



Propaganda and Censorship Agency Shut Down

US shuts down its ‘propaganda and censorship’ agency but still controls the stories you read in the press through other means

The Global Engagement Center was described by Elon Musk as a “threat to democracy”

The US State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) has shut down after the Continuing Resolution to fund government removed funding to keep the center open. The agency was responsible for spreading propaganda abroad and, according to conservatives, censoring dissident at home.

The GEC announced on December 23rd that it would cease operations by the end of that day. “The State Department has consulted with Congress regarding next steps,” the statement added.

The organization employed around 120 people and had an annual budget of \$61 million. Established in 2016, its stated goal was to “recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts.”

In practice, the GEC spearheaded complex propaganda campaigns of its own. During the coronavirus pandemic, the GEC funneled money to a range of NGOs which then compiled lists of social media accounts supposedly spreading “disinformation” about the virus and its origins, which were then presented to the platforms to be banned or removed. Many of the accounts belonged to what Twitter’s former trust and safety chief, Yoel Roth, called “ordinary Americans,” raising concerns among conservatives that the GEC was violating its prohibition on operating within the US.

In 2023, the GEC was forced to cut ties with George Soros’ ‘Global Disinformation Initiative’, after it emerged that the agency was paying Soros’ organization to compile lists of “high risk” news outlets to use in an advertiser boycott campaign. These news sites were predominantly right-leaning and American-based.

X owner Elon Musk called the GEC a “threat to our democracy” last year, describing the agency as the “worst offender in US government censorship [and] media manipulation.”

Musk was instrumental in finally shutting down the GEC. A mammoth 1,547-page spending bill put before the House of Representatives by Speaker Mike Johnson last week would have preserved funding for the agency, until Musk threatened to fund primary election challenges to any Republican who voted for it.

Musk decried the bill, which also included pay raises for lawmakers, as “criminal,” “outrageous,” “unconscionable,” and ultimately “one of the worst bills ever written.” President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect J.D. Vance then released a joint statement against the bill, forcing Johnson to replace it with a trimmed-down piece of legislation totaling less than 120 pages which did not include funding the GEC.

This Musk-approved bill failed in a 235-174 vote, with 38 Republicans joining 197 Democrats to block its passage. It eventually passed without removing the US debt ceiling President Elect Trump requested.

The GEC has come under significant scrutiny following reports from the Washington Examiner on it granting taxpayer dollars to the Global Disinformation Index and other outside groups working to suppress right-leaning voices online. The Federalist and the Daily Wire, two conservative media outlets, joined Texas last year in suing the GEC over its bankrolling of the Global Disinformation Index and a New York-based company called NewsGuard that claims it tracks misinformation.

However, GEC was not the only journalist threat to free speech. According to June 21, 2017 commentary from Maiya Clark and Mike Gonzalez of The Daily Signal, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) is a **Foreign Soros-Backed Media Outlet that bashes conservatives with US Taxpayer Dollars**. It’s hidden relationship with Washington casts new doubts on the integrity



of prominent Western media outlets.

An investigation published in December by France’s Mediapart and its partners, including Drop Site News (US), Il Fatto Quotidiano (Italy), and Reporters United (Greece), has uncovered that the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), the world’s largest investigative journalism network, is secretly controlled by the US government.

The report reveals that Washington has provided around half of the organization’s funding and has significant sway over its leadership and editorial direction, raising questions about the independence of the network’s reporting.

US govt funds more than half of OCCRP budget

Since its founding in 2008, the OCCRP has received at least \$47 million from American government sources. This accounts for approximately half of the organization’s overall funding, making the US state the largest donor by far.

The OCCRP’s financial dependence on the US government has led to concerns about the potential influence

According to Drew Sullivan, the OCCRP’s co-founder and publisher, the US government remains the organization’s largest donor, providing crucial financial support for its operations. In an interview with German state broadcaster NDR, Sullivan acknowledged, “I’m very grateful to the US government” for its support.



While OCCRP officials insist that government grants come with “impenetrable guardrails” to protect journalistic integrity, critics will argue that such substantial funding creates a structural dependence that could affect editorial independence.

Washington has veto power over OCCRP leadership

In addition to providing substantial funding, the US government also wields significant influence over the OCCRP’s leadership. Washington has the right to veto key personnel appointments within the organization, including the nomination of its publisher, Sullivan. Under agreements with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other government bodies, the OCCRP must submit resumes of potential hires for senior roles to the American government for approval.

USAID’s Shannon Maguire confirmed this in a statement, saying the agency has the “right to have its say” on personnel decisions. Sullivan himself admitted in an interview that the US can use this veto power, although he maintained that it has never been exercised. “If they veto somebody, we can say we don’t take the money,” he said. The power to dictate appointments, however, underscores the US government’s influence over the OCCRP’s leadership.

Soros provides significant funding In addition to the US government, the OCCRP has also relied on funding from private donors, including the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the pressure group founded by Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros. While OSF’s contributions are significant, they have not raised the same concerns about influence as the US government’s donations, as far as the authors of the investigation are concerned. Still, OSF’s role adds to the complex web of financial support that the OCCRP has received over the years.

OCCRP founded based on secret US govt

grant The OCCRP’s origins are tied directly to US government funding. In 2007, the US State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) provided the initial \$1.7 million to establish the network. This secret funding, funneled through the Journalism Development Group (JDG) controlled by Sullivan, was key to the creation of the OCCRP.

Sullivan’s relationship with USAID and the US government dates back to the early 2000s, when he worked on a USAID-funded initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina to train local journalists. He later used his connections to secure funding from the US government to establish the OCCRP. The fact that such an influential journalistic network was born out of a covert US government grant raises concerns about the independence of its operations.

US govt funds investigations aimed at opponents such as Russia

One of the most striking revelations of the investigation is that the US government has directed the OCCRP to focus its investigations on specific countries, including Russia and Venezuela. The OCCRP received \$2.2 million from the US to investigate Russian media in an effort dubbed ‘Balancing the Russian media sphere’.

Similarly, the organization was granted \$2.3 million to investigate corruption in Cyprus and Malta, two locations where Russian business people have significant financial interests.

By funding investigations that target certain countries, the US government has influenced the scope of the OCCRP’s reporting, ensuring that its investigations align with American geopolitical interests. The OCCRP has worked on several high-profile international investigations, including ‘Cyprus Confidential’, which exposed Russian citizens allegedly using the island as a tax haven to bypass sanctions. These investigations are clearly in line with US foreign policy priorities.

OCCRP reports weaponized to justify US sanctions policy

The OCCRP’s investigative reports have also been used by the US government to justify its foreign policy, particularly sanctions. Through the Global Anti-Corruption Consortium (GACC), a program co-financed by the US State Department, OCCRP investigations have been directly linked to judicial actions and sanctions procedures.

The US government uses the OCCRP’s findings to push for greater sanctions on individuals and entities it frames as being associated with corruption, often targeting countries such as Russia and Venezuela.

Sullivan confirmed that the OCCRP works closely with governments, including the US, to apply the findings of its investigations in ways that support broader international policy goals. “We believe the GACC has proven to be highly successful,” Sullivan said. This program has been instrumental in lobbying for tougher anti-corruption and anti-money laundering legislation, he adds, often in countries that the US government sees as adversaries.

Propaganda tool designed to advise US foreign policy interests

The revelations of the OCCRP’s close ties to the US government will fuel criticism that the organization is not simply an independent journalistic entity, but rather a tool used by the US to promote its foreign policy interests. While the OCCRP maintains that it operates independently, its reliance on US funding and its role in advancing US political goals suggests that its reporting may be subject to external influence, particularly when it comes to issues that affect US geopolitical priorities.

As one director of a South American media outlet put it, “The OCCRP makes the US seem virtuous and allows them to set the agenda of what is defined as corruption.” While the OCCRP continues to investigate corruption in many parts of the world, its close financial relationship with the US government raises significant questions about the organization’s independence and the potential for its work to be used as a tool of American foreign policy.

In conclusion, the findings from Mediapart and its partners highlight the complex and often hidden relationship between the OCCRP and the US government. Despite its protestations, the scale of its financial dependence on the US government and the influence that Washington has over its operations will hardly be ignored.