

U.S. judge blocks Trump's effort to shutter the Voice of America



Washington, April 23 (RHC)-- A U.S. federal judge has stated that U.S. President Donald Trump illegally halted the operation of the Voice of America (VOA), a federally funded international news service created by Congress.

In a ruling on Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ordered the Trump administration to restore the 83-year-old broadcaster's capacity to the levels before Trump slashed funding and laid off scores of personnel.

In a March court filing stating that all 1,300 employees had been placed on administrative leave, lawyers for VOA said that the broadcaster seeks to report the news “truthfully, impartially, and objectively”, pushing back against claims from the Trump administration that it promotes a “leftist bias” and is insufficiently “pro-American”.

Judge Lamberth also ordered the administration to restore the capacity of two other broadcasters also funded by the federal Agency for Global Media, Radio Free Asia and Middle East Broadcasting Networks, while those lawsuits progress. The judge also denied a similar request for two additional networks, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Open Technology Fund.

Trump and his allies have wielded federal funds to dismantle programmes and agencies within the government that they dislike and compel greater ideological compliance from media organisations and universities under the premise of combatting what the administration portrays as “left-wing” views. Kari Lake, a close Trump ally, was also placed in charge of the Agency for Global Media.

The administration shuttered VOA in March, instituting funding cuts that Lamberth said reflected a “hasty, indiscriminate approach”.

A labour union representing workers at the Agency for Global Media celebrated the ruling as a “powerful affirmation of the role that independent journalism plays in advancing democracy and countering disinformation”.

VOA was first founded during World War II in an effort by the U.S. government to counter Nazi propaganda and was later used to project pro-U.S. views to countries around the world during the Cold War, a history that has led some to criticize the network as a means of promoting U.S. imperialism around the world.

“That simple mission [delivering impartial news] is a powerful one for those living across the globe without access to a free press and without the ability to otherwise discern what is truly happening,” lawyers for VOA wrote.

Many other institutions created during the post-war era to project U.S. political and cultural influence around the world, such as the humanitarian assistance agency USAID, have also come under attack by a Trump administration that sees them as ideological enemies or sources of bureaucratic bloat.

After largely gutting USAID, tech billionaire and Trump ally Elon Musk said that the international assistance group had been a “viper’s nest of radical left Marxists who hate America.”

[SOURCE: REUTERS and NEWS AGENCIES]

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