



Gauging who would gain from Russian interference

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Are you shocked that the Russians might have had an interest in who won the U.S. presidential election? Nations have always had an interest in who rules the nations they deal with – both opponents and friends – and that they often try to influence the outcomes should come as no surprise.

The communists, and particularly the old Soviet Union, were very explicit in their stated mission for world domination. They pursued this by a combination of military conquests and interventions, and the creation of communist parties in most countries, with the mission of overthrowing the existing government.

It is not clear whether Vladimir Putin and his colleagues in the Kremlin thought Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump would be easier to deal with to further their interests. The Democrats claim that Mr. Putin favored Mr. Trump or the Russians would have never allowed the WikiLeaks email dumps of John Podesta (Mrs. Clinton's campaign chairman) and the others, assuming the Russians had control over the process.

Mr. Putin had a clear-cut Russian national interest in discouraging oil and gas fracking in the United States and elsewhere. The Russian economy and budget are highly dependent on foreign oil and gas sales – and high oil prices. Increases in the world supply of oil and gas depress the prices of these commodities. So it is completely rational for the Russians to do whatever they can to discourage production by others, including the U.S.

As has been disclosed in a number of articles (including several by yours truly) in major U.S. and foreign newspapers and by organizations that "follow the money" to nonprofit groups that have a lobbying arm – Russian money flowed into offshore, nonprofit entities, finally winding up in the coffers of such organizations as the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the League of Conservation Voters. All three of these left-leaning environmentalist groups

aggressively lobby against oil and gas development. The sums of money were not chicken feed, but totaled in the tens of millions of dollars.

During the presidential campaign, Mrs. Clinton made it clear that she was on the side of those groups who were lobbying against further oil and gas development, including fracking. Mr. Trump took the opposite position, making it known that his goal was to encourage a great expansion of the oil and gas industry in the United States so we would never again be dependent on foreign countries. The obvious question arises: Why would Mr. Putin favor Mr. Trump over Mrs. Clinton when clearly her policies were much more in line with what was in Russia's best interest? And, in particular, where Russia had already spent considerable funds to support Mrs. Clinton's allies.

Furthermore, as The New York Times and others reported in 2015, apparently the Clintons could be bought. They helped facilitate a deal where the Russians obtained 20 percent of the U.S. uranium reserves, in apparent exchange for donations over a period of time to the Clinton Foundation. There was also the case of the famous Hillary "reset" with the Russians and President Obama's pledge to the Russian prime minister to be more "flexible" once he was "re-elected." Finally, there is the fact that Mr. Podesta and his brother received substantial payments for representing a government-controlled Russian bank.

Perhaps Mr. Putin did think that Mr. Trump would be even more of a patsy than Mrs. Clinton – but given his demonstrated ability to take advantage of her and her allies – this seems a stretch.

Mr. Trump had also made it clear during the campaign that he favored bigger increases in military spending than Mrs. Clinton. Mr. Putin surely recalls the Reagan military buildup, which went a long way toward bankrupting and ultimately destroying the Soviet Union once the Soviets lost the economic heft to compete. Russia is at even a greater economic disadvantage today, so it is unlikely that Mr. Putin wants to repeat that same mistake.

When trying to unravel a mystery, there is the old adage "follow the money." The congressional committees investigating the Russian involvement in our election need to spend time on who was trying to buy whom and for what purpose. They will find plenty of individuals from both camps who had meetings with Russian officials, which is unlikely to reveal much. Part of the job of Russia officials is to talk with U.S. opinion leaders and knowledgeable sources – and vice versa. But actions and money flows are more important than words.

Perhaps Mr. Trump or his campaign was the recipient of major Russian or other foreign government funds, intended to help his election. But so far, no hard evidence has been presented.

The evidence is very strong, though, that the Russian government directed money that did find its way to U.S. environmental groups that were supporters of Mrs. Clinton, her allies and her positions. This may have been legal or illegal, depending on how it was handled and what reports were filed.

But the American people deserve to know if the Russians or other foreign governments were putting their hands-on the financial scales in trying to help one candidate or another.

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