



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on September 5, 2024

DOJ Takes on Alleged Russian Propaganda Scheme Targeting Conservatives

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the seizure of 32 domains linked to a Russian campaign accused of spreading propaganda to sway voters in the United States and other countries. It also indicted two employees of the Russian media company RT (formerly Russia Today), a Russian state media network, for covertly funding the American conservative media company to further Russian interests.

The Indictment

According to the indictment's [press release](#),



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“The Justice Department has charged two employees of RT, a Russian state-controlled media outlet, in a \$10 million scheme to create and distribute content to U.S. audiences with hidden Russian government messaging,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “The Justice Department will not tolerate attempts by an authoritarian regime to exploit our country’s free exchange of ideas in order to covertly further its own propaganda efforts, and our investigation into this matter remains ongoing.”

“The tools” of this alleged scheme were two Russian nationals, Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, whom the DOJ charged with conspiracy to violate the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Both individuals are currently at large.

Tenet Media

The DOJ indictment does not directly identify the “Tennessee-based online content creation company” that allegedly received Russian funding, but the details provided align closely with [Tenet Media](#), a platform that describes itself as a “network of heterodox commentators focusing on Western political and cultural issues,” as does “Company-1” referenced by the DOJ in its indictment.

Tenet Media’s website features several popular conservative personalities, including Tim Pool, Benny Johnson, Dave Rubin, Lauren Southern, Taylor Hansen, and Matt Christiansen, as part of its lineup.

Tenet Media’s [YouTube channel](#), boasting more than 316,000 subscribers, includes content from Pool, Johnson, and Christiansen that largely addresses political topics and cultural debates. [The latest videos](#) are dedicated to the criticism of Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris and her running mate, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, the DNC convention, immigrant criminality, and pro-life issues.

According to the indictment,

To support the production and publication of its videos, U.S. Company-I employs three staff



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producers — Producer-1, Producer-2, and a third individual (“Producer-3”) — and a purported outside editing firm staffed by, among others, KALASHNIKOV and AFANASYEVA.

The DOJ alleges that in 2024, Afanasieva provided around 841 video clips to the staff of the company, which were regularly uploaded to social-media channels. By June 2024, one of Tenet’s founders had granted both Russian agents the authority to directly upload content to its platform.

The agency says the company received \$10 million from Russian sources to produce English-language videos on various social-media channels. These videos, according to the DOJ, covered topics such as “inflation, immigration, and other topics related to domestic and foreign policy” with the goal to “amplify domestic divisions in the United States.”

Deceived Commentators

Many of the influencers associated with Tenet Media have amassed large followings on social media and video-sharing platforms such as X and YouTube. Although the DOJ’s indictment doesn’t specifically name any individuals, it mentions that Commentator-1 and Commentator-2 have YouTube subscriber counts of more than 2.4 million and 1.3 million, respectively. These numbers closely match those of [Dave Rubin](#) and [Tim Pool](#), whose YouTube channels have 2.45 million and 1.37 million subscribers, respectively.

The indictment does not accuse the influencers of any intentional wrongdoing. Instead, it suggests they were misled by the company’s founders and Russian operatives. Tenet’s founder, Lauren Chen, as well as her husband, allegedly knew the true source of the funds but deceived the commentators by claiming the money came from a wealthy private investor named “Eduard Grigoriann.”

The text of the indictment reveals that at least one of them requested a profile on “Grigoriann” before agreeing to a contract and was subsequently provided with a fake one-page profile.

Influencers’ Statements

In a Wednesday statement on X, Pool said that should the allegations prove true, “I as well as the other personalities and commentators were deceived and are victims.” He stressed that he alone had “full editorial control” over the content that was “often apolitical,” adding that “Putin is a scumbag.”

Johnson and Rubin echoed the sentiment, saying that they were victims in this alleged scheme.

The Doppelgänger

In a [separate statement](#) on Wednesday, the DOJ announced that it had seized 32 internet domains used to execute “Russian government-directed foreign malign influence campaigns,” known as “Doppelgänger.” These sites were allegedly used to “covertly spread Russian government propaganda, reducing international support for Ukraine, bolstering pro-Russian policies and interests, and influencing voters in U.S. and foreign elections, including the U.S. 2024 Presidential Election.”

The campaign, according to Merick Garland’s statement, was orchestrated by Russian president Vladimir Putin’s inner circle “to secure Russia’s preferred outcome in the election.”

Additionally, the Treasury Department [imposed sanctions](#) on 10 individuals and the Russian non-profit organization ANO Dialog and the state media outlet RT for their roles in conducting an alleged



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disinformation campaign.

DOJ's Elections Preparations

The DOJ, along with its subordinate entity, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which had previously been [caught](#) engaging in a sweeping censorship campaign on behalf of the Biden administration by pressuring social-media companies to moderate content, including [the suppression](#) of the Hunter Biden laptop story, is actively involved in countering foreign interference in elections and “preventing the spread of misinformation.”

As reported by [Bloomberg](#) on Tuesday, the DOJ said that it “won’t pressure social media companies to remove or block content when the government shares information about foreign threats to national security or elections, after claims that platforms were previously coerced.”

The document quoted by the outlet promises that DOJ’s focus will be “on disrupting the foreign actors behind the accounts and exposing their hidden hand” while leaving it up to the companies to decide how to handle the problematic content.



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