

Feds Create Orwellian Propaganda Agency to Combat 'Fake News'

Our elected officials in Washington have a habit of passing the laws that the American people would probably most like to know about at times when very few are likely to see it.

On December 23rd of last year, while we the people were busy making preparations for the holidays, President Obama signed the [National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017](#) into law. Deep within this vast jungle of ink, paper, and legalese, lies a brand new federal agency created to combat what Hillary Clinton has called an "[epidemic of fake news and malicious false propaganda](#)."

Enter the Global Engagement Center

Sandwiched in the middle of the 969-page Act, we find the production of the latest Department of State agency. The newly created Global Engagement Center is tasked with coordinating the Federal Government's efforts to "understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation... aimed at undermining United States national security interests."

This appears to be the government's response to the as-yet unsubstantiated claims of "Russian hacking" that allegedly stole the election. No definition of what constitutes "propaganda and disinformation" or "national security interests" is given. In practice, these words can mean anything the Center would like them to mean.

Supposedly, the Center will only be targeting propaganda from foreign sources. But given that our government does not hesitate to cast blame on other countries without providing

evidence, there's little reason to believe that American citizens with dissident views can't be branded as foreign propaganda outlets.

Another highlight of the Act includes the stipulation that the Global Engagement Center will provide support for "the development and dissemination of fact-based narratives and analysis to counter propaganda and disinformation directed at the United States and" its partners and allies.

Unless these "fact-based narratives" are based on solid evidence from reliable sources, they will amount to whatever the Center decides is true. If the recent behavior of US intelligence agencies is any indication of what to expect, the only evidence will come in the form of anonymous sources from classified reports.

Secret evidence is as good as no evidence, and no honest judge would accept it in a court of law. No one should accept it in the court of public opinion either.

That's Not All

The NDAA also states that that the new agency will share "expertise among Federal departments and agencies."

Translation: The Center will have access to the full might of the US intelligence apparatus and be in close cooperation with agencies such as the CIA and the NSA.

This new agency will also have the power to collect, what the [U.S. Code defines](#) as, any collection of information about an individual, "including, education, financial transactions... or other identifying particular assigned to the individual, such as a finger or voice print or a photograph."

This record of personal information is intended for the purpose of researching foreign...

...propaganda and disinformation efforts and communications

related to public diplomacy efforts intended for foreign audiences. Such research and data analysis shall be reasonably tailored to meet the purposes of this paragraph and shall be carried out with due regard for privacy and civil liberties guidance and oversight."

Since US intelligence has set the precedent of making accusations without proving them, anything not of foreign origin could easily be contrived as such.

With this provision, everything about you is fair game to be gathered, researched, and analyzed to help the Center fight news and opinions that don't fit their narrative. The latter part, which specifies communications "intended for foreign audiences," does not read to me as a limitation, but rather an additional item to research and analyze, along with the foreign propaganda and disinformation efforts. Also, since US intelligence has set the precedent of making accusations without proving them, anything not of foreign origin could easily be contrived as such.

And the promise of "due regard for privacy and civil liberties guidance and oversight" seems like lip service. The bill gives no explanation of how this will be guaranteed and specifies no penalty for abuse of the powers it grants.

The Center is authorized to operate for eight years.

Notably, it is also authorized to financially support various groups, apparently of its own choosing, including "civil society groups, media content providers, nongovernmental organizations, federally funded research and development centers, private companies, or academic institutions."

Art Reflects Life

Frankly, though I am not the first to say it, the Global Engagement Center reminds me of the Ministry of Truth in

George Orwell's 1984. Known as "Minitrue" in the novel, this agency was responsible for correcting past and present records of news media, entertainment, and the arts when they did not flatter the single ruling Party; the Party's power rested largely on its ability to cover its mistakes and failures.

Like Minitrue, the Global Engagement Center's mission is to promote the version of the news that it would like you to see – what Orwell called "goodthink" – with the bonus of keeping a detailed record of dissenters, contrarians, and anyone that questions the party line.

Our voices remain the most powerful weapons we have, and we can use them to make it very clear that we will continue to separate truth from fiction by our own judgment. Whether in writing, film, art, or spoken word, we must defend truth, our freedom of speech, and our right to think for ourselves like it's a matter of life and death. Because, if you believe Orwell's account – it is.

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