

# PETER BAKER DISCOVERS THAT RUSSIA SOWS PARTISAN ANTAGONISM AND THEN HELPS THEM DO SO!

I laughed yesterday when Peter Baker tweeted about how “striking” it is that Vladimir Putin is adopting Trump’s perceived enemies as his own.



**Peter Baker**  
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Striking how Putin is adopting Trump's perceived enemies as his own. The new Russian sanctions list includes people Trump considers adversaries like Letitia James, Brad Raffensperger and the officer who shot Ashli Babbitt even though none has anything to do with Russia policy.

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But then Baker wrote up his laughably naive observation into a NYT story.

Baker, you’ll recall, is one of NYT’s crack journalists who buried Trump’s admission that he had spoken to Putin about adoptions before writing a false explanation about the June 9, 2016 Trump Tower meeting emphasizing adoptions. Baker and Maggie Haberman chose instead to emphasize Trump’s scripted attack on Jeff Sessions. The Mueller Report showed that NYT’s willingness to dumbly repeat Trump’s script proved even more useful to Trump’s efforts to undermine the Rule of Law than his covert effort to get Corey Lewandowski to ferry orders to Jeff Sessions.

And here we are, almost five years later, and

Baker still naively plays into obvious Russian efforts to sow division in the US, in significant part by playing to Trump's narcissism and the feral loyalty of Trump's supporters, to say nothing of playing up racial division. Baker picks out three names from among 500 newly added to Russian sanctions: Tish James, Brad Raffensperger, and Michael Byrd, the Black cop who prevented Ashli Babbitt from breaching the hallway through which Members of Congress were fleeing by shooting her.

Among the 500 people singled out for travel and financial restrictions on Friday were Americans seen as adversaries by Mr. Trump, including Letitia James, the state attorney general of New York who has investigated and sued him. Brad Raffensperger, the secretary of state of Georgia who rebuffed Mr. Trump's pressure to reverse the outcome of the 2020 election, also made the list. And Lt. Michael Byrd, the Capitol Police officer who shot the pro-Trump rioter Ashli Babbitt on Jan. 6, 2021, was another notable name.

Reviewed more broadly, however, the sanctions were an attack on US Rule of Law generally, or certainly the notion that Trump's people should be subject to it. They include the current or former Attorneys General of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Washington, DC, Wisconsin. Aside from former Oklahoma AG John O'Connor, which may be a mistake, it almost seems like they worked from an outdated membership list from the Democratic Attorneys General Association. Though for some reason, Putin missed Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel, maybe because she's a badass lesbian who makes Putin afraid.

The sanctions list does include every US Attorney who has presided over the January 6

investigation.

- Michael Sherwin (who as Acting US Attorney in DC oversaw the beginning of the January 6 investigation)
- Channing Phillips (who, as Acting US Attorney for DC in 2021 oversaw the early parts of the January 6 investigation)
- Michael Graves (currently US Attorney for DC overseeing the January 6 investigation)
- Jack Smith (Special Counsel)

But it also includes other senior legal officials, some of whom have gotten more attention for investigating Russia than Trump.

- Paul Abbate, FBI Deputy Director
- Michael Driscoll, Assistant FBI Director for the New York Field Office
- BJ Kang, a recently retired FBI Agent who helped to bust Putin's pen-tester, Vladimir Klyushin
- Alan Kohler, FBI AD for Counterintelligence
- Jonathan Lenzner, FBI Chief of Staff
- Matt Olsen, Assistant Attorney General for National Security
- Ken Polite, Assistant Attorney General for Criminal Division

- Audrey Strauss (still listed as US Attorney for SDNY and not an attorney in private practice at Fried Frank)
- David Sundberg, Assistant FBI Director for the Washington Field Office
- Kevin Vorndran, a senior official in the FBI Washington Field Office, whom Russia may have confused with Bryan Vorndran, the guy who heads FBI's Cyber Division, which has recently busted up some Russian cyberattacks
- Damien Williams, SDNY US Attorney

The inclusion of Kohler, who played a key role in the Trump stolen documents case but who also presided over the Charles McGonigal and other Oleg Deripaska cases that came through SDNY, is particularly notable. This is, in significant part, an attempt to suggest that if *either* Russia *or* Trump is held accountable legally, it will harm Russia. It is a transparent effort – no different than dozens of similar efforts going back to 2016, and to the extent that this plays to racism, goes back a half century – to lead Trump supporters to believe their interests are more aligned with Putin's than those of the United States, or at least the United States when led by Joe Biden.

In addition to Brad Raffensperger, Putin also included Mark Esper, who got fired as Defense Secretary because he undercut Trump's authority to attack the US government by invoking the insurrection act.

A broad swathe of the list includes members of NGOs, particularly those NGOs that fascists are

attempting to discredit with claims that attempts to combat disinformation equate to censorship. Nina Jankewicz got sanctioned in her own right.

Of two members of the Open Society Fund, Leonard Benardo is included; his name may become prominent if John Durham's abusive attempt to investigate Benardo, which may be detailed in the classified section of the Durham Report, begins to leak.

Along with all those defenders of truth and justice, Putin included Stephen Colbert and Heather Cox Richardson.

Again, this is a transparent effort, one that continues past efforts that extend to sheltering members of the far right and stoking US racism, to supplant the allegiance of Trump's supporters to the United States with an affiliation, through Trump, to Russia. Trump's narcissism might lead him to magnify these sanctions. His campaign advisors likely will try to prevent that.

But Putin won't need to rely on Trump to magnify this statement of a shared allegiance.

He has Peter Baker for that.

Baker somehow could not distinguish language as transparent truth from language as an attempt to manipulate, and so stated as fact that "Trump's perceived enemies" are Putin's own. Aside from the law enforcement officials who've targeted both Russian hackers and Trump, they're not. Rather, this is an attempt – an utterly transparent one!! – to make Trump's followers *believe that*, and so regard Russia more favorably.

Because Baker thought his banal observation about these sanctions was worth a story in the NYT, he called up the Russian Foreign Ministry for comment. That's how the claim that the people who attacked democracy on January 6 are simply dissidents got inserted into the NYT.

None of those three has anything to do with Russia policy and the only reason they would have come to Moscow's attention is because Mr. Trump has publicly assailed them. The Russian Foreign Ministry offered no specific explanation for why they would be included on the list but did say that among its targets were "those in government and law enforcement agencies who are directly involved in the persecution of dissidents in the wake of the so-called storming of the Capitol."

You got played, Peter Baker, into serving as a mouthpiece for Russian propaganda.

You got played into contributing to Russia's efforts to undermine US democracy.