

# A Bare-Knuckle Fight Over Recounts

Democrats are trying to stop Donald Trump's inauguration by claiming Russian interference in the election, but the White House sees no evidence and Trump is now challenging the recounts, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

When the Clinton campaign said it would join the recount in three Rust Belt states narrowly lost to Donald Trump, it didn't say its motive was overcoming the vote totals but instead to find out if there was "foreign interference" in the election.

"This election cycle was unique in the degree of foreign interference witnessed throughout the campaign," wrote Clinton campaign counsel Marc Elias. "The U.S. government concluded that Russian state actors were behind the hacks of the Democratic National Committee and the personal email accounts of Hillary for America campaign officials."

During the campaign Hillary Clinton made no secret of where she thought that foreign interference might be coming from. She repeatedly blamed Russia for trying to sway the election.

When the Green Party's Jill Stein launched her recount campaign in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania (the three states that gave Trump the victory), Stein's announcement quoted her on her website as saying that because "foreign agents" had "hacked into party databases, private email servers, and voter databases in certain states, many Americans are wondering if our election results are reliable." Stein's page was then updated to eliminate reference to "foreign agents" in her quote.

But her recount petition filed in Wisconsin begins by saying "it was widely reported that foreign operators breached voter registration databases in at least two states and stole hundreds of thousands of voter records." The petition then says the U.S. intelligence community is "confident" Russia was behind the hacks. There is "well-documented and conclusive evidence of foreign interference in the presidential race before the election ... [that] call[s] into question the results and indicate the possibility that (a) widespread breach occurred," Stein's lawyers wrote.

In fact the intelligence community has never made public its evidence for independent computer experts to weigh in on. After the election, the Obama administration said it had no proof of Russian interference in the election

tallies and that the results “accurately reflect the will of the American people.”

### **Citing Press Articles**

Nevertheless, Exhibit A in Stein’s petition is an affidavit from Professor J. Alex Halderman, a professor of computer science at the University of Michigan, who alleges that Russia hacked the election. Halderman took part in a conference call with the Clinton campaign last month trying to convince the campaign to seek a recount, which it only did after Stein launched her effort.

Exhibit B from Stein’s petition is an article from Wired Magazine about Russia’s alleged role in the hack. Exhibit C is a New York Times article quoting DellSecureWorks, a private security firm, saying Russia was behind the hack of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta. The company says Podesta clicked on a phishing link to gain access to his account. The Times relied on the company’s word that Russian spies were behind the phishing expedition, without also offering any proof that could be analyzed by other computer security experts.

Exhibits D through G – meaning all of Stein’s exhibits – are on alleged Russian hacking. One article is about an alleged attempted Russian hack of the 2014, post-coup Ukrainian election.

In her many media appearances since launching the recount campaign, Stein has carefully avoided mentioning Russia, or foreign agents, as she inadvertently did in her initial web posting. But her petition is about nothing else but Russia’s alleged hacking of the election.

Scott McLarty, the Green Party national media coordinator, told me in an email last week that the Green Party has “not taken a position on meddling by foreign agents.” Since then, top Green Party officials have distanced themselves from Stein, including her running mate, Ajamu Baraka.

“I’m not in favor of the recount,” Baraka told CNN. He said he told Stein “it was a potentially dangerous move” because it “would be seen as carrying the water for the Democrats.”

Margaret Flowers, the Green’s Senate candidate in Maryland, posted an open letter signed by several prominent party members saying, “While we support electoral reforms, including how the vote is counted, we do not support the current recount being undertaken by Jill Stein.”

The recount, however, does appear to have gotten under the skin of Donald Trump and his allies who, on Friday, went to courts in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, seeking to stop any further examination of the votes. The challenges

did not immediately stop the recounts but could create legal complications down the road.

### **Lobbying the Electors**

Since recounts that overturn the vote totals seem unlikely, it appears the Clinton campaign's Plan B is to use any evidence of tampering that it can pin on Russia to lobby electors to change their votes to Clinton when the Electoral College meets in state capitals on Dec. 19.

Trump won the electoral college 306 to 232. That means 38 Republican electors would have to be convinced to change their vote to Clinton to reach the required 270 to win the White House.

Finding evidence of hacking of election computers that can somehow be blamed on Russia could be crucial for the Clinton team in their effort to convince electors to change their vote.

Russia has been blamed in the U.S. for many things and though proof never seems to be supplied, it is widely believed anyway. It has been accepted as fact by American corporate media, for instance, that Russia invaded Ukraine and had a hand in shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, though the supposed evidence is more argumentative than conclusive.

Emotional appeals to elector's patriotism and defense of the American system against interference by Russia could make a persuasive argument, however.

At an event at Harvard University on Thursday, Robby Mook, Clinton's campaign manager, repeatedly blamed Russia for hacking and tampering with the election. "Congress has got to investigate what happened with Russia here," said Mook. "It is outrageous that a foreign aggressor got involved in our election."

Robert Reich, labor secretary under President Bill Clinton and a Hillary supporter, argued that one reason the electors should flip to Clinton is to "stop foreign interference in an election."

Quoting on article, he wrote on Facebook: "The Framers were extremely concerned about infiltration by rivals including Great Britain. In Federalist No. 68, Hamilton wrote that one major purpose of the Electoral College was to stop the 'desire in foreign powers to gain an improper ascendant in our councils.' He said that the college would, 'Guard against all danger of this sort ... with the most provident and judicious attention' from the electors."

Reich continued: "There's incontrovertible evidence Russia interfered in the campaign by hacking the email accounts of top Democratic officials and

cooperating with WikiLeaks' parallel campaign to undermine Hillary Clinton campaign." If such incontrovertible evidence exists, the Obama administration's intelligence community has not shared it with the public.

Clinton operatives are also making her victory by more than 2 million popular votes part of their appeal to electors to switch sides.

Twenty-four states do not legally bind electors to the popular vote in their states. Elsewhere, electors face fines of about \$1,000 if they vote against the will of the people of their states.

Laurence Tribe, a well-known and connected Democratic lawyer, has offered to defend *pro bono* any elector who breaks the law by changing their vote to Clinton. And there are plans to mount a constitutional challenge against the 26 states that legally bind the electors' to their state's popular vote.

### **Accompanying Media Campaign**

The lobbying effort to blame Russia and get the electors to flip their votes is being accompanied by an intense media campaign.

In the announcement that the Clinton campaign would join the recount, campaign counsel Elias aligned the campaign with an unverified Washington Post article based largely on a shadowy, anonymous group that blamed a list of 200 alternative media sites and political groups for spreading Russian propaganda to influence the election, without providing any evidence.

"The Washington Post reported that the Russian government was behind much of the 'fake news' propaganda that circulated online in the closing weeks of the election," Elias wrote.

A Huffington Post article said one of the eight reasons the electors should overturn the election is because "Russian covert action influenced the election."

The staunchly pro-Clinton Daily Kos wrote that "Even if they never touched a voting machine, there's absolutely no doubt: Russia hacked the election."

If evidence of hacking is found in the recounts, the Clinton campaign would be greatly aided in lobbying electors with confirmation from the Obama administration that Russia was behind it. But on the day before the Clinton team joined the recount, the Obama administration appeared to throw a wrench into the plan to blame Russia.

The administration said it remained "confident in the overall integrity of electoral infrastructure, a confidence that was borne out," adding: "As a

result, we believe our elections were free and fair from a cyber-security perspective.”

The timing of that statement may have been intended to undermine Clinton as a split was reported between President Obama and Hillary Clinton over whether to have a recount.

Not satisfied with the administration’s conclusion, a group of Democratic senators on Thursday asked that information about Russian hacking should be declassified and released to the public.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest responded that the administration would take a look at the request. But he added that the intelligence community “did not observe an increase in malicious cyber-activity on Election Day from the Russians that was directed at disrupting the casting or counting of ballots.”

**Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist based at the U.N. since 1990. He has written for the Boston Globe, the London Daily Telegraph, the Johannesburg Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at @unjoe.**

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## Slow Start to Crucial Fund Drive

**From Editor Robert Parry:** We only do three fund drives a year so as not to impose too much on our readers, but our most important drive comes at the end of each year, setting the parameters for our budget in the year ahead. So far, it’s off to a slow start although the impact of Consortiumnews’ journalism is at an all-time high.

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Robert Parry

**Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.**

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## A Trump Plus: Reduced Tensions with Russia

For many Americans, the choice between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump was painful – a classic case of choosing a lesser evil – but William Blum sees at least some hope in Trump's turning away from war with Russia.

By William Blum

That he may not be "qualified" is unimportant. That he's never held a government or elected position is unimportant. That on a personal level he may be a shmuck is unimportant. What counts to me mainly at this early stage is that he – as opposed to dear Hillary – is unlikely to start a war against Russia.

His questioning of the absolute sacredness of NATO, calling it “obsolete”, and his meeting with Democratic Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, an outspoken critic of U.S. regime-change policy, specifically Syria, are encouraging signs.

Even more so is his appointment of General Michael Flynn as National Security Adviser. Flynn dined last year in Moscow with Vladimir Putin at a gala celebrating RT (Russia Today), the Russian state’s English-language, leftist-leaning TV channel. Flynn now carries the stigma in the American media as an individual who does not see Russia or Putin as the devil. It is truly remarkable how nonchalantly American journalists can look upon the possibility of a war with Russia, even a nuclear war.

(I can now expect a barrage of emails from my excessively politically-correct readers about Flynn’s alleged anti-Islam side. But that, even if true, is irrelevant to this discussion of avoiding a war with Russia.)

I think American influence under Trump could also inspire a solution to the bloody Russia-Ukraine crisis, which is the result of the U.S. overthrow of the democratically-elected Ukrainian government in 2014 to further advance the U.S./NATO surrounding of Russia; after which he could end the U.S.-imposed sanctions against Russia, which hardly anyone in Europe benefits from or wants; and then – finally! – an end to the embargo against Cuba. What a day for celebration that will be! Too bad that Fidel won’t be around to enjoy it.

We may have other days of celebration if Trump pardons or in some other manner frees Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and/or Edward Snowden. Neither Barack Obama nor Hillary Clinton would do this, but I think there’s at least a chance with the Donald. And those three heroes may now enjoy feeling at least a modicum of hope. Picture a meeting of them all together on some future marvelous day with you watching it on a video.

Trump will also probably not hold back on military actions against radical Islam because of any fear of being called anti-Islam. He’s repulsed enough by ISIS to want to destroy them, something that can’t always be said about Mr. Obama.

International trade deals, written by corporate lawyers for the benefit of their bosses, with little concern about the rest of us, may have rougher sailing in the Trump White House than is usually the case with such deals.

The mainstream critics of Trump foreign policy should be embarrassed, even humbled, by what they supported in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Instead, what bothers them about the President-elect is his lack of desire to make the rest of the world in America’s image. He appears rather to be more concerned with the world not making America in *its* image.

In the latest chapter of *Alice in Trumpland*, he now says that he does not plan to prosecute Hillary Clinton, that he has an “open mind” about a climate-change accord from which he had vowed to withdraw the United States, and that he’s no longer certain that torturing terrorism suspects is a good idea. So whatever fears you may have about certain of his expressed weird policies ... just wait ... they may fall by the wayside just as easily; although I still think that on a personal level he’s a [two-syllable word: first syllable is a synonym for a donkey; second syllable means “an opening”]

Trump’s apparently deep-seated need for approval may continue to succumb poorly to widespread criticism and protests. Poor little Donald ... so powerful ... yet so vulnerable.

The Trump dilemma, as well as the whole Hillary Clinton mess, could have probably been avoided if Bernie Sanders had been nominated. That large historical “if” is almost on a par with the Democrats choosing Harry Truman to replace Henry Wallace in 1944 as the ailing Roosevelt’s vice president. Truman brought us a charming little thing called the Cold War, which in turn gave us McCarthyism. But Wallace, like Sanders, was just a little too damn leftist for the refined Democratic Party bosses.

**William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/> .]**

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