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AIPAC Still Our Biggest Foreign Agent

Senate Hearing on Foreign Agents Registration Act

Grant Smith
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Alleged Russian meddling in the US electoral process will be the subject of a Senate Judiciary Hearing on Wednesday. The hearing is titled "Oversight of the Justice Department's (Non) Enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act: Lessons from the Obama Administration and Current Compliance Practices." In 1938 the U.S. Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act to mandate disclosure of the activities of non-diplomatic foreign agents in the United States propagandizing for war, swinging public opinion, and obtaining foreign aid and other economic benefits through congressional lobbying without disclosing that their activities were conducted on behalf of foreign principals.

The first panel of witnesses for Wednesday's Senate hearing will include Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the National Security Division of the Justice Department Adam Hickey,

Assistant Director of the Counterintelligence Division of the FBI Bill Priestap and Inspector General of the Justice Department Michael Horowitz.

Second panel witnesses include Glenn Simpson of Fusion GPS, an outfit which circulated the now infamous dossier of allegations made against Donald Trump by a British spy. William Browder, a Russian market investment expert from Hermitage Capital Management, who has now deemed Russia "absolutely uninvestable" will also testify. According to reports, Browder knows Natalia Veselnitskaya, the Russian lawyer who met with Donald Trump Jr. to peddle opposition research on Hillary Clinton.

Panel Chairman Chuck Grassley may ultimately conclude that the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) has failed and that unregistered Russian foreign agents are taking over America. If so, he will be half right, but not the first such senator to express concern. Grassley should consider what happened after a more extensive Senate FARA inquiry was launched 55 years ago.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman JW Fulbright became convinced that unregistered Israeli foreign agents were a serious matter in 1961. A classified staff report worried that:

"In recent years there has been an increasing number of incidents involving attempts by foreign governments, or their agents, to influence the conduct of American foreign policy by techniques outside normal diplomatic channels....there have been occasions when representatives of other governments have been privately accused of engaging in covert activities within the United States and elsewhere, for the purpose of influencing United States Policy (the Lavon Affair)."

The Lavon Affair referred to Israeli false-flag terror attacks on US facilities in Egypt, in the interest of preventing the handover of the Suez Canal to Egyptian control. The Israeli spies were caught and prosecuted by Egypt, while the disclosure of the attacks created a diplomatic crisis.

During the course of the 1960s Senate and Justice Department investigations, it was revealed that Israel was funneling millions of dollars to unregistered foreign agents in America to lobby for foreign aid to Israel, set up think tanks, engage in Madison Avenue public relations, fund lobbying newsletters, and establish an umbrella organization called the American Zionist Council (AZC).

Within the AZC was an unincorporated unit that lobbied congress called the "American Israel Public Affairs Committee."

On November 21, 1962, the Department of Justice ordered the AZC to begin registering as an Israeli foreign agent. This touched off an intense battle between the Justice Department and the AZC which outlasted both JFK and RFK. The bloodied and bruised Justice Department hid away its files on the affair until they were finally declassified and released in 2008.

The effort to register Israel's foreign agents clearly failed. Just 42 days after the Justice Department order, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee incorporated itself in Washington and took over the AZC's functions. Since the year it was ordered to register—as part

of the AZC—AIPAC has extracted an inflation-adjusted \$250 billion from US taxpayers for its foreign principals. Influencing the conduct of US policy "by techniques outside normal diplomatic channels" has never stopped.

If AIPAC had complied with the 1962 FARA order, by now it would have filed 109 required biennial reports (1963-2017) of its activities. It would have had to detail joint efforts with Israeli operatives. These include a 1975 incident in which AIPAC Director Morris Amitay circulated classified information about a proposed US Hawk missile sale to Jordan. AIPAC's FARA file would have had to detail AIPAC staffers Steven Rosen, Douglas Bloomfield and Ester Kurz 1984 receipt of stolen classified information taken from US industry groups opposed to allowing duty free imports from Israel into the United States. Of course, the FARA disclosure would include details on two AIPAC executives, Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman, who from 2002-2004 solicited and received stolen classified national defense information from Colonel Lawrence Franklin about Iran and other matters which they passed to the Israeli embassy. The pair attempted to contextualize and place the stolen classified national defense information in the *Washington Post* to precipitate a US attack on Iran.

AIPAC is not complying with the 1962 DOJ order. The Grassley panel might want to invite the FARA Section Head Heather Hunt, who knows all about the AZC-AIPAC incident, to testify why. In 2009 Hunt, along with other members of the FARA division, received a two-hour briefing with the unsubtle title of "The American Israel Public Affairs Committee is an Unregistered Foreign Agent of the Israeli Government." (PDF)

If Grassley does not believe Israeli foreign agent activity to be important, he might want to invite as a star witness Stephanie Schriock. Schriock has publicly claimed that as a high-powered campaign fundraiser for major candidates across the US, the first step in obtaining seed funding for a political campaign was always to circulate a position paper on Israel to AIPAC regional officials. Only then could candidates obtain funds from willing pro-Israel donors sufficient to launch a serious campaign. The Israel lobby's oversized role in US campaign finance on Israel's behalf has now made regional peace and productive innovation in US policy impossible, and war all but inevitable.

Grassley might also engage in the following thought experiment as he ponders his upcoming hearing. "What happens to a candidate or incumbent if they loudly criticize Russia or US policy toward Russia?" He should then swap out "Russia" for "Israel."

Today, AIPAC may obtain most of its lobbying budget from a relatively small, but wealthy, group of US donors. But that does not mean it is not an Israeli foreign agent for three reasons. The first observable sign, listed on the Department of Justice FARA webpage, is that AIPAC is so obviously devoted to the sole purpose of channeling US taxpayer funds to a foreign country. Such breaks, though DOJ lists sugar quotas as an example, is the major red flag. Despite changes in its PR framing, AIPAC's primary business is the same as when founder Si Kenen first conceived it. "The lobby for Israel, known as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) since 1959, came into existence in 1951. It was established at that time because Israel needed American economic assistance..."

The second is that AIPAC was incontrovertibly established with foreign seed funding, including to Kenen, nestled inside the AZC. The third is that, as an unincorporated unit within the AZC, AIPAC was clearly covered by the order to register as an Israeli foreign agent.

AIPAC's top priorities include maneuvering the US to attack Iran, keeping US forces in the region as a buffer, protecting Israeli nuclear hegemony and making criticism and boycotts of Israel in the US impossible. Americans overwhelmingly oppose all that, as well as unconditional US aid to Israel. Senator Grassley should therefore ignore for a moment the flap over Russia, and his own top-25 position as a recipient of pro-Israel PAC money. He should then look seriously at the longest-running unresolved foreign agent problem and ask what action would be best for America.

Grant F. Smith is the director of the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy in Washington and the author of the 2016 book, Big Israel: How Israel's Lobby moves America and America's Defense Line: The Justice Department's Battle to Register the Israel Lobby as Agents of a Foreign Government.