

Who's A 'Foreign Agent'?

In Washington, who isn't?

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You know [life's become a joke](#) when the US Department of Justice starts requiring foreign media to register as foreign agents. Will the BBC be forced to issue a disclaimer with every broadcast and web posting: "Proceed with caution - British propaganda ahead"? Don't bet the ranch on it.

Such distinctions are reserved for the current bogeyman of the moment, i.e. typically some marginal outlet with a small-to-minuscule audience, in this case RT, formerly Russia Today, and its companion web site Sputnik. Banned from advertising on Twitter, and the subject of an official investigation by both houses of Congress *and* a special counsel, these two relatively minor state-sponsored outlets are nonetheless credited with nearly single-handedly putting Donald Trump in the White House.

It didn't take much to create the kind of atmosphere in which a direct assault on the First Amendment goes largely unnoticed and even implicitly supported. A mysterious Russian "troll farm" amplifying the perfidious "divisiveness" of RT/Sputnik "disinformation," a few hundred thousand bucks in Facebook ads (mostly placed after the election), and the "expert" testimony of professional hysterics who traffic in the mythology of the new cold war. Such are the ingredients that go into the making of a new industry, or rather a revived one: Kremlinology.

Compared to the "experts" of yesteryear, today's Kremlinologists are a crankish lot. Bereft of any real knowledge of either Russian politics or the language, their elaborate conspiracy theories are unanchored by observable facts. Instead, we are treated to a series of mysterious "links," and seemingly ambiguous meetings, which add up to a monumental nothing. Twitter accounts that may or may not be real human beings retweet "fake news" generated and centrally directed by Vladimir Putin, and this - so they tell us - was a meaningful and even a decisive factor in the 2016 presidential election. Yes, this nonsense is now the conventional wisdom in Washington, D.C., where the foreign lobbies that matter, the ones with real power, rule the roost.

Since professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt have done such a thorough job documenting the power and influence of Israel's lobby in the US, the often decisive role played by AIPAC and allied groups is today largely acknowledged, even by the lobby's partisans. If you have time or inclination, it's worth looking into how AIPAC - surely not an insignificant force - and its predecessors were exempted from having to register under the terms of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Senator William J. Fulbright and the lobby had [quite a go-round](#) during congressional hearings on the subject.

How many foreign-funded thinktanks in Washington are pushing an agenda dictated by the

amount of cold hard cash flowing into their coffers from abroad? Shall we have the public pronouncements of the Alliance to Secure Democracy - [funded by a baker's dozen of foreign governments](#) - labeled with the requisite Department of Justice "disclaimer"? What about the sainted Brookings Institution, which is on the take from a [couple](#) of [dubious](#) sources? And if not, why not?

Ranked in terms of their real influence and reach, the Russians are on a par with Syria, Zimbabwe, and the office of the Orleanist Pretender to the French Throne. The lobbyists with real clout - the Saudis, the Israelis, the EU/Franco-German bloc, the China lobbies (Taiwan and the mainland), not to mention George Soros, who surely qualifies as a country - are given free rein. If the feds are now intent on strictly enforcing the FARA, there are an awful lot of folks in the Imperial City who are going to have to come out of the closet, so to speak, and admit they're simply megaphones for foreign actors.

If we're going to start prohibiting or even limiting the activities of foreign lobbyists, then groups like the Atlantic Council - flush with foreign cash - are going to be set back on their heels. Which is why a strict double standard is in place and will remain so.

Indeed, ordinary standards of all sort, including the rules of evidence, have been thrown underfoot in the Blame Russia stampede to such an extent that to express certain views - say, on NATO expansion, or the wisdom of carrying out provocative military exercises at the gates of Moscow - is to be labeled an "unconscious agent" of the Russian state. Which means, of course, that anyone who challenges the new cold war paradigm, and criticizes US foreign policy as hegemonist, not in our interests, and dangerous, is part of the alleged Russian conspiracy to "undermine our democracy."

Like the Kremlinologists of the 1950s, our phony "experts" are shameless opportunists looking to cash in on the latest fad: unlike their predecessors, however, none of these people actually knows anything about Russia, foreign policy, or "Putinism," so-called. The old school anti-Communist "experts" who solemnly testified before Congress that subversion was everywhere in our midst at least had some real experience: many of them were ex-Communists, who knew the ideology and its adherents inside out.

Not so this latest batch: their insubstantial visions of ghostly cyber-armies who somehow maneuvered not only the election of Donald Trump but also pulled off Brexit, are unconvincing. Yet propaganda, to be effective, needn't be all that convincing: volume and the power of sheer repetition are often enough to achieve the desired result, which in this case is to demonize anyone who opposes the new cold war with Russia.

That's why, time after time, we see the professional smear-mongers going after Antiwar.com, as well as any other "alternative" media that fails to go along with the "mainstream" script. Thus I was treated to [the ridiculous spectacle](#) of seeing the Russians blamed for the Catalan secession movement on the grounds that I - being "reliably pro-Russian" - supported the Catalan cause!

The War Party wants to drive anyone who opposes their agenda out of the public square, and silence proponents of peace once and for all. The next phase of this witch-hunt is to go after Putin's so-called "dupes" and "fellow travelers," which means anyone who opposes our foreign policy of global intervention but can't be directly tied to Russia.

The militarists don't want a foreign policy debate: their whole modus operandi is to shut

down debate, to delegitimize dissent from the bipartisan interventionist status quo as a Russian covert operation. You'll notice that their favorite argument these days is that such-and-such is "divisive." Brazen and quite clever, actually, this openly censorious quasi-authoritarian tone is really an act of desperation. Faced with the public's overwhelming opposition to new wars, the War Party has decided to simply outlaw the opposition - that is, to shut it down in the name of curbing "foreign influence."

As we have seen, however, what's really going on here is the fierce competition of foreign interests. It's a question of which foreign interests will gain the favor of the Empire, and thus the upper hand, at any given moment. In the Washington casino, every conceivable country and would-be country is represented with cash on the table, hoping the Wheel of Fashion will turn in their direction. Every interest has a place at the table - with a single exception. The lobby for America, the one pressure group that puts American interests first, is nowhere in evidence. I'm afraid it's too much to expect that US government officials are and ought to be the front line defenders of American interests narrowly conceived.

If anyone is surprised that journalists haven't been the first ones to protest the imposition of content regulations on "foreign" media, then they are being naïve. The "liberal" media has been agitating for some form of censorship, whether governmental edicts against "hate speech" or corporate conformity compacts, and Russia-gate has been their bread and butter. Perhaps this accounts for the [tepid statement](#) of the Committee to Protect Journalists, which declared "We're uncomfortable with governments deciding what constitutes journalism or propaganda."

An outright assault on the First Amendment is a mere discomfort: is that the Founders I hear weeping?

The Freedom of the Press Foundation worried that the DOJ decision "opens up serious risk of retaliation for many brave journalists who work in Russia - both independent reporters who may get funding from the US and the US government's own Voice of America." So their big worry is what this will do to US government propaganda efforts: no hint that a far more important principle is at stake.

What's in store for us is a full-fledged no-holds-barred all-out witch hunt, with the reincarnation and rebranding of the ill-favored "House Un-American Activities Committee," and, worse, the revival of the hysteria that made it possible. There can't be any compromise in a fight of this kind: the enemy is out to illegalize us. They want to make dissent the equivalent of treason. We can't let them succeed.

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