in some cases criminally charged is something that would be a better deterrence ... we need to uncover all of the connections ... we are not going to let adversaries, whether it is Russia, China, Iran or anybody else, basically try to influence Americans as to how we should vote in picking our leaders.”



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