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To: m_taibbi@yahoo.com <m_taibbi@yahoo.com>
Cc: Steven Brill <steven.brill@newsguardtech.com>
Sent: Friday, March 10, 2023 at 09:59:54 AM EST
Subject: Inaccuracies relating to NewsGuard

Matt:

I noticed with interest and surprise how you referred to NewsGuard in your congressional testimony on Thursday. There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding about NewsGuard and our work.

During the hearing, NewsGuard was inaccurately described as "U.S. government funded." Unlike other entities mentioned during the hearing, we are not a non-profit funded by government grants. We are a business with many licensees paying to access our proprietary data, including government entities that pay to license our data. These licenses are only for access to our data and are entirely unrelated to our rating of news publishers.

For example, as is public, our work for the Pentagon's Cyber Command is focused on the identification and analysis of information operations targeting the U.S. and its allies conducted by hostile governments, including Russia and China. Our analysts alert officials in the U.S. and in other democracies, including Ukraine, about new false narratives targeting America and its allies, and we provide an understanding of how this disinformation spreads online. We are proud of our work countering Russian and Chinese disinformation on behalf of Western democracies.

Contrary to claims made in the hearings, we oppose any government involvement in rating news sources, and we also oppose government censorship. This is why our work rating news sources and identifying false narratives being spread by foreign governments is entirely independent and free of any outside influence, including from the U.S. or any other government.

It also appears you have confused NewsGuard with entities that create secret rankings and/or have partisan approaches to their work assessing news sources. We founded NewsGuard in 2018 in part because we saw the need for an entity that would operate in a strictly apolitical and fully transparent manner. We rate news and information sources using

nine apolitical criteria relating to basic journalistic practices, such as whether publishers disclose their ownership and have corrections policies. For example, many websites operated by the Chinese Communist Party fail to disclose their ownership and control. Readers who have access to our ratings instantly know they are being presented with Chinese propaganda on these sites.

We provide information to readers so that they can make up their own minds about the journalistic practices of the sources they see in their social media feeds and search results. One of our criteria is whether a publisher "handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly." For example, Fox News passes this criterion because it provides an "About" section that describes its political point of view and does not present opinion as news. In contrast, CNN and MSNBC fail this criterion for reasons set out in our ratings.

The fact that we apply our criteria equally to all publishers means that there are right-wing publishers with high scores and left-wing publishers with low scores and vice versa. In all cases, publishers know our criteria and their score. If a publisher fails on any of our criteria, our analysts reach out for comment, which we include in our write-ups. More than 20% of the publishers we have rated have taken steps to improve their scores by improving their practices. In other words, we are the opposite of the Silicon Valley platforms and partisan services that secretly rate news sources based on undisclosed criteria. To state the obvious, Silicon Valley algorithms don't call for comment. We always do. Rather than government censorship of content online, we believe readers should have the information they need about sources of news they see online so that they can make up their own minds about which sources they choose to trust and which to distrust.

We understand the concern of publishers that they not be rated on a partisan basis. My recent op-ed in the Washington Examiner, which is running a series on other, partisan rating entities, was headlined "Only Transparent, Apolitical Ratings for News Publishers Can Be Trusted," and included, "I understand why conservative journalists are skeptical about ratings of news sites done by Silicon Valley tech companies or liberal advocacy groups: I am skeptical, too, as a longtime editorial writer and conservative columnist for the Wall Street Journal who wrote or edited books for the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and Regnery Publishing." https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/only-transparent-apolitical-ratings-for-news-publishers-can-be-trusted

The op-ed observed that the Washington Examiner series reported that many conservative websites failed the criteria of a service called the Global Disinformation Index whose ratings are not disclosed to the public or even to the publishers, and operates in an entirely different manner than we do. For example, the editors of the libertarian magazine Reason were surprised that GDI placed Reason on a Top 10 list of disinformation websites while refusing to explain to them why. In contrast, Reason gets a perfect 100/100 score from NewsGuard, as an editor of Reason explained: https://reason.com/2023/02/14/global-disinformation-index-state-department-list-risk-reason/

So we are not "funded" by the U.S. government, like you we oppose government censorship, and our ratings of news sources are done in a fully transparent and apolitical manner.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards,

Gordon

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