

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/did-russia-elect-trump/?print=1>

Did Russia Elect Trump?

By Philip Giraldi
December 12, 2016

On Friday, the *Washington Post* reported ^[1] that the CIA has concluded that Russia acted to aid Donald Trump in winning the election. The story follows accusations that the Russian government was behind the hack of the private servers used by the Democratic National Committee, as well as the Gmail account of Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager, John Podesta. The information obtained was provided to WikiLeaks and other sources like the Romanian Guccifer 2.0 in order to be made public and discredit the Clinton campaign—and potentially influence the outcome of the election. The *New York Times* is reporting ^[2] that the Russians also hacked the Republican National Committee server but did not release any of the information obtained. The GOP claims that its system was not breached.

The allegations about Moscow’s involvement in the election derive from a still-secret report ^[3] prepared by the CIA that represents the intelligence community’s consensus on the issue, though the use of the word “consensus” implies that there was dissent over the conclusions, and there is even a suggestion that not all of the community signed off on the final draft. For what it’s worth, the report does not address whether the hacking influenced the result of the election, and both the Russian government and WikiLeaks have denied that they were acting in collusion or were part of any organized effort to promote the Trump campaign.

The White House has responded to the analysis by calling for an investigation of hacking surrounding the campaign and election. Donald Trump has issued a statement dismissing the

CIA claim: “These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction ... it is now time to move on.”

The Trump response is frivolous because the vulnerability of the U.S. election process to outside interference is a serious issue involving both private and public information-sharing systems. It is also important to note how critics of Russia in Congress, including Republican Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham, are already exploiting the allegations to block any possible initiatives by Trump to improve ties with Moscow, which might have serious consequences down the road.

To determine what precisely is being alleged, it is necessary to rely on media accounts, as neither the CIA nor the White House has made public the classified report. It is, first of all, most important to consider the evidence for the hack and dissemination of the information. The White House is claiming the intelligence community has “high confidence” that the hack of servers and the dissemination of the material related to the election was directed from the top levels of the Russian government.

The wording is significant, as it implies that officials have established a direct chain of custody for the materials stolen, including named individuals in the Russian government and conduits used outside it. To put it another way, the U.S. government and its presumed allies at Britain’s GCHQ are claiming that they have obtained information on the series of “cutouts” used to move the information from the hackers to the outlets employed to disseminate the stories. That is why they are claiming “high confidence,” which implies having hard evidence.

That is a serious claim, but it is currently impossible to know whether it is true or not. Some anonymous government officials are reportedly conceding that the direct link from the Russian government to the actual hackers and then on to the disseminators of the information is lacking. If the intelligence community is nevertheless claiming that they know enough to conclude that it was directed from the top levels of the Russian government, then they should be able to produce documentary or other evidence of officials’ ordering the operation to take place.

If the CIA is to maintain its credibility, it should do just that, even if the report is in a sanitized or heavily redacted version to protect sources. Do they have that kind of information? It is clear that they do not, in spite of their assertion of “high confidence.” And there is a suggestion by Republican Rep. Devin Nunes, a persistent critic of Russian spying who is on the House Intelligence Committee, that the information they do have consists of innuendo and is largely circumstantial.

So what do they actually have? They likely have bits and pieces of the transmission belt the information moved along, and are presuming without necessarily knowing that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s agreement would have been necessary to initiate such an audacious operation. Putting all of that together, they are positing that approval from the Kremlin leadership was part of the process.

Press accounts indicate that there were two hacker groups tied to Russian intelligence that obtained the information in the first place, and that the material was then provided to others for release, WikiLeaks being the most prominent of the outlets used.

Some in the media are claiming that the Russian hack and dissemination of information had two objectives: first, to damage the campaign of Hillary Clinton; and second, to “undermine confidence in the U.S. electoral system,” as the *Washington Post* describes it ^[4]. I would argue that the “undermine confidence” part is implausible and that no intelligence organization would see that kind of objective as worth pursuing except under very rare circumstances. The Clinton campaign is, however, another story. Hillary Clinton castigated Russia throughout her campaign and made it clear that she would be confrontational in Syria and Eastern Europe. Trump endorsed détente, by contrast, so Moscow’s choice of candidate would have been obvious, and the Kremlin might well have decided to take steps to bolster the Trump campaign in support of Russia’s own self-interest.

Using intelligence resources to advance one’s national interest is what all governments do. The objective is to maintain secrecy, but no one should be too surprised when such activity is detected. Attempts to influence foreign opinion in a targeted country or within a targeted group is referred to in the trade as covert action. All major state players engage in covert action to a greater or lesser extent. The CIA certainly uses its media assets worldwide to place stories supportive of politicians and parties favored by the administration in power in Washington. I would have to assume that President Barack Obama has, for example, approved CIA-generated favorable press coverage of endangered politicians like Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, whose policies he strongly supports.

If a covert action involves the media, it will sometimes consist of totally invented stories that usually are quickly exposed for what they are, or accounts that are partly or largely true but also contain spin or some untruths to undermine or influence a prevailing narrative. If the stories are crafted subtly enough, they will be accepted as true by most of the public. Stories placed in that fashion by an intelligence agency, frequently acting through surrogates, can, upon exposure, be considered part of the “fake news” that has so traumatized the media of late.

Far better than fake news from the intelligence-agency point of view is real news, which is why exposure of the Clinton-Podesta-DNC emails was so effective. They were undeniably true, and they bring to mind another Russian intelligence operation in 2014, where the hacked phone of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was exploited to reveal that Nuland thought little of America’s European allies. The lesson that should be taken home from those errors in judgment is that we create our own vulnerabilities that others will exploit. If the DNC wanted to load the dice to make Bernie Sanders go away, it would have been best not to say so in an email. If John Podesta did not trust Hillary Clinton’s impulsive decisionmaking, he should not have written that opinion down and sent it off electronically. If Nuland wanted to commit an act of fornication on Europeans, she should not have discussed it on an unsecured cell phone.

So nearly every country employs espionage when dealing with others and works on promoting its own interests through the use of its intelligence and other national resources. That should surprise no one. And it is impossible to know if the WikiLeaks publication of hacked emails

changed the outcome of the recent election, though it is clear that it did not help Hillary. The lesson is not that the Russians spied on the United States and covertly assisted a candidate they favored. That should be a given, well understood by people in the White House and elsewhere in the administration. That information is no longer private in an age where electronic intrusion or hacking can be run out of someone's garage should also be a given. But when aspirants to high office are careless in what they say, when they say it, and how they communicate to associates, there will be consequences.

Far better to mend our own fences than try to punish the Russians for doing what comes naturally. That would only lead to a tit-for-tat worsening of an already bad relationship.