

They're Not Worried About "Russian Influence", They're Worried About Dissent



Caitlin Johnstone
4 hr ago

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Alliance for Securing Democracy

Hamilton 68: A New Tool to Track Russian Disinformation on Twitter

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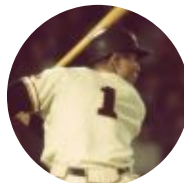
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Being labeled a Russian propagandist all day every day for criticizing US foreign policy is really weird, but one advantage it comes with is a useful perspective on what people have really been talking about all these years when they warn of the dangers of "Russian propaganda".

I know I'm not a Russian propagandist. I'm not paid by Russia, I have no connections to Russia, and until I started this political commentary gig in 2016 I thought very little about Russia. My opinions about the western empire sometimes turn up on Russian media

because I [let anyone use my work who wants to](#), but that was always something they did on their own without my submitting it to them and without any payment or solicitation of any kind. I'm literally just some random westerner sharing political opinions on the internet; those opinions just happen to disagree with the US empire and its stories about itself and its behavior.

Yet for years I've watched people pointing at me as an example of what "Russian propaganda" looks like. This has helped inform my understanding of all the panic about "Russian influence" that's been circulating these last six years, and given me some insight into how seriously it should be taken.



Matt Taibbi
@mtaibbi

Instead of tracking how "Russia" influenced American attitudes, Hamilton 68 simply collected a handful of mostly real, mostly American accounts, and described their organic conversations as Russian scheming:



racket.news

Move Over, Jayson Blair: Meet Hamilton 68, the New King of Media Fraud

7:44 PM · Jan 27, 2023

25,677Likes6,389Retweets

That's one reason why I wasn't surprised by [Matt Taibbi's reporting](#) on the Twitter Files revelations about Hamilton 68, an information op run by DC swamp monsters and backed by imperialist think tanks which generated hundreds if not thousands of completely bogus mainstream news reports about online Russian influence over the years.

Hamilton 68 purported to track Russian attempts to influence western thought on social media, but Twitter eventually figured out that the "Russians" the operation has been tracking were actually mostly real, mostly American accounts who just happened to say

things that didn't perfectly align with the official Beltway consensus. These accounts were often right-leaning, but also included people like [Consortium News editor Joe Lauria](#), who's about as far from a rightist as you can get.

They played a massive role in fanning the flames of public hysteria about online Russian influence, but while they did this by pretending to track the behavior of Russian influence ops, in reality they were tracking dissent.

One of the craziest things happening in the world today is the way westerners are being brainwashed by western propaganda into panicking about Russian propaganda, something that has no meaningful existence in the west. Before RT was shut down it was drawing a whopping [0.04 percent of the UK's total TV audience](#). The much-touted Russian election interference campaign on Facebook was [mostly unrelated to the election](#) and affected "approximately 1 out of 23,000 pieces of content" according to Facebook. Research by New York University into Russian trolling behavior on Twitter in the lead-up to the 2016 election [has found](#) "no evidence of a meaningful relationship between exposure to the Russian foreign influence campaign and changes in attitudes, polarization, or voting behavior." A study by the University of Adelaide [found](#) that despite all the warnings of Russian bots and trolls following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the overwhelming majority of inauthentic behavior on Twitter during that time was anti-Russian in nature.

Russia exerts essentially zero influence over what westerners think, yet we're all meant to freak out about "Russian propaganda" while [western oligarchs](#) and [government agencies](#) continually [hammer our minds](#) with [propaganda](#) designed to [manufacture our consent](#) for the status quo which benefits them.



Joel Whitney (he/him)
@joel_whitney

The arguments in this article are self defeating (a crisis of democracy should use secret unaccountable CIA subsidies to push "democracy") and have already been refuted countless times, and is pointless as we are still using disguised cutouts and pass throughs to do propaganda



Bill Kristol @BillKristol

"The cultural Cold War against Soviet Communism and, more specifically, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, can still serve as instructive models for conducting the long war of ideas against

authoritarian and anti-democratic challenges that we face today."

<https://t.co/sNnOGfb8Q1>

6:53 PM · Jan 30, 2023

122Likes42Retweets

All this and we're still seeing calls for more narrative management from the western empire, like the recent American Purpose article "[The Long War of Ideas](#)"

being [promoted](#) by people like Bill Kristol which calls for a resurrection of CIA culture war tactics like those used during the last cold war. Every day there's some new liberal politician sermonizing about the need to do more to fight Russian influence and protect American minds from "disinformation", even as we are shown over and over again that what they really want is to shut down dissident voices.

That's what we're seeing in the continual efforts to [increase online censorship](#), in the [bogus new "fact-checking" industry](#), in [calls to increase the output](#) of formal US government propaganda operations like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia, in the way all dissent about Russia has been [forcefully purged from the western media](#) in recent years, in the way [empire-amplified trolling operations](#) have been shouting down and drowning out critics of US foreign policy online, in the way [censorship via algorithm](#) has emerged as one of the major methods of restricting dissident speech.

They claim there needs to be a massive escalation in propaganda, censorship and online psyops in order to fight "Russian influence", while the only influence operations we're being subjected to in any meaningful way are only ever of the western variety. They just want to do more of that.

Our rulers aren't actually worried about "Russian influence", they're worried about dissent. They're worried the public won't consent to the "[great power competition](#)" they plan to subject us to for the foreseeable future unless they can exert massive influence over our minds, because they know that otherwise we will recognize that our interests are directly harmed by the economic warfare, exploding military spending and nuclear brinkmanship which necessarily accompanies that campaign to reign in Russia and stop the rise of China.

They're propagandizing us about the threat of foreign propaganda in order to justify propagandizing us more. We're being manipulated into consenting to agendas that no healthy person would ever consent to without copious amounts of manipulation.

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