



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE
Global Engagement Center

GEC Special Report

KREMLIN-FUNDED MEDIA:

RT AND SPUTNIK'S
ROLE IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION
AND PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM



JANUARY 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3	ANNEX 2: CASE STUDY — 2014 RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA	23
INTRODUCTION	4	DENIAL OF RUSSIAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT	23
RT AND SPUTNIK'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LACK OF TRANSPARENCY	7	FASCISM AND NEO-NAZIS	24
RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN RT AND SPUTNIK	7	COVERAGE OF THE DOWNING OF MH17	25
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	9	RT TARGETING AUDIENCES WITH UKRAINE-FOCUSED CONTENT	25
FINANCES	10	FOLLOW-ON EFFORTS AND PRAISE FROM PUTIN	25
RT AND SPUTNIK'S LACK OF OBJECTIVITY	11	ANNEX 3: CASE STUDY — 2015 DOWNING OF RUSSIAN SU-24	26
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PRO-KREMLIN PERSPECTIVE	11	WIDE-RANGING COVERAGE BEFORE THE SHOOTDOWN	26
RT AND SPUTNIK'S ROLE IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM	13	COVERAGE TURNS HOSTILE TO REFLECT THE KREMLIN LINE	26
CONNECTION TO CYBER-ENABLED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS	14	BACK TO NORMAL	27
CONNECTION TO PROXY SITES	15	ANNEX 4: CASE STUDY — SPRING 2021 RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILDUP ON THE UKRAINIAN BORDER	28
RT, SPUTNIK, AND PROXY SITES NEWS FRONT AND THE FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL VALUES PROTECTION	15	RETURN OF NARRATIVES DEVELOPED IN 2014	28
SPUTNIK AND THE PROXY SITE NEW EASTERN OUTLOOK (NEO)	16	FALSE NARRATIVE ONE: THE UNITED STATES AND NATO'S SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY RAISED TENSIONS	28
RT AND SPUTNIK'S ROLE IN SPREADING COVID-19 DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA	17	FALSE NARRATIVE TWO: UKRAINE HAS A SERIOUS NAZI/FASCIST PROBLEM	28
CONCLUSION	18	FALSE NARRATIVE THREE: UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES INTENTIONALLY INJURE CHILDREN	29
ANNEX 1: RUSSIAN STATE-FUNDED MEDIA OUTLETS	19	ONE-SIDED REPORTING AND BLATANT DISINFORMATION	29
ROSSIYA SEGODNYA	19	ENDNOTES	31
SPUTNIK	19		
RIA NOVOSTI	19		
TV-NOVOSTI	19		
RT (FORMALLY RUSSIA TODAY)	20		
RUPTLY	22		
MAFFICK	22		

FEATURE

06

RT and Sputnik as Key Instruments in Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russian state-funded and state-directed media outlets RT and Sputnik are critical elements in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. In an August 2020 [report](#), the U.S. Department of State's [Global Engagement Center](#) (GEC) outlined the five pillars of Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. RT and Sputnik are key state-funded and directed global messengers within this ecosystem, using the guise of conventional international media outlets to provide disinformation and propaganda support for the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives. RT and Sputnik also interact with other pillars of the ecosystem by amplifying content from Kremlin and Kremlin-aligned proxy sites (some of which are connected to Russian intelligence), weaponizing social media, and promoting cyber-enabled disinformation.

RT and Sputnik serve primarily as conduits for the Kremlin's talking points [while equating themselves with](#) publicly funded, transparent and journalistically independent media organizations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA). RT and Sputnik's opaque organizational structure and lack of financial transparency obscure the true extent of the Russian government's control over the outlets' editorial processes and staffing decisions. Moreover, [Russian](#) government officials and the outlets' leadership have openly discussed RT and Sputnik's role as tools of state propaganda.

RT and Sputnik's role as disinformation and propaganda outlets is most obvious when they report on issues of political importance to the Kremlin. A prevalent example is Russia's use of RT and Sputnik to attempt to change public opinions about Ukraine

in Europe, the United States, and as far away as Latin America. When factual reporting on major foreign policy priorities is not favorable, Russia uses state-funded international media outlets to inject pro-Kremlin disinformation and propaganda into the information environment.

RT and Sputnik's audience reach is difficult to measure in part because RT has reportedly [inflated](#) its broadcast statistics in the past, but also because both outlets operate as part of a network composed of numerous brands, websites, and social media accounts publishing content in many languages. Despite the inflation, [researchers have](#) found that RT Arabic's online reach, measured in terms of website hits, social media followers and likes, and social media video view counts, is comparable to those of prominent pan-Arab media outlets and BBC News Arabic. According to the Atlantic Council's [Digital Forensic Research Lab](#), RT has "garnered a significant audience," in Latin America, specifically highlighting the growth of RT's Facebook page during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Even if their audience statistics are incorrect, this does not diminish their demonstrable ability to play a key role in the laundering of narratives across Russia's disinformation ecosystem. Additionally, academic research shows RT's content has the ability to change the opinions of its viewers. One recent [study](#) reported that American consumers exposed to RT content are more likely than those not exposed to prefer that the United States withdraw from its global leadership position, even when the consumers are aware that RT is funded by the Russian government.

INTRODUCTION

RT and Sputnik are Russia's primary media outlets that produce content for non-Russian speaking audiences. RT, formerly known as Russia Today, is a Russian state-funded and state-directed news outlet, which [began](#) broadcasting internationally in December 2005. RT has developed into a global network of television channels, websites, and social media accounts publishing content in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, German, and Russian.² Launched in November 2014, Sputnik is the main foreign-facing project of [Rossiya Segodnya](#), an international news agency created in late 2013 by a [presidential executive order](#) to restructure Russian state media.³ Sputnik runs radio broadcasts, websites, and social media channels in more than 30 languages. Although RT is not officially a part of Rossiya Segodnya, it is affiliated with the media group through Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of both RT and Rossiya Segodnya. Moreover, RT's parent company, TV-Novosti, was founded by RIA Novosti, and RIA Novosti's founder's rights were transferred to Rossiya Segodnya via the aforementioned 2013 presidential executive order.⁴ Despite these connections, RT [denies](#) any associations with Rossiya Segodnya.

RT and Sputnik attempt to equate themselves with major independent and fact-based international media outlets—likely in order to increase their reach and credibility—and to portray any efforts to criticize their activities as violations of press freedom. However, RT and Sputnik are not transparent, and their

"RT AND SPUTNIK ARE NOT TRANSPARENT, AND THEIR OVERALL GOALS APPEAR TO BE FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM INDEPENDENT MEDIA."

overall goals appear to be fundamentally different from independent media. The Russian government is closely [involved](#) in RT and Sputnik's operations. The outlets' reporting and programming openly supports the Kremlin's positions and policies, and both frequently spread disinformation and propaganda aimed at undermining democratic rules-based societies. Russian government officials and RT and Sputnik leadership, as well as the outlets' [former and current](#) employees, have made comments about the striking differences between Russian state-funded and directed media outlets and independent international media organizations such as BBC, Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and VOA. In addition, the organizational structures of both RT and Sputnik are difficult to decipher and their public financial records are incomplete.

RT and Sputnik play an important role within Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem.⁵ They serve as means for the Kremlin to disseminate disinformation and propaganda

narratives to audiences outside of Russia to influence public opinion and foreign policy in favor of the Kremlin's political goals. There is a well-documented relationship between Russian state-funded media outlets and other pillars in the ecosystem, such as the weaponization of social media, the cultivation of proxy sources, and cyber-enabled influence operations. For example, RT and Sputnik frequently give favorable coverage to organizations such as WikiLeaks that have received information from hackers working for [Russian intelligence services](#). RT and Sputnik articles also often link to proxy websites [directed, controlled,](#) and/or [guided](#) by Russian intelligence services. In addition, Sputnik has reportedly [embedded malware](#) in Twitter posts, linking to its articles with the apparent intent to "manipulate additional web traffic of unwitting users in order to inorganically amplify stories that could cast doubt on the efficacy of particular [COVID-19] vaccines."

RT and Sputnik's work as disinformation and propaganda outlets is clearest when reporting on issues important to the Kremlin. The annexes of

this paper include three case studies that illustrate RT and Sputnik's biased, agenda-driven journalism, and show how the outlets inject disinformation and Kremlin propaganda into the information environment. The first case study examines RT's reporting during the 2014 Maidan revolution and the subsequent Russian invasion of Ukraine. The second case explores how RT and Sputnik reported on Turkey before and after the Turkish military shot down a Russian aircraft following its incursion into Turkish airspace in November 2015. The third case documents RT and Sputnik's coverage of Russia's Spring 2021 military buildup on the Ukrainian border. While RT and Sputnik leadership [have indicated](#) they report stories and views the major international media outlets have "neglected," their coverage of these three incidents illustrates that the outlets are significant conduits for Kremlin talking points aimed at influencing foreign public opinion in a way that benefits Russia's foreign policy and national security interests.

RT AND SPUTNIK

AS KEY INSTRUMENTS IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM



RT AND SPUTNIK'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

RT and Sputnik's [leaders argue](#) a false equivalency between their outlets and fact-based media organizations, obfuscating how the outlets spread Russian government disinformation. There are several indicators that show RT and Sputnik are not analogous to journalistically independent media outlets such as BBC and VOA. First, RT and Sputnik lack BBC and VOA's transparent organizational and financial structures. Second, the extent and the nature of government involvement in the outlets' activities is significantly larger at RT and Sputnik. Finally, [RT](#) and [Sputnik's](#) leadership have acknowledged the influential roles their outlets play as amplifiers of Kremlin-backed narratives.

"THE ORGANIZATION [TV-NOVOSTI] ENSURES THE PROTECTION OF INFORMATION THAT CONSTITUTES STATE SECRETS, CARRIES OUT WORK RELATED TO THE USE OF STATE SECRETS, AND ALSO CARRIES OUT ACTIVITIES AND (OR) PROVIDES SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF PROTECTING STATE SECRETS"

RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN RT AND SPUTNIK

RT and Sputnik do not state that they are independent from Russian government editorial oversight or direction. In contrast, [VOA](#) and [BBC](#) have documents detailing their editorial independence from the governments that fund them. TV-Novosti's charter, which is not available [online](#), lacks any statements about the organization's editorial independence, and section 3.10 of the charter points out its close government connection: "The organization [TV-Novosti] ensures the protection of information that constitutes state secrets, carries out work related to the use of state secrets, and also carries out activities and (or) provides services in the field of protecting state secrets."⁶ Rossiya Segodnya's [charter](#) includes a similar clause about the protection of state secrets.

There are also [documented](#) cases of close ties between Russian government officials and RT. Editor-in-Chief of RT, TV-Novosti and Rossiya Segodnya, Margarita Simonyan has [stated](#) that she has a secure line to the Kremlin via a yellow phone in order "to discuss secret things." The yellow phones are [described](#) as "a system of direct communication between Kremlin 'handlers' and chief editors at state-controlled media."⁷ There are also personal and personnel connections between the Kremlin and RT. For example, the [relationship](#) between Simonyan and Aleksey Gromov, the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration, whom independent media call "[Putin's media puppetmaster](#)," is well noted. Gromov, who is under U.S. [sanctions](#) for interfering in a U.S. election and for his role in the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, was one of the founders of RT, and Simonyan is often [referred](#) to as his protégé. Simonyan has said she [benefits](#) from Gromov's protection.⁸ Aydar Aganin, a career diplomat in the Russian

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, moved from the Russian diplomatic service to [manage](#) RT's Arabic language service expansion from 2007-2011. After leaving RT, he re-entered the [diplomatic service](#) as the senior counselor at the Russian Embassy to the United States, and later became the head of the Russian Mission to the Palestinian National Authority in Ramallah.

Former and current RT and Sputnik employees have also provided firsthand insights into the control the Kremlin has over RT and Sputnik's management and content. In a noteworthy February 2021 [study](#), the University of Oxford interviewed 23 anonymous current and former RT journalists. The study showed that "government control on RT includes hiring managers, imposing story angles, and, in some instances, disapproving of stories." One employee spoke of training for journalists intended to ensure their reporting would reflect the Kremlin's positions. Another shared the Russian government maintains an advisory team that oversees RT's hiring process. Several employees said RT chooses inexperienced journalists to be able to shape their perceptions and limit their pushback on editorial decisions—claims confirmed by other [sources](#).

Daniel Lange, a former employee at RT DE (formerly RT Deutsch), the German-language branch of RT, [said](#) the leadership of RT DE ordered him to spy on Russian opposition figure Aleksey Navalny while Navalny was recovering in a Berlin hospital from a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) assassination attempt using a chemical weapon. Lange wrote a book on his experiences working at RT DE, but the Western online bookseller distributing his book [pulled](#) it after complaints from RT. Other employees of RT DE [reported](#) they received criticism from Moscow for being too slow to publish an article about an October 2020 video conference featuring Russian President Putin. The German news magazine Der Spiegel [obtained](#) internal RT DE documents that reportedly "show the extent to which German staff are required to follow instructions from Moscow, and how political those instructions are." For example, the staff received detailed emails about conspiracy theories they could actively promote.

Similarly, a former [Sputnik White House correspondent](#) revealed his supervisor's insistence on pre-approving any questions he planned to ask the White House press secretary. The journalist's questions were frequently changed by his supervisor to be more aligned with Russian policy, and when the journalist veered away from the official line, he was reprimanded.

The [number of people who have spoken](#) out and the similarity of their experiences suggest the Russian government directly and consistently influences the reporting of both RT and Sputnik. After RT and Sputnik employees came forward with their stories, RT reportedly began requiring all [employees](#) to [sign](#) non-disclosure agreements.

As an example of the direct confluence between RT's activities and its support for the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives, RT journalists and other specialists went to [work](#) at Belarusian state media outlets after the Belarusian staff left in protest over the 2020 fraudulent elections. As a result, the style of Belarusian state media [changed](#) to become closer to Russian style disinformation and propaganda. For example,

Belarusian state media began to [promote](#) closer links between Russia and Belarus and started to use common Russian disinformation phrases such as “color revolutions” and “foreign agent” in their reporting. This Russian support for the Lukashenka regime via RT appears to be similar to other forms of political, financial and military assistance Russia has provided to support the regime.⁹

**UNLIKE MAJOR FACT-BASED
INTERNATIONAL MEDIA
OUTLETS, RT AND SPUTNIK
LACK FISCAL TRANSPARENCY**

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

RT and Sputnik’s organizational structure and management hierarchy are opaque. As of January 2022, Sputnik’s website [lists](#) Anton Anisimov, who previously worked for RT, as its editor-in-chief, there is no further information about the management structure. Until December 2021, Rossiya Segodnya, Sputnik’s parent company, [showed](#) only Dmitriy Kiselyov as the general director and Margarita Simonyan as editor-in-chief. Rossiya Segodnya recently created a [management page](#) that lists a few of the senior staff at their outlets, but still does not provide any detail about how the outlets are managed. Conversely, RT’s [website](#) lists only Margarita Simonyan as editor-in-chief, and Aleksey Nikolov as the managing director, but no other management. The organization that operates RT, TV-Novosti, lists [Aleksey Nikolov](#) as the general director and [Margarita Simonyan](#) as editor-in-chief in government documents.¹⁰ Of the employees listed, it appears that some work for both RT and Rossiya Segodnya despite the two organizations claiming to be [separate](#). In some cases, senior staff alternate between the different outlets and Rossiya Segodnya.¹¹ The fact that certain individuals appear to work for more than one outlet at a time – and rotate between organizations – indicates a connection, at least via personnel.

In contrast, independent and fact-based media outlets to which RT and Sputnik incorrectly compare themselves, whether private or government-funded, are consistently more transparent about their organizational structure and management hierarchy.¹² Most provide detailed documents about how their organizations are run, the [company’s strategy, and lists](#) of board [members](#) and [upper management](#).¹³ When organizational charts of media outlets such as VOA and BBC are examined, organizational structures are readily apparent. For example, each website clearly displays the [leadership hierarchy](#) and [other important staff](#).

FINANCES

Unlike [major fact-based international media outlets](#), RT and Sputnik lack fiscal transparency. They do not publish public budget sheets or detailed annual financial reports, and the public must rely on vague estimates occasionally announced by the Russian government. The limited amount of information they do provide about budgets and expenditures is difficult to track and often includes conflicting figures.

RT's [website](#) has only limited, unverifiable, and contradictory budgetary information. RT's 2015 budget, according to its [website](#), was 13.85 billion rubles (about \$220 million at 2015 exchange rates). However, in a 2015 [interview](#) with the Russian independent media outlet Dozhd TV, Simonyan said the budget for that year was 18 billion rubles. The RT website [claims](#) its 2016 budget was \$275 million (17 billion rubles), while a [video](#) published by RT contradicts this information by claiming its 2016 budget was \$300 million (21 billion rubles).¹⁴ In 2019, RT announced on its Telegram [channel](#) that RT and Rossiya Segodnya's budget from federal funding was \$440 million, yet the official federal budget [number](#) for 2019 was \$430 million. While officials do sometimes round figures when describing budgets, these discrepancies are significant.

The leadership of both Russian organizations are likely aware of fiscal issues and are deliberately selective and obfuscating. As the editor-in-chief of both RT and TV-Novosti, Simonyan chairs the budget committee, according to TV-Novosti's charter. TV-Novosti's most recent 2019 [report](#) to the Russian Ministry of Justice, mandated annually for all non-profit organizations, consisted of only two numbers: the amount of money received from the government and the amount spent on the creation of mass media content and its global distribution. In 2020 and 2021, TV-Novosti did not [publish](#) the mandatory Ministry of Justice reports regarding their budget.¹⁵ The Russian government [provides](#) official budget numbers for TV-Novosti and Rossiya Segodnya, however due to discrepancies and lack of detail, it is difficult for researchers and oversight organizations to ascertain the actual levels of financial support for each outlet. This is especially true for Sputnik, which receives a portion of Rossiya Segodnya's budget, but does not disclose how much.

By comparison, the BBC publishes an annual detailed financial report. Its 2019-2020 [report](#) includes information on salaries, expenditures, performance ratings, etc. The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), the funding and oversight organization of VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), also publishes an [annual report](#), a [performance and accountability report](#) (which includes 45 pages on the organization's finances), and a 171-page [Congressional budget justification](#). German state-funded Deutsche Welle (DW) publishes similarly [transparent](#) information about its performance and budget.

RT AND SPUTNIK'S LACK OF OBJECTIVITY

RT Editor-in-Chief Simonyan frequently argues publicly it is impossible to create fair and balanced news, and RT must put forth the Russian government's [perspective](#). When asked in an April 2012 [interview](#) how she balances state interests with journalistic objectivity, Simonyan answered, "Like all other channels, there is no objectivity... when Russia is at war, we are, of course, on the side of Russia."¹⁶ The UK Office of Communications (OfCom) [fined](#) RT for violating impartiality rules based on its reporting of Ukraine and during the 2018 Russian poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter with a chemical weapon.

Other RT and Sputnik staff share Simonyan's view that high-quality, unbiased journalism is not the media's goal. Dmitriy Kiselyov, whom the EU [sanctioned](#) in 2014 over actions related to Ukraine, similarly [said](#), "Objectivity is a myth... If we speak about the editorial policy, of course, I would certainly want it to be associated with love for Russia." In a speech to young journalists, Sputnik Editor-in-Chief Anton Anisimov [stated](#), "One thing we're telling all the aspiring journalists that come and say that we want to work for Sputnik, make sure that what you believe in is in accord with what we do. Otherwise, you're going to have some sort of internal conflict because you'll be getting [paid] for doing something that you do not really believe in."¹⁷



"THE INFORMATION WEAPON, OF COURSE, IS USED IN CRITICAL MOMENTS, AND WAR IS ALWAYS A CRITICAL MOMENT. AND IT'S WAR. IT'S A WEAPON LIKE ANY OTHER." - Margarita Simonyan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PRO-KREMLIN PERSPECTIVE

Despite claims to their viewers that the outlets are legitimate news sources, both Russian government officials and the outlets' leadership have acknowledged RT and Sputnik amplify official government communications through one-sided reporting with the goal of influencing viewers to support the Kremlin's policies. A few examples of these acknowledgements are as follows:

Russia's President

In a June 2013 interview at RT's Moscow studios, President Putin [stated](#) he envisioned RT as an "absolutely independent news channel" but "the channel is funded by the government, so it cannot help but reflect the Russian government's official position on the events in our country and in the rest of the world, one way or another."

RT and Rossiya Segodnya Editor-In-Chief

In a March 2013 [interview](#), RT and Rossiya Segodnya's Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan likened RT to the military, saying, "The information weapon, of course, is used in critical moments,

and war is always a critical moment. And it's war. It's a weapon like any other."¹⁸ Simonyan has also acknowledged RT's strategy is to build up an audience then exploit it when politically necessary. In the same interview she [said](#), "when [the audience] comes in handy for us, or maybe it never comes in handy, but when it comes in handy, these people will already watch us."¹⁹ RT's [self-described](#) mission of offering an alternative perspective, shorthanded by its tagline, "Question More," first materialized after RT [rebranded](#) itself in 2009 with the [help](#) of a public relations firm. Simonyan [credits](#) the 2008 Russia-Georgia war with shaping her views on how RT needed to evolve in order to appeal to non-Russian audiences. The outlet's initial [purpose](#) was to showcase Russian culture and improve Russia's global image. Simonyan said in a 2012 [interview](#) that limiting the channel to Russian topics limited RT's appeal to foreign audiences, so the outlet changed its focus accordingly.

In November 2021, in response to news the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) fired employees for expressing opposition opinions, Simonyan [stated](#) "we too have always done this, we are doing it and we will continue to do so."²⁰

Rossiya Segodnya and RIA Novosti General Director

After Putin's 2013 [executive order](#) restructuring Russian state media, the new general director of RIA Novosti, Dmitriy Kiselyov, shared his vision of the agency's future with journalists on staff. He [said](#), "We are supported by the presidential administration and by the government. You know, there is freedom of speech in our country. But the period of impartial journalism is over. Objectivity is a myth that we have been offered; it has been imposed on us. I myself used to abide by these principles, but I went through an internal evolution."

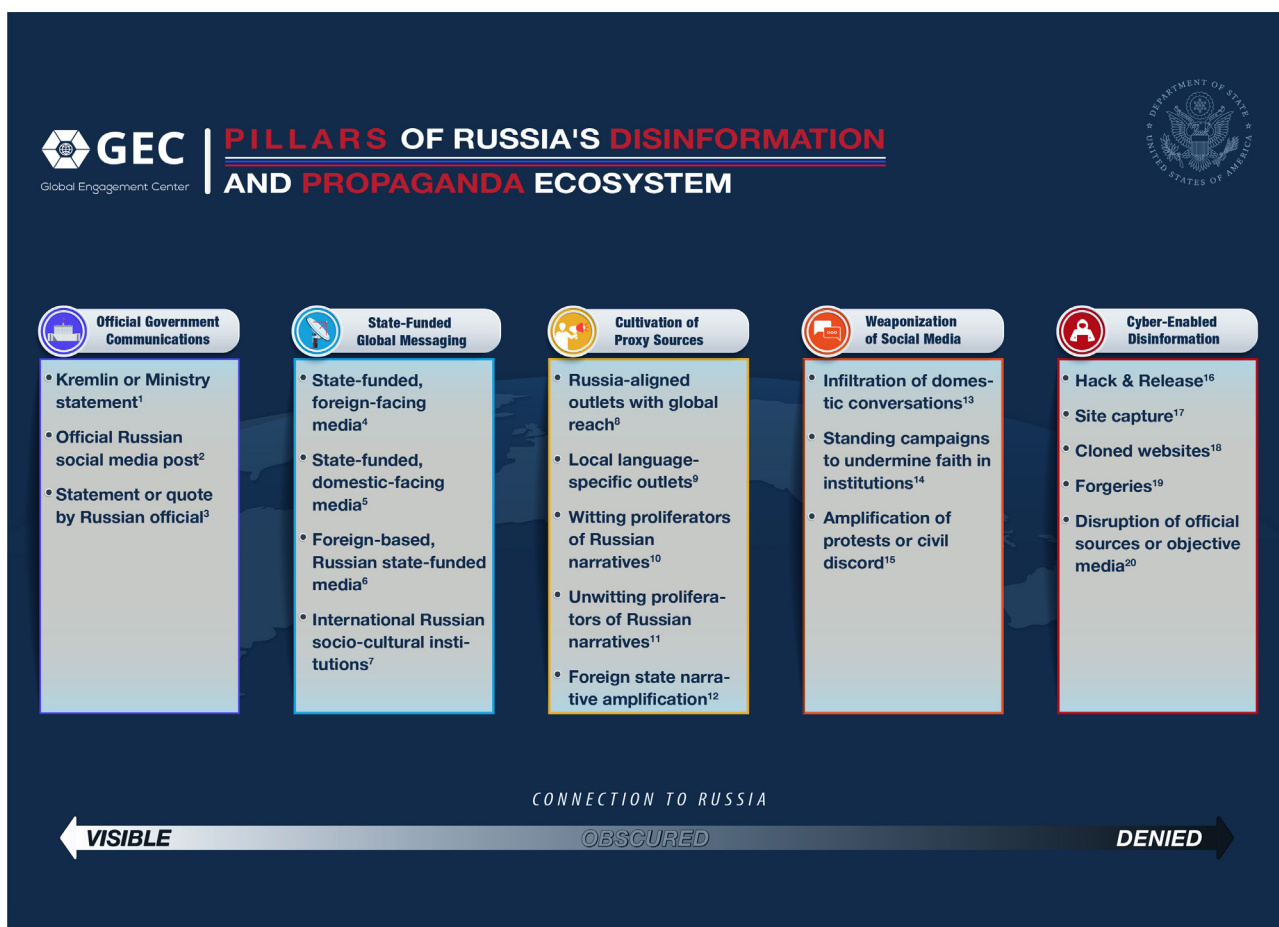
Sputnik Editor-In-Chief

When asked if Sputnik promotes the Kremlin's viewpoint during a 2016 training session for journalists, Sputnik's Editor-in-Chief Anton Anisimov [said](#), "Call it propaganda if you like." Anisimov also explained that his employees viewed their work as part of a global communications war: "In our newsroom, my colleagues are sometimes ranting about the communication war. Like: 'Yeah, let's go get 'em!' But I don't preoccupy myself with that."

Despite publicly comparing themselves to international media outlets such as BBC, DW, and VOA, statements by the leadership of RT, Sputnik and the Russian government clearly indicate that they work in support of the Kremlin's policies and goals.

RT AND SPUTNIK'S ROLE IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is the collection of official, proxy, and unattributed communication channels and platforms that Russia uses to create and amplify narratives. [The ecosystem consists of five main pillars](#): 1) official government communications; 2) state-funded global messaging; 3) the cultivation of proxy sources; 4) the weaponization of social media; and 5) cyber-enabled disinformation. The ecosystem reflects both the sources of disinformation and propaganda and the tactics that these channels use.



As entities in the second pillar, RT and Sputnik play an important role within the ecosystem as state-funded media outlets that proliferate Kremlin narratives to foreign audiences.

RT and Sputnik do not work in a vacuum within the disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. Each pillar has the potential to create a piece of disinformation or a narrative that the other pillars pick up, modify, and amplify. These relationships have a media multiplier effect that boosts each pillar's reach and resonance. The media multiplier effect can create disinformation storms with potentially dangerous effects.

Russia's government-funded and directed outlets are effectively influencing viewers' political convictions. A

February 2021 [article](#) by Erin Baggott Carter and Brett L. Carter in *Security Studies* showed for the first time that RT persuades some Americans to prefer that the United States withdraw from its global leadership position. On average, American media consumers exposed to RT content are 15 percent less likely to support an active foreign policy, 20 percent more likely to believe the United States is doing too much to solve global problems, and 10 percent more likely to value perceived national interests over the interests of U.S. allies. The study showed that informing people the Russian government funds RT did not return participants' opinions to their prior perspectives.

CONNECTION TO CYBER-ENABLED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

In addition to amplifying Kremlin narratives, RT and Sputnik facilitate and engage in cyber-enabled influence operations in close coordination with other pillars in the information ecosystem. RT and Simonyan have a close relationship with Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks. [The U.S. intelligence community](#) "assessed with high confidence that the GRU [Russian military intelligence] relayed material it acquired from the DNC [Democratic National Committee] and senior Democratic officials to WikiLeaks." In January 2012, RT [announced](#) it would broadcast Assange's talk show and that "RT news executive Nikolay Bogachikhin held talks with Assange to secure the show." According to a U.S. intelligence community report from 2017, [Simonyan](#) and [Bogachikhin](#) visited Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy in 2013. RT and WikiLeaks' close relationship is noted by the fact that RT [tweeted](#) at least twice about new batches of WikiLeaks releases before WikiLeaks itself made any announcements. RT and Sputnik, as well as proxy sites, then [amplified](#) and favorably covered the leaked information. The 2019 U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) [report](#) on Russian active measures in the 2016 U.S. general election cited numerous examples of the GRU communicating with WikiLeaks about the DNC through fake personas. The report stated this relationship is "part of the Russian government's overall strategy to use its state-controlled media to undermine U.S. democratic institutions."

In September 2020, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) [reported](#) Sputnik's Spanish-language website was at the center of a network of websites hosting malware files. The malware was linked to stories posted on Twitter about a pause in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine trials at the time. FAS [stated](#) "the placement of malware in these sites may provide opportunities for perpetrators to manipulate additional web traffic to unwitting users in order to inorganically amplify stories that could cast doubt on the efficacy of particular vaccines." Both RT and Sputnik have [promoted](#) vaccine conspiracy theories and amplified instances of adverse reactions to U.S., UK, and European-origin vaccines, often with misleading headlines or inaccurate context. Similarly, [Facebook](#) found Sputnik employees engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior by using pages and accounts to represent themselves online on independent news pages and general interest pages. In these cases, three pillars of Russia's ecosystem, state-funded global messaging, weaponization of social media, and cyber enabled-disinformation, worked together to amplify negative coverage and disinformation meant to harm Russia's perceived adversaries.

BOTH RT AND SPUTNIK HAVE PROMOTED VACCINE CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND AMPLIFIED INSTANCES OF ADVERSE REACTIONS TO U.S., UK, AND EUROPEAN-ORIGIN VACCINES, OFTEN WITH MISLEADING HEADLINES OR INACCURATE CONTEXT.

CONNECTION TO PROXY SITES

Another pillar of the ecosystem is the cultivation and use of proxy sources. A proxy site is an unofficial mouthpiece promoting disinformation and propaganda. In the context of Russian disinformation and propaganda, some proxy sites have direct links to the Russian state, some are enmeshed in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem, and others are more loosely connected via the narratives they promote. The connections are intentionally murky. The proxy websites act as connective tissue among the pillars

by either generating or laundering disinformation and propaganda narratives. RT and Sputnik have mutually beneficial relationships with writers for proxy sites, including [Finian Cunningham](#), [Pepe Escobar](#), and [Christopher Black](#).²¹ Several of the proxy sites these writers create content for, are [directed](#), [controlled](#), and/or [guided](#) by Russian intelligence services.

RT, SPUTNIK, AND PROXY SITES NEWS FRONT AND THE FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL VALUES PROTECTION

RT and Sputnik have regularly cited and reported content from the proxy website News Front, a Crimea-based disinformation and propaganda outlet [guided](#) by the FSB and [sanctioned](#) by the U.S. Department of the Treasury for its connections to Russian intelligence.²² News Front is a key player within the Russian disinformation and propaganda ecosystem and aims to spread disinformation narratives into non-Russian media. In a May 2020 Sputnik [interview](#), the head of News Front, Konstantin Knyrik, accused independent social media companies, which had previously removed News Front's accounts for using manipulative tactics, of censorship. News Front's social media activity "relied on a combination of authentic, duplicate and fake accounts...posing as independent news entities," according to [Facebook](#).

DFRLab analyzed Facebook's removal of pages and accounts affiliated with News Front, and [found](#) News Front's Spanish-language pages heavily amplified content from Russian state-controlled media outlets, including RT and Sputnik.²³ RT [amplified](#) Knyrik's call for the Russian government to retaliate against social media companies, [depicting](#) the measures against the manipulation of social platforms as an attack on "alternative media" and [repeating](#) the Russian Foreign Ministry's complaints about alleged discrimination against Russian-language media on YouTube.

Aleksandr Malkevich, a Russian national involved in spreading pro-Russian disinformation abroad, also participated in the May 2020 Sputnik interview with Knyrik. The United States has sanctioned Malkevich twice: [first](#), as the manager of the disinformation outlet USA Really, and [subsequently](#) as the founder of the Foundation for National Values Protection (FZNC). Both entities are associated with the U.S.-sanctioned

Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who finances global malign influence operations on behalf of the Kremlin. [According](#) to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Malkevich and News Front coordinate disinformation activities.

FZNC “[expert](#)” Maria Butina, who also [hosts](#) one of RT’s current [shows](#) on YouTube, [pleaded](#) guilty to “one count of conspiracy to act as a Russian agent in the U.S. without registering with the Justice Department” in December 2018. According to [NPR](#), Butina “conspired with a Russian government official, Aleksandr Torshin, to collect information and open unofficial lines of communication with influential and powerful Americans and to use those connections to Russia’s advantage.” She now is also a member of the Russian Parliament, representing President Putin’s United Russia party. RT and Sputnik regularly amplify Butina’s statements demonizing the United States, including claims that she was prosecuted because of the [color of her hair](#), that she was [enslaved](#), or that U.S. authorities “[stuff](#)” female prisoners with hormones to transform them “into obese monsters” to prevent them from rioting.

**RT AND SPUTNIK’S
EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE
PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN
AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN
COVID-19 VACCINES
WHILE PROMOTING
RUSSIAN VACCINES IS
COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AND
DAMAGING TO THE OVERALL
HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF
ALL GLOBAL PUBLICS.**

SPUTNIK AND THE PROXY SITE NEW EASTERN OUTLOOK (NEO)

Sputnik also featured content from another Russian proxy site, New Eastern Outlook (NEO). NEO is a pseudo-academic publication [directed and controlled](#) by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). In addition to spreading distorted narratives in support of the Kremlin’s broader strategic objectives, it spreads disinformation and propaganda aimed at undermining confidence in U.S., UK and European COVID-19 vaccines. NEO combines views of pro-Kremlin Russian academics with those of conspiracy theorists and critics of U.S. policy. A few examples of Sputnik amplifying NEO content are:

- In 2015, Sputnik covered at least two NEO article accusing the United States of [protecting](#) and [supporting](#) jihadists in the Middle East.
- In 2016, Sputnik Turkey covered at least two NEO articles: one [amplified](#) NEO’s disinformation accusing NATO and Kyiv of supporting fascism, while another [reported](#) on an NEO article suggesting “Western” media deliberately cover up human rights violations in the Middle East.
- In 2017, Sputnik [featured](#) an NEO article claiming the EU and NATO have failed Eastern bloc countries, which are now turning to Russia for support.
- In 2018, Sputnik Turkey spread disinformation by Russian military officials falsely claiming the United States tested toxic substances under the guise of drug testing on people in Georgia, and [cited](#) an

NEO article to support this fabricated claim.

- In 2019, Sputnik Mundo [quoted](#) an NEO article claiming a U.S. search for lithium was behind a coup in Bolivia.

RT AND SPUTNIK'S ROLE IN SPREADING COVID-19 DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

RT and Sputnik have played a key role in the spread of COVID-19 related disinformation. Their reporting has promoted [conspiracy theories](#) and sown disinformation about Western vaccines while simultaneously promoting the Russian made Sputnik V vaccine. RT and Sputnik's promotion of COVID-19 related disinformation narratives also attempts to undermine trust between citizens and their governments. For example, RT has [featured](#) stories on alleged [divisions](#) among European allies during the pandemic and highlighted anti-COVID-19 protests against government health measures in [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [Austria](#), and the [Netherlands](#) as acts of "civil disobedience." Sputnik France [claimed](#) the European Union's management of the pandemic and vaccine distribution has been a disaster. The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised [concern](#) about an "infodemic" of disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, warning the rapid spread of harmful dis- and misinformation "erodes the very social cohesion that sustains health systems and institutions that support well-being."

RT and Sputnik's narratives undermining America, UK, and European COVID-19 vaccines while promoting Russian vaccines is counterproductive and damaging to global public health. According to several studies, RT's COVID-19 coverage targeting foreign audiences differs significantly from its coverage in Russian. [RFE/RL](#) analysis showed "when it comes to COVID-19 messaging, RT... says all the right things about prevention, the importance of masks, and vaccination to its Russian-speaking audience, but peddles conspiracy theories and coronavirus falsehoods on its foreign-language platforms, in English, German, French, Spanish, and Arabic." Independent Russian-language online outlet [Meduza](#) described the difference in the coverage as "worlds apart," claiming Russian domestic vaccine opponents often use RT's foreign language content to justify their views. Meduza highlighted the particularly egregious role of RT DE in promoting "unscientific information about COVID-19" and providing a platform to "guests who are openly hostile to the very idea of vaccination." [Novaya Gazeta](#), which investigated RT France, reached similar conclusions, demonstrating how the outlet focused on criticizing COVID-19 related restrictions abroad, while either ignoring or approving comparable restrictions imposed by Russian authorities domestically. In September 2021, YouTube [deleted](#) two accounts associated with RT DE for [violating](#) the company's COVID misinformation policy. In December 2021, [YouTube](#) again took down an RT DE affiliated channel that RT created in an attempt to circumvent the September take downs. In response to the deletions, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [spread](#) disinformation blaming German authorities and media for allegedly conspiring against RT DE, and [threatened](#) German journalists in Russia saying, "there will certainly be a proper response from Russia. There are enough German journalists working there who are currently very comfortable."

CONCLUSION

The Russian government attempts to obscure RT and Sputnik's role as key instruments of state disinformation and propaganda. The Kremlin claims a false equivalency between the state-directed RT and Sputnik and other publicly funded, transparent, and journalistically independent media organizations, but the differences are stark. Russian authorities are significantly involved in the decision-making process related to the outlets' personnel and editorial policies. Moreover, RT and Sputnik are far less transparent about their management and financial structures than publicly funded international media. Most importantly, RT and Sputnik play an important role in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem as global conduits for the Kremlin's false claims, and by interacting with other key pillars in the ecosystem.

Unclassified open-source information illustrating RT and Sputnik's activities is readily available to both governments and the general public. These outlets are not comparable to independent international media outlets. Instead of providing objective, fact-based reporting, RT and Sputnik operate as state-funded global messengers of Russian government disinformation and propaganda. The Kremlin uses these outlets in an attempt to gain political advantage when Russia does not benefit from the truth. This report's case studies included as annexes demonstrate how the Kremlin has used these outlets to interfere in elections, undermine democracy, and threaten the rules-based international order.

ANNEX 1: RUSSIAN STATE-FUNDED MEDIA OUTLETS

The summary below outlines the relationships between the various Russian state-funded media outlets.

ROSSIYA SEGODNYA: On December 9, 2013, President Putin issued an [executive order](#) liquidating the Russian state information agency RIA Novosti and the Russian state radio broadcasting company Golos Rossii (translates to Voice of Russia). The order stipulated that all the property of the dissolved entities will be transferred to the newly formed state international news agency Rossiya Segodnya (translates to Russia Today, but is separate from RT), the stated purpose of which is to provide information on Russian state policy and public life for audiences abroad. According to the order, all of RIA Novosti's founder rights for the various organizations it created, such as TV-Novosti, were also transferred to Rossiya Segodnya. Rossiya Segodnya is the parent company of Sputnik, RIA Novosti (reconstituted—see below), and by relation to RIA Novosti, TV-Novosti. In 2013, RT [claimed](#) Rossiya Segodnya “will not be in any way related to RT television channel.”

Leadership: Dmitriy Kiselyov - General Director; Margarita Simonyan - Editor-in-Chief; [Galina Kozhina](#) - First Deputy General Director; Sergey Kochetkov - First Deputy Editor-in-Chief²⁴

SPUTNIK: Sputnik is [Rossiya Segodnya's](#) main project/brand targeting foreign audiences. It runs radio broadcasts, websites, and social media channels in more than 30 languages. It is the replacement for RIA Novosti's international news service and Golos Rossii following the 2013 [presidential executive order](#) that liquidated them both. Rossiya Segodnya's [website](#) states Sputnik was created in November 2014 “with the participation of Margarita Simonyan.” Sometimes Simonyan is [referred](#) to as Sputnik's editor-in-chief, however Sputnik's website does not list her as working at the outlet. Therefore, this link is likely made given her role as editor-in-chief of parent company Rossiya Segodnya.

Leadership: Anton Anisimov - Editor-in-Chief; [Andrey Blagodyrenko](#) - Head of Sputnik in countries that neighbor Russia; Tural Kerimov - Head of Sputnik in non-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Aleksey Orlov - Head of Sputnik for Russian-speaking audiences.

RIA NOVOSTI: Originally a state-owned news agency founded in 1941, but liquidated in 2013 by a [presidential executive order](#). Rossiya Segodnya kept the name RIA Novosti and restructured it to be Rossiya Segodnya's main project/brand targeting domestic audiences.

Leadership: Dmitriy Kiselyov - General Director; Margarita Simonyan - Editor-in-Chief; [Dmitriy Gornostayev](#) - Head of RIA Novosti; Anna Gavrilova - Head of ria[.]ru website

TV-NOVOSTI: [Established](#) in April 2005 by RIA Novosti, the Russian state international information agency. It is the parent company of [RT](#). In addition to RT, TV-Novosti operates the video news agency [Ruptly](#), the multilingual website [Russia Beyond](#) (formerly Russia Beyond the Headlines) and the Russian-

language website [KUB](#). According to independent media outlet [Proekt](#), Alexsey Gromov's son, also named Alexsey Gromov, is KUB's manager.

Leadership: [Aleksey Nikolov](#) - General Director; [Margarita Simonyan](#) - Editor-in-Chief. According to a 2021 Russian government [document](#), TV-Novosti has a new parent company as of August 2020: the Association for the Development of International Journalism (ADIJ). [ADIJ](#) was founded in 2019 by Simonyan, Nikolov, and a few other individuals [described](#) by the independent Russian media outlet Open Media as Simonyan's RT associates.

RT (FORMALLY RUSSIA TODAY): RT [began](#) broadcasting in December 2005 and developed into a network of television channels, websites, and social media channels publishing content in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, German, and Russian. RT was established by TV-Novosti, which was founded by RIA Novosti. RT's network also includes a sister news agency [Ruptly](#), which owns the entirety of [Redfish](#), and [owned](#) 51 percent of Maffick Media GmbH, before it became a U.S. LLC. Redfish is a digital content creator that is aimed at the Western political left. Maffick is a news outlet that hosts a variety of online pages such as In The Now, SoapBox and Waste-ED.

[Leadership](#): Margarita Simonyan - Editor-in-Chief; Aleksey Nikolov - Managing Director

Although Rossiya Segodnya does not [identify](#) RT as its affiliate, the two entities are linked through their shared leadership and through RIA Novosti, the original founder of the autonomous non-commercial organization TV-Novosti, the Russian state-funded entity responsible for the worldwide broadcasts of RT.

RT GROWTH TIMELINE:



- 2004 ▶ *Orange Revolution in Ukraine*
- 2005 ▶ First [broadcast](#) in English
- 2007 ▶ [Launch](#) of YouTube channel
- 2007 ▶ [Launch](#) of Arabic language channel
- 2008 ▶ *Georgian War*



- 2009 ▶ ● Russia Today changes its name to RT
- 2009 ▶ ● Launch of Spanish language channel
- 2010 ▶ ● The RT America channel begins broadcasting from its studio in Washington, DC
- 2011 ▶ ● *Arab Spring*
- 2011 ▶ ● RTDoc, RT's documentary channel, begins its 24/7 English-language broadcast
- 2012 ▶ ● RT begins reporting in Russian
- 2013 ▶ ● RT launches RUPTLY, a full-service global video news agency
- 2013 ▶ ● *Euromaidan*
- 2014 ▶ ● *Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Illegal annexation of Crimea*
- 2014 ▶ ● RT launches UK channel
- 2014 ▶ ● Launch of RT Deutsch, a German-language website
- 2015 ▶ ● Launch of RT en Français – RT's French language online platform
- 2017 ▶ ● RT launches French-language channel

RUPTLY: RT [launched](#) Ruptly in April 2013, but the media outlet officially [joined](#) the German Commercial Register in July 2012 and created its [YouTube](#) page in November 2012. Ruptly [describes](#) itself as a “news agency that provides real-time and archive visual news content to all media.” There is significant overlap between Ruptly and other outlets linked to TV-Novosti. Ruptly [grew](#) out of RT’s [FreeVideo](#) project, which RT [launched](#) in 2009 but is no longer in service. In 2018 the [Ruptly Verification Unit](#), which is a part of the outlet that claims to be dedicated to fact-checking videos, [merged](#) with and absorbed a branch of RT that investigated news sources called RT Digital.

RT and Ruptly also share personnel. The founder and first director of Ruptly, Denis Trunov, was also the first director of RT DE.²⁵ Ruptly’s current head is [Dinara Toktosunova](#), who is also the head of RT DE. Xenia Fedorova has been the head of RT France since its debut in 2017 and was also the head of Ruptly from 2015 to the beginning of 2017 after which Toktosunova took over.²⁶

[Redfish](#) claims Ruptly is its parent company and officially it is [registered](#) as belonging to Ruptly, however RT has also [called](#) Redfish an RT “digital content project.” Both Ruptly and Redfish are located in Berlin, and until 2021 when Maffick closed its Berlin office, Ruptly, Redfish, and Maffick shared the same [address](#). Ruptly’s [website](#) states it was founded “to act as an independent commercially funded organization and sister agency to RT,” while Redfish’s [website](#) states that Ruptly is “a news agency owned by RT.” On RT’s [website](#), Ruptly is described as “RT’s video agency.” This discrepancy could be an indicator of a lack of organizational independence.

Like RT and Sputnik, Ruptly presents itself as an outlet independent of the Kremlin’s influence, and the connection between Ruptly and TV-Novosti may not be obvious to the average news consumer. Various Western companies have used Ruptly’s footage, and according to Tubular Labs, it was the [most-watched](#) news agency on YouTube in 2020. In 2021 Ruptly made the [shortlist](#) for the UK-based Association for International Broadcasting (AIB) News Agency of the Year award. Aleksey Nikolov, managing director of RT and general director of TV-Novosti, was the former [AIB Chairman](#) from 2016-2018 and an [Executive Committee](#) member from 2018-2020. Nikolov has also been a [judge](#) for the AIB’s annual awards 10 of the 11 years of its existence.

MAFFICK: [Maffick](#) is an outlet that hosts a variety of online pages including In The Now, SoapBox and Waste-ED. Maffick was originally [registered](#) in Germany as Maffick Media GmbH, where it shared the same business [address](#) as Ruptly and Redfish. Ruptly [owned](#) 51 percent of Maffick Media GmbH before it became a U.S. LLC. Despite dropping “Media” from its name, Maffick kept many of the [same pages](#) that it ran as subsidiary of Ruptly, continues to use [email addresses](#) with the “Maffick Media” name, and runs an online page under the name of an opinion show that RT hosted. During a dispute with Facebook, a U.S. court [found](#) that Maffick was unable to demonstrate that it was likely to succeed in showing that a “Russia state-controlled-media” label put on Maffick’s Facebook pages was false. Maffick has registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), and its [documents](#) include information on \$5.6 million in transfers from TV-Novosti to Maffick since October 2019. Maffick’s FARA [documents](#) also show the contract

between Maffick and TV-Novosti states that “the substantive law of the Russian Federation appl[ies]” to their agreement and “all disputes, disagreements or claims” are “subject to resolution in the International Commercial Arbitration Court at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation in accordance with its Rules.”

ANNEX 2: CASE STUDY — 2014 RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

RT’s growth and development have reflected shifts and changes in the Kremlin’s foreign policy. The outlet’s parent company, TV-Novosti, was founded in [April 2005](#) and RT’s first broadcast was in [December 2005](#). Both events closely followed Ukraine’s November 2004 - January 2005 Orange Revolution, which was in response to a fraudulent presidential election that favored Moscow’s preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovich. The revolution ended following a second run-off election won by Viktor Yushchenko. The uprising resulted in intense scrutiny of Russia’s involvement in internal Ukrainian affairs from both the international community and the media. [Some](#) speculated one of the main goals of RT, or Russia Today as it was known then, was to improve the image of Russia tarnished during the Orange Revolution.

RT then adapted to changing Russian government policies. Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan mentioned in an April 2012 [interview](#) that RT’s performance during the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia was an important lesson on whether it could serve its purpose of influencing the non-Russian information space with Kremlin talking points. It was clear it had failed, which likely led RT to [rebrand](#) with the help of a PR firm just after the war.

Major political events in Ukraine once again occurred at the same time as major changes in Russian state media. Following the beginning of Ukraine’s Maidan Revolution in November 2013, President Putin [liquidated](#) RIA Novosti, a state-owned news agency [founded](#) in 1941, and Golos Rossii (Voice of Russia), a radio station founded in 1929. The December 2013 [order](#) stipulated that all the assets of the dissolved media outlets would be transferred to the newly formed state international news agency Rossiya Segodnya. Before it came under the control of Rossiya Segodnya, RIA Novosti [reported](#) “the move is the latest in a series of shifts in Russia’s news landscape, which appear to point toward a tightening of state control in the already heavily regulated media sector.” Two months after the signing of this order, Russia invaded Ukraine and RT began broadcasting the Kremlin’s disinformation to the world.

DENIAL OF RUSSIAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

RT played an important role in attempting to influence foreign audiences in support of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and eventual occupation of Crimea. While Putin and other government leaders denied Russian military presence in Ukraine, RT promoted Kremlin talking points through false, misleading, and biased coverage of events. Most international media reported the Kremlin’s initial denials of any Russian military presence and balanced it with coverage of credible, [well-documented](#) Russian troop presence. When

Putin finally did admit there had been Russian troops in Crimea, RT [presented](#) his statements without any context. [RT repeatedly](#) called the Russian military presence “self-defense forces” and an RT propaganda [piece](#) simply posted multiple photographs of locals posing with the soldiers accompanied by positive quotes. The outlet also reported Putin’s misleading claim that he had never [denied](#) the Russian troops’ presence, without mentioning that he had, in fact, [said](#) that there were no Russian forces in Crimea. A review of RT’s reporting on Russian troop presence in Ukraine shows its content diligently followed Kremlin talking points.

FASCISM AND NEO-NAZIS

In a likely attempt to damage the reputations of Maidan Revolution activists, the Ukrainian leadership, and the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the eyes of both Ukraine’s allies and the Russian population, the Kremlin pushed the narrative that neo-Nazism was rampant in Ukraine [prior](#) to, during, and [after](#) the annexation of Crimea. Before military intervention, RT began to run stories about alleged Nazism in Ukraine. On February 22, [RT’s homepage](#) featured a story, “[I’ll be fighting Jews and Russians till I die’: Ukrainian right-wing militants aiming for power.](#)” The next day, the [homepage](#) featured the headline, “[Monument to soldiers who died liberating Ukraine from Nazis toppled.](#)” On February 26, the [homepage](#) featured another story titled “[Alarming trend in Ukraine: Historic monuments toppled, Nazi symbols spread.](#)” These stories promulgated the falsehood that Ukrainians supported Nazism and fascism. This campaign of coverage continued throughout the year in prominent locations on RT’s website. The reporting was so biased that the UK’s Office of Communications, known as Ofcom, [found](#) multiple RT UK reports “failed to maintain due impartiality” and [threatened statutory sanctions](#) against the outlet. This grossly [exaggerated](#) neo-Nazi narrative, which the [Kremlin continues](#) to [peddle](#) today, is designed to build public support at home and abroad that Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine is justified.

R U S S I A
O B F U S C A T E D I T S
R O L E I N C R I M E A
A N D E A S T E R N
U K R A I N E T O
M I T I G A T E
I N T E R N A T I O N A L
R E A C T I O N A N D
D E T E R S U P P O R T
F O R U K R A I N E ,
W H I L E B U I L D I N G
R U S S I A N P U B L I C
S U P P O R T
F O R M I L I T A R Y
I N T E R V E N T I O N .

COVERAGE OF THE DOWNING OF MALAYSIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 17

RT's most desperate disinformation campaign during the Ukraine crisis came following the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) on July 17, 2014, over eastern Ukraine. In 2018, a Dutch-led joint investigation team [concluded](#) that a Buk surface-to-air missile belonging to Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade shot down the plane. In an effort to counter this narrative, RT developed a series of alternative theories to try to cast doubt on the facts. RT [promoted](#) the conspiracy that there was a Spanish air traffic controller at Ukraine's airport who claimed that there were Ukrainian fighters escorting the Malaysian Airlines flight right before it crashed - a theory [debunked](#) by the airport. Putin also [promoted](#) this narrative in an interview after it was widely known to be false. In addition, RT produced a [documentary](#) that put forward various unfounded alternative theories on the downing of MH17, which is still available on its website. The "disrespect for facts" in RT's reporting about the flight led one of their journalists to [quit](#) on the air. A [search](#) of "MH17" on RT's website at the time of publication shows most of the headlines still support the Kremlin's official stance that the Russian military was not involved.

RT TARGETING AUDIENCES WITH UKRAINE-FOCUSED CONTENT

The data points to a clear RT strategy to target non-Russian audiences with Kremlin messaging on Ukraine. A March 2015 [study](#) showed the majority of videos posted to RT's flagship English-language YouTube channel were about Ukraine. Videos on Ukraine accounted for 27 percent of all RT videos and about 27 percent of views. For RT Deutsch, as RT DE was known at the time, 43 percent of videos and 42 percent of views were focused on the conflict in Ukraine. About 40 percent of RT's French language YouTube account's videos and views were also of videos on Ukraine. On its U.S., Spanish-language, and Arabic-language channels, however, RT was not as successful in promoting its Ukraine videos which underperformed compared to videos on other topics, likely due to low audience interest in the Ukraine.

FOLLOW-ON EFFORTS AND PRAISE FROM PUTIN

Russia obfuscated its role in Crimea and eastern Ukraine to mitigate international reaction and deter support for Ukraine, while building Russian public support for military intervention. RT spread the Kremlin's disinformation under the guise of journalism and created confusion about the truth. Following up on the work RT did at the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Russia expanded its operations and created an entirely [new media outlet](#), Sputnik, which was announced on November 10, 2014. The unveiling of this new propaganda outlet came just two days before NATO [assessed](#) Russia had sent troops and military material into eastern Ukraine. Putin again solidified the importance he assigned to the role of the media during the invasion of Ukraine, and signaled its key role in future Russian military endeavors when he [honored](#) 300 journalists for their "objective coverage" of events in Crimea. RT's Simonyan was reportedly one of the recipients of the "For Service to the Fatherland" award.

ANNEX 3: CASE STUDY — 2015 DOWNING OF RUSSIAN SU-24

Another example demonstrating how RT and Sputnik serve as tools to reflect and amplify the policies of the Russian state is their coverage of the Turkish military's 2015 downing of a Russian Su-24 military aircraft after it entered Turkish air space on the border with Syria. Before the shootdown, RT and Sputnik's Turkey-related content did not demonstrate a clear agenda, and stories varied in tone and content. Its editorial policy changed drastically just as Moscow's stance towards Ankara became increasingly hostile. When President Erdogan publicly apologized in June 2016 for the incident, RT and Sputnik's coverage of Turkey reflected this reconciliation and negative coverage largely dissipated.

WIDE-RANGING COVERAGE BEFORE THE SHOOTDOWN

On November 24, 2015, the Turkish military [shot down](#) a Russian Su-24 jet fighter, claiming it had violated Turkish airspace. Russia argued the jet was downed over Syrian territory and posed no threat to Turkey. According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), for years prior to the incident Russian state media depicted Turkey as a "discount beach destination, a source of vegetables and clothing, and a reliable partner in construction projects, including Sochi's prized Olympic venues." A RAND Corporation publication [noted](#) "in the months prior to the attack...some articles [in the Turkish-language version of Sputnik] were critical of Turkey, some were sympathetic, and others were neutral."

A qualitative overview of Turkey-related articles published on RT's website three months prior to the downing of the plane showed a similar result. The tone of the content ranged from critical pieces [accusing](#) Turkey of supporting [terrorists](#) to positive stories about President Erdogan participating in the [opening](#) of a mosque in Moscow. An article about the October 3, 2015, accidental Russian incursion of Turkish airspace [portrayed](#) Turkey as an understanding partner. It quoted Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey's Prime Minister at the time, as saying: "There is no tension between Turkey and Russia in this sense. This was a mistake, they respect Turkey's borders and this will not happen again."

COVERAGE TURNS HOSTILE TO REFLECT THE KREMLIN LINE

President Putin [described](#) the November 2015 shoot-down as a "stab in the back delivered by terrorists' accomplices," and accused Turkey of funding ISIS through oil purchases. Putin also [alleged](#) the Turkish government had been promoting "Islamization" inside Turkey, warning that Russian tourists visiting Turkey could face security risks. To reflect this new aggressive Kremlin posture, RT and Sputnik significantly shifted their Turkey-related propaganda narratives, according to several studies and current and former RT staff interviewed by the Oxford Internet Institute.²⁷ Participants in the Institute's study [described](#) the change in RT's editorial policy to "stay in step with the Kremlin's line." The study describes how staff members, "cited changes in RT's narratives about Turkey" and noted "RT has usually portrayed Turkey in a less critical way. In 2015, when Turkish warplanes hit a Russian military aircraft while flying over Syrian territory, RT changed its narrative and started to present Turkey as an enemy."

RT and Sputnik immediately picked up on Putin's accusation that Turkey supported ISIS through oil trade, expanding the narrative to specifically target President Erdogan's son, Bilal. An RT article titled "[Ankara's oil business with ISIS](#)" speculated "Bilal Erdogan is directly involved in the black market oil business with Islamic State" and featured what it described as "photos of...Bilal having dinner in an Istanbul restaurant with an alleged ISIS leader." EUvsDisinfo later [debunked](#) this false claim.

A sample of other RT headlines promoting Putin's inflammatory charge include:

- "[Ankara defends ISIS, Turkish officials have financial interest in oil trade with group - PM Medvedev](#)"
- "[Russia presents proof of Turkey's role in ISIS oil trade](#)"
- "[Russia says Turkey's Erdogan & family involved in illegal ISIS oil trade](#)"
- "[Iran ready to present proof of Turkey's oil trade with ISIS – Tehran official](#)"
- "[ISIS would be easy to defeat if Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not support it – Assad's adviser to RT](#)"

According to [H. Akin Unver](#), a scholar from the independent Istanbul-based think tank the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM) and the author of a 2019 [study](#) on the impact of Russian digital information operations in Turkey from 2015 to 2019, this narrative was aimed at "distracting both Turkey and NATO allies from the fact that a Russian jet had strayed into Turkish airspace" and at driving "a wedge between Ankara and other NATO capitals over Turkey's policy toward the Islamic State."

RT and Sputnik disseminated a litany of other narratives in support of the Kremlin's objective to discredit Turkey, including:

- [Erdogan admires Hitler and Nazism](#)
- [Turkey is not a safe country for refugees](#)
- [Erdogan is a fascist dictator](#)

BACK TO NORMAL

In August 2016, Putin and Erdogan [held](#) a summit in St. Petersburg and agreed to bridge their differences over the downing of the Su-24. The meeting followed Putin's words of support for Erdogan immediately after the failed July 2016 coup d'état attempt in Turkey. After the August summit, "Russia's information operations in Turkey seemed to disappear almost entirely," writes Unver. According to [The Economist](#), since the meeting, Sputnik Turkey "has drummed up support for the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia," focusing on praising Turkey's acquisition of Russia's S-400 missile system "as a sign of the country's increasing independence" from NATO and the United States.

ANNEX 4: CASE STUDY — SPRING 2021 RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILDUP ON THE UKRAINIAN BORDER

In March 2021, Russia began, what at the time was the largest [buildup of troops](#) and military equipment on its border with Ukraine and in occupied Crimea since Russia's 2014 invasion. The buildup was intentionally very [visible](#), and this time Russia did not deny it. By May 2021, Russia claimed the buildup was part of a "routine" military exercise and that at least some of its troops would be pulled back from around Ukraine. Surrounding this build up, some familiar themes from past disinformation campaigns, especially from the 2014 invasion as outlined in Annex 2, reappeared. At the time of publication, Russia has once again built up its military presence on the Ukrainian border, this time surpassing the amount of troops in March 2021.

RETURN OF NARRATIVES DEVELOPED IN 2014

In 2014, Russia developed and deployed multiple disinformation narratives against Ukraine, many of which were highlighted in Annex 2. During the Spring 2021 buildup of troops and military equipment, Russian state-controlled media outlets once again deployed these incorrect narratives. Russia was able to build upon the disinformation foundation it laid in 2014 by repeating and reinforcing old narratives. This is a proven effective tactic, as [studies](#) have shown that people are more likely to accept a falsehood as true after being repeatedly exposed to it.

FALSE NARRATIVE ONE: THE UNITED STATES AND NATO'S SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY RAISED TENSIONS

A disinformation narrative that Russia repeatedly used in 2014 was that NATO Allies' verbal statements of support for Ukraine's right to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity meant the United States, European countries, and other partners wanted Ukraine to go to war with Russia on their behalf. This goes hand in hand with another false claim that Russia is not instigating the conflict but just reacting to the situation. During the military buildup in Spring 2021, RT and Sputnik published various stories to try and frame Russia's buildup of troops as a response to Western provocations.²⁸

FALSE NARRATIVE TWO: UKRAINE HAS A SERIOUS NAZI/FASCIST PROBLEM

As mentioned in Annex 2, in 2014, Russian state-funded and state-controlled media began spreading disinformation narratives describing the Ukrainian government, and a significant portion of the population, as either fascists or Nazis. Even after Ukraine became the second country in the world, after Israel, to [simultaneously](#) have a Jewish president and prime minister, Russian disinformation media outlets [continued](#) to push this narrative. RT continued to feature this false accusation on its [homepage](#) even following the Kremlin's announcement that it intended to remove Russian troops from around Ukraine's borders and Crimea following the Spring 2021 troop buildup.

Sputnik also worked alongside RT to spread this inflammatory narrative. The Italian-language branch of Sputnik [published](#) an opinion piece in which the author wrongly [claimed](#) “Russian citizens” in Ukraine, and Russia itself, are threatened by neo-Nazi aggression from Ukraine. The Greek-language version of Sputnik incorrectly [reported](#) on April 12 that Ukraine’s authorities are reluctant to confront militant groups with supposed neo-Nazi affiliations. [RT’s Arabic, Spanish](#) (and [here](#)) and [German-language](#) branches also published false neo-Nazi narratives during the early 2021 military buildup.

FALSE NARRATIVE THREE: UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES INTENTIONALLY INJURE CHILDREN

RT has repeatedly continued to spread disinformation narratives after they have been debunked. On April 3, 2021, the [Russian press](#) first reported a story of a young boy allegedly killed by a Ukrainian Armed Forces drone in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. However, there were no official statements by either the family of the boy or the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE). On April 5, [StopFake](#) contacted locals in the village where the event allegedly took place, who confirmed that a boy tragically died, but not because of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. On April 6, RT’s show “In Question” [reported](#) the story of the boy, with a video by Ruptly of the boy’s grandmother giving an emotional interview about how she found his dead body. At the end of the report, they did qualify that the story was not proven to be true; however, at the time of filming, it had already been debunked. Sputnik’s Spanish channel reported on the story, as [did](#) RT’s Spanish channel on April 9, three days after the OSCE had [published](#) its report showing the boy did not die from a drone. On April 14, RT’s German-language website, RT DE, also [published](#) a [story](#) claiming the boy died from a drone attack and called it an act of terrorism. As of May 2021, none of these stories have been corrected. This story was also amplified by proxy websites, such as the FSB-tasked [SouthFront](#).

This story is similar to another disinformation item published by the Russian press in 2014. On July 12, 2014, a woman told Russia’s Channel One she had witnessed Ukrainian soldiers [crucify](#) a young boy and drag his mother to death behind a tank. The next day, a Novaya Gazeta [journalist](#) was unable to find any witnesses in the town where the killings allegedly happened. It was later proven the woman who first spoke to Channel One was lying. Like the fake story about the boy being killed by a drone, RT mentioned the [story](#) despite it already having been debunked. The outlet also doubled down on the original disinformation narrative by claiming that multiple “[babies](#)” were crucified. On its website, RT claims it did not do a report on the story, however, it does admit that it appeared on one of its shows, “TruthSeeker.”

ONE-SIDED REPORTING AND BLATANT DISINFORMATION

Instead of providing a balanced account, RT and Sputnik frequently present only the Kremlin’s position on an issue.

On RT’s television shows, disinformation and propaganda that makes the Kremlin look good (and its perceived adversaries look bad) is repeatedly stated as fact. Despite RT’s attempts to market its shows as debates or discussions in which “[all things are considered](#),” pro-Kremlin statements are rarely questioned.

On April 6, 2021, in the same episode of RT's "In Question" that reported about the debunked story about the drone killing a boy, RT listed false reasons justifying Russia's military buildup, including an alleged promise by U.S. President Ronald Reagan to General Secretary Gorbachev to not expand NATO, which [Gorbachev](#) said never happened, and the incorrect claim that Ukraine had outlawed the Russian language. Another example is an April 16, 2021 [episode](#) of RT's show "CrossTalk," where a guest claimed that every country west of Russia, except for Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina, is now a part of NATO. None of these false statements were challenged by the hosts or other guests, nor are they corrected on RT's website.

ENDNOTES

¹The Atlantic Council is a recipient of U.S. Government funding.

²For more information on RT, see Monika L Richter's European Values [report](#) "The Kremlin's Platform for 'Useful Idiots' in the West: An Overview of RT's Editorial Strategy and Evidence of Impact"

³Rossiya Segodnya (Россия Сегодня) translated to English, is "Russia Today." However, Rossiya Segodnya and RT (formally Russia Today), are allegedly separate entities. When speaking in Russian, Rossiya Segodnya is always referred to using the Russian words, while RT (or Russia Today when it was called that) is always said in English. See Annex One for more details on the Russian state-owned media landscape.

⁴For a more in-depth description of Russian state-funded media, see Annex One.

⁵See the [GFC's Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem](#) for more information about the ecosystem. [Archived English version of the report](#)

⁶Original quotation in Russian: "3.10. Организация обеспечивает защиту сведений, составляющих государственную тайну, проводит работы, связанные с использованием сведений, составляющих государственную тайну, а также осуществляет мероприятия и (или) оказывает услуги в области защиты государственной тайны."

⁷Simonyan has since [denied](#) the importance of this yellow phone, however reporters have [documented](#) the "media hotline" between the Kremlin and other state-controlled media such as Rossiya-24.

⁸An example of Simonyan and Gromov's close relationship is the fact that he attended the [launch](#) of her book in 2019.

⁹Further proof of government ties was documented through photographs from a [RT hosted party](#) in 2011. The unusual attendees for a media outlet that had not yet started broadcasting in [Russian](#) included Russian Prime Minister Spokesperson [Dmitriy Peskov](#); [Nikolay Zakharov](#), head of public relations for the FSB; [Sergey Deyatov](#), head of press relations for the Russian Federal Guard Service; aide to then President Medvedev, [Arkadiy Dvorkovich](#), who is photographed next to RT's Simonyan; and [Konstantin Zatulin](#), Russian State Duma member and featured person in the [Glazyev tapes](#), which revealed via leaked audio that Russia was involved in organizing pro-Russian protests in Ukraine.

¹⁰According to a 2021 Ministry of Justice [document](#), TV-Novosti has a different parent company as of August 2020: Association for the Development of International Journalism (ADIJ). Simonyan, Nikolov, and a few other individuals whom the independent Russian media outlet Open Media [describes](#) as Simonyan's RT associates, founded [ADIJ](#) in 2019. There is no clear indication why ADIJ, a company established in 2019, became the new parent company of TV-Novosti, which was created in 2005.

¹¹For example, Tatyana Kukhareva is [reported](#) to be the Deputy Head of Sputnik News websites and radio, but was also the [former](#) head of new broadcasting at RT's French website. As of January 2022, she still [listed](#) herself as working at RT France, but as the Deputy editor-in-chief. Some [reports mention](#) that Vasily Pushkov was the director of the International Cooperation Directorate for Sputnik, while [other articles label](#) him as the as director of International Cooperation at Rossiya Segodnya.

¹²When the Washington, D.C. corporation T&R Productions, LLC (T&R) [registered](#) with the Department of Justice under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) as an agent for TV-Novosti in 2017, it stated, "Registrant is not sufficiently aware of who supervises, owns, direct, controls or subsidizes ANO TV-Novosti" to answer questions regarding whether TV-Novosti was supervised, owned, directed, or controlled, or subsidized by a foreign government, foreign political party, or other foreign principal.

¹³When questioned in an [interview](#) about the propagandic nature of RT, Margarita Simonyan, the outlet's editor-in-chief, says, "if you look at some of the mission statements of some of those channels like the BBC or Voice of America, you will find that their mission statements clearly state that this media organization exist to bring the voice or British values for that matter or the voice of America to the world." Simonyan incorrectly quotes the mission statements of the organizations in order to falsely make it appear they are more similar to RT. The portion of the [BBC's Charter](#) that she is quoting is, "The BBC should provide high-quality news coverage to international audiences, firmly based on British values of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness." The British values the BBC aims to bring to the world in good journalism. For the Voice of America (VOA), its [mission statement](#) has three main principles: "1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive. 2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions. 3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies." Neither the BBC nor VOA's mission statements say they exist to bring their respective countries opinions to the world.

¹⁴The difference in these two numbers cannot be explained by a difference in exchange rates. RT's [website](#) statistic of \$275 million (17 billion rubles) was published on November 1, 2016. On November 1, 2016 the [exchange rate](#) was 1 USD = 63.0789 RUB. At this time, \$275 million was about equal to 17.3 billion rubles, which is close to the amount the website gives in rubles. The [video](#) statistic of \$300 million was published on December 15, 2015 when the [exchange rate](#) was 1 USD = 70.075. In December 2015, \$300 million was equal to about 21 billion rubles.

¹⁵According to a [report](#) by Open Media, Russian state law requires all non-profit organizations, such as TV-Novosti, must submit to the Ministry of Justice annually two forms: 1) Form number ON0001, which reports on the organization's activities and the governing bodies; and 2) Form number ON0002, which reports on the how the organization spends funding received from the state budget. These forms are then published on the Ministry of Justice's website. Contrary to the law, TV-Novosti has not published form number ON0001 since 2010, and it has not published form number ON0002 since 2019. The Ministry of Justice has not punished TV-Novosti despite its violations.

¹⁶Original quotation in Russian: "как у всех других каналов... Нет никакой объективности...Так что, когда Россия воюет, мы, конечно, на стороне России."

¹⁷RT and Rossiya Segodnya's leaderships' statements are further supported by the fact that RT and Sputnik lack a journalistic code of practice, unlike most [fact-based international media](#) outlets. The closest similarity is a Russian organization called [Public Collegium on Press Complaints](#) (Общественная коллегия по жалобам на прессы) which acts as a self-regulator for Russian media and is funded by the [Russian Presidential Grants Fund](#). The Collegium has a [code of ethics](#), but there is no indication on either RT or Sputnik's websites that their journalists are held to the standards of the organization. Rossiya Segodnya is a [member](#) of the chamber of the Collegium, but RT is not. In addition, the opinion of the organization does not seem to be a significant concern for RT. For example, in November 2020 a [complaint](#) was made to the organization about an RT report, and RT did not participate in the hearing.

¹⁸Original quotation in Russian: Симоньян: "Информационное оружие, безусловно, используется в критические моменты, а война — это всегда критический момент. На то она и война. Это такое же оружие, как и любое другое."

¹⁹Original quotation in Russian: "И когда нам это пригодится, а может — никогда не пригодится, но когда пригодится, эти люди уже будут нас смотреть..."

²⁰Original quotation in Russian: Мы тоже всегда так делали, делаем и будем делать.

²¹<https://web.archive.org/web/20220104162556/https://en.news-front.info/2019/03/16/rubio-s-gloating-betrays-us-sabotage-in-venezuela-power-bltiz/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210118165629/https://en.news-front.info/2019/06/24/shutting-down-the-gulf-oil-trade-all-iran-needs-to-do-to-destroy-the-world-economy/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20220104190908/https://en.news-front.info/2018/01/26/genocide-conspiracy-north-korea-open-letter-international-criminal-court/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210225134554/https://southfront.org/the-making-of-us-empire-at-the-dawning-of-its-end/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20211214004241/https://journal-neo.org/author/christopher-black/>

²²<https://web.archive.org/web/20210125062309/https://www.rt.com/news/183368-ukraine-novoazovsk-kiiev-troops/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210126193700/https://www.rt.com/news/176480-donetsk-shelling-residential-areas/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210506103816/https://www.rt.com/news/172288-civilians-killed-ukraine-orphanage/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210520174624/https://russian.rt.com/russia/news/748118-news-front-kanal>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210308133922/https://www.rt.com/news/489243-youtube-delete-channels-crimea/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20201113163955/https://www.rt.com/russia/506623-youtube-censorship-rt-documentary/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210520175953/https://russian.rt.com/world/news/748261-mid-rossiya-youtube>; https://web.archive.org/web/20210624200005/https://sputnik-ossetia.ru/video_Studio/20190522/8651752/Konstantin-Knyrik-i-Elina-Marzoeva-ob-informatsionnoy-voynе-i-ne-tolko.html; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210506031319/https://sputniknews.com/europe/201609151045356710-news-front-journalists-detained-kosovo/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210624200553/https://it.sputniknews.com/20161201/mistero-italiano-rapito-in-siria-3718156.html>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210301200222/https://sputniknews.com/world/201612031048123973-syria-terrorists-italian-national-abduction/>; https://web.archive.org/web/202011106224154/https://br.sputniknews.com/oriente_medio_africa/201612037043979-sequestro-terrorismo-siria-italia-misterio-zanotti-video/; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210624200856/https://cz.sputniknews.com/20170128/pricina-smrt-predak-llr-4627306.html>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20170618121040/https://pl.sputniknews.com/swiat/201703275127674-Ukraina-rejestruje-organizacje-terrorystyczne/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210123112257/https://pl.sputniknews.com/opinie/201609233932792-ukraina-dziennikarze-donbas/>.

²³DFRLab is a recipient of U.S. Government funding.

²⁴Rossiya Segodnya uploaded a website page with more information about their management in December 2021.

²⁵Audinet, Maxime. Russia Today (RT): un média d'influence au service de l'État russe. Page 40.

²⁶Audinet, Maxime. Russia Today (RT): un média d'influence au service de l'État russe. Page 75.

²⁷https://web.archive.org/web/20210428173645/https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE278/RAND_PE278.pdf; <https://archive.ph/jxweG>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210425072203/https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/devlen.pdf>

²⁸RT: [Western allies of Ukraine supplying 'Kiev regime' with weapons & inciting 'bloody, destructive\[isic\]' force in Donbass, Russia claims; Russian troops on Ukraine border 'ready to defend country' in event of war says Defense Minister Shoigu, warning of NATO buildup; The West's sole prerogative is that Russia has no right to self-defense... even when the threat is right on its border \[op-ed\]; and Moscow orders ships to conduct Black Sea naval exercises amid confusion over whether US will deploy warships to volatile region](#); Sputnik: [Moscow Calls on Kiev, NATO to Refrain From Actions That Could Lead to Further Escalation in Donbass; Brits Push Russia War; Siege of Russia by US and its Allies Offers a Lesson for China; Lavrov Says Berlin Should Provide Info on Navalny Before Asking Questions About Ukraine; and Why Kiev's Preparation for War in Eastern Ukraine Cannot but Worry Russia](#).



GEC Special Report:

KREMLIN-FUNDED MEDIA: RT AND SPUTNIK'S ROLE IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM



United States Department of State
Global Engagement Center