

NewsNation's Dan Abrams Live
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8:00:42 p.m.
3 minutes and 42 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; RT, Russian-Owned News Channel Spreads Propaganda to American Cable Homes]

DAN ABRAMS: As you watch this network tonight or other news networks, you're seeing coverage in real time of a totally unprovoked attack by Vladimir Putin in Russia on its smaller neighbor Ukraine. While news networks across the political spectrum bring you information about the horrors of what's happening at Putin's hands, we have been watching RT — the Russian-owned news channel available in most American cable homes so you don't have to. It used to be called Russia Today and what they are producing and airing is astonishing. The reality, of course, is that hundreds are dying already as Putin tries to take over Ukraine to fulfill some sort of historical vendetta. No domestic news network — even the most extreme — are suggesting that this attack was somehow justifiable or justified. But if you watch RT, you enter into an alternate universe where you would think this is an effort by Putin to rescue the Ukrainian people in Donbass, who have been subjected to attacks, torture, and killings by the government there. Highly-produced segments, including some with western or American accents, talking about children being shot at by Ukrainian soldiers and about the lies being told by American and European officials about Putin. There's even a — a phony *Crossfire*-like talk show hosted by an American named Peter Lavelle that pretends to debate the invasion as if it's a two-sided question. The guy even wears an RT pin where I wear my American flag pin.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; RT Paints “Invasion of Donbass” as Russia Rescuing Ukrainian People]

They also have a large graphic that appears before many segments claiming that this is actually day 200 — 2,525 of the war, which they say started in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea claiming, of course, at the time, they were protecting ethnic Russians from far-right extremists in the region. An RT reporter even alleged that much of the footage is appearing on other networks is actually old footage from previous wars.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; RT Claims Other Networks Are Showing Old Footage From Previous Wars]

They have graphics on the screen which say things like, “Disarming Ukraine,” An “Operation in Ukraine Comes After Months of failed” Western “Talks.”

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Russian Owned Channel Has American Hosts and Gues [sic]]

This is a global network available in more than 100 countries and if you're watching the show, it is probably being streamed into your home. Here are just some moments from today alone.

SOURAYA FAAS: What Putin is doing at every right to do. At the end of the day, he was defending those two nations that he just made independent from ongoing years of war that Ukraine has been inflicting.

PETER LAVELLE: Welcome to *CrossTalk* where all things are considered. I'm Peter LaVelle. Moscow repeatedly warned it would not tolerate Ukraine being used by NATO to threaten Russia's national security.

CALEB MAUPIN: Russia has made clear it has no intent to invade Ukraine. However, at this point, they are engaging in an operation to protect the people of Donetsk and Luhansk and make sure they do not continue to face the shelling and bombardment they have been enduring for the past eight years.

PAULA SLIER: The president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has said that Putin chose to bring war back to Europe. Now, this is factually incorrect. You need to remember, of course, that the war has been ongoing since 2014, so that's eight years and the western media and western government are at fault for not pointing out.

ABRAMS: This is, you know, truly cuckoo stuff.

(....)

8:06:42 p.m.

1 minute and 45 seconds

ABRAMS: I have to say one of the things I found reassuring about the coverage today on all the networks is, today, you're not hearing any of that, right? Today, what you're hearing is Putin is the bad guy, that, on every single network I was watching — all day on every network and every one of them are positioning Putin as the bad guy. Now, there's other stuff in there, who's fault, etc., stuff. But — but there's no one suggesting what I was watching on our RT today, which is all that this is understandable and justifiable and you have to understand that Putin had to do this, that he was forced into this, etc. And it is you know, it is truly shocking to listen to him play another piece of sound. This is number 2. This is a reporter in studio today talking about the “military operation.”

RORY SUCHET: Russia's defense ministry has made it clear that the military operation is aimed at protecting the Donbass republic' following their recognition by Moscow. That is according to the ministry. It says that civilian areas in Ukraine will not be targeted, nor will soldiers who lay down their arms. Now, the ministry stresses that there's no danger to the Ukrainian population.

ABRAMS: Now, who are these — and apologize using this language — but these stooges who are willing to go on television — many of them Americans, not that guy — and sort of restate, not just. you know — you know, we use the word propaganda a lot here, but truly restate Putin's completely fictitious explanations for what he is doing. How do they find these people to do it?

(....)

8:13:43 p.m. [TEASE]

19 seconds

ABRAMS: Coming up, the propaganda footage we've been showing you from RT can be found just by picking up your remote. So is it time for the cable providers to give RT the ax? Germany already kicked them out. Considering the various sanctions, how is this foreign company registered as a foreign agent still on the air? That's next.

(....)

8:17:01 p.m.

6 minutes and 14 seconds

FAAS: The media, especially the United States media, is to make sure to choose their words very carefully because what they're doing is they're trying to push a narrative to try to push for a war and that's not something that we want. Nobody wants war. We all want peace.

ABRAMS: That is a woman named Souraya Foss, who RT — the Russian propaganda cable network, which is available in your home and in over 100 countries around the world — described her as a U.S. presidential candidate and I thought to myself, “how do I not know said us presidential candidate?” Well, looked it up, of course and she was a 2016 libertarian write-in candidate for president. Now, this is important because RT is a propaganda network coming out of Russia. And I will tell you that has been banned in Germany. The German government literally does not allow it anymore. Russian authorities have promised retaliatory measures against them and, here on American soil, RT has been registered as a foreign agent since 2017. U.S. intelligence agencies call it Russia's state-run propaganda machine. So, the question is, considering that we're sanctioning the Russians and the Russian government to punish them for this attack on Ukraine and we're banning trade and targeting banks with their money, how is it that this Russian network — that has to register as a foreign agent — can remain on the air here at home delivering Russian propaganda? Joining me now, once again, Colby Hall, founding editor at Mediaite.com and NewsNation contributor. Alright, Colby, thanks for coming back on the show. Appreciate it.

COLBY HALL: Thanks for having.

ABRAMS: So, what do you make of RT? You and I've been watching it a lot today. Is it surprising to you that there hasn't been a sort of groundswell of people saying we need to get rid of this thing?

HALL: I think — I think you're on something — on to something right now. I think, given where we are, there's newfound attention towards our team. You know, RT was always sort of a joke. Like, it's been around for 10, 15 years and they sort of been a populist play and, about 10 years ago, they hired Ed Schuultz from MSNBC, Larry King from CNN. And, you know, it sort of,

like, whatever. It wasn't really that big of a deal. It wasn't until 2017 when Trump was elected and the Russia, you know, conspiracy stuff came out that they were a foreign agent. Now, that we are in ostensibly, a — building — moving towards conflict and war and these sanctions, their propaganda is no longer just a funny joke. It's really sort of dangerous and Germany took the first step and said, let's pull them off. I'm not sure the United States is in a position to do that. It's a huge can of worms. I don't even know what that the process would be for them to do that. But, you know, we're looking at their content right now, their programming in an entirely different light because of what's happening in Ukraine.

ABRAMS: So, if there is pressure put on the cable systems — right — let's say that there are no major corporations, big name people who start saying, “this is crazy that this is still available on cable systems.” Do you think it's possible that they would cave and say we need to get rid of this?

HALL: Um, it's hard for me — I don't think the government can get involved. I think it's really impossible to break a contract. I mean, these cable providers, they have their deals and they can't just break the contract. What do they replace it with?

ABRAMS: And there's also an argument, by the way, that they knew what they were signing up for, right? I mean, they can't say, well, you know, they've changed their programming. It's like you signed up a Russian propaganda news network. You have a Russian news propaganda network.

HALL: Right and the Russian propaganda network was all sort of a joke and Putin was sort of you know, a guy that was, you know, getting blown off by Obama at meetings and now that he's turned into this sort of, you know, ogre — this madman that's invading at least Ukraine may be more, it's not so funny. It's not such a joke. And so I think the only real effective rule would be for public pressure to go to these providers and say, look, this is irresponsible. It's anti-American and you should no longer put this in there. I don't know — really — they're in 88 million homes. I don't know how many people watch them. But in terms of the viral, sort of, economy, the digital platform and the way stuff gets shared, they may have an impact, but it's a principle thing, I think.

ABRAMS: It's a fully distributed cable channel, meaning it is on almost every cable system. Now, whether they're paying to be on those channels, et cetera, who knows. But yeah, I do think — look, I don't think the government should get involved, right? But I do think that there should be pressure on some of these — and in particular, some of these hosts who are on there who are saying these cuckoo, Putin talking points issue and it's funny because my previous guest was saying, “well, can hear this on other networks, etc.” Yeah, there are arguments to be made, absolutely, about some of the things we've been hearing on — on other networks that sounds like it's pro-Putin, but what we heard — what we were listening to today was literally explanations for why Putin had to do this.

HALL: Right. It's dis-information. It's literally, like, the opposite of the truth and, yeah, you can say defining propaganda is a slippery. It's very, very subjective. In terms of, like, public pressure. I think the most recent case would be One America News, which is a far right — it got dropped

by DirecTV. They weren't really dropped. Their contract ended and AT&T, under pressure, said we're not going to renew.

ABRAMS: Right.

HALL: So, I — but I think there was public pressure. There was a campaign and yes, it was far-right. One — OANN — is — is not a reputable outlet by any means. But compared to RT and what they're saying, at least there's — they're somewhat rooted in the truth and if — if there's going to be a campaign to take One America News off, then, you know — but again — a lot more people —

ABRAMS: I — it's funny —

HALL: — are paying attention to RT now because of what's happened.

ABRAMS: — I just got beat up on the other side for saying what Tucker was saying was not the same as what I'm seeing on RT and I feel like now I might take you on on the other side for saying that, somehow, OANN is based in the truth.

HALL: You're always a contrarian.

ABRAMS: Yeah, yeah. Colby Hall, thank you for coming on. Appreciate.

HALL: Thanks for having me, Dan.