



Kremlin-backed news agency rolls out controversial American ads

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Kremlin-backed Russia Today news network has rolled out a provocative ad campaign that takes a sharp poke at U.S. media and the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

The pitch is aimed at convincing Americans of the merits of Russia Today - or RT - as an alternate news source to U.S. networks.

Featuring a stylized image of former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations, one ad reads: "This is what happens when there is no second opinion. Iraq War: No WMDs. 141, 802 civilian deaths."

The campaign includes two other politicians - former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and former President George W. Bush - and is running until the end of the year in Washington, New York City, and London.

RT spokeswoman Anna Belkina denies the ads are critical of the U.S. or the U.K.

"We thought it was a critical juncture in world politics," she said of the decision to run the campaign, which she says is about drawing attention to the importance of having a diversity of voices in the news.

"They're not supporting or criticizing a government or political party per se," she said. "It is so much more than politics - it's about current affairs and global affairs."

Justin Logan, director of foreign policy with the libertarian CATO Institute think-tank in D.C., says on its merits the ad campaign is "very evocative."

He says RT has pinpointed an uncomfortable truth - a moment when U.S. news media was heavily and fairly criticized for failing to question the White House line that former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

That line was used to justify the 2003 invasion but later proved false.

And Logan argues the ad will be seen differently by a different people: those who know RT is state-owned and those who aren't aware of the network's controversial relationship with the Kremlin.

"I know that RT is a Russia propaganda outfit - other people don't," he said.

The RT press office claims the global network is "editorially independent. What we do is present an alternative viewpoint on current events."

Tension between Russia and western nations is at high point following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine.

In March, an American RT anchor Liz Wahl quit on air, saying "personally I cannot be part of a network funded by the Russian government that whitewashes the actions (of Russian President Vladimir) Putin. I'm proud to be an American and believe in disseminating the truth."

RT has been available in Canada since 2009 and RT America began broadcasting out of D.C. in 2010.