

RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN WESTERN ELECTIONS, 2016-2017: A PRELIMINARY  
PROBE

By

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I describe and analyze from an historical perspective Russia's attempt to influence politics in the West during the period from 2016 to 2017 by focusing on recent national elections in the Netherlands, France, and the United States, and a national referendum called Brexit in the United Kingdom. Historians always rely upon primary sources that ordinarily do not become available for examination until decades after events have occurred. The Russian meddling is quite contemporary, virtually current history, and thus many primary sources for this study are not yet accessible. Fortunately, however, there are some primary sources available regarding the Russian interference in the three Western elections and the national referendum in the United Kingdom.

The unprecedented nature of the Russian attack sparked investigations of the charge of Russian meddling. Western government security and counterintelligence agencies, including America's seventeen security and intelligence agencies, examined the Russian actions.<sup>1</sup> So did top-notch researchers and reporters from Western broadcast and print news organizations, most notably the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, BBC, and CNN. These organizations and researchers, using sophisticated informational technology and hard work, uncovered patterns of Russian interference that encompassed hacking private databases and email servers; using automated bots (fake or automated accounts designed to simulate real people) and botnets

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<sup>1</sup> For a convenient listing of these agencies, see Nina Agrawal, "There's more than the CIA and FBI: The 17 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community," *LA Times*, January 17, 2017, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-17-intelligence-agencies-20170112-story.html/>

(content bots that use predictive algorithms to produce articles and other written material) to pump out and push false and misleading information and targeted disinformation on such Western social media sites as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter; leaking hacked documents and correspondence without context via Wikileaks; and spreading, reporting, and broadcasting false news and propaganda on Russian-government controlled news outlets like RT News (formerly Russia Today, a 24/7 international network that manages cable and satellite television channels for foreign audiences) and *Sputnik* (a multi-language news show and radio broadcaster).<sup>2</sup> The work of these groups, individuals, and agencies led to government hearings, counterintelligence reports, in-depth reporting, and eye-witness testimonials by reliable police and security officers that are now in the public domain and available for historians, and these publications and documents from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Russia are the main primary source for this study. There is also the firsthand account of Hilary Rodham Clinton called *What Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017) where she described the Russian policy and its impact on her loss to Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election in November 2016.

Apropos the election contest in the United States, there is an ongoing controversy over Russian activities because there is evidence that the victors, the Donald Trump campaign and the Republican Party, benefitted from the Russian actions and thus have a vested interest in denying, minimizing, or overlooking the Russian involvement because, at best, admitting such interference would taint the legitimacy of their victory and their right to govern and, at worse, would open up the possibility that the Trump people and

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<sup>2</sup> For purposes of simplicity, reports from RT in this study are simply identified as RT News.



some Republican leaders were cooperating with the Russians, wittingly or unwittingly, and thus violating laws that prevented such alignment and possibly hoping for help in future elections. These possibilities have led the Trump campaign and its allies in the Republican Party and parts of the partisan media world, notably Breitbart News Network and some Fox News commentators, to strive to undermine the credibility of the U.S. government agencies that reported on the Russian actions by denouncing them as anti-Trump “deep state” bureaucrats and their reports and news summaries of their reports as “fake news.” Not surprisingly, the Russian news organizations and the Kremlin support the Trump camp’s attack on U.S. security agencies.<sup>3</sup> President Donald Trump declared that he believed Vladimir Putin, the Russian leader, when he vouchsafed that Russia had not tampered in the election.<sup>4</sup>

Other Republicans and most other political leaders and the nonpartisan free media have largely validated the conclusions of the U.S. government agencies that have found massive Russian interference in the 2016 election. In addition, there is no such controversy in the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom. Government authorities there from different political parties. The comparative approach of this study helps balance the controversial nature of the American case and allows this writer to assume reasonably, on the basis of parallelism and historical continuity and in the absence of contrary facts, that the Russians had pursued a similar pattern of interference in the U.S. election that they had followed in other Western states.

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Sanger, “In Trump Administration, a Sharp Divide Over Election Interference,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2018, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see Julie Hirschfeld, “Trump says Putin ‘Means It’ about not Meddling,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2017, accessed January 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/11/world/asia/trump-putin-election.html>

This study is a scholarly probe into the issue of Russian entanglement in Western elections, based on available primary sources and pertinent secondary sources. Among the latter, there are some solid investigative books by journalists and scholars, including Luke Harding's *Collusion: Secret Meetings, Dirty Money, and How Russia Helped Donald Trump Win* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017). It is useful and connects the less obvious dots between Trump and his operatives and the Russian oligarchs, particularly in the realm of money and loans, but its evidence is circumstantial. In 2018 there was Michael Wolff's blockbuster account of the first months of the Trump administration called *Fire and Fury: Life Inside the Trump White House* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018). It painted a picture of a White House that was in chaos and preoccupied by the Russian issue. Another journalistic account that confirms White House confusion and obsession with the Russian issue is Howard Kurtz, *Media Madness: Donald Trump, the Press, and the War Over the Truth* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishers, 2018). Michael Isikoff of Yahoo News and David Corn of *Mother Jones* magazine have also made in-depth studies of the Russian meddling, which is available online, and have co-authored a valuable study that will be published in March called *Russian Roulette: The Inside Story of Putin's War on America and the Election of Donald Trump* (New York: Twelve, 2018). There is also James Comey's testimony before the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee on June 8, 2017. Comey was the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that was investigating the Russian problem when Trump fired him in 2017. Comey confirmed that the Russian government interfered in the American election.<sup>5</sup> Comey's *A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, and Leadership* (New

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<sup>5</sup> James Comey, "Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee," *New York*

York: Flatiron Books, 2018) will be available in April 2018. On February 16, 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted thirteen Russian nationals and released a detailed blueprint of the way the Russian government interfered through social media and unwitting Trump campaign officials in the 2016 election, and this study used that extraordinary document.<sup>6</sup> There are also some other important studies of parts of the American case, particularly since Trump's election, and this study uses them where appropriate, but there is no study that covers comparatively Russian interference in four simultaneous Western plebiscites.

This thesis seeks to fill that void. It offers a comparative study of Russia's intervention in Western elections. It uses the methodology of historical analysis—a study of primary and reliable secondary sources to produce a narrative that describes and explains what happened in 2016-2017 by showing and analyzing cause and effect. Its contribution is twofold: a general description of Russian interference and methods in recent Western elections and, secondly, an historical explanation for the tampering based upon past Russian foreign policy. I do describe some possible consequences of that interference and suggest policies to offset and neutralize future interference. However, I neither judge the effectiveness of the Russian meddling nor attempt to write a detailed and thorough history of Russian attempts to interfere in Western elections or produce the *soi disant* “smoking gun.” It is way too early for that type of assessment and access to

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*Times*, June 8, 2017, accessed January 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/us/politics/senate-hearing-transcript.html/>

<sup>6</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency et alii*, February 16, 2018, accessed February 18, 2018, [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

critical records in Russia, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States is not available.

This study ultimately argues that the Russian government actively interfered in Western voting events in 2016-17 in order to attempt to destabilize the governments, to show that democracies and constitutional societies are chaotic, to advance Russian national interest by weakening NATO and the European Union (EU), to sow seeds of dissension among Western allies, and to bolster fractious or minority political parties to create and exploit social, political, and economic divisions in Western societies. In short, the aim of the Kremlin was to try to weaken the West and to strengthen the case for the growth of values that the Russian elite, not the general Russian public, prefer and that included a preference for autocratic over democratic government, spheres of influence over global unity and governance, state property over private property, and state control of all major aspects of society, including religion, local government, school curricula, and the media.

Vladimir Putin happens to be the au courant Russian leader, but the Russian policy of interference in Western societies has a long legacy. The Western-Russian rivalry has been going on for centuries and was reflected in such events as Peter the Great's effort in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to borrow Western technology and weapons in order to proscribe Western influence in Russia and elsewhere and Lenin and Stalin's policy in the twentieth century to overturn the Western capitalist world order. Throughout the long and ambivalent relationship between Russia and the West, the West has largely overcome Russian obstruction and advanced its values at the expense of Russian values around the globe.

With the end of the Cold War and the implosion of the Soviet Union, it appeared as if the Russian elite had finally embraced the Western global order, but the Russian oligarchs regrouped under Vladimir Putin and again joined battle with the West in order to weaken the West and advance Russian traditional values. This thesis documents some of those advances. Chapter 1 provides a brief historical summary of the Russian-Western rivalry in order to document Russian motivation in the Russia government's current intrusion in Western elections. Chapter 2 offers a brief summary of Vladimir Putin's rise to power and his determination to combat the West and push Russian traditional values. Chapter 3 examines the Brexit case. Chapter 4 looks at the American election. Chapter 5 studies the Dutch issue. Chapter 6 looks into the French election. The conclusion offers a summary and suggestions.

## 2. WESTERN-RUSSIA RIVALRY

There are many scholarly books that document the long and tortured rivalry between Russia and the so-called West.<sup>7</sup> This chapter neither intends to reproduce that scholarship and history nor write reams of paper defining the “West” and “Russia” other than to state the West refers generally to a civilization of nations that has roots in Western Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) and the leader of which varies over time and includes such powers as Poland, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States; and Russia refers generally to a civilization of nations that has ties to Eastern or Orthodox Christianity (various Orthodox national traditions) and the leader of which, at least the self-proclaimed head, has been Russia after the Byzantine Empire fell to the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1453. The main goal of this chapter is briefly to describe the nature and course of that historical rivalry in order to help provide context and insight into the Russian government’s motivation regarding the current issue of Russian meddling in Western elections.

Russia and the West are products of different historical experiences over the course of centuries. They share many roots and influences, including Judaism, Greek and Roman classical traditions, and Christianity, and were both missionary societies that sought to convert and unify the world to Christian beliefs. They were political representatives of the first world religion that fostered global unity and fellowship around

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<sup>7</sup> For a good summary of the scholarship, see Dennis J. Dunn, *A History of Orthodox, Islamic, and Western Christian Political Values* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Dennis J. Dunn, *The Catholic Church and Soviet Russia, 1917-1939* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

religious beliefs and values, the first advocates of a form of globalization—religious globalization.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, however, they developed different political values that offered contrasting, often adversarial, blueprints of development. The Russian model favored absolutism, state control of the economy, and government domination of religion, information, and local government. The Western model preferred democracy and constitutional government, rule of law, private property, separation of church and state, and individual freedom.

From the fifteenth century on and once freed from Mongol domination, Russia, then called Muscovy, pushed Russian values as it worked to expand its influence around the globe. The challenge for the Russians was that the West by then had already taken the leadership role in the rivalry to advance values. Islam had also joined the ranks of proselytizing world religions, and Muslims were fostering Islamic values as the basis for global fellowship and unity. The West, however, was unrelenting. With the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, the Age of Discovery, the Renaissance of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, the West saw its values surpass both Russian and Muslim models and extend around the world. The advance was both the result of the push from Western explorers, missionaries, soldiers, scientists, and entrepreneurs, and of the pull from indigenous elites, who found the Western values hard to resist and moved, willingly or unwillingly, to adapt and integrate their own values with

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<sup>8</sup> There were much older religions and sacred moral traditions, including Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, but none of them, including Buddhism, which was a world religion, was a world religion or moral tradition that sought to convert the world. For a succinct description of the world's only two major proselytizing religions (Christianity and Islam) and their history, see Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Western values for the sake of development and survival. The New World, India, Japan, and other parts of Asia embraced Westernization.<sup>9</sup>

The Russians found that they could use military power to extend their values into neighboring regions and countries, including some bordering Western countries, but overall they could not compete globally with the West. They adjusted by importing some Western technology and weapons to bolster their own defense against Western values and influence. They also developed shrewd diplomacy and statecraft and policies to check the West, including resorting to dissimulation, splitting tactics to divide enemies, taking a cautious initiative in international affairs to challenge the status quo, and hypocrisy.<sup>10</sup> Of course, many states use such tactics and strategies to defend their interests, but the Russians became expert in the use of these tactics. They emerged as master chess players in their determination to stave off Western encroachment.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the West advanced. By the twentieth century, the struggle reached a critical level. Russia went through four revolutions in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The first occurred in 1905 in the midst of the Russo-Japanese War. It nearly toppled the Russian government and elite, but the revolutionaries, who wanted Western values, lacked leadership. The government promised Western values in the

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<sup>9</sup> This thesis does not wade into the scholarly controversies over the definition of Westernization or the benefits and drawbacks of that development. It simply accepts the fact that values associated with the West had emerged in the modern period as the dominant basis for a new world order.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn describes some of these characteristics in his *Political Values*, 181. For solid descriptions of tsarist foreign policy, see Hugh Ragsdale and Valerii Nikolaevich Ponomarev, ed. and trans., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press in association with the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993); on current Russian foreign policy, see Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Russian master chess player, Garry Kasparov, offers a perceptive analysis of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy in *Winter Is Coming* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015).



October Manifesto in 1905, which helped end the threat, but then it quickly moved to curb its promise. Two lessons were clear. The people were ready for change and future war would expose the government to that change.<sup>12</sup>

The second revolution took place in February 1917 when the government collapsed because of its involvement in World War I. The regime that took the place of the tsar was called the Provisional Government and it promised to enact a train of Western values. However, it never really got the opportunity because it failed to withdraw Russia from World War I, which was ruining the country and the people.<sup>13</sup> Its myopia led to the third revolution in October 1917, also called the Bolshevik or Communist Revolution. The soldiers, sailors, and peasants brought down the Provisional Government and put the Communists into power because Lenin, the head of the Communist Party, promised to end Russia's participation in the war. He did and then he quickly set up a secret police force and the Red Army to ensure that he and the Communists stayed in power. The goal of this new Communist elite was not much different than the old tsarist elite. They favored government control of property and society. They also had some other ideological hang-ups that they borrowed from Western intellectuals like Karl Marx, such as a society without religion and organizing people on the basis of economic class. Marx also demanded an end of private property and capitalism and that fit in with the Russian elite view, too. Marx gave the Russian Communists a modern anti-Western ideology that arguably put them as a more advanced

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<sup>12</sup> Dunn, *Catholic Church and Soviet Russia*, 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> See the still valuable book by Oliver H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: The Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950; reissued by Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1989).

society than Western society. It also gave them the self-confidence to try to take down the Western global order and to advance their values, now newly and ironically adorned with the shibboleths of a modern Western ideology.<sup>14</sup>

The Communists, however, ran into trouble with the Russian people. The people wanted private property, freedom of religion, and basic human rights. In the chaos and confusion at the end of World War I and the various revolutions accompanying that event, many peasants had simply taken land that hitherto had been in the hands of the elite. The Communists tried to take the land back in 1921, but quickly retreated when the peasants, sailors, and soldiers rose up against them. The Communists then built up the secret police, eventually called the KGB, and the Red Army. In 1928 they launched the fourth revolution called Collectivization. They used massive force and killing fields to coerce the Russians and associated people who lived in the new Russian state called the Soviet Union to give up their property and freedom and again accept the old values of the Russian elite. The Communists even relented on their campaign against religion once they took control of the Orthodox Church. The Communists informed the people that they now lived in an advanced state, but that they had to bear huge sacrifices in order for Russia to defeat the West and the Western global order.<sup>15</sup>

For almost seventy-five years, Russia and the West stood at odds. They temporarily united against the Axis Powers in World War II, but their fundamental clash

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<sup>14</sup> On the Bolshevik Revolution, see Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); and Shelia Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, updated 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2017).

<sup>15</sup> On Collectivization, see Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Shelia Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

over values brought them back into conflict in the modern postwar period. In the end the result of the Cold War was the same as the rivalry between the West and the tsarist elite. The values of the Russian elite in the twentieth century failed to produce a dynamic, healthy society. The Communists in the end lost the Cold War and the Soviet Union imploded in 1991.

With the fall of the Soviet Empire, many Russians expected to see the growth of Western values in their country. Boris Yeltsin, the first post-Soviet leader, attempted to develop some parts of the Western value system. He faced enormous challenges and proved unable to solve them. The Russian elite looked for an alternative to push its agenda and it found him in the person of Vladimir Putin who was head of the successor of the KGB, the Federal Security Service or FSB.

### 3. VLADIMIR PUTIN

“I was brought up in a very ordinary family, in fact, a worker’s family. Both my father and my mother were ordinary citizens.”<sup>16</sup> This quote is how the most powerful man in Russia, Vladimir Putin, described his family background. Although most of his biography is controversial and some facts are not clear, it is true that Vladimir Putin was from a worker’s family. He was born on October 7, 1952, in Leningrad, which had largely been obliterated during World War II. The siege of Leningrad was one of the most devastating battles during World War II. The Axis Powers besieged Leningrad for almost three years. Food was limited and famine was a frequent visitor. No one who lived in Leningrad, including the Putin family, was unscathed by the war.

Both Putin’s parents survived the war, although Putin’s father was wounded in combat against the German troops and his older brother was killed. The family lived in a communal apartment with other families, where privacy was unknown and survival was a daily struggle. According to journalist Masha Gessen, such apartments were dwellings where “the stairs were crumbling, and the stairwell rarely had a working light-bulb.”<sup>17</sup> The trauma and suffering of living in Leningrad was a constant reality for young Vladimir. It is difficult to say how the cruel and barbarous experience played out in his life, but it is not unreasonable to conclude that it hardened him and made him what the Soviets called a “hooligan,” a street-smart tough who often got into fights.

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<sup>16</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, *First person: an astonishingly frank self-portrait by Russia’s president* (London: Public Affairs/Perseus, 2000), 21.

<sup>17</sup> Masha Gessen, *The man without a face: the unlikely rise of Vladimir Putin* (NY, NY, USA: Riverhead Books, 2014), 46.

There is another dimension to life in Leningrad. It was, after all, the city that Peter the Great built to interact with the West and it was the capital of the Russian Empire, when it was called St. Petersburg. It was often contrasted with Moscow, which was the capital of old Muscovy and closer to Asia. In a sense, citizens of Leningrad were open to contact with the West. Perhaps Putin, who became fluent in German, reflected Russian ambivalence toward the West—admiring it for its technology and science but fearing it for its values.<sup>18</sup>

Putin was eight years old when he entered first grade in School No. 193. There is not much reliable information about his years in elementary school and what is available has been apparently revised to present a picture that Putin wants. In any event, the Putin of these years is depicted as a kind of troublemaker. According to his official biography, he was punished several times because he did not want to wear a red kerchief, which symbolized membership in the Communist youth organization called the Young Pioneers at his school.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Putin wanted to present an image of himself as non-ideological, and, actually, such a depiction was not unreasonable. He did not commit to the Young Pioneers or later the Komsomol, the Communist organization for young adults. He finally joined the Communist Party in 1975 on the eve of his graduation from Leningrad State University. To be sure, Putin was a Russian patriot, but Communist Party membership was attractive to him for career advancement, not a philosophy of life, and the career that attracted him was working for the secret police of the Soviet Empire,

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<sup>18</sup> James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); has written perceptively about Russia's ambivalence to the West and the importance of Moscow and St. Petersburg as both real and metaphorical symbols of that split.

<sup>19</sup> Gessen, *Putin*, 53.

namely the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB). He was a policeman at heart and felt at ease with the use of force and violence to maintain or restore order. He liked, too, that the KGB was an elite force of dedicated comrades and professions on whose shoulders the Soviet imperium rested.<sup>20</sup>

After Putin completed elementary school, he was admitted to High School No. 293. During his high school years, he earned “As” in history, German and gym; “Bs” in geography, literature, and the Russian language; and the equivalent of “Cs” in physics, chemistry, algebra, and geometry.<sup>21</sup> Putin’s aptitude was the humanities and he continued to excel in German, history and gym, which proved to be assets for his future career in the KGB. He also took up judo and earned a black belt. Putin stated later that, “when I was in ninth grade, I was influenced by films and books, and I developed a desire to work for the KGB.”<sup>22</sup>

Putin, as mentioned, attended Leningrad State University and graduated in 1975 with a degree in law. Upon graduation, he was accepted into the KGB and started to study in the 401<sup>st</sup> KGB school in Leningrad. After finishing this training, he was, according to his autobiography, appointed to the “Directorate secretariat, and then counterintelligence division, half a year later he was sent to operations personnel.”<sup>23</sup> All this happened between 1975-1980. The higher rankings officials in the KGB school at Leningrad recommended that Putin be sent to attend the KGB school No.1 in Moscow where he could develop better counterintelligence skills. He was admitted to this elite

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<sup>20</sup> Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: vintage Books, 2016), 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Gessen, *Putin*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Putin, *First person*, 43; Myers, *New Tsar*, 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Putin, *First person*, 73.

institution in 1980. After spending one year in the KGB school No.1 in Moscow, Putin returned to Leningrad. He was given a job in the intelligence unit. Such jobs were full of lower-level operatives who had dreamed of being spies. It was not a desirable assignment for the restless Putin who had been described by his former professors in the KGB as ambitious, energetic, and “with a diminished sense of danger.”<sup>24</sup> By this time, he was married. His wife was Lyudmila Putina, a flight attendant. Her life is largely a closed book, but Putin did state that when they met, it was love at first sight.

Life changed for Putin in 1985, when he was assigned to an intelligence unit in Dresden (East Germany). Most of the job had to do with collecting news printed in the local newspapers in order to create fake news and propaganda to expand support for the USSR among the East Germans. Putin was well paid and lived in a nice apartment with other KGB and Stasi agents (East German secret police), but he found the job boring. He gained weight and slipped into a depression.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, a major transformation was underway in the Soviet Union. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev inherited a stagnant economy with productivity levels far below those of the United States and Western Europe. Gorbachev’s main goals were to improve the economy by instituting liberal reforms (*Perestroika*) and to ease tensions with the West and to democratize the USSR (*Glasnost*). During Gorbachev’s tenure, the USSR slowly started to become more open. Suddenly there were Western films, theater, and exhibitions in the Soviet Union, cultural events that were strictly controlled and even

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<sup>24</sup> Gessen, *Putin*, 78; Fiona Hill and Clifford H. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Gessen, *Putin*, 91.

banned before Gorbachev. Scholars also entered closed Soviet archives to find out about the crimes of the Soviet regime. This new climate of openness was seen by the hard liners in the Communist Party and the KGB as dangerous and reckless.

Before long, the Soviet Empire began to crack. The change that Gorbachev encouraged took on a life of its own. At the end of the 1980s, the Kremlin began to lose control over the Soviet Republics and its East European satellites. Putin had a front row seat in East Germany. The East German government could not control protests in the streets, where people were claiming that they had a right to move to the West. In 1989, Gorbachev turned his back on the East German Government declaring, "Moscow will not interfere in East Germany's problems."<sup>26</sup> Following this statement, in November of 1989, the East German Government declared that the people were free to travel within Berlin. This event marked the beginning of the end of the Berlin Wall.

Vladimir Putin lived through the events of 1989 in a state of shock. He could not believe what was going on. In Dresden, the people were gathering on the streets and others were trying to board trains to travel to the West. People were breaking into the Stasi and the Security Ministry buildings across East Germany. The sensitive information held in those buildings had to be destroyed, including all the information Putin had worked on.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, the government of Gorbachev was teetering. As implied earlier, Gorbachev had created many enemies inside the KGB and the Communist Party. *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* were not welcomed by the hardliners. Furthermore, all

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<sup>26</sup> Serge Schmemmann, "Gorbachev Lends Honecker a Hand," *New York Times*, October 06, 1989, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/07/world/gorbachev-lends-honecker-a-hand.html/>.



Gorbachev's promises about improving the economy fell short. The decade of 1990s started with food rationing. Local governments in the cities had to organize the purchase of food supplies coming from Germany because the Kremlin was paralyzed. The Soviet Republics started to declare their independence from the USSR and again there was no response from the Kremlin, except in Lithuania, where Gorbachev sent tanks to its capital in order to stop the uprising. However, the use of force did not prevent Lithuania's independence. The paralysis led to a coup d'état started by the KGB and hardliners in the Communist Party in August 1991, which failed. Boris Yeltsin, who was the president of the Russian Republic within the USSR, opposed the coup, rallied the army, and saved Gorbachev. Yeltsin, however, did not preserve the Soviet Union. In December 1991, the Soviet Union officially came to an end and Gorbachev resigned. Yeltsin became president of a new Russian Federation and a member of a constellation of some former Soviet republics called the Commonwealth of Independent States. Most former republics of the USSR became independent states. One semiautonomous republic in the Caucasus, Chechnya, that hoped to declare its independence, too, was blocked by Russian forces. Moscow was reeling from the departure of the republics, but it drew the line on semiautonomous regions that lacked republican status.

With the Soviet Union falling apart, Putin came back to Leningrad in 1989. Early in 1990, the city of Leningrad created the post of mayor of the city, which did not exist before. Anatoly Sobchak, who was one of Putin's law professors, was elected mayor. Sobchak was a charismatic man who hoped to transform Leningrad, now called St. Petersburg, into a dynamic city. He named Putin as an advisor in international relations and later, in 1991, appointed him as deputy mayor of international relations. Putin's

initial job was to sign licenses and authorize food imports into the city of St. Petersburg. Putin apparently used the position to take bribes and to curry favor with his former comrades in the KGB and Soviet bureaucracy. After an investigation in 2000 German authorities concluded that KGB officers and other Soviet bureaucrats sent “billions of dollars overseas from Russia to offshore bank accounts” in the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> According to the report, the Russian insiders traded Russian goods in the city of St. Petersburg and other cities for money and they received their trading licenses from Putin, who was paid a hefty fee for his help. Those same Russian “businessmen,” some of whom also had ties to Yeltsin’s regime, eventually became oligarchs in Putin’s orbit and supported his rise to power in Moscow.

During Yeltsin’s tenure as president of the Russian Federation, the economy continued in a downside spiral. In a country where most of the population depended on state financial aid, Yeltsin’s decision to stop state subsidies ended up causing a massive spread of poverty and a general decline in the living standard. In addition, Yeltsin, perhaps because of his alcoholism, began to lose control on the central government. His desire to pursue liberal reforms was exploited by former KGB agents and Soviet bureaucrats who became known as the “Kremlin family.” Their goal was to fleece Russia of its riches and to make public property their private property at hugely

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<sup>27</sup> Thea Cooke, "Has Vladimir Putin Always Been Corrupt? And Does It Matter?" Wilson Center, January 11, 2013, accessed August 17, 2017 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/has-vladimir-putin-always-been-corrupt-and-does-it-matter/>

discounted prices. There were many resources and the state was weak, and Yeltsin either could not control them or acquiesced in their rapacity.<sup>28</sup>

To make matters worse, Yeltsin sent the army to Chechnya in 1994 in order to put down a rebellion and restore Russian rule. Yeltsin proved unable to suppress Chechnya, and the conflict continued through the 1990s.

Yeltsin's ability to rule now became an open question. However, he was reelected in 1996 in large part because Boris Berezovsky, the owner of Channel 1, the most popular television station in Russia, threw his weight behind Yeltsin.<sup>29</sup> Berezovsky was a liberal reformer at heart and thought Yeltsin could still make progressive changes. He apparently decided that Yeltsin needed help and he identified Vladimir Putin, who was out of job after Sobchak was defeated for reelection as mayor of St. Petersburg in 1996, as someone who could help. Berezovsky believed Putin was a pro-market reformer like Sobchak. He stated that Putin was not a charismatic man but was curious, straightforward, and hardworking. They had met each other in the early 1990s, became fast friends, and skied together in Switzerland. Berezovsky persuaded Yeltsin to appoint Putin deputy head of management in the Kremlin in 1998. Putin moved up quickly in the corrupt Yeltsin "Kremlin Family." In 1998, Yeltsin named him director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor of the KGB. As Russia's chief policeman, Putin's

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<sup>28</sup> In his memoirs entitled *Midnight Diaries* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), Yeltsin admits to his problem with alcohol and making mistakes in Chechnya, but he takes no responsibility for the culture of corruption that enveloped his regime in the final years of his presidency.

<sup>29</sup> Luke Harding, "Boris Berezovsky: a tale of revenge, betrayal and feuds with Putin," *The Observer*, March 23, 2013, accessed August 21, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/23/boris-berezovsky-vladimir-putin-feud/>

goal was to reinvigorate the Russian secret police, which had been demoralized after the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>30</sup>

Putin's star continued to rise. On August 9, 1999, Yeltsin appointed him prime minister. One of the main dilemmas that vexed Yeltsin was the continuing Chechnya war, which had reached a tense standoff between Chechen nationals who wanted independence and Russian leaders who desired to halt the hemorrhaging of the Russian imperial lands, particularly in the sensitive oil pipeline region of the Caspian Sea and Caucasus. As prime minister, Putin made Chechnya his issue. He tapped into the strongman tradition that Russians historically favored and immediately threatened Chechens with force. His popularity soared in Russian opinion polls.

In September 1999 massive bombs went off in various Russian apartment complexes, killing 293 people, most of whom were Russian soldiers and their families. The Kremlin blamed the bombings on Chechens, who denied any involvement, and Putin stepped forward with tough and crude rhetoric. "We'll follow terrorists everywhere," he declared. "We'll corner the bandits in the toilet and wipe them out."<sup>31</sup> On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin resigned, making Putin acting president, and ordered an election for a new president within 90 days. The short deadline gave potential candidates hardly anytime to organize a campaign but decidedly favored Putin who had the advantage of being acting president. The major issues were the economy and the war in Chechnya. In his campaign,

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<sup>30</sup> Arkady Ostrovsky, *The invention of Russia: The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News* (New York: Viking, 2017), 99.

<sup>31</sup> David Satter, "The Unsolved Mystery Behind the Act of Terror That Brought Putin to Power," *National Review*, August 17, 2016, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/439060/vladimir-putin-1999-russian-apartment-house-bombings-was-putin-responsible/>

Putin made the war in Chechnya the dominant issue and he promised to use unbridled force until the secessionists were completely obliterated.

To the surprise of no one, Putin won the election on March 28, 2000, and it was clear that the bombings in 1999 and his determination to wipe out Chechen nationalism were critical in his victory. However, there was and is controversy over who was responsible for the apartment bombing in 1999. The Kremlin has maintained that it was the work of secessionists in Chechnya. Others saw the hand of Putin and his supporters in the FSB. In their mind, the bombings were intended to justify an intervention in Chechnya, to demonstrate Putin's strong character and leadership in the fight against terrorism through his forceful response and intervention in Chechnya, and to boost his popularity.<sup>32</sup> One piece of evidence that pointed to the bombing being an inside operation came from Pavel Voloshin, a reporter from *Novaya Gazeta*, who argued that the "perpetrators and *zakazchiki* [those who gave orders] of the terrorist acts can be determined by the provenance of the explosives"...and in Russia all "explosive substances" are "under strict state control" and any attempt "to conceal a supply of hexogen [the explosives used in the bombing] by skirting the existing rules is de facto impossible."<sup>33</sup> Whether the bombing was an inside job or not, there is no doubt that Putin's use of the bombing and his flinty stand against Chechnya were very useful to his election in 2000.

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<sup>32</sup> John B. Dunlop, *The Moscow Bombings of September 1999 Examinations of Russian Terrorist Attacks at the Onset of Vladimir Putin's Rule* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verl., 2014), 43.

<sup>33</sup> David Satter, "The Unsolved Mystery Behind the Act of Terror That Brought Putin to Power."

After his victory, Putin showed his true colors. He was not a liberal or a reformer. He was a fan of the old Russian values of authoritarianism, state control of the economy, the news media, and local government.<sup>34</sup> As for Berezovsky, he was shocked at Putin's authoritarian approach and he fled to London where, like many of Putin's political opponents, he died under suspicious circumstances in 2013. The "Kremlin Family," however, was not surprised. The oligarchs formed a cocoon around Putin. They supported his plan to dramatically increase the power of the Kremlin and he, in turn, backed their desire to maintain ownership of some of Russia's national wealth and resources. However, Putin warned them to behave as businessmen and to restrain their greed. He clearly wanted to rebuild the power of the state and that entailed increasing the economic power of the central government, particularly in the oil and gas fields. Under Putin, the Russian government expropriated the property of any oligarch who criticized the regime. Some oligarchs were quickly removed, but many survived, and they and their families remain Putin's first line of support. Putin pulled their political teeth, but allowed them to keep their wealth provided they gave him absolute loyalty.<sup>35</sup>

In 2004, Putin was reelected as Russian President. In December 2004, he had to confront the crisis of Beslan. It was a school terrorist attack where schoolteachers and students, most of them kids, were taken as hostages. The group, which apparently conducted the terrorist attack was a Chechen radical cell. The Kremlin's response to the hostages' crisis was unrestrained force. On September 3, forty-eight hours after the crisis began, Russian special forces invaded the building, leaving 330 casualties. Most of the

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<sup>34</sup> Anne Garrels, *Putin Country: A Journey into the Real Russia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 35, 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> On the oligarchs, see David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia*, new and rev. ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

casualties were children. The Kremlin was strongly criticized for its action. Putin dismissed the criticism and used the crisis to centralize power. He slashed the number of local independent organizations that had developed during the decade of the 1990s and ended the popular election of governors and independent lawmakers.<sup>36</sup> He also largely gutted independent news sources and then nationalized the media. There was no longer a free and independent press in Russia. The Russian parliament called the *Duma* became a rubberstamp for Putin's policies. Elections were still held, but they were largely farces. The experiment of democracy in Russia was over. Putin gave the following explanation for the expansion of state power:

In the fight against manifestations of terror we have practically failed to achieve visible results. We failed to achieve visible results above all in liquidating its sources. Under current conditions, the system of executive power in the country should not just be adapted to operating in crisis situations, but should be radically restructured in order to strengthen the unity of the country and prevent further crises.<sup>37</sup>

In 2008 the Constitution prevented Putin for running for president for another term, so he had his protégé, Dmitry Medvedev, run for president and name him prime minister. In 2012, he ran for president again and won, and has now indicated that he will have the constitution changed so that he can run once more in 2018.

With Putin's consolidation of power and with the return of traditional Russian values, Putin was ready to confront the West. His problem was that Russia was relatively weak. It had a smaller population and land base than that of the USSR. It also had lost its sphere of influence and satellites in Eastern Europe, and its economy was depressed,

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Baker, "Putin Moves to Centralize Authority," *Washington Post*, September 14, 2004, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17838-2004Sep13.html/>

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, "Address by President Vladimir Putin," Kremlin, September 4, 2004, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22589/>

particularly after the price of oil and natural gas fell during the great recession of 2008-10. Nonetheless, Putin's Russia had some arrows in its quiver. It was a nuclear power. It also had gas and oil reserves upon which its neighbors, including those in Europe, depended so those exports could be wielded to advance Russian interests.<sup>38</sup> It additionally had a patriotic population, a reviving secret police force, and a decent army that was dispirited but could be revived with investment and morale boosting.

Still, that was not enough. Putin needed additional assets. He fell back on some true and tried Russian foreign policy traits, namely the use of propaganda to change the global narrative, the craft of dissimulation to trick enemies into thinking Russia was stronger than it was, the skill of splintering allies through the exploitation of divisive issues, the art of espionage, the tactic of exploiting the openness of Western societies, and the knack of shrewd diplomacy. But to maximize these strengths and to gain additional leverage, he decided he needed something else. He turned to the Internet and cyber warfare. Russia became a leading expert in the use of informational technology, and his government used this ability to attack the West through its elections in 2016-17.

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<sup>38</sup> Adam Withnall, "Putin's gas threat: What happens if Russia cuts the gas to Europe?" *The Independent*, February 27, 2015, accessed November 07, 2017 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putins-gas-threat-what-happens-if-russia-cuts-the-gas-to-europe-10074294.html/>



#### **4. RUSSIA MEDDLING AND BREXIT**

The creation of the European Union (EU) in the twentieth century was a watershed event in the history of the world and the growth of Western values. Its initial impetus came from the postwar Christian Democratic political parties; such luminaries as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, and Konrad Adenauer; and the United States and its allies. The existence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was set up in 1949, was a similarly extraordinary undertaking and it provided the essential security for the EU to emerge, grow, and change the geopolitical history of Europe from one of conflict and balance of power to continent-wide peace, prosperity, and governance.

The history of the EU began in 1951 when France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Italy, and Luxemburg agreed to the Treaty of Paris that set up the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that placed their steel and coal industries under their joint management. In 1957, these six nations signed the Treaty of Rome that extended their economic cooperation by creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Commission. In 1967 they folded their various organizations into the European Community (EC). In 1973 the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark became members of the EC. Six years later a European parliament in Brussels was established and representatives were elected by citizens of the member nations. In 1981, Greece became a member and Spain and Portugal joined in 1986 when all members agreed to set up the EU that would replace the EC. In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht officially established the EU. At about the same time, the EU permitted the

unimpeded movement of goods, services, and member citizens across borders. This was formalized into what became known as the Schengen agreements.<sup>39</sup> The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland were not Schengen countries in that they still had some border controls, but they effectively acted like they were in that they agreed to allow EU citizens to work in their countries without visas.<sup>40</sup> As the EU grew, NATO also expanded on a parallel path. Europe was an amazing area of creativity, entrepreneurship, peace, and economic power.

With the collapse of the Soviet Empire and Yugoslavia, many former Communist states raced to join the EU. In 2004 the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia adhered. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became members, followed by Croatia in 2013. As of 2018, there were 28 states in the EU and there is a waiting list of countries wishing to join. In the first decade of the twenty-first century both Georgia and Ukraine, which the Russians considered within their sphere of influence, indicated a desire to move into the EU.

The Russian government under Vladimir Putin viewed the EU and the simultaneous expansion of NATO as dire threats to Russia and its influence. In 2007, at a security conference in Munich, Putin derided democracy and denounced the EU, NATO, and the United States. With raw bitterness, he chided the West, “Russia — we are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason, those who teach us do not want to learn themselves.” Vladimir Putin pleaded for a “dialogue between

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<sup>39</sup> Schengen Visa info, “Schengen Agreement,” January 29, 2014, accessed November 07, 2017 <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/schengen-agreement/>

<sup>40</sup> Government Digital Service, “Visa- Free access to EU Schengen area,” Foreign and Commonwealth office, June 23 2014, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/visa-free-access-to-eu-schengen-area/>

civilizations” and an end of “double standards” where the United States had defined democracy as establishing a “unipolar world.” He went on to criticize the West for its limited vision of democracy and condemned the United States for its use of military force “that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.”<sup>41</sup> He was referring to U.S. intervention in the Balkans, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and the Middle East in general.

When Georgia showed an interest in the EU in 2008 Russia invaded the Georgian territory of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, displaced 30,000 Georgians, and kept Russian troops there to this day. The Russian government recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in August 2008.<sup>42</sup>

When Ukraine indicated that it planned to engage more than it had with Europe and to apply for EU membership and possibly join NATO, Putin had the Russian army invade and annex Ukraine’s Crimea in 2014, where a quick vote by the citizens was arranged under occupation to approve the annexation. He then instigated a civil war in the eastern region of Ukraine that borders Russia where fighting continues to this day. In March 2014, Putin blamed the West for his attack on Ukraine:

Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. These are things that could have become a reality were it not for the choice the Crimean people made, and I want to say thank you to them for this. But let me say too that we are not opposed

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<sup>41</sup>Vladimir Putin “Transcript of Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Conference on Security Policy,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 2015, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>

<sup>42</sup> Dimitri Medvedev, “Russian Presidential Decree No.1261 about the recognition of the Republic of South Ossetia” Cis Legislation, August 26, 2008, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=24165/>

to cooperation with NATO, for this is certainly not the case. For all the internal processes within the organization, NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way around.<sup>43</sup>

Putin then went on to excoriate Western Europe and the United States for believing “in their exclusivity and exceptionalism” and driving a Western agenda across the globe that was “aimed against Ukraine and Russia.”<sup>44</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church approved of the attack and declared, “the Russian people are a divided nation on their historic territory that have a right to be united in one state body.”<sup>45</sup>

The West rejected Putin’s defense of Russian aggression and punished the Kremlin for its attack against Ukraine by imposing a host of stringent economic sanctions on Russia. These were in addition to the US Magnitsky Act of 2012, which had put sanctions on certain Russian oligarchs who were directly responsible for murdering a leading political critic of Putin, Sergei Magnitsky.<sup>46</sup>

Putin also sent Russian forces into Syria in 2015 to shore up support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad who was engulfed in a popular rebellion against his

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<sup>43</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," The Kremlin, March 18, 2014, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603/>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Also see Garrels, *Putin Country*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> V. Klymenko, ed, *Ukraine—2014, socio-political conflict and the church. Positions of religious figures, experts and citizens* (Kyiv: Razumkov Centre and Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development), accessed January 31, 2018 [http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/1403784774\\_file.pdf/](http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/1403784774_file.pdf/). Also see Garrels, *Putin Country*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> U. S. Congress, “Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012,” 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., January 3, 2012, H. R. 6156, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr6156enr/pdf/BILLS-112hr6156enr.pdf>

dictatorship. The Russians were careful and waited until the United States indicated that it would not directly intervene, but they then did take the initiative.<sup>47</sup> Their presence, particularly their indiscriminate bombing of rebel enclaves that the US and Europe were supporting, sent millions of Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe. The Syrians became part of a flood of refugees into Europe from Iraq and Afghanistan who were running away from war and violence that resulted from the terrorism of such Islamic extremists like ISIS and the Taliban and Western and Muslim efforts to defeat the extremists.

Putin was increasingly alert to other soft power ways to weaken and divide the West. He found that the Western tradition of holding democratic elections that were open and free could be influenced by the Russian state through the use of the Internet, new social media, and hacking all made possible by sophisticated informational technology. Moscow apparently did not know whether such activities, which I henceforth call “info war” would be effective, but it was a way at least to have Russia’s voice be heard and to publicize an alternative narrative to a Western “unipolar” world. The campaign was supplemented by disinformation, propaganda, funding of extremist political parties, espionage, hyping of divisive issues and politicians, leaked information, religious broadcasts, and other traditional ways of affecting public opinion. Russia’s skill and knowledge on how to exploit informational technology was perhaps given a boost when Putin extended in 2013 asylum to Edward Snowden, who was an international fugitive wanted on espionage charges in the United States for stealing and publishing secret documents that exposed American spies. It was further augmented when Moscow manipulated or forged a working tie, sometime before the American election in 2016,

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<sup>47</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *What Is Russia Up To in the Middle East?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017) 1-6.

with Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, to have Wikileaks, which had the reputation of favoring liberal democracy, serve as an apparently neutral leaker of divisive information that had been stolen by Russian hackers.<sup>48</sup> Julian Assange denied having any tie to Russia.

An analysis of Moscow's "info war" policy revealed that the Russians mainly stressed eight subjects that were already dividing and enflaming Western public opinion: immigrants and refugees, traditional morality, LGBT rights, Islam, race, globalization, nationalism, and American leadership. It is impossible to prove at this point that the Russian interference caused Americans and Europeans to vote against their previously held belief, turned out or suppressed voters in disproportionate numbers, or created some new way of looking at issues. Nonetheless, the Russian action was remarkable for its skill in exploiting weaknesses in Western communication technology and the knowledge base of Western voters and in understanding divisive domestic issues in the West.

The Brexit referendum of June 23, 2016, was an unexpected development for Putin and thus the Kremlin's effort to affect the vote was preliminary and tentative, more or less an unrehearsed testing of the "info war" strategy. Brexit was a surprise to the Russians because it was a shock to the British and the rest of the world. Some British citizens and political leaders were quite unhappy about the fact that EU membership basically meant that the UK had to cede some sovereign authority to Brussels and that the UK was losing control over its immigration policy, a particularly sensitive issue because of the mainly Muslim Iraqi and Syrian refugees flooding into Europe and the ongoing

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<sup>48</sup> Sue Halperin, "The Nihilism of Julian Assange," *New York Review of Books*, July 13, 2017, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/07/13/nihilism-of-julian-assange-wikileaks/>

danger of Islamic terrorists slipping through to the UK. Of course, the UK benefitted enormously from EU membership. David Cameron, the prime minister, decided to put the complaints to a national referendum that would ask the British, Scots, Welsh, and Northern Irish if they wanted to exit (Brexit) or remain in the EU. Cameron and most observers thought the vote would go in favor of remaining, but the very fact that there was a vote created an opportunity for the Kremlin to try to push the UK toward departing the EU, which would be a body blow to the EU and perhaps, unwittingly, to NATO.

The British Government and Parliament sanctioned the referendum after negotiations to limit the movement of EU citizens into the United Kingdom failed. In the referendum, the key players were the Conservative Party, the Labor Party, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). The Conservative Party was split between members who wanted to remain in the EU and those who did not. The Labor Party was committed to remaining in the EU. The UKIP was in favor of leaving the EU. UKIP was led by Nigel Farage who had for years pushed an anti-European Union, anti-immigration, and narrow nationalist position. He declared that, “The EU has failed us all. We must break free of the EU and take control of our borders.”<sup>49</sup> He also stated unabashedly in 2014 that Putin was a leader that he admired.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Matt Dathan Political Correspondent for MailOnline, "Nigel Farage in racism storm over Brexit poster showing thousands of male refugees and warning country is at 'breaking point'," *Daily Mail Online*, June 16, 2016, accessed November 05, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3644716/Nigel-Farage-racism-storm-Brexit-poster-showing-thousands-male-refugees-warning-country-breaking-point.html/>

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, “UK anti-EU party head admires Putin for ‘brilliant’ Syria Policy,” Reuters, March 31, 2014, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFBREA2U0R920140331/>

The Brexit referendum gave a victory to the leave position by a margin of 51.89% to 48.11% of the total votes. It sent shockwaves across the United Kingdom, Europe, and the world. Domestically, there were deep divisions and remorse. Scotland and Northern Ireland had voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and the result led Scotland to push for its own referendum to leave the UK and become a sovereign country that could then join the EU. Internationally, there was dismay in EU capitals, Tokyo, and Washington DC, but jubilation in Moscow.<sup>51</sup> After the referendum, Cameron resigned because he was part of the members in the Conservative Party who voted for remaining in the EU. Theresa May was elected prime minister. She opened negotiations with the EU over British separation. However, the talks have not yet achieved a settlement and there seems to be a modicum of regret and doubt in the UK over the result.

The evidence linking the Kremlin to the Brexit vote was circumstantial. There was ample evidence of Russian support for rightwing politicians and political movements across Europe, including those in the UK on the eve of the Brexit vote.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Russian news media published pro-Brexit information. *Sputnik*, for example, published an English-language article in the UK entitled “Another reason for BREXIT: EU was a CIA Project from the Beginning.”<sup>53</sup> It essentially argued that “the CIA essentially treated

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<sup>51</sup>Maxim Trudolyubov, “We Are Right, You Are Wrong: Russia’s Response to Brexit,” Wilson Center, June 29, 2016, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/we-are-right-you-are-wrong-russias-response-to-brexit/>

<sup>52</sup> Peter Foster and Matthew Holehouse, “Russia accused of clandestine funding European parties as US conducts major review of Vladimir Putin’s strategy,” *The Telegraph*, January 16, 2016, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/12103602/America-to-investigate-Russian-meddling-in-EU.html/>

<sup>53</sup> Lee Stranahan, “Another Reason for Brexit: EU was a CIA project from the beginning,” *Sputnik*, May 1, 2016, accessed November 5, 2017,



some of the EU's founding fathers as hired hands, and even actively prevented them from finding alternative funding that would have broken the reliance on Washington."<sup>54</sup> This assertion was fatuous but people ignorant of history could have been swayed to vote for Brexit as a way to defy American involvement in Europe. Another story on RT News entitled "Propaganda techniques nudging UK to remain in Europe" accused the European Union of manipulation of facts and brainwashing British citizens to persuade them to vote against Brexit.<sup>55</sup>

Media and low-level government spokesmen in Russia carefully pushed for Brexit and argued that the British are a proud and independent people who will make up their own minds.<sup>56</sup> Russian news media also featured in its coverage pro-Brexit Nigel Farage and his anti-EU and anti-immigrant positions. After Brexit, Farage continued to appear on RT News programs to trumpet Brexit, and apparently he was paid for his appearances. He also became a consultant to the Trump campaign and became a subject of investigation by the American government as a "person of interest" in the Trump-Russia investigation.<sup>57</sup>

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<https://sputniknews.com/europe/201605011038913349-brexit-european-union-cia-project-analysis/>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Sam Gerrans, "Propaganda techniques nudging UK to remain in Europe," RT International, May 22, 2016, accessed November 6, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/344004-propaganda-techniques-uk-brexit/>

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, "EU referendum: is Putting betting on a Brexit?" BBC, June 14, 2016, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-36523251/eu-referendum-is-putin-betting-on-a-brexit/>

<sup>57</sup> Stephanie Kirchgaessner, Nick Hopkins, and Luke Harding, "Nigel Farage is 'person of interest' in FBI investigation into Trump and Russia," *The Guardian*, June 02, 2017, accessed November 06, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/01/nigel-farage-is-person-of-interest-in-fbi-investigation-into-trump-and-russia/>

The Russian ambassador to the UK also met three months before Brexit with Aaron Banks, the British insurance tycoon, who financed the Brexit campaign, and he is now under investigation by the US and British authorities over the source of his donations to the BREXIT campaign.<sup>58</sup>

In 2017, it also became clear that the Kremlin used bots on social media to push the Brexit vote and purchased ads on Facebook and Twitter to advocate for Brexit and attack the EU.<sup>59</sup> In April 2017, the public administration and constitutional affairs committee (PACAC) in the House of Commons led by the former Labor minister, Ben Bradshaw, published a report in which it cautiously concluded that it was very likely that Russia and China had interfered in the British referendum. The report specifically singled out a cyberattack that collapsed the British government's voter registration website just 100 minutes before the deadline to register to vote.<sup>60</sup> The government solved the issue at the time by extending the registration deadline until it was fixed.

In November 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May showed no such caution and in a speech before business leaders in London announced that the Kremlin had indisputably interfered in the referendum vote. She declared that Vladimir Putin's government was trying to "undermine free societies" and was "planting fake stories" to "sow discord in the West" by "weaponizing information" and "deploying its state-run media organizations to

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<sup>58</sup> Caroline Wheeler, "Leave campaign funder Arron Banks to testify on 'Russia ties' to Brexit and Donald Trump," *The Times & The Sunday Times*, July 30, 2017, accessed November 06, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/leave-campaign-funder-arron-banks-to-testify-on-russia-ties-to-brexit-and-donald-trump-9dmsbqp3v/>

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey Smith, "Russia Used Twitter Bots to Influence the Brexit Vote Too," *Fortune*, November 15, 2017, accessed February 5, 2018 <http://fortune.com/2017/11/15/russia-twitter-bots-influence-brexit/>

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Hincks, "Brexit Cyber Attack: Report Points to Foreign Interference," *Time*, April 1, 2017, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://time.com/4735665/brexit-vote-foreign-cyber-attack/>

plant fake stories.” She continued, “So I have a very simple message for Russia. We know what you are doing. And you will not succeed.” She added, “The U.K. will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and work with our allies to do likewise.”<sup>61</sup> No one knows if Brexit would have succeeded without the Russians or with British voters’ awareness of Russian involvement, but it was now clear that the British government was concerned that its democratic procedures were vulnerable.

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<sup>61</sup> Theresa May, Gov. UK, “PM Speech to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet 2017,” Prime Minister’s Office, November 13, 2017, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-to-the-lord-mayors-banquet-2017>

## 5. RUSSIA MEDDLING AND THE UNITED STATES

The Brexit result undoubtedly encouraged the Russian government to try to influence the American presidential election on November 9, 2016. For Putin, this would be the coup de grace. The United States was the most powerful country in the world, the principal foe of Russia's ambitions, and the lynchpin behind the EU, NATO, and the entire global system of law, order, and stability. The candidates were Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton. Trump was the ideal Kremlin man—a populist, anti-globalist, strident nationalist, isolationist, and proponent of immigration based upon religion, race, and education. He also dabbled in bigoted and anti-Islamic rhetoric, had virtually no experience in government or foreign affairs, and was suspicious of experienced government bureaucrats, particularly in the State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the other national security agencies. He was also bigger than life, a television celebrity, and a man with an ego that was easily bruised and an angry temper that led him to say outrageous things and tell falsehoods to rebut criticism and media questions. He also liked Putin and Russia, and Putin praised him, stating in 2015 that, "he's a really brilliant and talented person without any doubt."<sup>62</sup> No one knows why Trump had such a propensity—some say it is because he favored authoritarian approach to government, others argued that the Russians have something on him, either he or his companies owed them huge amounts of money, he was laundering

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<sup>62</sup> Neetzan Zimmerman, "Putin praises Trump: He's a really brilliant and talented person," *The Hill*, December 17, 2015, accessed November 15, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/263555-putin-praises-trump-hes-a-really-brilliant-and-talented-person/>

the dirty money of Putin and the oligarchs, or he was compromised by tapes or crimes, perhaps something that he did when he was in Moscow to chair the Miss Universe contest in 2013.<sup>63</sup> A paper called the Steele Dossier appeared in June or July 2016. It was largely the work of former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele, who had a contract from GPS Fusion owner Glenn Simpson to collect information on Trump. It indicated that the Kremlin had compromising information on Trump.<sup>64</sup>

Clinton, on the other hand, was the ultimate policy wonk who stood for American leadership of the Western world order and believed Putin was a dictator and enemy of the United States.<sup>65</sup> If president, she would likely box Russia into a corner and push to have the Russian people be free and independent of their self-serving political elite. She was a serious person who was reserved, thoughtful, and tactful. She was also very careful, had a difficult time connecting to people, and seemed to carry herself with a certain air of

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<sup>63</sup> See Luke Harding's *Collusion: Secret Meetings, Dirty Money, and How Russia Helped Donald Trump Win* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 8-10, 13-14, 251-331. ; David Corn, "A Veteran Spy Has Given the FBI Information Alleging a Russian Operation to Cultivate Donald Trump," *Mother Jones*, October 31, 2016, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/veteran-spy-gave-fbi-info-alleging-russian-operation-cultivate-donald-trump/>; Michael Isikoff, "U.S. Intl Officials Probe Ties Between Trump Adviser and Kremlin," *Yahoo News*, September 23, 2016, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/u-s-intel-officials-probe-ties-between-trump-adviser-and-kremlin-175046002.html/>

<sup>64</sup> Tim Mak, "Fusion GPS Founder's Senate Judiciary Testimony Released," National Public Radio, January 9, 2018, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/09/576789880/author-of-russia-dossier-worried-trump-was-being-blackmailed>. The reputed source of Steele's information was Oleg Erovinkin, a former general in the KGB and its successor FSB. He was found dead in Moscow in January 2017 under suspicious circumstances. Robert Mendick, "Mystery death of ex-KGB chief linked to MI6 spy's dossier on Donald Trump," *The Telegraph*, January 27, 2017, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/27/mystery-death-ex-kgb-chief-linked-mi6-spys-dossier-donald-trump/>

<sup>65</sup> Hillary R. Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 233-34, 326-46, 350-65, 369-407.

entitlement.<sup>66</sup> In many ways, she was the opposite of the flamboyant and boastful Donald Trump. Russian news media like RT News and *Sputnik* published articles throughout her primary battles that blamed her for the chaos in Libya.<sup>67</sup>

The problem of the Kremlin was that Trump had to beat sixteen Republican candidates to match up against Hilary. That turned out to be easier than anyone thought. He simply used personal attacks on his opponents. It was so unexpected and brash that it became popular. People would tune in to find out what outrageous insult he would hurl at the respected and uptight Republican establishment. He soon had a populist following that included a significant segment of the population that felt left out of the global economy or alienated from the pace of change in the United States. Some thought his business background might help with jobs and the economy. Others liked his polarizing rants and his attacks upon the media, which he called “fake news” if it criticized him or failed to praise him. Nonetheless, there was evidence that the Russians weighed in to help undermine Trump’s Republican opponents. The case of Marco Rubio serves an example. Rubio, in an appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee investigating Russian meddling, argued that his campaign suffered several Russian attempts of hacking. On March 30, 2017, he testified that,

Former members of my presidential campaign team who had access to the internal information of my presidential campaign were targeted by IP addresses with an unknown location within Russia... That effort was unsuccessful. I would also inform the Committee within the last 24 hours, at 10:45 a.m. yesterday, a second

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Conrad, “*What Happened* by Hilary Rodham Clinton Review—No Twinge of Remorse,” *The Guardian*, September 18, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/18/what-happened-hillary-rodham-clinton-review#img-1/>

<sup>67</sup> Sam Gerrans, “Role of Hillary Clinton in Libya war exposed,” *RT International*, March 3, 2016, accessed November 19, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/usa/334400-hillary-clinton-libya-role/>

attempt was made, again, against former members of my presidential campaign team who had access to our internal information-again targeted from an IP address from an unknown location in Russia. And that effort was also unsuccessful.<sup>68</sup>

Besides Rubio's experience, the U. S. Department of Justice provided evidence that the Russians attacked Trump's Republican rivals.<sup>69</sup>

Once Trump secured the nomination of the Republican Party, the Russian effort to help him win the presidential election moved into high gear. The details of that operation are not yet entirely public, but both the Obama administration and all seventeen U.S. government security and intelligence agencies unanimously concluded that the Russians meddled in the election.<sup>70</sup> The narrative below simply describes in rough chronological order the public actions, known events, people, or published documents related to the Russian interference by agencies of the U.S. government, Congressional investigations or hearings, or the free press and news media. Reports generally agree that cyber experts or contractors in the employ of the Kremlin hacked the private emails in July 2016 of the Democratic National Committee and John Podesta, Clinton's campaign chairman. The emails were then leaked by Wikileaks and a Russian group called "Guccifer 2.0." The information indicated that Hilary Clinton was the preferred candidate of the DNC, which was supposed to be neutral and fair, during the Democratic

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<sup>68</sup> Intelligence Committee, "Hearings," [U.S. Senate, March 31, 2017, accessed November 19, 2017, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearing-intelligence-matters-1/>]; Emmarie Huetteman, "Marco Rubio Says His Campaign Was a Target of Russian Cyberattacks," *New York Times*. March 30, 2017, accessed November 19, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/us/politics/marco-rubio-russian-cyberattacks.html>

<sup>69</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency et al*, February 16, 2018, accessed February 18, 2018, [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.; Anonymous, "List of unclassified Documents related to Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election," *Washington Post*, accessed February 1, 2018 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/world/read-documents-related-to-russian-meddling-in-the-2016-us-presidential-election/2221/>

primaries when she was challenged by Senator Bernie Sanders. The revelations divided the Democratic Party and forced Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, to resign.<sup>71</sup> The leaked emails also linked Clinton to major donors who sought favors for their contributions and described Clinton's campaign strategy.<sup>72</sup> On October 7, 2016, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in cooperation with the National intelligence agency reported that, "The Russian government directed the recent compromises of e-mails from U.S. persons and institutions, including from U.S. political organizations... These thefts and disclosures are intended to interfere with the U.S. election process."<sup>73</sup> On February 16, 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice released a detailed blueprint of the way the Russian government used social media and unwitting Trump campaign personnel to damage Clinton, boost Bernie Sanders, and exult Trump. The report showed that the Russians sought to turn Americans against one another over

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<sup>71</sup> Michael D. Shear and Matthew Rosenberg, "Released Emails Suggest the D.N.C. Derided the Sanders Campaign," *New York Times*, July 22, 2016, accessed November 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/us/politics/dnc-emails-sanders-clinton.html/>; Anne Gearan, Philip Rucker, and Abby Phillip, "DNC chairwoman will resign in aftermath of committee email controversy," *Washington Post*, July 24, 2016, accessed November 19, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hacked-emails-cast-doubt-on-hopes-for-party-unity-at-democratic-convention/2016/07/24/a446c260-51a9-11e6-b7de-dfe509430c39\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.13ffbe7ddf6b/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hacked-emails-cast-doubt-on-hopes-for-party-unity-at-democratic-convention/2016/07/24/a446c260-51a9-11e6-b7de-dfe509430c39_story.html?utm_term=.13ffbe7ddf6b/)

<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Confessore And Steve Eder, "In Hacked D.N.C. Emails, a Glimpse of How Big Money Works," *New York Times*, July 25, 2016, accessed November 19, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/us/politics/dnc-wikileaks-emails-fundraising.html/>

<sup>73</sup> Ellen Nakashima, "U.S. government officially accuses Russia of hacking campaign to interfere with elections," *Washington Post*, October 07, 2016, accessed November 19, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-government-officially-accuses-russia-of-hacking-campaign-to-influence-elections/2016/10/07/4e0b9654-8cbf-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.de157e894ee2/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-government-officially-accuses-russia-of-hacking-campaign-to-influence-elections/2016/10/07/4e0b9654-8cbf-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66_story.html?utm_term=.de157e894ee2/). The hacker, whether he was Russian or not, was employed by the Russian government.



divisive social issues with the intent of suppressing voters for Clinton and increasing voters for Trump.<sup>74</sup>

Later it was reported that Dutch domestic intelligence AIVD had penetrated as early as 2014 the Russian operation called Cozy Bear that targeted the U.S. government and the political campaigns of the Democratic and Republican Parties over the period from 2014 to 2016 and had incontrovertible evidence, including video, of Russian hackers at work. The Dutch shared their information with the U.S. government in 2016, which helped explain why the Obama administration spoke with such certainty about Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>75</sup> US intelligence agencies eventually reported that the Russian hackers used different names and aliases, including *APT 28*, *APT 29*, *Cozy Bear*, *Dragonfly*, *Eviltoss*, *Energic Bear*, *Fancy Bear*, *Operation Pawn Storm*, *Sand Worm*, *Skipper*, *Sourface*, and many more. In addition, they stressed the attacks were sophisticated and used phishing technology that normally indicated state sponsorship.<sup>76</sup>

The Russians also attempted to hack and manipulate election servers in twenty-one states, including Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma,

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<sup>74</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency et alii*, February 16, 2018, accessed February 19, 2018, [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

<sup>75</sup> Rick Noack, “The Dutch were a secret U.S. ally in the war against Russian hackers, local media reveal,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 2018, accessed February 1, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/26/dutch-media-reveal-country-to-be-secret-u-s-ally-in-war-against-russian-hackers/?utm\\_term=.9fdb4f46e2b7/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/26/dutch-media-reveal-country-to-be-secret-u-s-ally-in-war-against-russian-hackers/?utm_term=.9fdb4f46e2b7/)

<sup>76</sup> NCCIC and FBI, “Russian Malicious Cyber Activity,” United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team, December 29, 2016, accessed February 1, 2018, [https://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/JAR\\_16-20296A\\_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf/](https://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/JAR_16-20296A_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf/)

Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.<sup>77</sup> Those attempts failed, but the Department of Homeland Security announced on February 7, 2018, that the Russians successfully penetrated the voter registration systems of several states where in theory they could remove voters from the rolls.<sup>78</sup> Jeh Johnson, who was DHS Secretary during the election, told NBC News that “2016 was a wake-up call and now it's incumbent upon states and the Feds to do something about it before our democracy is attacked again.”<sup>79</sup>

U.S. intelligence and Western news reporters also concurred that the Russian government planned and orchestrated a systemic and massive social media campaign to divide U.S. citizens. A Russian organization called the Internet Research Agency and other Russian-affiliated agents purchased inflammatory ads and built fake Facebook groups to stoke social unrest and division that energized Trump's base and campaign. The Internet Research Agency's activities, according to the Department of Justice, were manned by eighty Russian nationals, headquartered in one building in St. Petersburg, largely funded by money to the tune of some fifty million dollars annually by the companies of Yevgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin, who was called “Putin's chef” because he

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<sup>77</sup> Sari Horwitz, Ellen Nakashima, and Matea Gold, "DHS tells states about Russian hacking during 2016 election," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-tells-states-about-russian-hacking-during-2016-election/2017/09/22/fd263a2c-9fe2-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.6154990dbb74/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-tells-states-about-russian-hacking-during-2016-election/2017/09/22/fd263a2c-9fe2-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e_story.html?utm_term=.6154990dbb74/)

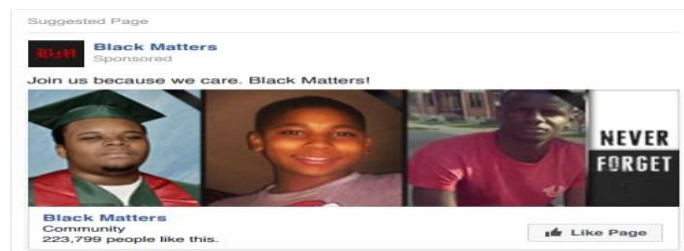
<sup>78</sup> Sari Horwitz, Ellen Nakashima, and Matea Gold, "DHS tells states about Russian hacking during 2016 election," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-tells-states-about-russian-hacking-during-2016-election/2017/09/22/fd263a2c-9fe2-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.6154990dbb74/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-tells-states-about-russian-hacking-during-2016-election/2017/09/22/fd263a2c-9fe2-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e_story.html?utm_term=.6154990dbb74/)

<sup>79</sup> Cynthia Mcffaden, “Russians penetrated U.S. voter systems, top U.S. official says,” NBC News, February 8, 2018, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/russians-penetrated-u-s-voter-systems-says-top-u-s-n845721>.

served at his restaurants and elsewhere what Putin wanted. The main social media platform that the Russians used was Facebook and its photo-sharing site called Instagram where they built fake groups called the “Army of Jesus,” “Blacktivist,” “Secured Borders,” “South United,” “Heart of Texas, and “United Muslims of America.” They also invented false U. S. persons and took over the identities of real Americans and used the deception and the manufactured group sites to create virtual online networks and attracted hundreds of thousands of followers, many in carefully targeted so-called “purple states,” who were manipulated and unaware of the Russian involvement.<sup>80</sup> They often called for rallies and were a principal vehicle for inviting thousands of unsuspecting Americans to Trump’s rallies.<sup>81</sup>

Examples of ads and groups exploiting the Black Lives Matter Movement, immigration from Mexico and Central America, and suspicion of Muslims are reproduced below.

Illustration 1: Black Matters Facebook ad.<sup>82</sup>



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<sup>80</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency et alii*, February 16, 2018, accessed February 19, 2018, [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; Deirdra O'Regan and Joyce Koh, "Analysis | How Russian Facebook ads used race and religion to inflame divisions," *Washington Post*, November 03, 2017, accessed November 26, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/11/03/how-russian-facebook-ads-used-race-and-religion-to-inflame-divisions/?utm\\_term=.fc5bc97393c6/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/11/03/how-russian-facebook-ads-used-race-and-religion-to-inflame-divisions/?utm_term=.fc5bc97393c6/)

This ad was posted on Facebook in July 2015. The individuals in the pictures were Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Freddie Gray. All of them were shot by the police. The ad targeted users in cities with large African-American populations where racial tension and protests against police violence were high, implied that Hillary approved of the killings, and referred to her as “Killary.”

Illustration 2: Immigration issue Facebook ad.<sup>83</sup>



This ad was posted on Facebook in September 2016. It reproduced the divisive language that Trump used during his campaign, accused Hillary and Obama of promising amnesty and citizenship to illegal immigrants, and argued that only Trump’s policies would make the United States safe and secure from criminal, rapists, and murderers.

Illustration 3: United Muslims of America Facebook ad.<sup>84</sup>



<sup>83</sup> [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#); O'Regan and Joyce Koh, "Analysis."

<sup>84</sup> [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#); O'Regan and Joyce Koh, "Analysis."

This ad called “United Muslim of America” linked Hilary to Muslims and promoted Trump’s openly anti-Muslim position. The grammatical errors were a sign that it was done quickly and was perhaps the work of a non-English speaker.

The false and incendiary charges were repeated and then tweeted and retweeted to make an impact. Members of the Trump organization unwittingly repeated and then amplified the lies and disinformation about Clinton.<sup>85</sup>

In early September 2017, Facebook found that there were “more than 3,000 ads addressing social and political issues that ran in the US between 2015 and 2017 and that appear to have come from accounts associated with a Russian entity known as the Internet Research Agency.”<sup>86</sup> On September 21, 2017, Facebook announced full cooperation with the Intelligence committees in the Senate and House of Representatives regarding Russian-linked ads before, during, and after the Presidential campaign.

In addition, Russian-affiliated operatives deployed hordes of Twitter bots to stoke criticism of Hillary Clinton, praise Trump, and create social divisions among Americans.<sup>87</sup> As of February 2018, Twitter had suspended 1.4 million Twitter accounts that it found to be managed by the Russian government owned Internet Research Agency.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

<sup>86</sup> [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#); Colin Streh, "Facebook to Provide Congress With Ads Linked to Internet Research Agency," Facebook, September 21, 2017, accessed November 26, 2017, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/09/providing-congress-with-ads-linked-to-internet-research-agency/>

<sup>87</sup> Clinton, *What happened?* 359; [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#).

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous, “1.4 m Twitter accounts notified of Russian interactions,” Sky News, February 1, 2018, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://news.sky.com/story/twitter-doubles-accounts-notified-of-russian-interactions-11231434/>

The Russians also used YouTube, the world's largest online video site. In 2013 RT, Russia's state backed news channel, which American intelligence officials call the "Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet," reached one billion views on YouTube.<sup>89</sup> YouTube helped RT develop "one of the largest online audiences of any news organization in the world" and was "a prominent presence on YouTube search results."<sup>90</sup> With such sway and operating in the open, RT News relentlessly lambasted Clinton and lauded Trump during the 2016 election. It was a propaganda coup without historical precedent. Google, the owner of YouTube, announced on October 7, 2017, that Russian agents had bought ads on to spread "disinformation across Google's many products," including Google search, Gmail, and DoubleClick "in an attempt to interfere in the 2016 election."<sup>91</sup> Of course, many states used propaganda, disinformation, and soft power to influence both domestic and foreign public opinion in their favor. The United States established Voice of America and Radio Free Europe to broadcast its views from bases in the West to people behind the Iron Curtain. The Russian approach was noteworthy because of its sophistication and skill in penetrating and manipulating Western communication platforms and outlets, hiding its involvement in these activities, and, in some instances, making it appear as if some counterfeit movements were

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<sup>89</sup> National Intelligence Council, "Background to 'Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections': The Analytic and Cyber Incident Attribution," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 6, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Daisuke Wakabayashi and Nicholas Confessore, "Russia's Favored Outlet Is an Online News Giant. Youtube Helped," *New York Times*, October 23, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/23/technology/youtube-russia-rt.html>

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Dwoskin, Adam Entous and Craig Timberg, "Google Uncovers Russian-bought Ads on YouTube, Gmail and other Platforms," *The Switch*, October 9, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/10/09/google-uncovers-russian-bought-ads-on-youtube-gmail-and-other-platforms/?utm\\_term=.76a71c2abba0/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/10/09/google-uncovers-russian-bought-ads-on-youtube-gmail-and-other-platforms/?utm_term=.76a71c2abba0/)

legitimate domestic developments. This was evidence of the skill of Russian cyber technocrats and propagandists and of Western governments' inability to control the Russian meddling, to inform their citizens of the Russian meddling, and to regulate social media. Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA) of the House Intelligence Committee remarked,

The social media campaign was also designed to further a broader Kremlin objective: sowing discord in the US by inflaming passions on a range of divisive issues. The Russians did so by weaving together fake accounts, pages, and communities to push politicized content and videos, and to mobilize real Americans to sign online petitions and join rallies and protests.<sup>92</sup>

Senator Richard M. Burr (R-NC), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded, ” “The Russian intelligence service is determined and clever and I recommend that every campaign and every election official take this very seriously.”<sup>93</sup>

Russia media also vilified Clinton regularly in its publications and broadcasts and praised, endorsed, or publicized Trump's positions. According to U.S. intelligence officials, Russian media falsely claimed that there was widespread corruption at the Clinton Foundation, that Hilary had close ties to Islamic extremism, and that she was in poor physical and mental health.<sup>94</sup> Trump also regularly blamed Clinton for violence at his rallies, and the Russian media echoed the charge.

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<sup>92</sup> Adam Schiff, "Intel Committee Ranking Member Schiff Opening Statement at Open Hearing with Tech Companies," U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Selection on Intelligence Democratic Office, November 01, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://democrats-intelligence.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=330/>

<sup>93</sup> Nicholas Fandos, "Senate Intelligence Heads Warn That Russian Election Meddling Continues," *New York Times*, October 04, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/04/us/politics/senate-intelligence-committee-russia-election-trump.html/>

<sup>94</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency et al*, February 16, 2018, accessed February 18, 2018, [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#); National Intelligence Council, "Background to 'Assessing



One of the most curious coups of the Russians was to hire and reorient the views of longtime Hilary supporter, Ed Schultz. Schultz was a liberal commentator on MSNBC who always defended Obama's policies. Moreover, he once critiqued Trump for being a racist after Trump asked for Obama's birth certificate.<sup>95</sup> He was one of the most progressive commentators of MSNBC. During his tenure at the MSNBC, he was the headliner on the program called "The Ed show," where he commented about the political news in the U.S. and not infrequently attacked Putin for his flagrant violation of human rights in Russia. On July 30, 2015, the program was cancelled.

Seven months later, on January 14, 2016, he signed up to host a program for the Russian media outlet, RT news, which offered him the lead on a program called "The News with Ed Shultz." Soon he began to support Trump and criticize Clinton. He called her campaign "deplorable" and he backed Bernie Sanders during the Democratic primaries. Today, he is still with RT News and states that he is encouraged by Trump's decision to "open the door toward a positive relationship with Russia."<sup>96</sup>

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Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections': The Analytic and Cyber Incident Attribution.""; also see Adam Nagourney, "Calm before storm? Pressure mounts as MSM admits Clinton's health is 'campaign issue'," *RT International*, September 12, 2016, accessed November 25, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/usa/359021-clinton-pneumonia-msm-health/> and Paul Roderick Gregory, "Media Wakes Up To Russia's 'Fake News' Only After It Is Applied Against Hillary," *Forbes*, November 29, 2016, accessed November 25 2017,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2016/11/29/media-wakes-up-to-russias-fake-news-only-after-it-is-applied-against-hillary/#500a0edc1749/>

<sup>95</sup> Paul Farhi, "How Ed Schultz transformed from MSNBC lefty to the American face of Moscow media," *Washington Post*, December 20, 2016, accessed November 19, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/how-ed-schultz-transformed-from-msnbc-lefty-to-the-american-face-of-moscow-media/2016/12/20/320713f4-c322-11e6-8422-eac61c0ef74d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f8a43bf25927/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/how-ed-schultz-transformed-from-msnbc-lefty-to-the-american-face-of-moscow-media/2016/12/20/320713f4-c322-11e6-8422-eac61c0ef74d_story.html?utm_term=.f8a43bf25927/)

<sup>96</sup> Tom Kludt, "What the heck is Ed Schultz doing at CPAC?" CNN, February 23, 2017, accessed November 19, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/02/23/media/ed-schultz-cpac/index.html/>



Another way that the Russians impacted the election was surprising, perhaps even to the Russians. Donald Trump included in his campaign people who had contacts, in some cases, a long-term relationship with Moscow. Michael Flynn, who had been forced out in 2014 as the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency for the Obama Administration, provided Trump with national security advice and became the National Security Adviser in the Trump administration in January 2017. He had extensive ties to the Kremlin. He had visited Russia's military intelligence agency called GRU, knew Putin personally, appeared occasionally on RT News, and had developed a tight bond with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergei Kislyak.<sup>97</sup> Both President Obama before he left office and Acting Attorney General Sally Q. Yates during Trump's first month in office warned the Trump administration that Flynn had not revealed all of his ties to the Russian government and thus might be vulnerable to blackmail. Trump kept Flynn on until February 13, 2017, when he was forced to resign because he did not provide an accurate description of his discussions and contacts with the Russian ambassador.<sup>98</sup> Trump was clearly irritated over Flynn's resignation and he decided, with the support of his Attorney General Jeff Sessions, to fire the FBI director, James Comey, over the Department of Justice's scrutiny of Flynn. The unsuspected firing of Comey and the growing perception of Russia's involvement in the 2016 election forced the

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<sup>97</sup> Michael Crowley et al., "All of Trump's Ties to Russia, in 7 Charts," *Politico*, March 23, 2017, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/connections-trump-putin-russia-ties-chart-flynn-page-manafort-sessions-214868/>

<sup>98</sup> Gregor Aisch and K. K. Rebecca, "The Timeline of Michael Flynn's Phone Call With Russia: Who Knew What, and When," *New York Times*, February 14, 2017, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/02/14/us/politics/flynn-call-russia-timeline.html/>

Department of Justice to hire Special Council Robert Mueller, former director of the FBI, to probe the Russian connection. Sessions had to recuse himself from the Mueller investigation because he had a role in Comey's termination. On December 1, 2017, Mueller indicted Flynn. Flynn pleaded guilty to the charge of making "willfully and knowingly false and fictitious statements" to the FBI. Mueller could have charged him and his son with possible collusion between the Russian government and members of Trump's team, as well as potential obstruction of justice, but it became clear that Mueller reduced the charge because Flynn agreed to cooperate with the investigation.

Besides Flynn there was Paul Manafort. He was Trump's campaign manager from March 28 to the end of August 2016. Manafort was Putin's man. He was a political adviser of Viktor Yanukovych, the former pro-Putin Ukrainian president, who was ousted from power after the Ukrainian revolution. He was also a business friend of Dmytro Firtash who has been accused of racketeering, money laundering, and ties to Ivan Fursin, the Ukrainian billionaire and businessman, and to Semion Mogilevich, the reputed head of the Russian Mafia, who operated in Putin's orbit.<sup>99</sup>

In addition, Manafort was a business partner of Oleg Deripaska, a Russian oligarch who owned the Russian industrial group called Basic Element, which was one of the largest aluminum conglomerates in the world.<sup>100</sup> According to the *Washington Post*, during the Republican primaries in 2016, Manafort gave Deripaska copies of Trump's

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<sup>99</sup> Christina Sterbenz, "The Worst Gangster Most People Have Never Heard Of," *Business Insider*, December 01, 2014, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/semion-mogilevich-2014-11/>

<sup>100</sup> Crowley et al., "All of Trump's Ties to Russia, in 7 Charts."; Andrew Roth, "Analysis | Manafort's Russia connection: What you need to know about Oleg Deripaska," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2017, accessed December 11, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/09/24/manaforts-russia-connection-what-you-need-to-know-about-oleg-deripaska/?utm\\_term=.06272b4116b1/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/09/24/manaforts-russia-connection-what-you-need-to-know-about-oleg-deripaska/?utm_term=.06272b4116b1/)

personal briefings from the US government, which could have included confidential national security issues.<sup>101</sup> On September 10, 2017, the FBI raided Manafort's house in search of evidence of various crimes.

In October 2017, he and his close associate Rick Gates, who was also a Trump campaign official, were indicted by the US government on twelve counts, including conspiracy against the United States, conspiracy to launder money, unregistered agent of a foreign principal, false and misleading US Foreign Agents Registration Act statements, false statements, and seven counts of failure to file reports of foreign bank and financial accounts.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, during Manafort and Gates' tenure with the Trump campaign, the Republican Party, which had a reputation for a strong defense policy and a hard stand against Russian aggression in Ukraine, removed from its platform the aim of arming the Ukrainians.

Gates apparently was deeply involved with the Russians.<sup>103</sup> In a surprise development, his lawyers withdrew from his defense team in February 2018 and reports circulated that Gates had agreed to cooperate with Mueller's investigation.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Roth, "Analysis | Manafort's Russia connection: What you need to know about Oleg Deripaska,"

<sup>102</sup> Sharon Lafraniere, Matt Apuzzo, and Adam Goldman, "With a Picked Lock and a Threatened Indictment, Mueller's Inquiry Sets a Tone," *New York Times*, September 18, 2017, December 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/us/politics/mueller-russia-investigation.html/>; American Broadcasting Company, "Manafort and Richard W. Gates III. indictment: The full text," October 30, 2017, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/paul-manafort-rick-gates-indictment-full-text/story?id=50809405>.

<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Confessore and Barry Meier, "How the Russia Investigation Entangled Rick Gates, a Manafort Protégé," *New York Times*, June 16, 2017, December 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/politics/rick-gates-russia.html/>

<sup>104</sup> Darren Samuelshon, "Lawyers for Rick Gates withdraw from Russia case," *Politico*, February 2, 2018, accessed February 2, 2018,

A fourth campaign official to be indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice was George Papadopoulos. He pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts and meetings with Russian officials and operatives and agreed to cooperate with the Mueller probe of Russia's interference in the U.S. election.<sup>105</sup>

A fifth person, Rex Tillerson, who became the U.S. Secretary of State in the Trump administration, knew Putin and had close personal relations with Igor Sechin, the president of the Russian state-owned Oil Company, Rosneft, and one of Putin's closest allies and a former KGB agent.<sup>106</sup> Tillerson was the former CEO of ExxonMobil. When he was the head of ExxonMobil, he signed agreements with Rosneft and Gazprom, the Russian state-owned energy giants, to develop oil fields in the Russian Arctic. These projects were cancelled after the Obama administration imposed sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Crimea. At the time, Tillerson issued a public statement opposing the US sanctions.<sup>107</sup>

A sixth Trump associate who had connections with the Russians was Attorney General Jeff Sessions. The Attorney General denied that he had contacts with the Russian ambassador during the Presidential campaign in September 2016. He later had

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<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/01/lawyers-for-rick-gates-withdraw-from-russia-case-383422/>

<sup>105</sup> For background on the four indicted Trump campaign officials, see Zachary Coen and Madison Park, "The four people charged in Mueller's investigation," CNN, December 4, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/04/politics/whos-charged-russia-investigation/index.html>

<sup>106</sup> Luke Harding, "Igor Sechin: Rosneft's Kremlin hard man comes out of the shadows," *The Guardian*, October 18, 2012, December 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/oct/18/igor-sechin-rosneft-kremlin-hard-man-shadows/>

<sup>107</sup> Joel Gehrke, "Rex Tillerson: Trump not very happy about Russia sanctions bill," *The Washington Examiner*, August 1, 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/rex-tillerson-trump-not-very-happy-about-russia-sanctions-bill/article/2630324/>

to amend his testimony and ultimately, as mentioned, had to recuse himself from the Department of Justice's investigation of a connection between the Trump campaign and the Russian government.<sup>108</sup>

A seventh Trump campaign adviser who had ties to the Russians was Carter Page. He was an American political consultant who had worked most of his life for the oil industry. In that capacity, he met the top executives of both Rosneft and Gazprom and advertised himself as an "informal advisor" to the Kremlin. The FBI was so concerned about Page that it obtained a FISA court warrant in 2016 to monitor him.<sup>109</sup>

An eighth individual was Roger Stone, who is a close ally of Donald Trump and many Republican leaders. On several occasions in 2016 he hosted programs of political analysis for RT News. He also made a splash by tweeting in August 2016 that he had a "back channel" to Wikileaks editor, Julian Assange, and that soon a trove of emails from the DNC and John Podesta would be published, as indeed they were, both by Wikileaks

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<sup>108</sup> For background, see Confirmation hearings on January 10, 2017; Senate Judiciary Committee investigation Russian interference on Oct. 10, 2017; Marshall Cohen, "Jeff Sessions' denials on Russia, explained," CNN, November 14, 2017, accessed December 11, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/14/politics/jeff-sessions-denials-on-russia/index.html/>

<sup>109</sup> Aaron Carter, "Carter Page confirms he called himself an 'informal' advisor to Russia's government-but let him explain," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2017, accessed February 7, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/02/06/carter-pages-explanation-for-having-claimed-to-be-an-informal-advisor-to-the-kremlin-isnt-great/?utm\\_term=.ca759a8d4e90](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/02/06/carter-pages-explanation-for-having-claimed-to-be-an-informal-advisor-to-the-kremlin-isnt-great/?utm_term=.ca759a8d4e90)

and the Russian hacking group called Guccifer 2.<sup>110</sup> In testimony before the House and Intelligence Committees, he denied any contact with Assange.<sup>111</sup>

Stone's testimony was contradicted by his published, although eventually deleted, Tweets. One example of his Tweets is reproduced below.

Illustration 4. Stone's tweet.<sup>112</sup>



Finally, there are many financial connections between the Trump Organization, Trump family members, and Trump business associates with Russia. The list is long, so only a few of the relationships are described. The Trump Organization, the name of a holding company managing all of Trump's businesses, had a tie to the largest "private" bank in Russia, the Alfa Bank. The details of that nexus are vague but the FBI is investigating the relationship.<sup>113</sup> Jared Kushner and his wife, Ivanka Trump, knew and had joined Roman Abramovich and his wife, Dasha Zhukova, in various investments,

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<sup>110</sup> Crowley et al., "All of Trump's Ties to Russia, in 7 Charts,"; Marina Fang, "Former Trump Adviser Roger Stone Admits Collusion With WikiLeaks, Then Deletes It," *Huff Post*, March 06, 2017, accessed December 11, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/roger-stone-donald-trump-julian-assange-us\\_58bc24cae4b0d2821b4ec16c/](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/roger-stone-donald-trump-julian-assange-us_58bc24cae4b0d2821b4ec16c/)

<sup>111</sup> Intelligence Committee, "House Intelligence Committee investigation about the Russian interference," House of Representatives, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://intelligence.house.gov/>

<sup>112</sup> O'Regan and Koh, "Analysis | How Russian Facebook ads used race and religion to inflame divisions."

<sup>113</sup> Pamela Brown and Jose Pagliery, "Sources: FBI investigation continues into 'odd' computer link between Russian bank and Trump Organization," CNN, March 10, 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/09/politics/fbi-investigation-continues-into-odd-computer-link-between-russian-bank-and-trump-organization/index.html/>

including Thrive Capital, a company founded by Joshua Kushner (Jared's older brother), and Artsy, a company that connected collectors to artworks. Abramovich was one of the richest men in Russia and one of Putin's closest advisers. The Russian is also a close friend of Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Fox News, News Corporation, Sky UK, and many other business.<sup>114</sup> Kushner, who has an office in the White House, consistently failed to provide accurate information on his contacts with Russians to the US government and had not yet received, as of this writing, a security clearance.

The Russian intrusion into the American election took a bold turn when Russians connected to the Kremlin asked for a meeting with Trump Jr. in Trump Tower. Surprisingly, because the Logan Act of 1799 appeared to prohibit such contacts, the meeting was held on June 9, 2016. Included in the meeting were Paul Manafort, the campaign chairman; Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and adviser; and Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son. The Russians included Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer and lobbyist, and Rinat Akhmetshin, a Russian-American lobbyist.<sup>115</sup> According to Steve Bannon, once Trump's chief political adviser, the

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<sup>114</sup> On the contacts, see Stephanie Baker, Irina Reznik, and Katya Kazakina, "Billionaire Ally of Putin Socialized With Kushner, Ivanka Trump," Bloomberg, August 18, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-18/billionaire-ally-of-putin-socialized-with-kushner-ivanka-trump/>; James Chad Hanna, "The Power of Suggestion," *Artinfo*, October 19, 2011, accessed December 22, 2017; <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/36888/the-power-of-suggestion/>; Jon Swaine, "Jared Kushner failed to disclose emails sent to Trump team about WikiLeaks and Russia," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/16/jared-kushner-russia-wikileaks-emails-trump-team/>

<sup>115</sup> According to the "Steele Dossier," Veselnitskaya's portfolio included getting the Magnitsky Act repealed. See Matt Flegenheimer, "Glenn R Simpson: Fusion GPS founder behind Trump-Russia dossier returns to the spotlight," *The Independent*, January 19, 2018, accessed February 2, 2018,

meeting bordered on being “treasonous” and “unpatriotic.”<sup>116</sup> Bannon further declared that there was zero chance that Don Jr. did not inform his father about the discussions and decisions at the meeting and introduce the Russians to Trump Sr.<sup>117</sup> Whether Bannon’s charge and description were accurate or not, Special Prosecutor Muller opened an investigation into that meeting and into possible obstruction of justice. According to Don Jr.’s email chain the purpose of the meeting was to get dirt on Hilary Clinton.<sup>118</sup>

The Russian effort to impact the American election in 2016 was agreed upon by virtually every US government agency and news organization. However, the Trump administration was not so sure and has equivocated. There is no such hesitation among other Western governments about Russian interference in their elections. As mentioned, on February 17, 2018, new evidence about the Russian meddling in the U.S. elections was released. The Justice Department indicted 13 Russians and three companies and charged them with interference in “the 2016 U.S Presidential election.”<sup>119</sup> The indictment led to a sharp divide in the Trump administration, with some members endorsing the finding but others, including Trump, distracting and confusing the public by claiming, on the basis that he and the Trump campaign were not mentioned in the indictment, that there was no collusion and that there was no evidence that the Russians

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[http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long\\_reads/glenn-r-simpson-who-is-trump-russia-dossier-fusion-gps-hearing-transcript-senate-interview-a8153451.html/](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/glenn-r-simpson-who-is-trump-russia-dossier-fusion-gps-hearing-transcript-senate-interview-a8153451.html/)

<sup>116</sup> Michael Wolff, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Don Jr. released the email chain and the *New York Times* reproduced it in chronological order. See “Read Emails on Donald Trump Jr.’s Russia Meeting,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2017, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/07/11/us/politics/donald-trump-jr-email-text.html/>

<sup>119</sup> [Internet Research Agency Indictment - Department of Justice](#), accessed February 19, 2018.



impacted the outcome of the election.<sup>120</sup> The idea of Russian interference and the Trump administration's unwillingness to pursue that issue are two separate questions, but only time and perhaps the Mueller investigation will tell if the answer to each question is connected.

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<sup>120</sup> *New York Times*, February 18, 2018, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/17/world/europe/russia-meddling-mcmaster.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=7141250C255B87119F6F0291986F39F5&gwt=pay>; *New York Times*, February 19, 2018, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/us/politics/trump-blames-obama-and-democrats-for-failing-to-stop-russian-meddling.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=BF8D4B0F84DA44D5B275DD853452C493&gwt=pay>.

## 6. RUSSIA MEDDLING AND THE NETHERLANDS

The Russian campaign to influence the election for parliament in the Netherlands was seemingly not on the Dutch government's radar screen, despite the strong signs that Russia had enmeshed itself in multiple ways in the U.S. presidential election in November 2016. The Dutch Joint Sigint Cyber Unit (JSCU) had apparently penetrated the Russian hacking group called Cozy Bear as early as 2014 and had discovered the Russian operatives at work in their task to impact the American election. The information was shared with both the US Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.<sup>121</sup> However, the Dutch did not seem to have grasped that their own parliamentary election was also a target of Moscow or perhaps they did know and successfully and covertly neutralized the Russians without self-defeating publicity.

Of course, the Dutch knew of Russia's propaganda and political activities to weaken the EU and NATO, to divide Europe over immigration, to polarize it over fears of Islamic terrorism, and to depress it over sliding morality. In April 2016, they witnessed a successful effort by anti-EU Parliament member Harry Van Bommel to defeat an EU-sponsored referendum that would have given the Dutch approval to the EU effort to assist Ukraine in its struggle against Russia. Van Bommel's tactic was to bring to public meetings his "Ukrainian team," which was comprised mainly of Russians or Russian-speaking persons from the Russian-supported break-away regions of eastern

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<sup>121</sup> Ellen Nakashima, "New details emerge about 2014 Russian hack of the State Department: It was 'hand to hand combat'," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2017, accessed February 3, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-details-emerge-about-2014-russian-hack-of-the-state-department-it-was-hand-to-hand-combat/2017/04/03/d89168e0-124c-11e7-833c-503e1f6394c9\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f18c77c8bc04/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-details-emerge-about-2014-russian-hack-of-the-state-department-it-was-hand-to-hand-combat/2017/04/03/d89168e0-124c-11e7-833c-503e1f6394c9_story.html?utm_term=.f18c77c8bc04/)

Ukraine and who identified themselves as Ukrainian, to testify that Russia had been mischaracterized by the EU and was not an aggressor.<sup>122</sup>

What the Dutch leaders did not appreciate was Russia's plan to help drive support for the rightwing leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV), Geert Wilders. The Dutch parliamentary election was scheduled for March 15, 2017, and Wilders hoped that his nationalist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim Party for Freedom would make a decent showing. His main opposition was the conservative-liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Other parties in the election included the center right party Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), led by Sybrand Buma, and the social-liberal party called Democrats 66, led by Alexander Pechtold.

Wilders was born and raised in a middle-class family in the southeastern part of the Netherlands in 1963. He founded the PVV in 2006. Before entering politics, he worked for the health industry in the city of Utrecht. During the 1980s, he visited the Middle East where he developed strong anti-Islamist traits. Those traits became more radical and pronounced as he aged. He entered politics in 1997 when "he was elected to the Utrecht city council as a member of the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (the antecedent of the PVV)."<sup>123</sup> One year later he was elected to parliament.

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<sup>122</sup> Andrew Higgins, "Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How Group of Russians tilted a Dutch Vote," *New York Times*, February 16, 2017, accessed February 4, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-fake-news-dutch-vote.html/>

<sup>123</sup> Michael Ray, "Geert Wilders," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 20, 2017, accessed September 7, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Geert-Wilders/>

His major issue was Islamophobia.<sup>124</sup> He opposed Turkey's admission into the EU, Muslim immigration into the Netherlands, and the growth of Islamic institutions in the Netherlands, including mosques and burkas. The terrorist acts in Europe associated with such extremist groups as ISIS intensified his support. The flood of Muslim refugees into Europe in the wake of the Iraq and Syrian wars also increased his followers. Nonetheless, most Dutch citizens and certainly most European leaders thought of him as a fringe politician.<sup>125</sup>

The Kremlin, however, liked what it saw in Wilders. He was a catalyst for division, instability, and emotive explosiveness. He fit the profile of the politicians whom the Russian government was cultivating across Europe—populists, whether of the Left or the Right, who were anti-EU, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim.

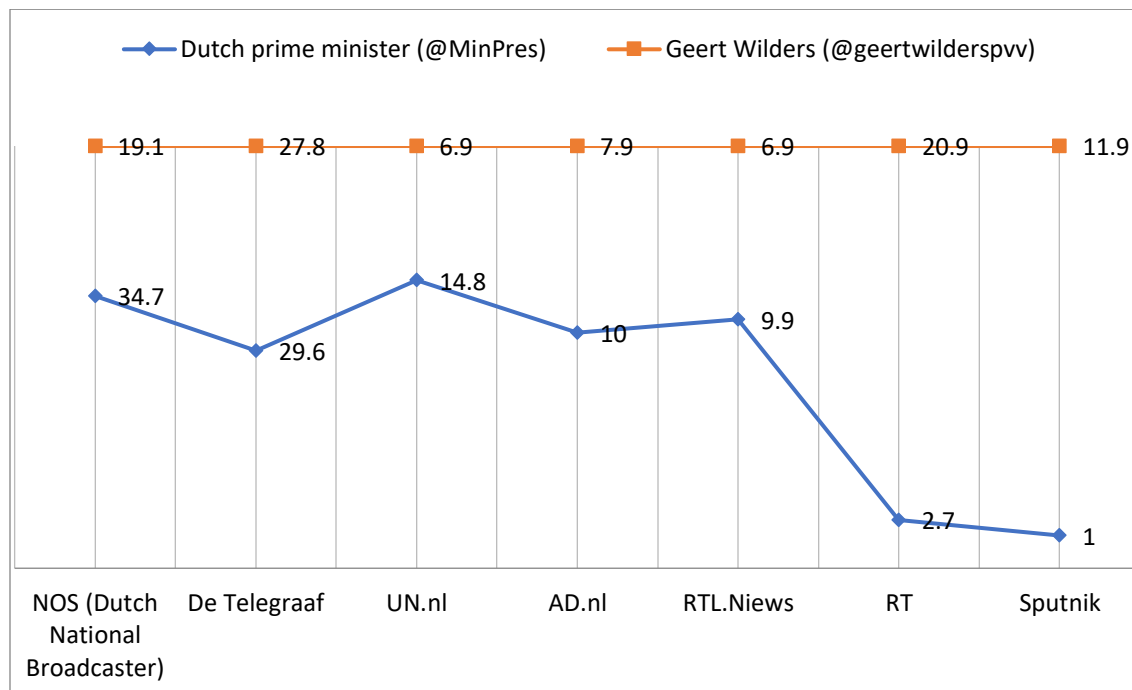
The Russians put RT News, *Sputnik*, and the Twitter accounts of these news organizations behind Wilders to enhance his name recognition, to highlight his positions, and to link him to Prime Minister Rutte in order to give him credibility as a leader while simultaneously giving him more attention than Rutte. For example, Sputnik's twitter account, @SputnikInt, and RT News' twitter account, @RT\_com,, mentioned Wilders 12 times and 8 times more than Rutte, respectively, in the weeks preceding the election. At the same time, RT News gave Geert Wilders 20.9% coverage compared to 9.9% for Rutte, and *Sputnik* allotted Wilders 11.9% time compared to 2.7% for Rutte. The graph below showed the unbalanced coverage of RT News and *Sputnik*.

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<sup>124</sup>For a biography of Geert Wilders, "Greet Wilders Weblog," accessed February 3, 2018, <https://www.geertwilders.nl/>

<sup>125</sup>For more information see "'Fringe' No Longer: Geert Wilders In Dutch Election Race," *WND*, March 10, 2017, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.wnd.com/2017/03/fringe-no-longer-geert-wilders-in-dutch-election-race/>

Illustration 5. Graphic representing the total percentage of tweets that mention each candidate in each media outlet.<sup>126</sup>



The Russians also tried to intensify a rift between Turkey and the EU, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany. Its goal was to weaken the EU and NATO, but it also supported the positions of Wilders. The issue was twofold. Refugees from Syria and Iraq were flooding into the EU because of the wars in the Middle East. The EU, mainly Germany, agreed to pay the Turks to hold back and provide shelter for some of the refugees in Turkey. That was not a popular position with the Dutch, and Wilders heavily criticized the Rutte government for endorsing it. The other problem was that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wanted to revise the Turkish constitution to increase his

<sup>126</sup> David Blood, "Is social media empowering Dutch populism," *Financial Times*, March 14, 2017, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/b1830ac2-07f4-11e7-97d1-5e720a26771b?mhq5j=e5/>

power in the wake of a coup against his regime. He sent Turkish officials, including his foreign minister to Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland to hold rallies among Turkish expats who could vote in the Turkish referendum. The Dutch did not want the foreign minister to arrive in the Netherlands before the Dutch election on March 15, but the Turkish government insisted and sent the foreign minister to the Netherlands where the Dutch government refused to allow his plane to land. There was quite a dustup over this development, and Erdogan tactlessly accused the Dutch of Nazism, which played well for Wilders who claimed Rutte was weak and that Muslims were overrunning Europe. The issue was eventually settled, but the strain hurt the cohesion of the EU and NATO, and the Kremlin stoked the fire by opening up discussions with Turkey to see if it wanted to buy Russia's most advanced S-400 missile system.<sup>127</sup> Thus was the stage set for the March 15 election.

On the eve of the election, RT News offered special coverage of the debate between Wilders and Rutte. It centered its story on Wilders opposition to unrestrained immigration, to LGBT rights, and to Turkey's interference in Dutch domestic politics.<sup>128</sup> It included an attack on Rutte for "taken as a hostage by Turkish President, Erdogan." and for refusing to close Dutch borders.<sup>129</sup>

On March 15, the day of the election, RT News and *Sputnik* provided favorable coverage of Wilders. For example, RT News published an article headlined "*Dutch head*

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<sup>127</sup> Melik Kaylan, "Did Putin Try to Influence The Dutch Elections Through Erdogan?" *Forbes*, March 16, 2017, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2017/03/16/did-putin-try-to-influence-the-dutch-elections-through-erdogan/#7046c5911679/>

<sup>128</sup> Glenn Greenwald, "'You're Erdogan's hostage, close borders,' far-right populist Wilders tells Dutch PM," *RT International*, March 14, 2017, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/380630-dutch-election-rivals-debate/>

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

to polls amid tense immigration policy debate.”<sup>130</sup> The article maintained that the Netherlands’ position on immigration was a disaster and that Wilders could solve the problem.

On election day, Wilders achieved a significant success when his party obtained 13.1% of the total votes and 20 seats in the Dutch parliament.<sup>131</sup> Although the People’s party for Freedom and Democracy won with 21.3% of the total votes and 33 seats in Parliament, Wilders’ second place was a victory for an extremist party in Europe and in a country where extremist politics from the era of World War II were still open wounds.<sup>132</sup>

After the election RT News and *Sputnik* continued the attack on Rutte and offered support for Wilders’ positions. RT News falsely claimed the Rutte-led Dutch Parliament favored a law to punish traditional schools, which do not want to teach LGTB awareness in their curriculums. The goal of the law was to promote tolerance among youth, but Wilders opposed it and RT News portrayed the law as an attack traditional morality.<sup>133</sup>

*Sputnik* claimed that the attempt by the Turkish foreign minister to come to the Netherlands in March 2017 to rally Turkish ex-pats in the Netherlands in favor of

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<sup>130</sup> Paula Slier, "Dutch head to polls amid tense immigration policy debate," *RT International*, March 15, 2017, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/380754-dutch-election-wilders-rutte/>

<sup>131</sup> Hanna Yusuf et al., "Dutch elections: Rutte starts coalition talks after beating Wilders into second – as it happened," *The Guardian*, March 16, 2017, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2017/mar/15/dutch-election-voters-go-to-the-polls-in-the-netherlands-live/>

<sup>132</sup> Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940. After Rotterdam being obliterated by German air force, the Dutch army surrendered.

<sup>133</sup> Bryan Stelter, "Dutch MPs vote to punish schools that refuse to teach LGBT awareness," *RT International*. April 13, 2017, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/384622-dutch-parliament-lgbt-schools/>

Erdogan's desire to revise the Turkish constitution amounted to an attack and would lead to "holy wars" in Europe.<sup>134</sup>

*Sputnik* also published articles on its Dutch website claiming that immigrants were changing the culture and morality of Europe and the Netherlands. According to the Russian news agency, "Europe is suffering from a morality crisis and a lack of a proper debate about these issues (morality and immigration)."<sup>135</sup> *Sputnik* also implied that the morality and immigration crises were caused by liberal politicians such as Prime Minister Rutte.<sup>136</sup>

All in all, the Kremlin's "info war" strategy in the Netherlands tried to exploit social divisions, fears, and real problems related to refugees, terrorism, and national interest clashes among NATO members. But the Russians did not cause the cultural rifts and they had no answer for them.

Dutch intelligence has remained quiet about Russian interference in the March 15 election. Perhaps its reticence is related to the fact that the Dutch penetrated the Russian plan to influence elections in the West and any public statement would alert the Kremlin to the Dutch action. There does not seem to be any evidence that the Russians successfully hacked email servers of the Dutch government, so perhaps the Dutch in a quiet way had effective barriers in place. We do know that the Dutch intelligence agency (AIVD) published a report about Russian activities in 2016 that stipulated that the

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<sup>134</sup> Neil Clark, "Turkish Foreign Minister: 'Holy Wars Will Soon Begin in Europe'," *Sputnik International*, March 16, 2017, accessed October 2, 2017,

<https://sputniknews.com/europe/201703161051655452-turkey-cavusoglu-europe-wars/>

<sup>135</sup> John Wight, "Crisis of Values Gnawing at the Ends of the EU," *Sputnik International*, March 20, 2017, accessed October 2, 2017,

<https://sputniknews.com/europe/201703201051761039-eu-crisis-values/>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.



Netherlands had been targeted as part of a global campaign to influence policy and perceptions on Russia. As part of this effort, the report maintained, Moscow had made use of a network of contacts built up over the years.<sup>137</sup> The report concluded, “Russia has tried to hack email accounts of Dutch government employees in at least 100 cases. One of their targets was the Ministry of General Affairs, where Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s office is also located.”<sup>138</sup> It further declared,

Their [Russians’] cyber-attacks drew the most attention in 2016, but the Russians also still use intelligence officers to recruit human sources. There is a permanent presence of such agents in the Netherlands, operating under false guises in various parts of value to their homeland. Russia’s espionage activities seek to influence decision-making processes, perceptions and public opinion. In this clandestine political influence, the dissemination of disinformation and propaganda plays an important role. This is an area in which Russia and its intelligence services have a long and colorful history, but the rise of the internet has made it far easier for them to extend their reach and the impact of this can be substantial. In the Netherlands, too, there are issues and processes where Russia has vested interest in the outcome and so may well resort to covert influence and manipulation. The AIVD is investigating clandestine Russian influence activities against the Netherlands and Dutch interests.<sup>139</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude that the Dutch knew the Russians would try to impact their election and took counter steps to block them. The government said as much when on December 18, 2017, it cryptically informed parliament, “It is essential that public opinion is not influenced by disinformation from state actors.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Andrew Higgins, "Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote."

<sup>138</sup> AIVD, “Annual Report 2016,” April 4, 2017, accessed August 6, 2017, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/annual-report/2017/04/04/annual-report-2016>.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Janene Pieters, “Dutch Gov’t Takes Official Stance Against Fake News, Foreign Electioneering,” *NLtimes*, December 19, 2017, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://nltimes.nl/2017/12/19/dutch-govt-takes-official-stance-fake-news-foreign-electioneering>

## 7. RUSSIA MEDDLING AND FRANCE

France held its presidential election on April 23, 2017. There were four major candidates: Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen, François Fillon, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Emmanuel Macron was the leader of the *La République En Marche* (EM), which was centrist and liberal. Marine Le Pen was the leader of the *Front National* (FN), which favored nationalism, Islamophobia, anti-globalization, and opposition to the European Union. François Fillon was the leader of *Parti républicain* (LR), which was center right and shared some ideas with Christian Democratic Parties across the continent. Finally, Jean-Luc Mélenchon was the leader of *La France Insoumise* (FI), which represented leftwing populists.

The Russian government liked all of the candidates except Macron who was pro-EU and pro-NATO. The other three politicians wanted closer ties to Moscow, but the clear favorite of Moscow was Le Pen. Putin favored Marine Le Pen. She was the daughter of the National Front's founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was famous for his far-right, anti-Semitic, and nativist views. The daughter softened the anti-Semitism, but she was fruit of the same vine. Her political platform and views revealed a deep and abiding opposition to globalization and immigration, particularly Islamic immigration. Her opening campaign message put it this way: "Financial globalization and Islamist globalization are helping each other out. Those two ideologies want to bring France to its knees."<sup>141</sup> In addition, she opposed NATO, the EU, and close ties with the Germany of

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<sup>141</sup> Ingrid Melander, "France's Le Pen launches election bid with vow to fight globalization," *Reuters*, February 5, 2017, accessed September 8, 2017,

Angela Merkel. She endorsed Trump's nativism, isolationism, and divisive politics, and Trump expressed support for her.<sup>142</sup> Her favorite world leader was Vladimir Putin about whom she declared, "I won't hide that, in a certain sense, I admire Vladimir Putin."<sup>143</sup>

In the months before the election, Russian news media ran articles praising Le Pen and castigating Macron. RT news and *Sputnik* presented Marine Le Pen as a woman with good intentions surrounded by "chaos" and "anti-patriotic" opponents. Macron, on the other hand, was depicted as a lackey of the US and global financial circles. *Sputnik*, for example, published an article in French six weeks before the election entitled "Ex-French Economy Minister Macron could be an US agent lobbying banks' interests," in which it alleged that Macron had personal moral defects and had links to Rothschild & Co, which it implied was working on behalf of US global interests. The article was rather slipshod and not likely to persuade French voters that Macron was an American mole. Rothschild & Co was a French-British financial holding company, not American, and *Sputnik's* only evidence of a tie was a statement provided by Julian Assange, the founder

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-fn/frances-le-pen-launches-election-bid-with-vow-to-fight-globalization-idUSKBN15K0R1/>

<sup>142</sup> Aaron Blake, "Trump is now supporting far-right French candidate Marine Le Pen, for all intents and purposes," *Washington Post*, April 21, 2017, accessed February 3, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/21/trump-is-now-supporting-far-right-french-candidate-marine-le-pen-for-all-intents-and-purposes/?utm\\_term=.343aaa8559c8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/21/trump-is-now-supporting-far-right-french-candidate-marine-le-pen-for-all-intents-and-purposes/?utm_term=.343aaa8559c8)

<sup>143</sup> Adam Nossiter, "Marine Le Pen of France Meets With Vladimir Putin in Moscow," *New York Times*, March 24, 2017, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/world/europe/marine-le-pen-of-france-meets-with-putin-in-moscow.html/>

of Wikileaks, who said, “Macron conducted controversial political correspondence with former U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.”<sup>144</sup>

Another attack came in the form of a report that claimed that Macron was financially beholding to Saudi Arabia. The report was labeled as a press release from *Le Soir*, which was a French language Belgian newspaper. *Le Soir*, however, stated that the report was false news and had used a phony version of its website to make it appear as if it were its release.<sup>145</sup> Whether it was the work of the Russians or not is unproven, but it was consistent with “fake news” used in Russia’s “info war” strategy against the West.

On election day RT news published an article named “*Hope for the EU? European elites flock to praise Macron, some call for Le Pen’s defeat.*” The article was a clear attempt to tie Macron to EU elites and Le Pen to French nationalism.<sup>146</sup> The anti-Macron propaganda was so intense that Macron decided to ban Russian news outlets from his campaign events.<sup>147</sup> And so it went.

In addition to pro-Le Pen publicity, the Russian government assisted Le Pen’s campaign with a massive loan. Le Pen tried to borrow \$30 million from French banks,

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<sup>144</sup> Margarita Simonyan, "Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be 'US Agent' Lobbying Banks' Interests," *Sputnik International*, February 04, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017,

<https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201702041050340451-macron-us-agent-dhuicq/>

<sup>145</sup> La Rédaction en Chef du Soir, "Fausse information sur Macron: Le Soir victime de plagiat" *Le Soir*, March 2, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017,

<http://plus.lesoir.be/84312/article/2017-03-02/fausse-information-sur-macron-le-soir-victime-de-plagiat/>

<sup>146</sup> Bryan Stelter, "Hope of EU? European elites flock to praise Macron, some call for Le Pen's defeat," *RT International*, April 24, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017,

<https://www.rt.com/news/385881-french-elections-macron-eu-support/.change/>

<sup>147</sup> Andrew Osborn and Richard Balmforth, "Macron camp bars Russian news outlets, angers Moscow," *Reuters*, April 27, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-macron-russia/macron-camp-bars-russian-news-outlets-angers-moscow-idUSKBN17T2GB/>

but found no takers. Into the breach stepped the First Czech Russian Bank (FCRB).<sup>148</sup> This bank was founded in 1996 to offer banking services to companies investing in Russia and the Czech Republic. Its owner was Gennady Timchenko who was reputed to be the third wealthiest man in Russia and one of Putin's closest allies. He was on the U.S. list of persons who were sanctioned after the Russian invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.<sup>149</sup> Once Le Pen secured the loan, she expressed her support for the Russian annexation of Crimea. On February 7, according to *The Independent*, the British online newspaper, she announced in public forum that, "There was no coup d'état in Ukraine...It's not just what I think, it's a reality. There was an agreement between different nations and the next day this agreement was broken and some people took power after the referendum...there was no invasion of Crimea, Crimea has always been Russian."<sup>150</sup>

Putin's piece de resistance was to bring Le Pen to Moscow and celebrate her as the new leader of France and Europe. With her popularity growing in the polls, Le Pen arrived at the Kremlin on March 24, 2017. There she warmed Putin's heart. She called for more cooperation between France and Russia, supported the lifting of the economic sanctions on Russia that were in place because of Russia's attack on Ukraine and annexation of the Crimea, and criticized the EU. The Russians saluted her and Maria

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<sup>148</sup> Henry Samuel, "Marine Le Pen's links to Russia under US scrutiny," *The Telegraph*, December 21, 2016, accessed October 31, 2017,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/21/marine-le-pens-russian-links-us-scrutiny/>

<sup>149</sup> Jack Farhy, "US frustrates Russian oligarchs' cat and mouse over sanctions," *Financial Times*, August 9, 2015, accessed October 29, 2017,

<https://www.ft.com/content/3a5326d0-3ce4-11e5-bbd1-b37bc06f590/>

<sup>150</sup> Lucy Pasha-Robinson, "Marine Le Pen backs Vladimir Putin and denies invasion of Crimea," *The Independent*, February 6, 2017, accessed October 31, 2017,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/marine-le-pen-front-national-russian-kremlin-putin-invasion-annexation-crimea-ukraine-2014-a7566196.html/>

Katasonova, a spokeswoman for the Russian pro-Le Pen campaign declared, “We’re on the verge of a new global order.” Russian media also lauded her beauty and appeal, calling her a “charismatic blonde.”<sup>151</sup>

Both Putin and Le Pen denied that Russia was attempting to affect the French election. Putin artfully declared, “Russia has no intention of interfering in anyone’s internal business or electoral processes.”<sup>152</sup>

Beyond loans and favorable propaganda, the Russian government sought to exploit fear of Islamic terrorism, the breakdown of traditional morality, and growing racism. While there was no overt and specific campaign targeted at France, Russian media offered Russia as a “civilizational model” that could lead and unite everyone around the world who was exasperated by the decline of traditional morality. In 2016, with his voice magnified by the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian think tanks, and Russian news outlets, especially RT and *Sputnik*, Putin and his spokespersons started to refer to Russia as “Holy Russia” and attacked what they called Western decadence. They also informed nationalist and conservative elements in the West that the Russians were with them in their opposition to gay and feminists’ rights, same-sex marriage, homosexuality, individual rights over the rights of community and nation, tradition-bashing globalization and multiculturalism, liberal democracy, and other movements that

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<sup>151</sup> For more information see Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Russia love Marine Le Pen,” *Politico*, February 17, 2017, accessed February 3, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-%E2%99%A5-marine-le-pen-national-front-vladimir-putin-kremlin-france-elections/>

<sup>152</sup> Juliet Perry, “Putin meets French far-right candidate Marine Le Pen at Kremlin,” CNN, March 24, 2017, accessed October 25, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/24/europe/putin-le-pen-kremlin/index.html/>

undermined traditional values and Christian morality.<sup>153</sup> The Kremlin and Orthodox Church supporters called Europe “Gayropa,” and assailed the disappearance of religion in Europe. Putin soon found himself portrayed among some Christian far-right groups as the protector of Christianity and a favorite of White supremacist groups, who depicted him as the savior and protector of the White race.

When the election was held, no one won an outright majority of the votes, so a runoff election was scheduled on May 3 for the two leading candidates, Macron and Le Pen. France was a foundational member of the EU and worked closely with Germany to maintain stability across Europe. It was also a key ally of the United States and NATO and was involved in the Western-led effort against Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and Africa. Moscow was interested in weakening the EU, NATO, and the Franco-American relationship. It wanted, too, to shatter the German-French bond and to enlist French support for its effort in Syria on behalf of Bashar al-Assad.

Given the fact that Russian interference in Western elections was now a major concern of Western governments, the world’s attention suddenly riveted on France. Journalists and news media reporters descended on Paris and flooded the French provinces to chronicle the spectacle of what appeared to be an encore episode of the Cold War—Western values pitted against the interests of the Kremlin. As the French say, it was déjà vu.

As the climax of the election dawned, Russian hackers and Wikileaks published personal emails from Emmanuel Macron and targeted him with an onslaught of

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<sup>153</sup> Alan Feuer and Andrew Higgins, “Extremists Turn to a Leader to Protect Western Values: Vladimir Putin,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2016, accessed February 3, 2018, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/world/americas/alt-right-vladimir-putin.html?\\_r=0/](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/world/americas/alt-right-vladimir-putin.html?_r=0/)

propaganda and disinformation, everything from links to offshore accounts to being an American stooge.<sup>154</sup> The U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) and its director, Admiral Michael Rogers, announced that there was “Russian activity” surrounding the French election.<sup>155</sup> Trend Micro, the cybersecurity and anti-virus Japanese firm, also reported that the Russians were behind the leaking of Macron’s personal emails.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, Trend Micro declared that the name of the operation that targeted Macron was part of a larger operation called Operation Pawn Storm that was linked to the Russian hackers group Fancy Bear and APT 28, which were managed by the Russian government. Trend Micro concluded that Operation Pawn Storm was

An ongoing cyber espionage campaign that’s as far-reaching as it is ambitious. It has been known to primarily target military, embassy, and defense contractor personnel from the United States and its allies, including government institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Opposing factions, dissidents of the Russian government, international media, and high-profile political personalities.<sup>157</sup>

The French were alert to the Kremlin’s gambit. The French election took place under the strict control of the French intelligence services. The French Network and

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<sup>154</sup> Lizzie Dearden, "Emmanuel Macron launches legal complaint over offshore account allegations spread by Marine Le Pen," *The Independent*, May 4, 2017, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-presidential-election-latest-emmanuel-macron-legal-complaint-marine-le-pen-offshore-account-a7717461.html/>

<sup>155</sup> Michael Rogers, “Admiral Michael Rogers testifies before the Senate Armed Services committee (2017),” Armed Services Committee, May 9, 2017, accessed February 8, 2018, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rogers\\_05-09-17.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rogers_05-09-17.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> David Martin, "Russia-linked hackers targeting French election, security firm says," CBS, April 25, 2017, accessed November 5, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-hacked-french-election-trend-micro-report-fancy-bear-pawn-storm/>

<sup>157</sup> Trend Micro, "Operation Pawn Storm: Fast Facts and the Latest Developments," January 16, 2016, accessed November 5, 2017, <https://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cyber-attacks/operation-pawn-storm-fast-facts/>



Information Security Agency (ANSSI), whose mission was to defend France from cyberattacks, as well as, to provide network and information security played a critical role in the election.<sup>158</sup> The former French president, François Hollande, mobilized every resource available to protect the elections from any Russian interference and he accused Russia of using all means possible to influence the outcome of the coming election.<sup>159</sup> In fact, it appears that the Macron campaign outsmarted the Russians and Wikileaks by planting bogus documents among the hacked emails and thus was able credibly to dismiss the publication of the whole cache of hacked documents by pointing to examples of spurious documents.<sup>160</sup>

In the end, Macron won a resounding victory with over 66% of the vote. Clearly, the Russian effort to help Le Pen to victory failed. She received a little over 33% of the votes. Perhaps the Kremlin had not taken into their plan that French voters were independent, intelligent, and repulsed by any attempt to subvert their right to vote and to undermine the EU and France's position as a crucial member of the West and its values.

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<sup>158</sup> ANSSI, "The National Cybersecurity Agency of France," accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.ssi.gouv.fr/en/cybersecurity-in-france/the-national-cybersecurity-agency-of-france/>

<sup>159</sup>Anthony Berthelie, "François Hollande accuse la Russie d'utiliser "les mêmes procédés" que l'URSS pour "influencer les opinions publiques", " *Huff Post*, March 06, 2017, accessed November 4, 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/03/06/francois-hollande-accuse-la-russie-dutiliser-les-memes-procede\\_a\\_21874105/](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/03/06/francois-hollande-accuse-la-russie-dutiliser-les-memes-procede_a_21874105/)

<sup>160</sup> Christopher Dickey, "Did Macron Outsmart Campaign Hackers," *The Daily Beast*, May 6, 2017, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/did-macron-outsmart-campaign-hackers>

## 8. CONCLUSION

The security and intelligence agencies of the Western governments that were the focus of this research agreed that the Kremlin attempted to interfere in their elections in 2016-17. The executive branches of those governments, with the exception of the Trump administration, agreed with their security and intelligence services. The Trump administration's demurral is controversial because it is colored by its understandable desire to appear as having won its election without the aid of Moscow. Nonetheless, we do know that the Russians interfered in the Western elections in 2016-17.

We do not know with certainty the results of the Russian meddling. We do know the EU has not expanded since 2013 and NATO has not added a new member since Montenegro joined in 2017. We do know that the United Kingdom is negotiating to withdraw from the EU, but so far, the discussions have not born much fruit and we do not know if the Russian involvement in Brexit taints the mandate that the Conservative Party won to pull the UK out of the EU. We do know that the French successfully defended themselves against Russian hacking and propaganda, but we do not know if the Russian involvement affected the election of Emmanuel Macron. We also know that the Dutch government's intelligence service penetrated the Russian hacking scheme and alerted the U.S. government of Russian activities during the 2016 election in the United States. We further know that the Netherlands was subjected to anti-EU news and campaigns, which had a Russian bias, and did not support an EU referendum to help Ukraine against Russia and gave some support to anti-EU candidate Wilders and his party. However, the Russians did not penetrate the emails of Prime Minister Rutte, so perhaps the Dutch in a

quiet way had blocked Russian contractors, but we remain uncertain. We do know that Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, but no one can say unequivocally that the Russians were decisive in that outcome. We do know that the sanctions against the Russians for their invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea are still in place. We do know that the Trump administration, in contrast to U.S. intelligence and security agencies, downplayed the Russian meddling and wanted to dilute the sanctions on Russia (related to the 2016 election, Ukraine, and the Magnitsky Act) and has refused to impose new sanctions related to Russian meddling to the point where the contretemps has polarized American society and divided the government. No one knows why the Trump presidency set that course.

This research has described the Russian interference and some of its methods. It also revealed that the Russians, while using traditional methods of influencing public opinion like propaganda and espionage, were focused on exploiting the opportunities afforded by the Internet, social media, freedom of the press, and the openness of Western societies to impact voters. They were particularly effective at hacking Western emails and email servers, using bots and botniks to drive scurrilous or inflammatory stories on Twitter, creating fake groups and fictitious persons on Facebook and Instagram, positioning themselves as objective news outlets with an alternative point of view on YouTube, and using Wikileaks, which now is seen as a willing tool of the Kremlin, to release stolen and private communication in order to damage or boost different political candidates. In the case of the United States, they also were able to develop close ties with Trump campaign and administration officials. In the Netherlands, they used

Russians parading as Ukrainians to damage EU efforts to help the beleaguered Ukrainians against Russian aggression.

Although this thesis does not study the vulnerabilities of Western society, it is clear that the Russian action exposed weaknesses in Western elections, news reports, and social media. It also does not engage the level of responsibility born by US and European populations for the vulnerability of their systems to “attacks” or for their level of domestic political animosity over the contentious issues that made their populations susceptible to Russian attempts to interfere. It is time for the governments and the voters to reflect on their history and the values that have inspired their societies and to commit to changes to both protect and realize these values.

This study has outlined what it believes was the motivation of the Kremlin—a desire to maintain and expand its values, which highlight authoritarianism and a Machiavellian approach to power, and to undermine Western values and the existing global order based largely on Western values, particularly the rule of law. Moscow wants a world that is divided into spheres of influence rather than one that seeks global unity, fellowship, and interdependence. It was and is determined to try and weaken NATO, the EU, the Euro and U.S. dollar, and American leadership of the existing global order.

The struggle between Western and Russian values is an old one, and both sides have used propaganda and misinformation to push their positions. The Russian government has developed a sophisticated “info war” strategy, and the West, which also uses cyber warfare and soft power, has apparently slipped behind the Kremlin in the development of this technology.

Accurate information and truth are particularly critical to Western governments because they rely upon voters who are educated and know the facts. Democracies cannot long survive unchallenged lies. It is vital that Western societies cooperate with one another to protect and invest in academic freedom, the free and independent press, and new and sophisticated technology to counter falsehoods and promote truth. This is a major issue because the Trump administration has not agreed to develop a common defense against future Russian interference.

It is also critical that social media companies, operating in the jurisdiction of Western governments, eliminate phony and deceptive automated accounts (bots and botniks) and block lies and propaganda from being published on their platforms. It is vital that these companies take the initiative and stop the misuse of their platforms that allow hidden authorship and self-interest to parade as objective truth and that other companies that pay huge advertising money to these social media companies pull back their investments until these social media companies prohibit lies, disinformation, and deception from possibly influencing elections. It is telling that when the huge Anglo-Dutch consumer goods company called Unilever threatened to organize an advertising boycott of the unregulated social media companies, Facebook reacted and declared on February 13, 2018, that it will purge “extremism” from its social media sites.<sup>161</sup>

Finally, it is important that Western governments remain mindful of Russia’s history and of the desire of the Russian people, not necessarily the oligarchs, to know

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<sup>161</sup> Matthew Field, “Facebook Pledges Extremism Purge After Unilever Boycott Threat,” *The Telegraph*, February 13, 2018, accessed February 19, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2018/02/13/facebook-promise-extremism-clean-up-unilever-boycott-threat/>

truth and to develop their individual gifts and talents. The West should help the Russian people grow a healthy and creative society because the whole world would benefit from Russian genius, but ultimately the Russians will have to change their society from within.

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