

Russia attempted to clandestinely manipulate our 2016 presidential election, a fact shared with the voters by President Obama and every FBI and CIA chief, active and former. We unmasked the hackers who muddied Hillary Clinton's campaign and found the probes into the election machinery of a number of states. What we do not know yet is how many Americans cooperated, colluded, or sought Russian money and help. That question will be answered by the Mueller investigation in due time.

What we can know is what history reveals about Russian objectives. Why would they want to interfere in our election? Why did they obviously sully and sow conspiracy theories about Hillary Clinton, while planting false stories in key states in support of Donald Trump? What did they hope to get out of rigging this presidential election? What is their larger policy?

The Soviet Union lost the Cold War, a half-century struggle between two superpowers with nuclear arsenals. With our usual short attention span, the US and Europe looked the other way as the formerly proud Soviet Union fell into disarray as it resumed its former identity as Russia. A former KGB operative, Vladimir Putin, managed through guile to become the New Russia's elected leader. He has proven to be intelligent, sober (a novelty among Russian leaders), and with intentions to be president for life.

Russia, despite its size and reabsorption of some of its former colonies, is a shadow of its Soviet self. It is not a superpower. Its economy does not compete or compare with that of the United States or the European Union. Its population today is half of what it was at the onset of World War II, and shows no signs of recovering. Life expectancy of its male population is not at developed world levels, largely due to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. What keeps Russia going as a viable economic player is petroleum, a resource subject to market swings. In addition, oil will eventually be replaced by non-polluting energy sources.

What, then, can Russia do about no longer being a superpower? Their policy objectives are to cut us down to their level by removing us from the position of world leader we have had since the end of World War II.

The US is the father of the global system of rule of law. We have spent our money and blood in support of a world system with a common monetary system, with norms and values for democratic institutions, with alliances for common defense (NATO), and world trade with no barriers. We presided over the demise of empires, including those of our friends and allies: the British, French, Dutch, and Belgians. We destroyed the Nazi and Japanese empires, and ultimately destroyed the Soviet empire.

So what can the bitter Putin do to dethrone us? His intelligence services can sow chaos and dissent, interfere with democratic elections, and bit by bit destroy the global system that the US created. Their first success was interfering in a British referendum to remove Britain from the European Union (BRITXIT). Through false news and hacking, the British very unwisely voted to withdraw from their European partners, a move sure to diminish both Britain and the EU.

The Russians were caught interfering in the French election, and the French voters repelled this attack. They did the same in Germany, but failed. But they have succeeded in a clandestine attack on democratic institutions in Poland and Hungary, once parts of the Soviet Union. These countries are now virtual dictatorships that destabilize the courts, jail journalists, and promote poisonous versions of nationalism.

And Trump, Putin's preferred candidate for the American presidency, has alienated NATO, the EU, and withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord. Russia benefits from all of this. Trump wants to remove the US from the Pacific Trade agreement that both the Russians and Chinese hate. He condemns the press, the courts, and violated every norm and ethical constraint on his presidential power. The Soviets have gotten plenty for their money; their bang for the buck is intended to diminish us from global leadership. A bargain, I think.

685 words

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