

Russia propagandizing on U.S. cable channel

excerpted from the September 2010 edition of *Christian Crusade Newspaper*
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Billy James Hargis II, publisher ~ Keith Wilkerson, managing editor

Russia does everything possible to disguise its propaganda arm in America, a cable TV channel called “Russia Today.”

For example, the channel available on many American cable services was recently renamed “RT.” However it only takes a few minutes of watching the Russian government-financed news service to figure out what it is: *Russian propaganda aimed at American audiences.*

Just as nothing much can be believed on the cable TV channel Al-Jazeera, which is financed by Islamists sympathetic to al-Qaide and the Taliban, nothing much on RT can be accepted at face value.

RT cost the Russian government about \$30 million in 2005 to set up and \$60 million for its first year of operation. It started broadcasting on Dec. 10, 2005, with nearly 100 English-speaking journalists reporting for it worldwide.

Today RT is still financed by the Russian state budget.

According to a variety of sources such as the German magazine *Der Spiegel* and the watchdog group Reporters Without Borders, the channel presents nothing but pro-Kremlin party-line propaganda.

Of course, the Russian government denies that. And, unsurprisingly, the *New York Times* is willing to parrot their defense that it’s just one more 24-hour news channel.

“No longer viewing America through the lens of Communist ideology, the Russians’ new take on the United States is more subtle,” reports the *New York Times*. “The station offers a blend of social critique, debates on international issues and, new this year, a dip into conspiracy theories that is helping ratings.

“The station’s motto?” writes the *Times*. “No, it is not ‘We will bury you,’ as Khrushchev might have had it. In the new voice of Russia, the station asks viewers to ‘Question More.’”

“The Russian government owned Russia Today cable channel has hit the U.S. airwaves and is hoping to make a big splash,” warns the conservative watchdog group Accuracy in Media. .

Russia Today has been broadcasting worldwide, in English, since 2005. Until a year ago, however, the focus fell exclusively on Russia. Coverage was not as obvious as during Soviet days. It might not heap lavish praise on Russia’s fine grain harvest, but still it always shows Russia in the most positive light possible.

What is new is the channel’s recent efforts to report news about the United States.

Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion who is now an opposition activist in Russia, says the channel remains the “principal organ of external propaganda for the current Russian government.”

Its intent is to influence Americans.

“There are certain rules of any dictatorship: never save money on police or propaganda,” says Kasparov. “They made many cuts on social programs, but they spend money on propaganda.”

The goal is to win acceptance in American foreign policy circles for Russian government policies and actions.

The channel's news producers say their new focus on reporting American news is no cold-war-style propaganda effort, but rather an effort to improve ratings for the channel.

One recent report focused on a summit meeting in Washington by Christians United for Israel, in which Russia Today raised questions about the influence of religion on American foreign policy.

Another report featured an interview with Malik Zulu Shabazz, the national chairman of the New Black Panther Party.

A Russia Today spokesman said that the Russian-paid journalists are not specifically looking for negative qualities of American life and politics to highlight.

Instead, the spokesman characterized the station's editors as applying to the United States the same yardsticks that Western correspondents use in their coverage of Russia.

One recent headline on the station's Website proclaimed: "Welcome to the Gulag, American style."

With the change to this format and with rebranding as "RT," ratings in the United States have risen.

China also has a cable channel, the Xinhua News Network Corporation, which on July 1 began 24-hour English broadcasts sponsored by the Chinese government.

In the United States, the British Broadcasting Corporation is the most-watched foreign news company that receives government financing.