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ARMENIAN INFLUENCE PRESENTS A CASE STUDY ON THE FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT - THE DAILY CALLER - 05.02.2018

Raoul LOWERY-CONTRERAS

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AVİM recently published a commentary[1] regarding the sale of F-35 stealth fighter airplanes to Turkey and a defamation campaign opposed to such sale led by Armenian American and Hellenic American organizations. We concluded our commentary with the following lines: These calls deserve to get the most ill-advised call award of the month. Amidst such a defamation campaign, the time has come for the US to face its citizens and ask whether it is America first or their ethnic origins."

A recent article published regarding the activities of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) furthers our argument regarding these diaspora organizations in the US. This commentary by Raoul Lowery-Contreras further highlights the need for these organizations to decide on whether to place their Americanness or their ethnic identity first.

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The Daily Caller (05.02.2018)

Raoul LOWERY-CONTRERAS

Foreign political lobbying caught the attention of U.S. authorities in 2017, resulting in

criminal charges against three men from the Donald Trumps presidential campaign and a guilty plea by a former White House official.

Lobbying by individuals and groups to influence U.S. government policy is protected under the U.S. Constitutions First Amendment as a right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Such efforts are legal, unless they are not.

The importance of foreign lobbying surfaced most particularly in 2017 with the roles of former Trump presidential campaign manager Paul Manafort, former national security adviser Michael Flynn and a Russian television company, Russia Today (RT). The U.S. government demanded registration of RT as a foreign agent. The same for Flynn: He had to register as a foreign agent just days before he lied to the Federal Bureau of Investigation about his lobbying activities.

Flynns lobbying activity brought him under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which requires lobbyists, advisers, representatives and agents of foreign governments to register. Rarely has anyone been prosecuted for violating FARA; tardy registrations like Flynns are normal.

Groups chartered under specific Internal Revenue Service tax-free categories are regulated, and activities that violate the terms of IRS tax-free registrations (Section 501 (c) 3, for example) are illegal.

A recent Forbes magazine op-ed suggested that the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) is purported to be a non-government organization, but it is widely believed to have deep ties to Russian influence. The Committee (reveals) Armenias post-Soviet nations longstanding tradition as a proxy to its former motherland.

Activities of ANCA affiliates are questioned here not because they represent Armenian American issues to Congress and the administration, but because ANCA represents views of the government of Armenia and, by proxy, the Russian government. Without registration, that may violate FARA and lobbying laws.

Armenian borders and air defenses are guarded by Russian soldiers; the Russian army stations 5,000 troops in Armenia; Russia provides $200 million in credit so Armenia can purchase Russian weapons, and Armenias armed forces are integrated into Russias defense forces.

In this country, hundreds of questionable campaign contributions are made by Armenian-favoring groups to members of Congress. Along with cash contributions come endorsements that, themselves, are potentially illegal for certain IRS-chartered groups to make.

This Armenian controversy has simmered for a decade. In February 2009, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) filed complaints with the Department of Justice, the IRS, the House of Representatives and the Senate, alleging that two ANCA affiliates violated FARA by not registering as foreign agents while promoting Armenian and Russian governmental policies.

CREWs then-executive director, Melanie Sloan, signed the complaint. She made news more recently by alleging she was verbally abused and harassed when she worked for Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.); Conyers has since resigned.

CREWs complaint alleged that ANCA affiliates, the Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region (ANCA-WR) and the ANCA Endowment Fund ☀ which share offices and a common website, have participated in political campaigns in violation of federal tax law, which specifically bars groups organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from participating in political campaigns ☀ on October 24, 2008, ANCA (endorsed) 15 candidates for the United States Senate and 211 candidates for the United States House of Representatives and published these endorsements on its shared website with ANCA-WR: ANCA also endorsed the Obama-Biden ticket for the presidency.

CREW also alleged that ANCA is closely associated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) ☀ which is part of the ruling coalition government in the Republic of Armenia ☀ . In 2006, the U.S. embassy in Yerevan prepared a study on the Armenian-American community and found that the ARFs U.S.-based political advocacy arm is the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). ANCA is the principal political spokesperson for ARF policies in the United States.

ANCA claims to have lobbied by taking credit for persuading nine members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to badger a nominee for ambassador to Azerbaijan on the Armenian genocide debate. (The U.S. has refused to officially acknowledge that the alleged genocide occurred.) Then it objected when President Obama recess-appointed long-time state Department diplomat Mathew Bryza ambassador to Azerbaijan and blocked any vote to confirm his appointment; after his year of service, he left the State Department.

In 2006, ANCA persuaded lawmakers to block U.S. financial help for a railway that now links Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan but not Armenia and convinced Congress to exclude Azerbaijan from a list of former Soviet republics eligible for U.S. aid (Section 907 of the 1992 foreign-aid act, which Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump have effectively junked since 2002, given Azerbaijans substantial contributions to U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the region).

Significantly, The Washington Post editorialized in 2010 that ANCA is a particularly noxious lobby that, at that time, opposed the nomination for ambassador to Azerbaijan of long-time diplomat Matthew J. Bryza because his wife is Turkish-born, suggesting that he wouldnt strongly support the Armenian side of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

According to the Post, ANCAs lobbying has made reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, more difficult thus helping perpetuate Armenias impoverishment and overdependence on Russia. Post editorial page editor Fred Hiatt commented at the time that ANCAs obstreperousness was a vivid example of how the larger U.S. national interest can fall victim to special interest jockeying and political accommodation.

American law under FARA requires that lobbyists for foreign governments register. Groups that brag about representing foreign governments views are required to register as foreign agents because that is what they are. If they dont, they should have their IRS tax-free status revoked and they should be prosecuted.

Raoul Contreras is the author of The Armenian Lobby & U.S. Foreign Policy (2017) and The Mexican Border: Immigration, War and a Trillion Dollars in Trade (2016). He formerly wrote for the New American News Service of the New York Times.

http://dailycaller.com/2018/02/05/armenian-influence-presents-a-case-study-on-the-foreign-agents-registration-act

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[1] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, The Joint Armenian-Hellenic American Defamation Campaign On Turkeys Involvement In F-35 Programme, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2018/12, http://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/THE-JOINT-ARMENIAN-HELLENIC-AMERICAN-DEFAMATION-CAMPAIGN-ON-TURKEY-S-INVOLVEMENT-IN-F-35-PROGRAMME

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