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FEATURES

Holland Cooke Exits RT America

March 3, 2022

By Holland Cooke
Consultant



BLOCK ISLAND, RI – How’s THAT for timing? On February 19, my bride and I jetted-off to sunny Nassau, to exhale. Airports were mobbed, with school vacation week and the Presidents’ Day holiday upon us. And unlike those sudden vacations that Fox News faux pas sometimes trigger, this getaway really was booked months in advance.

The night before, on what became my last TV show, I asked viewers “WHY DO American corporate mainstream media seem impatient for war in Ukraine?” Eager to own the story, ABC, CBS, NBC and cable news channels had been beating the drum for weeks, as President Biden told us with certainty invasion was imminent while President Putin amassed the biggest deployment since World War II. Merely “tense” when our trip began, the world was at war when we got home.

Tip: Keep your phone on “Airplane Mode” when you’re in other countries, even friendly ones. Roaming charges can be draconian, hackers are evil artistes, and that’s why there’s voicemail. But even so delightfully-disconnected, and with robust Wi-Fi among amenities in our all-included Bahamas beach bubble, I saw Facebook friends turning surly because I hadn’t rushed back to ceremonially, loudly resign from Russian government-funded RT America.

When you’re 71, and you’ve commuted between Rhode Island and Washington since 2017, daydreaming about retirement is a pre-existing condition. So this seemed as good a time as any.

Like my “Big Picture” predecessor Thom Hartmann, who handed me the host baton on-air back then, I was never once censored, and never handed a script. And whenever anyone

asked “When is your show on?” I’d explain mock-nonchalantly: “Right after Larry King, and just before Jesse Ventura.” Until this week, RT’s vast cast also included William Shatner and Dennis Miller. And 100+ enthused, whip-smart colleagues I genuinely enjoyed working alongside in a bustling broadcast center, handsome and lavishly equipped, two blocks from the White House, with an amazing hi-tech coffee machine. And having programmed WTOP in the 1980s and VP’d a USA Today new media unit in the ‘90s, I enjoyed revisiting the DC I liked living in for a dozen years.

THANK YOU RADIO for cohorts I enjoyed introducing to a worldwide TV audience. Among others, David Bernstein, John Bisney, Joe Connolly, Jon Elliott, Paul Gleiser, Dave Graveline, Tom Grisham, Heidi Harris, Harry Hurley, Fred Jacobs, Tom Kraeutler, Chris Salcedo, Doug Stephan, and Steven J.J. Weisman each appeared multiple times. And thanks to Michael Harrison, whose “Talkers Ten” top stories countdown debuted each year-end on my show, and who was a frequent guest in between. And I owe it all to our dear departed chum Ed Schultz, my client in the early 2000s when he was at KFGO/Fargo. In a TALKERS profile back then, I predicted he was going places. Next place was national radio syndication, then MSBNC where he had me in his talking-head rotation for 6 years before I followed him to RT America. It’s easier to guest than host, as I learned when RT hired me, and my late-career learning curve was a kick.

While Sarah and I were toasting each other at the swim-up bar last week, RT colleagues back in Washington began bailing; and under the circumstances I too was feeling complete when I returned to a shorthanded operation. I agreed to do a show this week, and had booked and was

scripting on the topic of refugees, a snapshot of desperate Ukraine pilgrims' plight. But that show won't air. In an all-hands meeting Thursday (3/3) at noon, management spared remaining RT-ers the dilemma. We've been canceled, by cable/satellite/online distribution platforms. In cable news dog-years, four+ is a good run. Immensely grateful for having had this opportunity, I head home to Block Island to deactivate my on-vacation voicemail greeting and return client phone calls.

Pray for peace.

Holland Cooke is author of the E-book "Multiply Your Podcast Subscribers, Without Buying Clicks," available exclusively from [Talkers Books](#) and "Spot-On: Commercial Copy Points That Earned The Benjamins," a [FREE download here](#). HC is a consultant working at the intersection of broadcasting and the Internet. Follow him on Twitter @HollandCooke

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