

ABC's *World News Tonight with David Muir*

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6:31:46 p.m. [TEASE]

15 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Kremlin's Media Crackdown]

DAVID MUIR: Tonight, the Kremlin launching an alarming crackdown on journalists in Russia. A new law making it a crime to report "fake news," anything the government doesn't agree with. The last thing they played on air at the independent Russian TV station before they walked out.

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6:33:48 p.m.

17 seconds

MUIR: And inside Russia tonight, the Kremlin's assault on free speech, blocking Facebook and Twitter and a new law. Journalists now facing up to 15 years prison for so-called fake news, anyone spreading what the government deems as "false information," potentially for using like words like war and invasion.

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6:44:44 p.m.

2 minutes and 44 seconds

MUIR: Well, tonight, the White House says it is concerned about the freedom of speech inside Russia. There has been a new crackdown tonight. The Kremlin and parliament now threatening reporters with up to 15 years in prison for spreading what they call, "fake news," potentially outlawing words like war or invasion. And, tonight here, the last thing the independent TV station played before they walked out. Mary Bruce at the White House.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Kremlin's Media Crackdown; Russia Steps Up Censorship With Law Against 'False Information']

MARY BRUCE: Tonight, the White House says it is deeply concerned about Russian plans to block Facebook and threats to freedom of speech as the Kremlin is now cracking down on the press. Vladimir Putin signing a law tonight, making it a crime to spread what the Russian government considers fake news about the conflict in Ukraine. The maximum penalty? 15 years in jail. Independent Russian news outlets have always found it difficult to operate. Now it's impossible. The staff at Moscow's last independent TV station walking off set as their final symbolic broadcast played out, *Swan Lake*, the ballet that played on state TV at the fall of the Soviet Union. Some western networks, including ABC News, are now not broadcasting from the country.

BBC NEWS INTERIM DIRECTOR JONATHAN MUNRO: We don't want to find that out the hard way, by finding that someone has said something which we believe to be true or used words which are now outlawed like "war" or "invasion," and find that we're then punished in a completely draconian and unacceptable way.

BRUCE: More than 8,000 anti-war protesters have been detained across Russia in the last week, according to an independent report. They too could face up to 15 years in jail. But Putin's support does run deep, as our James Longman saw.

JAMES LONGMAN [TO WOMAN]: So you don't believe that Russia is invading Ukraine at the moment?

BRUCE: "'Of course I do not believe it. It's nonsense,' she says. 'If it was needed, Russia would have captured Ukraine a long time ago.'"

MUIR: Mary Bruce joins us from the White House. And Mary, we've now seen several news organizations pause their broadcasting from Russia, and, of course, we know that includes ABC News.

BRUCE: David, because of this new censorship law passed in Russia, we are now seeing some western networks including CNN, Bloomberg, and the BBC, and, of course, our very own ABC News team not broadcasting from Russia. An ABC News spokesperson adding, "we will continue to assess the situation and determine what this law means for the safety of our teams on the ground." The White House tonight telling me the Russian people deserve to know about the death and destruction being inflicted by their government on the people of Ukraine. David.

MUIR: But yes, the safety and security of our team is paramount. Mary Bruce live at the White House. Mary, thank you.