

State Department Condemns* Designation of Media as Foreign Agents

(*Only applies to Russia)

By [Moon of Alabama](#)

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[Moon of Alabama](#) 29 November 2017

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#),
[Media Disinformation](#)

UPDATED below

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Today the U.S. State Department hit the ball of hypocrisy out of the park.

It remarked that “legislation that allows .. to label media outlets as ‘foreign agents’ ... presents yet another threat to free media”. It noted that “freedom of expression—including speech and media ... is a universal human rights obligation”.

The remark came after the U.S. Department of Justice required the Russian outlet *RT America* to register as a ‘foreign agent’ under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA). *RT* registered as ordered on November 13.

But the State Department statement was NOT in response to the DOJ requirement against *RT*. The State Department reacted to a new Russian law that was issued in response to the demand against *RT*. The new Russian law is a mirror to the U.S. FARA law. It demands that foreign media which are active in Russia register as ‘foreign agents’. (The EU poodles followed the State Department nonsense with an equally dumb statement.)

With its criticism of the Russian version of the FARA law while ignoring the U.S. FARA action against *RT*, the State Department confirmed the allegations of hypocrisy *RT* and other media have raised against the U.S. government.

The whole issue started with the notable liar James Clapper under the Obama administration. He and other ‘intelligence’ people found that *RT* was too truthful in its reporting to be allowed to inform the U.S. public. Publication of criticism of the U.S. government based on verifiable facts is seen as an unfriendly act which must be punished.

Congress and the U.S. Justice Department under the Trump administration followed up on that. FARA is originally NOT directed against foreign media. The Trump Justice Department circumvented the spirit of the law to apply it to *RT*.

The Russian government had warned several times that the application of FARA against *RT* would be followed up on with a similar requirement against U.S. media in Russia. The Trump administration ignored those warnings. It now condemns the Russian move.

Here is timeline of the relevant events:

[Clapper calls for U.S. Information Agency 'on steroids' to counter Russian propaganda](#) - Washington Times, Jan 5 2017

"We could do with having a USIA on steroids to fight this information war [with Russia] a lot more aggressively than we're doing right now," Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

...
"[Russia Today] was very active in promoting a particular point of view, disparaging our system, our alleged hypocrisy about human rights," he said. "Whatever crack, fissure they could find in our tapestry, they would exploit it," via the state-owned news network.

[Intelligence Report on Russian Hacking](#) - Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Jan 6 2017 - Annex I, originally published on 11 December 2012 by the Open Source Center

RT America TV, a Kremlin-financed channel operated from within the United States, has substantially expanded its repertoire of programming that highlights criticism of alleged US shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties.

...
RT aired a documentary about the Occupy Wall Street movement on 1, 2, and 4 November. RT framed the movement as a fight against "the ruling class" and described the current US political system as corrupt and dominated by corporations.

...
RT's reports often characterize the United States as a "surveillance state" and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use.

...
RT has also focused on criticism of the US economic system, US currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the US national debt.

...
RT is a leading media voice opposing Western intervention in the Syrian conflict and blaming the West for waging "information wars" against the Syrian Government.

[Cicilline Introduces Bipartisan Bill to Close Russia Today Loophole](#) - Congress, June 7 2017

U.S. Congressman David N. Cicilline (D-RI), who serves as co-chair of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee (DPCC), and U.S. Congressman Matthew Gaetz (R-FL) today introduced legislation to close a loophole in foreign agent registration requirements that Russia Today exploited extensively during last year's presidential election.

[Justice Dept Asks Russia's RT to Register as Foreign Agent](#) - Newsmax, September 13 2017

RT said late Monday that the company that supplies all the services for its RT America channel was told by the DOJ in a letter that it is obligated to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, an act aimed at lobbyists and lawyers representing foreign political interests.

...
FARA specifically exempts US and foreign news organizations, and the DOJ

focus on the company that supplies services for RT might be a way around that stipulation.

[Russia to amend law to classify U.S. media 'foreign agents'](#) – Reuters, Nov 10 2017

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia’s parliament warned on Friday some U.S. and other foreign media could be declared “foreign agents” and obliged to regularly declare full details of their funding, finances and staffing.

...
Russian lawmakers said the move was retaliation for a demand by the U.S. Department of Justice that Kremlin-backed TV station RT register in the United States as a “foreign agent”, something Moscow has said it regards as an unfriendly act.

[Russia’s RT America registers as 'foreign agent' in U.S.](#) – Reuters, Nov 13 2017

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON (Reuters) – The Kremlin-backed television station RT America registered Monday with the U.S. Department of Justice as a “foreign agent” in the United States, the outlet’s editor in chief said and the Department of Justice confirmed later in the day.

[Russia warns U.S. media of possible foreign agent status](#) – AP, Nov 16 2017

MOSCOW – Russia’s Justice Ministry has warned several U.S. government-funded news outlets they could be designated as foreign agents under a new bill that has yet to be fully approved. The bill, endorsed by Russia’s lower house on Wednesday, comes in response to U.S. demands that Russian state-funded RT TV register as a foreign agent. It needs to be approved by the upper house and signed by President Vladimir Putin to become law.

[Russian president Putin signs foreign agent media law to match U.S. action](#) – USA Today, Nov 25 2017

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law Saturday a new bill designating international media outlets as foreign agents in retaliation for a similar measure taken by the U.S. Department of Justice against the state-funded RT television.

[EU Criticizes Russia’s 'Foreign Agents' Media Law](#) – RFLRF, Nov 26 2017

BRUSSELS — The European Union has criticized legislation signed by President Vladimir Putin that empowers Russia’s government to designate media outlets receiving funding from abroad as “foreign agents” and impose sanctions against them.

...
Maja Kocijancic, the spokesperson of the European Commission for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said in a November 26 statement that the “legislation goes against Russia’s human rights obligations and commitments.”

New Russian legislation that allows the Ministry of Justice to label media outlets as “foreign agents” and to monitor or block certain internet activity presents yet another threat to free media in Russia. Freedom of expression—including speech and media which a government may find inconvenient—is a universal human rights obligation Russia has pledged to uphold.



New Russian legislation that allows the Ministry of Justice to label media outlets as “foreign agents” and to monitor or block certain internet activity presents yet another threat to free media in [#Russia](#).



3:03 PM - 28 Nov 2017

With a few words less the statement by the State Department would have gained universality. It would have made perfect sense. See here for a corrected version:

Home > Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs > Bureau of Public Affairs > Bureau of Public Affairs: Office of Press Relations > Press Releases
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Restrictive Media-Focused Legislation



Press Statement
Heather Nauert
Department Spokesperson
Washington, DC
November 28, 2017

legislation that allows the Ministry of Justice to label media outlets as “foreign agents” and to monitor or block certain internet activity presents yet another threat to free media in Russia. Freedom of expression—including speech and media which a government may find inconvenient—is a universal human rights obligation Russia has pledged to uphold.

The United States has previously highlighted the threat posed by the Foreign Agents Law, which requires organizations doing their work. Expanding the Foreign Agents Law to include media outlets opens the door to onerous requirements that could further stifle freedom of speech and editorial independence.

The United States urges Russia not to use this legislation to further restrict the operation of media outlets or freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Justice's attempt to justify new, media-focused legislation by expanding the registration requirements in the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA) is disingenuous and inappropriate. FARA does not police the content of information disseminated, does not limit the publication of information or advocacy materials, and does not restrict an organization's ability to operate.

Unfortunately the State Department's spokesperson [added](#) some verbose lamenting about

one specific country. It thereby exposed itself to the very criticism the U.S. government strives to suppress.

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UPDATE - Nov 30 0:50am

As consequence of the FARA designation of RT's U.S. production company RT is [now losing access](#) to the Congressional Gallery. Congress Gallery access is in turn required to get White House press credentials. RT is now likely to lose those too.

Meanwhile a consultative Congress commission is [pressing to designate](#) the Chinese news-agency XINHUA as 'foreign agent'. It also wants all staff of XINHUA to register as such. That would make it nearly impossible for freelancer and others who work for multiple media to continue with their XINHUA gigs.

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