

Sintesi

Il Segretario di Stato Marco Rubio ha chiuso l'ufficio del Dipartimento di Stato che si occupava di tracciare e contrastare la disinformazione globale da attori esteri, mettendo in congedo retribuito i suoi circa 40 dipendenti. L'ufficio aveva il compito di monitorare le campagne di disinformazione di potenze rivali degli Stati Uniti e gruppi terroristici, ma è stato accusato da alcuni legislatori repubblicani di censurare le voci politiche di destra e coordinarsi con le aziende di social media. La chiusura è stata criticata da James P Rubin, ex funzionario del Dipartimento di Stato, come un disarmo unilaterale nella guerra informativa contro Russia e Cina.

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Rubio Shutting Office on Foreign Disinformation

By EDWARD WONG

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his aides shut down a State Department office on Wednesday that tracks and counters global disinformation from foreign actors, including the governments of China, Russia and Iran, U.S. officials said.

The closing of the office, the Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Hub, had been in the works for weeks. Mr. Rubio put all 40 or so of its employees on paid leave on Wednesday morning, the first step in firing them this spring. The State Department fired about 80 contractors working for the office in March and cut almost all contracts related to its work.

The office had been tracking disinformation campaigns by rival powers of the United States, as well as terrorist groups, and publishing reports on them. Some Republican lawmakers in recent years have accused federal employees and nongovernment experts working on tracking disinformation of trying to stifle the views of right-wing political groups around the world and trying to coordinate with social media companies to do so. Russian disinformation often circulates in far-right online channels.

Mr. Rubio released a statement before noon on Wednesday announcing the closure, saying that the office and its precursor in the Biden administration had “spent millions of dollars to actively silence and censor the voices of Americans they were supposed to be serving.” Mr. Rubio did not present any evidence to support the claim.

James P. Rubin, a former State Department official who ran the precursor to the office in the Biden administration, pushed back on the move to shutter the operation.

“This amounts to a form of unilateral disarmament in the information warfare Russia and China are conducting all over the world,” he said on Wednesday.

He said that on his watch, “no efforts were made inside the United States — only international.”

“All of our efforts were focused on Russian and Chinese opera-

tions in Latin America, Europe and Africa,” Mr. Rubin said.

The office now falls under the authority of Darren Beattie, a political appointee who is the senior official acting as the under secretary for public diplomacy. Mr. Beattie was organizing the firings, said two U.S. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to candidly discuss actions by senior aides to President Trump.

Mr. Beattie was himself fired from a job as a White House speechwriter during the first Trump administration after CNN published a report saying he had given a speech to a group of white nationalists. He has made controversial social media posts on issues of race, including one that said “competent white men must be in charge if you want things to work.”

After starting his job at the State Department, Mr. Beattie gained access to the email accounts of current and former employees who had worked on countering disinformation, the two U.S. officials said. He has looked through them to find evidence of censorship of conservative ideas, they said.

The State Department declined to comment on Mr. Beattie’s role.

Diplomats are bracing for a series of deep cuts at the State Department. A memo has circulated in Mr. Rubio’s office that proposes, in coordination with the White House, a cut to the agency’s budget of nearly 50 percent next fiscal year. Another memo proposes closing 10 embassies and 17 consulates.

The cuts are occurring as China has expanded its diplomatic footprint across the globe, and as that country and Russia have become much more aggressive in spreading disinformation in recent years. When Mr. Rubio was a senator from Florida, he continually spoke about the need to expend government resources to counter both rivals in contested areas around the world and online.

The office for countering foreign disinformation is a successor to the Global Engagement Center, which was set up in 2011 to counter the propaganda of terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Is-

lamic State. It recently had 125 employees and a budget of \$61 million.

The center came under attack during the Biden administration from several House Republicans who called its work an effort to censor conservative ideas in the public sphere, including on social media sites. Conservative groups filed lawsuits against the group. In 2023, Elon Musk, the conservative billionaire who has become a close adviser to Mr. Trump, said the center was the “worst offender in U.S. government censorship.”

Mr. Rubin, the center’s coordinator, rebutted the accusations at the time, saying it had a “focus on how foreign adversaries, primarily China and Russia, use information operations and malign interference to manipulate world opinion.”

Late last year, some House Republicans successfully blocked congressional reauthorization of the center. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and his aides reorganized the efforts to counter foreign disinformation at the State Department by creating the Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Hub.

The State Department under Mr. Blinken managed to move the most essential functions of the efforts into the new office, a U.S. official said. That included channels to inform allies and partners about disinformation spread by China among citizens of various nations in Asia, the official said.

The Trump administration has dismantled federal government efforts to monitor U.S. elections for foreign interference, reassigning dozens of officials across several agencies who had worked on the issue. Those employees had tried to combat false content online and worked on broader safeguards to protect elections from cyberattacks or other attempts to disrupt voting systems. U.S. intelligence officials



Rubio chiude il dipartimento sulla disinformazione estera

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say Russia is the most active foreign government involved in election interference, and intelligence agencies assessed that the Kremlin intervened in the 2016 U.S. elections in favor of Mr. Trump.