

The “Evil Guys List”? “Free Journalism” in the Service of US Foreign Policy

The Role of Reporters without Borders

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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An organization calling itself Reporters Without Borders (RWB; French: *Reporters sans frontières*, or RSF) has just named Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, China’s President Hu Jintao, Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbayev and Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko to their list of Forty Worst Predators of Press Freedom for 2010. Most significant about their list of ‘bad guys’ is the geopolitical relation of those leaders and those countries to the current ‘enemies list’ of the US State Department. That is no accident, as becomes clear when we look more closely at who funds RWB.

In their declaration RWB states, “Since these predators have faces, we must know them to better denounce them. Reporters without Borders has decided to draw their portraits.” Their colourful language is no accident. The term predator conjures up images of horror in most people.

In their latest ‘Evil Guys’ list just released they remark about Russia’s Putin: “As well as manipulating groups and institutions, Putin has promoted a climate of pumped-up national pride that encourages the persecution of dissidents and freethinkers and fosters a level of impunity that is steadily undermining the rule of law.” RWB said that Putin, “the former KGB officer,” has exerted so much control over all aspects of life in Russia that “the national TV stations now speak with a single voice.” Interestingly enough, the citation and a report of the naming of Putin appeared in an article in the Russian state-owned media, RIA Novosti.[1]

With respect to China, RWB states: “In honour of the Shanghai World Expo, the biggest display of Chinese might (sic) since the 2008 Olympic Games, Reporters Without Borders has for the past week been inviting Internet users to visit a specially created page on its website dedicated to the freedoms that are flouted in China.”[2]

Perhaps just as important as the list of bad guys from RWB are the names that are not on it. One might ask why names of such world-class enemies of free speech and press freedom as Georgia’s dictator, President Mikhail Saakashvili, or the former Ukraine President Viktor Yushchenko, or the recently deposed dictator of Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev are absent. All three came to power in Washington-backed coups, also termed Color Revolutions. Notably, all the persons just named by RWB as “predators” have been targets of Washington-financed destabilization attempts in recent years.

Who stands behind RWB?

The slick media image that RWB presents to the world, such as using the term “predators,”

is no accident. It is the product of RWB's ad agency. Announcing the list of forty on May 3 on their website, RWB states, "The list of Predators of Press Freedom is released today, backed by a campaign ad produced by the Saatchi & Saatchi agency... There are 40 names on this year's list of predators... that cannot stand the press, treat it as an enemy and directly attack journalists. They are powerful, dangerous, violent and above the law." [3]

Saatchi & Saatchi is one of the world's most influential "hidden persuaders" or PR firms. They are credited with the campaign that brought Margaret Thatcher to power and are the ad firm for Gordon Brown's Labour Party. Clients have included Citigroup, Hewlett-Packard, DuPont, Proctor & Gamble. One might ask where RWB gets the finances to hire such elite advisors?

NED hiding behind RWB

The most interesting question is not the deeds of Hu Jintao or Putin or Ahmadinejad in the last year in relation to their national press, but rather who is judging these leaders. We might well ask, "Who judges the judges?" The answer is, Washington.

Reporters Without Borders is an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). According to its website it is headquartered in Paris, France. Paris is a curious home base for an organization that, as it turns out, is financed by the US Congress and by agencies tied to the US government.

If we go to the RWB website to find who stands behind these self-anointed judges of world press freedom, we find nothing. Not even their board of directors are named, let alone their financial backers. Their annual published Income and Expenditure statements give no clue who stands behind them financially.

Millions of dollars of their annual income are disclosed as being from "sale of publications." It does not name the publications or to whom they were sold. As one researcher noted, "Even taking into account that the books are published for free, it would have had to sell 170 200 books in 2004 and 188 400 books in 2005 to earn the more than \$2 million the organization claims to make each year 516 books per day in 2005. The money clearly had to come from other sources, as it turns out it did." [4] An attempt to go on the RWB website to order any of their publications found no link to any purchasing information nor any price listings or book summary. Very curious indeed.

In their official financial statements and income accounts published in September 2009, they state: "The organisation's finances in 2008 were marked by the end of the campaign (begun in 2001) over the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games which significantly affected income and expenditure." [5] That means RWB spent eight years and undisclosed amounts of money campaigning against the Government of China in the run-up to the Beijing 2008 Olympics. For what purpose? Notably, the RWB names China's President Hu Jintao as this year's 'predator' for his actions in cracking down on unrest in Tibet in March 2010 and Xinjiang in July 2009, both of which were the covert work of a US-financed NGO called National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Hmmm.

After years of trying to hide it, Robert Menard, Paris-based Secretary-General of Reporters Sans Frontieres or RWB, confessed that the RWB budget was primarily funded by "US organizations strictly linked to US foreign policy." [6] Those US based organizations which support RWB include the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US

Congress' National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Also included is the Center for Free Cuba, whose trustee, Otto Reich, was forced to resign from the George W. Bush Administration after exposure of his role in a CIA-backed coup attempt against Venezuela's democratically elected President Hugo Chavez.[7]

As one researcher found after months of trying to get a reply from NED about their funding of Reporters Without Borders, which included a flat denial from RSF executive director Lucie Morillon, the NED revealed, according to Diana Barahona writing in Znet that Reporters Without Borders received grants over at least three years from the International Republican Institute. The IRI is one of four subsidiaries of NED.[8]. An IRI spokesperson has denied IRI funding the RWB.

The NED, as I detail in my book, *Full Spectrum Dominance: Totalitarian Democracy in the New World Order*, was created by the US Congress during the Reagan administration on the initiative of then-CIA Director Bill Casey to replace the CIA's civil society covert action programs, which had been exposed by the Church committee in the mid-1970s. As Allen Weinstein, the man who drafted the legislation creating the NED admitted years later, "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA." [9]

Perhaps an organization sitting as judge of world press freedom ought itself to practice a little more openness and transparency about where its backing originates. Otherwise we might think they have something to hide.

F. William Engdahl is also author of the book, *Gods of Money: Wall Street and the Death of the American Century*, available at end of May 2010. He may be reached via his website at www.engdahl.oilgeopolitics.net

Notes

[1] RIA Novosti, *RSF names Putin, Kadyrov freedom "predators,"* RIA Novosti, Moscow, May 4, 2010, accessed in <http://en.rian.ru/world/20100504/158862330.html>

[2] Reporters Without Borders website, *Reporters without Borders works on all fronts*, May 3, 2010, accessed in <http://en.rsf.org/reporters-sans-frontieres-sur-tous-03-05-2010,37337.html>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Diana Barahona, *Reporters Without Borders and Washington's Coups*, ZNet, August 2, 2006, accessed in <http://www.zcommunications.org/reporters-without-borders-and-washingtons-coups-by-diana-barahona>

[5] Reporters Without Borders, *Income and Expenditures to end December 2008*, published September 7, 2009, accessed in <http://en.rsf.org/income-and-expenditure-07-09-2009,34401>

[6] Source Watch, *Reporters Without Borders*, accessed in http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Reporters_Without_Borders

[7] Ibid.

[8] Diana Barahona, op.cit. An IRI spokesperson has denied IRI funding the RWB.

[9] Allen Weinstein, quoted in David Ignatius, *Openness is the Secret to Democracy*, Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 30 September 1991, pp. 24-25.

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