

House Passes New Russia Sanctions, Pumps Adrenaline into Cold War 2.0

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Late this afternoon the US House of Representatives [overwhelmingly passed](#) HR 3364, the “Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.” The vote was 419-3, with the only nays coming from Republicans **Justin Amash** (R-MI), **John Duncan** (R-TN), and **Thomas Massie** (R-KY).

The bill adds additional sanctions on Russia as punishment for the as-yet-unproven claims that Moscow somehow interfered in US elections to help secure a victory for **Donald Trump**. It also seeks to punish Russia for its supposed involvement in Ukraine — ignoring that unrest in Ukraine stems from the US-initiated coup against the democratically elected government of **Viktor Yanukovich** in 2014.

The legislation ties the president’s hands in an unprecedented way, as should Trump decide within his Constitutional authority as Executive to pursue a foreign policy requiring the canceling of sanctions he is not free to do so. He must write to Congress asking permission to end the sanctions and give convincing reason why Congress should agree. Congress then has 30 days to consider the President’s request during which time he is forbidden from taking any action on the matter.

It President Trump does not veto this bill, it will signify that he has essentially given up on his presidency. At least when it comes to foreign policy. Will the bill for such a surrender come due should he decide to seek a second term?

One little-noted part of the typically difficult to digest piece of legislation is a section (231) that imposes sanctions on “persons” who are “engaging in transactions with the intelligence or defense sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation.”

What does this mean? It is unclear but suspicious. In Section 221 of Part 2 of Subtitle A of Title 2 where terms are defined for the Russian sanctions part of the legislation there are entries defining “person” and “United States person.” For the purposes of the bill: “PERSON.—The term ‘person’ means an individual or entity.” A “United States Person” is:

- (A) a United States citizen or an alien law fully admitted for permanent residence to the United States; or
- (B) an entity organized under the laws of the United States or of any jurisdiction within the United States, including a foreign branch of such an entity.

The bill does not make clear whether one can be both a “person” and a “United States person” at the same time. Indeed there does not appear to be any exclusivity suggesting that a “United States person” is not also a “person” for the purpose of this section of the bill.

Why is this interesting? **Director of Central Intelligence Mike Pompeo** in an April [speech](#) to the Center for Strategic and International Studies condemned Russian state-funded television station RT as “Russia’s primary propaganda outlet.” In May, Pompeo said that RT attempts to “muddle” Russian intelligence’s involvement in Wikileaks. In January the Intelligence Community Assessment on Russian involvement in US elections intensively focused on the actions of RT.

It is clear that Pompeo and other hawks in the Trump Administration, along with Beltway neocons, have long endeavored to tie RT to Russian intelligence. Might this bill not open the door for sanctions against “persons” including possibly US citizens who are employed by — or even appear on — RT?

The bill requires the President to:

...impose 5 or more of the sanctions described in section 235 with respect to a person the President determines knowingly, on or after such date of enactment, engages in a significant transaction with a person that is part of, or operates for or on behalf of, the defense or intelligence sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation, including the Main Intelligence Agency of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation or the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

The sanctions include prohibition of “persons” so determined from engaging in financial transactions with “United States financial institutions” under certain circumstances.

So do we see the beginning of a crackdown on RT buried in the obscure language of this legislation?

The legislation is clearly interested in information warfare. In fact it appropriates a quarter of a billion dollars for something called a “Countering Russian Influence Fund,” which will among other meddling serve to prop up foreign media outlets whose editorial line is in sync with US foreign policy. In short, the US taxpayer will subsidize “fake news” produced on foreign soil and then likely broadcast directly or indirectly back to the US to further propagandize the people who pay the bills.

It will also fund “non-governmental” organizations in targeted countries who act in the service of US foreign policy goals. It is the weaponization of the non-profit sector, courtesy of the US taxpayer.

The government of Russia has been much-criticized over legislation to force transparency on foreign-funded political organizations operating on Russian soil, but of course United States law is far more restrictive when it comes to foreign funds seeking to influence the electoral process (unless you happen to operate something called “The Clinton Foundation”).

This massive appropriation of our tax dollars will no doubt enrich Russia-targeting organizations in places like Poland and the Baltics. Look for more “experts” warning of Russian “aggression” every time a NATO exercise takes place within feet of Russia’s

borders.

In all, this bill represents the massive failure of the US Congress and entire foreign policy establishment to come up with a coherent idea of the US place in a post-post Cold War world, where various US wars of choice (and deception) have cost thousands of American lives, millions of foreign lives, and trillions of dollars. A new Cold War, which this legislation injects with a shot of adrenaline, only serves to further underscore the absolute intellectual bankruptcy at the heart of Washington's "expert" foreign policy elite.

The ultimate irony, however, is that like most of what Congress does, the bill is largely irrelevant. The idea that Europe is going to shoot itself in the foot again by going along with another cockamamie Washington sanctions scheme is getting harder to believe. The break may not come immediately, but Europe is [clearly losing its patience](#) with Washington's brain-dead neocons. The sooner the better.

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