

**Najib-FBC scandal hits US magazine
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After international broadcasters CNBC and BBC, US magazine The Atlantic also launched an internal investigation into its connections with a public relations company which was hired by the Malaysian government to glam up the image of BN politicians overseas.

According to prominent Washington-based news portal Politico, a spokesperson of The Atlantic confirmed that the magazine is probing its cooperation with London-based FBC Media Ltd, which has provided editorial content on foreign subjects while doing public relations work for some of the same governments it was reporting on.

“In addition to the internal review, the magazine also said Justin Smith, president of Atlantic Media Co, has resigned from the board of FBC, the firm at the centre of a controversy over whether it improperly mixed its journalism and PR businesses. It was Smith who connected FBC Media with The Atlantic,” read the report.

It revealed that FBC's chairman, Alan Friedman (left), had approached the century-old magazine about hosting an event featuring his client, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak. The event, held in March, was moderated by The Atlantic national correspondent James Fallows.

Concerns were also raised whether Friedman's reports from the World Economic Forum in Davos in January for The Atlantic were aimed to promote his clients.

Smith, who has sat on FBC's board since 2007, told Politico on Sunday that he informed Friedman two weeks ago of his desire to step down.

“The truth is that Alan Friedman has been a friend of mine for nearly 20 years,” Smith said.

“In light of this friendship and my past association with the company, I am very disturbed to learn of the serious allegations being raised about FBC and Alan's conduct. What I would particularly regret, should these accusations directed at FBC be proven true, is my role in having introduced Alan to The Atlantic's editors and event planners.

Full review ordered

“I have directed a full review of The Atlantic's dealings with him, and the responsibility at The Atlantic for any problems it might uncover will be mine. It is my job to safeguard at all costs The Atlantic's reputation for editorial integrity,” Smith was quoted as saying.

The Najib-FBC scandal was first disclosed by Sarawak Report, a portal founded by journalist Clare Rewcastle-Brown, who is the sister-in-law of former British prime minister Gordon Brown.

It claimed that FBC was paid millions of ringgit by BN politicians, including Najib and long-serving Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud, to glam up their image overseas.

This was verified by the entries in the government's Supplementary Budget 2010 which showed that FBC was allocated RM28.35 million for work on a 'Global Strategic Communications Campaign' ordered in 2009. The company had received RM29.34 million the previous year.

British-based daily The Independent also reported that documents filed with the US House of Representatives in 2008 show that FBC contracted the Washington-based American lobbying company Apco Worldwide.

Following the disclosure, CNBC and BBC had pulled all FBC-produced content and launched their own

internal investigations last month.

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