

# BYLINE TIMES

— WHAT THE PAPERS DON'T SAY —

## IMPACT: How Byline Times Shifts the Overton Window

### Who We Are and Why We Exist

[Byline Times](#) is an independent, investigative news organisation built to say what the rest of the UK media will not say.

Britain's legacy press is structurally conservative: dependent on billionaire proprietors, ad revenue, and political access. It repeats and amplifies far-right narratives on immigration, "woke ideology," and national identity, while often downplaying corruption, foreign interference, dark money, and creeping authoritarianism. It's not interested in moving the Overton Window back toward pluralist democracy and the rule of law — it is, in many cases, part of the push in the other direction.

We are trying to pull the conversation back to evidence.

Our model is simple:

1. Expose what powerful actors are doing.
2. Prove it with documentation.
3. Force consequences in law, regulation, Parliament, and international bodies.

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## 1. The Crisis in British Journalism

We've spent years documenting how the UK's media environment is being actively weaponised. Our coverage has consistently exposed the revolving door of the "political media class" — the tight circle of senior editors, lobby journalists, proprietors and ministers who shape the story together — and how that system protected Boris Johnson and laundered his messaging through supposedly "independent" outlets ([The Media, Johnson and Covid: 'An Orgy of Narcissism' that Killed Thousands](#)).

For obvious reasons, *Byline Times* was virtually alone in revealing the scale of public money that flowed to the billionaire-owned press during the pandemic under the Cabinet Office’s “All In, All Together” scheme — a covert subsidy and advertorial deal arranged with the News Media Association that pumped well over £100 million in emergency government advertising and tax relief into legacy national newspapers, including Johnson’s former employers, while excluding most independent media ([‘The Press Equivalent of the PPE “VIP” Channel’: Submission to COVID Inquiry On Newspaper ‘Bungs’ Calls for Answers on Use of Taxpayer Money](#); [Bungs to Billionaires: Cummings Exposes Johnson’s Cash for Content Scandal](#)). Dominic Cummings would later confirm on the record that Johnson personally negotiated “direct bungs” to newspaper groups “with no officials on the calls,” then had them dressed up as “COVID relief,” in exchange for supportive coverage that helped set the national line on lockdown, competence.

## **Fleet Street ‘Dark Arts’**

With [Byline Investigates](#), we helped sustain pressure in the civil phone-hacking and unlawful information-gathering litigation against Rupert Murdoch’s News Group Newspapers (publisher of *The Sun* and the now-defunct *News of the World*) and Mirror Group — work that dragged internal emails, payments to private investigators, and newsroom practices into the High Court record. It has been estimated that over £1bn has now been paid out to claimants for privacy intrusion.

In December 2023, Mr Justice Fancourt ruled that phone hacking and other unlawful information gathering (“UIG”) at Mirror Group Newspapers was “widespread and habitual,” that editors including Piers Morgan knew about it, and that executives concealed it from the board, awarding Prince Harry £140,600 in damages and describing “extensive” unlawful activity up to 2011 ([High Court judgment PDF](#); [Byline Times analysis of the ruling](#); [Byline Times on calls for a criminal probe into Piers Morgan](#)).

In January 2025, News Group Newspapers then agreed a major settlement with Prince Harry and others, issued what Harry’s lawyers called a “historic admission,” and delivered a “full and unequivocal apology” in court for “serious intrusion” into Harry’s private life by *The Sun*, acknowledging “incidents of unlawful activity” carried out by private investigators working for *The Sun* — i.e. unlawful information gathering — as well as long-running phone hacking and surveillance by the *News of the World* ([The Guardian on NGN’s ‘historic admission’](#); [Financial Times on Murdoch’s UK tabloid apology](#); [AP full statement in court](#)).

That same litigation front is now aimed at the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*: Prince Harry, Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Sir Elton John and others are suing Associated Newspapers for alleged industrial-scale unlawful information gathering — including landline tapping, bugging cars and homes, blagging medical records and bank data, and even alleged break-ins — claims the publisher denies and is fighting in the High Court ([Byline Times on what Harry’s win against the Mirror means for Murdoch and the Mail](#); [The Guardian on the Mail case naming dozens of senior journalists and editors](#); [Reuters on the Mail lawsuit and allegations of phone hacking, burglary and data theft](#)).

## **BBC ‘Impartiality’**

The BBC’s “impartiality” crisis is now structural, and *Byline Times* has been documenting it for years. Peter Jukes warned as early as 2019 that the BBC was failing to treat law-breaking around Vote Leave, Cambridge Analytica and Arron Banks’ Leave.EU operation as a democracy issue, downplaying electoral illegality and opaque data operations as just “both sides” politics instead of potential subversion of the referendum itself ([The BBC on the Edge of the Abyss](#)).

Brian Cathcart and others have since shown how that failure isn’t neutral — it’s captured. Sir Robbie Gibb, a former Downing Street director of communications for Theresa May, joined the BBC Board and was accused of using his position to lean on editorial appointments and output despite his own Conservative links, triggering public interventions from BBC journalists and hundreds of media figures calling for him to be removed from any role overseeing editorial standards ([The Independence of Britain’s Media Has Been in Jeopardy for a Long Time](#); [More than 400 media figures urge BBC board to remove Robbie Gibb over Gaza](#)).

Patrick Howse, a former BBC producer now writing for *Byline Times*, has described how this culture turns “impartiality” into deference: editors were “scared to cast Boris Johnson in a bad light,” even when reporting on his misconduct, and are now platforming Nigel Farage and Reform UK as if they were the dominant opposition, granting them uncritical billing and agenda-setting coverage under the banner of “balance” ([‘It’s Coming from the Top’: Concerns Inside BBC of Fear of Casting Boris Johnson in a Bad Light](#); [How the BBC’s Flawed Impartiality Scuppered a Podcast About a Heating System](#)).

Adam Bienkov then obtained leaked minutes from the BBC’s own Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee showing this wasn’t accidental drift but an explicit strategy: senior executives, including Director-General Tim Davie and News chief Deborah Turness, discussed changing BBC “story selection” and even drama output specifically to “address low trust issues with Reform voters” and win over Nigel Farage’s base — a plan agreed in a meeting where BBC Board member (and former Tory No.10 comms chief) Robbie Gibb was present ([BBC Bosses Draw Up Plans to Win Over Reform Voters by Changing News and Drama Output](#)).

## **Dan Wootton, #MediaToo and Media Impunity**

*Byline Times* led the long-form #MediaToo investigation into Dan Wootton — then one of *GB News*’ most high-profile presenters and a former senior Sun and MailOnline executive — after multiple sources alleged that he had used fake online identities (“Maria Joseph” / “Martin Branning”) to obtain intimate images and videos from men by deception, and to solicit sexual material and encounters from junior colleagues, often while exerting professional power over them. [GB News Star Dan Wootton Unmasked in Cash-for-Sexual Images Catfishing Scandal ; MailOnline and The Sun Hid Serious Dan Wootton Claims While Attacking Huw Edwards and the BBC](#).

As Wootton denied wrongdoing and portrayed the allegations as a political hit job, legacy outlets largely blinked. Some even took down their own coverage after receiving aggressive pre-publication legal threats from Wootton’s lawyers, with *The Guardian* and the *Mirror* pulling stories about the police investigation into him. We reported how that “disappearing act” revealed a structural problem: powerful media figures could use privacy law and libel threat to memory-hole scrutiny of themselves while still fronting “anti-woke” outrage on air. [Disappearing Act: Major Publishers Delete Stories on Dan Wootton After Legal Threat](#); [Disappearing Dan Wootton Articles Show a Serious Need for an s.40 Alternative](#).

Wootton responded by threatening to sue *Byline Times*, launching a public crowdfunder to bankroll litigation against us — and personally urging supporters (including high-profile *GB News* allies) to “help shut this down.” We published the threats and carried on reporting, and we in turn raised legal funds to defend the investigation and protect sources. [GB News ‘Axes’ Dan Wootton After Fox Storm and Catfish Scandal – the Full Story](#); [Help Byline Times’ Legal Costs for our Wootton / GB News / #MediaToo Investigation](#).

Police in London and Scotland opened inquiries after our reporting, and although the Metropolitan Police later said in February 2024 they would take “no further action,” Wootton lost his *MailOnline* column, was suspended and then pushed out of *GB News* after the Laurence Fox misogyny-on-air incident, and is now facing civil proceedings over alleged “catfishing” of a former colleague. [Dan Wootton Hit With £7,500 Costs Over Failed Court Bid to Name ‘Catfishing Victim’](#); [MailOnline Terminates Dan Wootton Contract After GB News Suspension](#); [Dan Wootton tricked colleague into sending intimate pictures, court told](#).

This is what #MediaToo looks like in practice: where the rest of the industry blinks, protects its own, or quietly deletes its stories, we print, we hold the line against legal intimidation, we raise money for legal defence in public, and we sit in court until there is a record.

## **GB News**

We’ve also shown how *GB News* acts less like a neutral broadcaster and more like a campaigning vehicle for the hard right: sitting MPs as presenters, one-party talking points presented as “the people’s voice,” and “town hall” events structured to give leaders a largely uncontested platform.

Ofcom has increasingly agreed that this crosses a line. In October 2024, Ofcom imposed a £100,000 penalty on *GB News* for “People’s Forum: The Prime Minister,” saying the broadcast handed then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak a “mostly uncontested platform” to promote government policy just before a general election — and ordered *GB News* to air a statement admitting the breach. [Ofcom decision on GB News](#).

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## **2. Covid Panic and Procurement**

## Herd Immunity

From the start of the pandemic, Byline Times challenged the UK Government's flirtation with "herd immunity" — the idea that COVID should be allowed to spread until enough people had been infected to slow transmission — and documented how it shaped, and warped, early policy. On 12 March 2020, Otto English warned that Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings appeared to be pursuing "get COVID done" by letting the virus move through the population, calling it "so dangerous to us all" because it gambled with mass death and long-term illness in an entirely uncharted virus (["Get COVID Done"](#)).

By late March 2020, our reporters were publishing leaked SAGE material and behavioural science advice showing that "herd immunity" wasn't a media misunderstanding but a live internal justification for keeping the economy open — a strategy associated with Dominic Cummings and presented to the public as calm inevitability rather than as a choice to tolerate preventable deaths (["COVID-19 Special Investigation: Behavioural Scientists Told Government to Use 'Herd Immunity' to Justify Business as Usual"](#); ["SAGEGATE – How 'Herd Immunity' Was Imposed on the Government's Science Advisory Group"](#)).

We then tracked how that same logic was rebranded and revived in October 2020 as the so-called [Great Barrington Declaration](#), which repackaged mass infection of the "low risk" population ("focused protection") as responsible policy despite warnings from public health leaders and the World Health Organization that this was "scientifically and ethically problematic" and would lead to huge avoidable death among the vulnerable. ([The Guardian](#)) By 2021, Nafeez Ahmed was still finding Cabinet Office modelling built around letting younger people be deliberately exposed to drive immunity, showing that the "ghost of herd immunity" had never really left government thinking (["The Ghost of 'Herd Immunity' Still Haunts Boris Johnson's 'Roadmap' Out of Lockdown"](#)). ([Byline Times](#))

When the UK COVID-19 Inquiry finally began taking evidence, it confirmed what we'd been reporting for years: that talk of "herd immunity" in February–March 2020 wasn't a harmless communications slip, it drove delay, created fatal complacency, and left officials improvising policy around an undefined term for an unknown virus. The Government's own former Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, told the Inquiry he "regretted" using the phrase because it was seized on inside and outside Downing Street as a strategic end-state rather than a warning, and that this misunderstanding helped fuel chaos at the heart of the UK's response (["Dominic Cummings Incriminates the Government \(and Himself\) on the 'Herd Immunity' Catastrophe"](#); [Vallance to UK COVID Inquiry](#)). ([Byline Times](#))

## Crony Contracts

When COVID hit, we followed the money. Our first article on suspicious PPE procurement was in mid-April 2020, only a few weeks into the first lockdown. For over six months, until the

National Audit Office reported, *Byline Times* was the only media organisation covering this issue, with dozens of articles published.

We reported how a secret “VIP lane” (also called the “High Priority Lane”) routed emergency PPE contracts to politically connected insiders and donors, fast-tracking deals worth hundreds of millions of pounds and often producing unusable kit at huge mark-ups. We documented how “urgent crisis procurement” turned into an insider enrichment machine with billions going to Conservative Party donors and associates. We were first to report on the PPE Medpro contract, which led to the investigation of Baroness Mone.

The National Audit Office later confirmed that the Government set up a parallel channel to prioritise leads from ministers, MPs and peers, and that normal checks were overwhelmed. [National Audit Office: PPE supply investigation](#).

In January 2022, the High Court ruled that this “VIP lane” breached the Government’s duty to treat suppliers equally and was unlawful. The case, brought by the Good Law Project and EveryDoctor, established in law that the Government’s preferential fast-track for politically connected suppliers was illegal. [High Court VIP lane ruling](#).

That ruling didn’t end the story. In 2025, the UK Government won £122 million in damages against PPE Medpro — a politically connected company that got pandemic contracts through that same VIP route — after the High Court found the firm breached its gown supply contract by delivering unusable kit. [UK wins lawsuit against PPE Medpro](#).

Here’s the updated paragraph with inline links and the Government action quote from Parliament added at the end:

Russell Scott — who has been reporting daily from the official UK COVID-19 Inquiry for [Byline Times](#) and wrote the Byline Books investigation [VIP Lane: Cronyism and the Pandemic](#) — was shortlisted for a British Journalism Award for his coverage of the Government’s PPE “VIP lane!”, ([‘Matt Hancock and Three Conservative Peers Referred 60 Suppliers Onto the PPE COVID VIP Lane’](#); [‘The Sheer Scale of the COVID “VIP Lane” PPE Scandal Has Still Not Been Revealed Five Years On’](#)).

In October 2025, the Treasury confirmed in a written Parliamentary answer that the new Covid Counter Fraud Commissioner had focused on £1.4 billion of disputed PPE contracts, referred some suppliers to the National Crime Agency stating “the government is leaving no stone unturned to investigate and recover public funds lost through pandemic-related fraud and non-delivered contracts.” [UK Parliament Written Answer, 20 Oct 2025](#). ([theyworkforyou.com](#))

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### 3. Following the Money: Palantir, Procurement and the New Data State

We tracked what happens when private surveillance-tech firms start running the machinery of the British state.

We were early to warn that the NHS's new Federated Data Platform (FDP) — a £300m+ national data spine awarded to Palantir, a US surveillance and defence contractor chaired by Peter Thiel — risked turning core health infrastructure into a for-profit analytics and targeting layer with minimal democratic oversight, and we platformed groups such as Foxglove as they launched legal action arguing there was “no legal basis” for Palantir to run the NHS-wide platform and that key terms were being hidden from the public ([Foxglove on Palantir legal action](#); [Good Law Project challenge](#)).

Labour MP Dawn Butler then picked this up directly in Parliament: she formally tabled written questions in July 2025 asking whether Palantir and its partners would gain access to NHS patients' DNA data through the FDP, forcing ministers to confirm on the record what data Palantir could see ([House of Commons Written Question 65233, Dawn Butler → DHSC](#)). ([UK Parliament](#)) Butler has repeatedly cited *Byline Times*' investigations in Parliament — on the floor of the House when she pressed then Health Secretary Matt Hancock about a secret £3 million COVID propaganda contract to Tory-aligned ad firm Topham Guerin first exposed by *Byline Times* ([How Two Right-Wing Meme Merchants Scored a £3 Million Government Coronavirus Contract](#)) and in committee, where she warned that “people outside... are understanding sleaze... because of what *Byline Times* and other investigative journalists are doing in highlighting the cronyism and corruption,” during scrutiny of the Government's new tech agency model ([Hansard, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill Committee, 20 April 2021](#), lines 1105–1108). ([Byline Times](#))

By 2025, the Palantir fight had reached select committees, with Palantir executives hauled before MPs and publicly accusing UK doctors of letting “ideology” get in the way after the British Medical Association warned that putting Palantir at the heart of the NHS would destroy public trust and embed a defence contractor in civilian health planning ([Palantir accuses UK doctors of choosing 'ideology over patient interest'](#)). ([theguardian.com](#))

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## 4. Israel/Gaza: Naming Atrocity Early, Forcing Accountability

Within a week of Hamas's 7 October 2023 massacre in southern Israel and Israel's immediate large-scale bombardment and siege of Gaza, *Byline Times* published [“Israel, Gaza and the Spectre of Genocide”](#) by Professor Martin Shaw, one of Britain's foremost genocide scholars. He warned that Israel's actions — collective punishment, large-scale strikes on civilians, rhetoric of annihilation — risked crossing the line into genocidal intent, and that this could not be justified as “self-defence” under international law.

That framing, which much of the UK media dismissed in October 2023 as “extreme,” is now playing out in court. The International Criminal Court has sought and obtained arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, alleging war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza — including starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and deliberate targeting of civilian populations. [ICC Prosecutor applications and warrants re: Palestine](#); [AP: ICC prosecutor defends Netanyahu warrant alleging starvation as a weapon of war](#).

We then tracked the UK domestic fallout. In July 2025, we revealed that a UK-registered charity fundraising for Israeli soldiers had circulated a graphic video showing what appeared to be a Palestinian being killed, using that footage as part of a fundraising pitch for the Israel Defence Forces. After our reporting, the Charity Commission issued an Official Warning to the charity — UK Friends of the Association for the Wellbeing of Israel’s Soldiers (UK-AWIS) — citing “misconduct and/or mismanagement,” governance failures, and trustees’ breach of duty for letting that content go live. [UK Charity Sanctioned Over Israeli Military Fundraising Video](#); [Charity Commission Official Warning](#).

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## 5. War Crimes in Ukraine: The Kherson ‘Human Safari’

We have reporters on the ground in Ukraine, and we take their evidence all the way to Geneva, The Hague and New York.

From summer 2024 onward, our war correspondent [Zarina Zabrisky](#) documented how Russian forces across the Dnipro River were using cheap FPV (first-person-view) drones to stalk, hunt and kill civilians in and around Kherson — sometimes filming the attacks for propaganda and fund-raising. Locals described their city as a “human safari”: pensioners, parents, kids hunted from above for sport. See: [“Aerial Terror in Kherson – A City Under Drone Siege”](#).

In May 2025, the United Nations’ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine confirmed that Russia’s drone attacks on Kherson civilians amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity, describing a campaign of murder and terror to drive civilians out. [UN Confirms Russian Drone Attacks on Kherson are Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes](#).

Days later, Human Rights Watch published [“Hunted From Above: Russia’s Use of Drones to Attack Civilians in Kherson, Ukraine”](#), documenting that Russian forces were systematically using commercial quadcopters, fitted with explosives, to pursue and kill civilians, and calling those attacks war crimes and crimes against humanity. [HRW: Russia Using Drones to Attack Civilians](#). This culminated in a UN report

On 27 October 2025, [based on our reporting](#), the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine [presented new findings](#) to the 80th United Nations General Assembly, documenting a systematic campaign to depopulate southern Ukraine

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## 6. Foreign Interference & Information Warfare

We treat Britain's democracy as an ecosystem under pressure: by oligarch money, intelligence services, kompromat, dark PR, shell lobbying, bot farms, and state-linked disinformation.

### The Lebedevs, Boris Johnson and UK National Security

*Byline Times* has led sustained reporting into Boris Johnson's relationship with Alexander Lebedev — a former KGB officer turned oligarch — and his son Evgeny Lebedev, now Lord Lebedev and a UK media proprietor. This relationship wasn't just gossip about a flashy social circle. It raised explicit national security questions, which then spilt into Parliament, into the UK's appointments watchdog, and onto the floor of the House of Commons. ([Hansard](#))

Adam Bienkov's investigation for *Byline Times*, "[Laundering the Lebedevs](#)", traces how Johnson cultivated access to the Lebedevs over the years — from his time as Mayor of London through his time as Foreign Secretary and then Prime Minister — including repeated, lavish trips to their Italian estates, such as Alexander Lebedev's Palazzo Terranova in Umbria. It also shows how Johnson personally drove Evgeny Lebedev's elevation to the House of Lords in 2020, despite security service concerns that making him a life peer could pose a national security risk. Those concerns were serious enough that UK intelligence briefed No. 10 and advised against the peerage at first, and the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC) initially flagged the nomination. Johnson pushed ahead anyway. ([Financial Times](#))

That story then detonated at Westminster.

On 29 March 2022, the Labour front bench forced an Opposition Day vote using a rare humble address motion to demand that the Government hand over all documents "relating to the advice given by security services" about Lord Lebedev's peerage — including any warnings to Boris Johnson and any interventions by Johnson to overturn or soften those warnings. [House of Commons Library: "Advice relating to the appointment of Lord Lebedev"](#). The motion explicitly framed Evgeny Lebedev's peerage as a matter of national security, not patronage. Keir Starmer also wrote to the House of Lords Appointments Commission, calling for the vetting advice to be made public and called for Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee to investigate. ([House of Commons Library](#))

That same day, MPs debated "Appointment of Lord Lebedev" on the floor of the House of Commons. Multiple MPs cited reports that UK intelligence had initially warned against giving Evgeny Lebedev a seat in the House of Lords, and that the warning was later "reframed" after intervention from the Prime Minister. MPs also raised the question of whether Johnson, as Foreign Secretary, had met Alexander Lebedev (a former KGB officer) without officials or security present, and whether that contact was ever properly logged in government records. [Hansard: Appointment of Lord Lebedev, House of Commons, 29 March 2022](#). ([Hansard](#))

Otto English's earlier work for *Byline Times* set the frame for that parliamentary moment. He showed how parts of the UK media had spent years treating Evgeny Lebedev as a colourful socialite — “the glamorous oligarch son and the fun-loving politician” — rather than as what the security services clearly understood him to be: a potential live counterintelligence risk. English and other Byline reporters documented how Boris Johnson, while serving as Foreign Secretary, flew to the Lebedev estate in Perugia directly after a NATO meeting on Russia held in the immediate aftermath of the Salisbury nerve agent attack, and did so without the usual Foreign Office officials or full security escort. Witnesses later told reporters Johnson looked dishevelled at the airport on return and said he'd had “a heavy night.” Italian intelligence had reportedly monitored the Lebedev villa over espionage concerns. ([The Guardian](#))

Parliament then had to confront that detail too. When pressed by MPs in July 2022, Johnson admitted to the Liaison Committee that he had, as Foreign Secretary, met Alexander Lebedev privately in Italy without officials present, but insisted that “as far as I am aware, no Government business was discussed.” [PM statement to MPs, July 2022, reported in The Guardian](#). That answer, notably qualified (“as far as I am aware”), did not resolve whether sensitive matters were discussed off the books, nor whether proper reporting procedures were followed. ([The Guardian](#))

John Sweeney then took this out of the evasive language of Westminster and into plain English in his Byline TV film [Kompromat](#). The film reconstructs Johnson's unaccompanied 2018 Perugia trip, his meetings with Alexander Lebedev, and his ongoing social proximity to Evgeny Lebedev, and asks the question the British establishment didn't want on the record: was the UK Prime Minister personally vulnerable to kompromat by interests tied to the Russian security state? The documentary also shows how those relationships were laundered into acceptability by UK media patronage and Evgeny Lebedev's ownership of titles like the Evening Standard and The Independent. ([The Guardian](#))

Pressure from Parliament, and later from FOI challenges, forced further disclosures. In January 2025, newly released HOLAC material (obtained after sustained pressure including Commons motions and media scrutiny) confirmed that Boris Johnson had nominated Evgeny Lebedev to the House of Lords without even supplying the normal written “citation” justifying why he should be ennobled. HOLAC also confirmed that the Security Service had personally briefed Johnson in Downing Street about the national security risks linked to Lebedev's elevation — and that Johnson went ahead regardless. [Financial Times reporting on HOLAC disclosures, January 2025](#). ([Financial Times](#))

HOLAC is supposed to vet peerage nominations for “propriety,” and the House of Commons Library briefing notes that Boris Johnson's handling of Lebedev — like his later overruling of HOLAC to elevate Tory donor Peter Cruddas — pushed the appointments system past its informal guardrails. HOLAC had to ask for “further elucidation” from the security services before it relented, and even then, MPs from across the House demanded to see the full security advice. [House of Commons Library briefing on Lord Lebedev](#). ([House of Commons Library](#))

## **From Kompromat to Statute: FIRS**

We've tracked how these influence networks and covert relationships flow into British politics — and how the state is slowly reacting. Back in 2019, after Parliament's DCMS Committee warned about Russian interference, dark money and disinformation in UK democracy, Peter Jukes reported for *Byline Times* that David Lammy was calling for a “Mueller-style” criminal investigation into links between the 2016 Leave campaign, Donald Trump's circle and Russia, and for new laws to force transparency around foreign influence in British politics ([Explosive Report Exposes the Molten Core of the Brexit, Trump, Russia Scandal](#)).

In 2025, that demand finally materialised in statute: the UK began rolling out the [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme \(FIRS\)](#), created under the National Security Act 2023. Under regulations laid before Parliament on 1 April 2025, ministers confirmed that from 1 July 2025 anyone conducting “political influence activities” in the UK at the “direction of a foreign power” must register or face criminal penalties, and that Russia would be placed in an “enhanced tier,” triggering even stricter reporting and enforcement ([Hansard: Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, 1 April 2025](#); [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme to Come Fully Into Effect](#); [Russia to Be Placed on Foreign Influence Registration Scheme](#)). The Home Office frames FIRS as a tool to stop covert foreign penetration of UK politics, influence-buying and disinformation networks; critics point out that key gaps remain — notably that China was initially not placed in the same “enhanced” tier as Russia, despite extensive UK concerns about Chinese influence operations.

## **Kremlin Hybrid Warfare and Byline Times Journalists on Russia's stop list**

In August 2025, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly named and sanctioned multiple *Byline Times* and Byline TV journalists and contributors — including Adrian Goldberg, Caolan Robertson, John Sweeney, Paul Conroy and Zarina Zabriskey — adding them to its official “stop list,” banning them from Russia and denouncing their work as an “anti-Russia narrative.” [Russia Sanctions Byline Times Journalists and Contributors for Exposing Putin's War Crimes](#).

The ministry accused us of “demonising our country” and “actively fabricating anti-Russia narratives to diminish Moscow's international influence,” explicitly naming our investigations into Russian war crimes in Ukraine and our evidence of systematic drone terror against civilians in Kherson.

## **The FBI and the “Doppelgänger” Network**

We don't treat disinformation as “trolling.” We treat it as an operation.

Our investigation [“Under the Radar: Unmasking the Coordinated Reach of Russian ‘Doppelgänger’ Bots”](#) mapped a Kremlin-linked influence network using cloned versions of Western news outlets, AI-generated fake personas, and bot amplification to inject pro-Russian narratives into UK, US and EU online spaces — including messages designed to undermine support for Ukraine and to nudge Western electorates toward pro-Kremlin positions.

In September 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Treasury announced coordinated action against what they explicitly named as a Russian state-backed “Doppelgänger” operation: they seized 32 domains, unsealed affidavits describing how Russian government proxies spoofed Western media brands to influence voters in the U.S. and beyond, and warned this was a live election interference effort run with Kremlin approval. [US Department of Justice press release on Doppelgänger](#); [US Treasury action on Russian malign influence](#); [GMFUS analysis of DOJ vs. Doppelgänger](#).

*Byline Times*’ technical mapping — domains, mirrors, botnets, funding routes — is now being echoed in U.S. federal affidavits and seizures. Our reporting became part of the evidentiary ecosystem for law enforcement and national security action.

## **Byline Times Journalists on Russia’s Stop List**

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## **7. Migration, Islamophobia & the Manufactured Culture War**

From day one, we’ve treated anti-migrant and anti-Muslim panic as a weaponised project, not an accident. Our first ever print edition in March 2019 — published days after the Christchurch mosque massacre — led with Caroline Orr’s investigation, [“Robert Mercer: Fuelling a Multi-million Dollar Anti-Muslim Propaganda Industry”](#), which showed how Trump mega-donor Robert Mercer and his network pumped more than \$200 million into an organised US anti-Muslim propaganda machine between 2008 and 2013, laundering “white genocide”/“great replacement” conspiracy theory rhetoric into mainstream politics on both sides of the Atlantic — the same rhetoric echoed in the Christchurch terrorist’s manifesto.

The UK press and *GB News*-style broadcasters have since spent years pumping out an “invasion” narrative: migrants and Muslims cast as an existential national threat, and any attempt at humane policy cast as “weak,” “traitorous” or “woke.” We pull that apart.

We show how supposedly “spontaneous” anti-migrant street groups are very often encouraged, legitimised or signal-boosted by the same politicians and pundits who then go on air to condemn “disorder.” We expose how panic over “small boats” is used to justify policies with no evidence of deterrent effect, while ignoring the actual labour, asylum and foreign policy drivers of movement.

We also document how Islamophobia is laundered into the mainstream via moral panic. Brian Cathcart has shown in *Byline Times* how *The Times*’ long-running “Muslim grooming gangs” framing — driven by named reporters and repeatedly found to have relied on distortion and omission — built a false impression that child sexual exploitation was primarily a Muslim or Pakistani crime, despite the Home Office’s own analysis showing that abuse is not confined to one ethnicity and that *The Times*’ narrative fed anti-Muslim hatred rather than protecting victims ([“Home Office Study Trashes The Times’ ‘Muslim Grooming Gangs’ Narrative”](#) by Brian Cathcart and Paddy French). ([acrecampaigns.org](http://acrecampaigns.org))

Andrew Kersley has tracked what happens next: how that distorted “grooming gangs = Muslims” story is now harvested by UK and transatlantic far-right groups, who insert themselves into abuse survivors’ pain, build networks around “protecting our girls,” and then weaponise that anger into anti-migrant street mobilisation and anti-Muslim agitation — all while doing nothing to fund actual victim support ([“Special Investigation: ‘The Far-Right Is Cynically Taking Advantage of Child Sexual Exploitation Survivors’”](#) and [“Special Investigation: The Network of Far-Right Groups Exploiting the Survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation”](#) by Andrew Kersley).

We treat migration not as a culture war but as a supply chain: labour shortages, trafficking routes, post-imperial responsibilities, Home Office failures, and the cost (in pounds and in human lives) of headline-friendly cruelty that doesn’t work. This moves the debate from “Who are we scared of?” to “Who profits from keeping you scared?”

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## 8. Reframing Identities

From the outset, *Byline Times* has treated race, belonging and national identity as constitutional questions, not lifestyle colour. Our Editor-in-Chief [Hardeep Matharu](#) has shown how Britain’s culture warriors are trying to redefine “Britishness” as an ethnonational purity test — using empire nostalgia, flag rituals and talk of “common sense” to delegitimise anti-racism, migrant rights, civil liberties, protest and pluralism. In [“From Folklore to Wokelore: How Myths of Britishness Are Turning Totalitarian”](#) and [“A Disunited Kingdom: For Younger Minorities, ‘Britishness’ Is An Identity We Can Work With — A Quest for ‘Englishness’ Must Confront This”](#), she argues that the battle over who counts as “us” is the battle over democracy itself. ([bylinesupplement.com](http://bylinesupplement.com))

Matharu has also forced a reckoning with empire, class and Brexit through her own family. In [“The Story of Brexit is the Story of Empire: Why Did So Many Asian Immigrants Vote for Brexit?”](#)

and [“How My Punjabi Immigrant New Labour-Supporting Parents were Charmed by Boris Johnson”](#), she shows how Commonwealth migrants internalised both the promise and the hierarchy of Britishness, and how that complicated loyalty was later recruited by Brexit and by Boris Johnson — not as crude racism, but as a story about national agency. She links this to a country drifting backward into imperial myth instead of building a shared future ([“Backwards Britain: Having Rejected a European Future, We Can Only Hark Back to an Imperial Past”](#)). She’s also dismantled the comforting idea that “diverse faces in high office = progress,” profiling Priti Patel and Rishi Sunak. In [“Priti Patel Cannot Make Herself a Poster Girl for a ‘Non-Racist Britain’”](#) and [“The Identity Trap: No One Narrative Can Encompass the Different Dimensions of Diversity”](#), she shows how Patel and Sunak deploy their own immigrant success stories to deny structural racism, front a hardline anti-migrant agenda, and revive a colonial “divide and rule” logic inside modern Conservatism. ([Byline Times](#))

Matharu and Sonia Purnell have pushed a constitutional argument that’s now mainstream: Britain can’t keep relying on “good chaps” — well-bred men who are just assumed to behave — to restrain political power. In the *Byline Times* print edition and digital front pages they set out how Boris Johnson smashed that old gentleman’s-code model, hollowed out standards, and proved that without hard rules, bad actors will simply break the system for personal gain. See Hardeep Matharu’s print essay [“‘Good Chaps’ Left the Building a While Ago, Britain – It’s Time to Wake Up”](#).. That framing — that the UK’s unwritten constitution is no longer protected by personal honour, and needs binding law — has since been amplified in Simon Kuper’s book *Good Chaps: How Corrupt Politicians Broke Our Law and Institutions – And What We Can Do About It* (Profile Books), which argues that Britain must replace trust in “good chaps” with enforceable rules if it wants to prevent another Johnson-era breakdown. ([The Times](#))

We’ve also reported on how identity politics is being repackaged inside Labour. Writers Jon Bloomfield and David Edgar have tracked the rise of “Blue Labour” and its descendant currents — an authoritarian, flag-and-faith, anti-migrant, “nation first” politics marketed as working-class authenticity — and warned that Maurice Glasman’s project has drifted into open nationalist-populism and Trumpist culture war positioning. See [“Blue Labour on MAGA Square: Maurice Glasman’s Journey to Trumpism”](#) and [“Red Tory to Blue Labour – How Spiked and UnHerd are Keeping National Populism Alive”](#). ([Byline Times](#)) Peter Osborne’s *Byline Times* diary and reporting then link that ideological shift to personnel and power: he describes Keir Starmer’s chief strategist Morgan McSweeney — the unelected operator shaping Labour’s message on borders, patriotism and “order” — as “the most powerful individual in Britain,” and warns that this Blue Labour/“Hard Labour” turn risks normalising a soft version of national-populism inside government in an attempt to head off Nigel Farage rather than confront him ([“The Most Powerful Individual in Britain”](#); [“Why We Must Call the National-Populist Far Right by Its Name”](#)). ([bylinesupplement.com](#))

Hardeep Matharu has been shortlisted for “Editors’ Editor of the Year” by the British Society of Magazine Editors for exactly this kind of work: reframing “culture war” stories as questions of power, constitutional ethics and who gets to belong.

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## 9. The Broligarchs: Tech Billionaires, Race Science and Capture of the State

We are mapping what we call the “broligarchs”: the tech billionaires and surveillance capitalists — Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Palantir and their networks — who bankroll and feed far-right ideology into mainstream politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Working with journalists including Carole Cadwalladr, Dr Nafeez Ahmed, Peter Jukes, Heidi Siegmund Cuda, Olly Haynes, Max Colbert and Iain Overton, we’ve shown how these actors push US-style “anti-woke,” anti-migrant, authoritarian talking points into UK and EU discourse, while simultaneously trying to wire their own companies into state infrastructure (health data, border systems, policing, military AI). Peter Jukes has traced how Rupert Murdoch’s traditional media oligarchy has mutated into direct platform capture by Elon Musk, and how that fusion is already reshaping geopolitics, NATO cohesion and UK politics, in investigations such as [“From Murdoch to Musk: Hacking the State”](#) and [“The Gulf of America”](#).

On Palantir, we were early, detailed and on the record about the quiet capture of Britain’s public infrastructure by a US “spytech” firm founded by Peter Thiel and built on US national security and military/intelligence contracts. Our reporters Iain Overton and Max Colbert revealed how former Labour grandee Peter Mandelson helped arrange Keir Starmer’s behind-closed-doors visit to Palantir while Mandelson’s own lobbying firm was representing Palantir — raising obvious questions about access and influence over a £300m+ NHS “Federated Data Platform” that gives a private US contractor privileged visibility of national health data ([“Peter Mandelson’s Fixing of Keir Starmer’s Visit to Spytech Firm Palantir Raises Serious Questions”](#)).

At the same time, we’ve documented how Elon Musk’s capture of Twitter/X has effectively turned a single private owner into an unelected geopolitical actor — often in alignment with the Kremlin. Heidi Siegmund Cuda has shown, in [“Unmusked: How Elon Musk is Using Twitter to Destroy the Concept of Objective Truth”](#), how Musk rapidly repositioned the platform as an amplifier for extremist and authoritarian narratives, echoed Vladimir Putin’s preferred “peace plan” for Ukraine (including recognising Russia’s annexation of Crimea), and was even accused by former US National Security Council adviser Fiona Hill of laundering Kremlin messaging under the cover of “free speech.” Peter Jukes has followed this through to hard power: in his reporting on Musk, X/Twitter and Starlink, including [“X – Marks the Spot: Russia’s Second Front”](#), he shows how the platform has throttled pro-Ukraine content, boosted pro-Kremlin propaganda, mocked President Zelensky, undermined Western military aid narratives, and even restricted Ukraine’s battlefield access to Starlink — effectively giving Russia both an information front and, at times, a tactical advantage.

Finally, Dr Nafeez Ahmed has mapped the ideology underpinning all of this and given it a lineage. In [“How Nazi Race Science Conquered the White House, and Is Coming for Your Democracy”](#), he traces how explicitly white supremacist, eugenics-rooted “race science” has been laundered back into mainstream right-wing policymaking via Silicon Valley billionaires,

“anti-woke” think tanks and dark-money networks — normalising authoritarian hierarchy as “common sense.”

He and Peter Jukes have shown how Peter Thiel sits at the centre of that pipeline: financing Palantir; bankrolling MAGA hardliners; cultivating neo-reactionary theorists like Curtis Yarvin (the “Dark Enlightenment” blogger known as Mencius Moldbug, who openly argues against democracy); and building direct relationships with UK political actors such as Lord Maurice Glasman of Blue Labour — now described as a bridge between British “post-liberal” circles and Trumpworld. See [“Blue Labour and the Thiel Effect: How MAGA is Making Inroads into British Politics”](#) and [“Curtis Yarvin: How the Alt-Right Gets In”](#).

This is the system we’re documenting: billionaire ideology → captured platforms and surveillance infrastructure → direct leverage over public policy, national data, borders, health systems and even European war strategy.

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## Our Investigative Model

Here’s how this all works in practice:

- We gather documents: contracts, lobbying registers, FOI disclosures, WhatsApps, board minutes, shell company filings, flight manifests, Charity Commission rulings, Ofcom decisions, UN findings, ICC warrants.
- We publish fast — often months or years before legacy outlets, who are constrained by owners’ interests, advertiser pressure, political access games, or fear of legal threats.
- We link UK politics to global systems of power: Russian oligarch influence, US billionaire “broligarchs,” Israeli military fundraising in Britain, Kremlin drone terror in Kherson, Palantir inside the NHS, GB News normalising politicians as “news anchors.”
- We don’t stop at publication. We keep going until there are downstream consequences in law, regulation or international accountability.

And those consequences are now routine:

- High Court rulings that the Government’s “VIP lane” for PPE was unlawful.
- Ofcom fining GB News £100,000 for systemic impartiality breaches and being forced by a High Court challenge to rewrite its rules on politicians presenting news.
- The Charity Commission issuing a formal Official Warning over a UK charity’s fundraising for Israeli soldiers after we exposed its “kill shot” style video.

- The UN and Human Rights Watch confirming that Russia’s FPV drone “human safari” in Kherson is a pattern of war crimes and crimes against humanity — exactly what our reporters documented first.
- The U.S. Department of Justice and Treasury seizing Kremlin disinformation domains in the “Doppelgänger” network and publicly describing the same playbook we mapped.
- The UK rolling out the [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme](#), effectively acknowledging — in law — the national security risk we’ve been reporting in relation to oligarch access, kompromat and covert lobbying.

This is what impact journalism looks like: evidence that doesn’t just inform the public, but arms regulators, courts, watchdogs, Parliament, human rights investigators, and even allied governments.

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### **And that’s the point.**

Our work is dragging British political debate — the Overton Window — back toward legality, accountability, pluralism and material reality, and away from imported authoritarian fantasies.

If you want to talk collaboration, evidence-sharing or amplification, contact [stephen@byline.com](mailto:stephen@byline.com).