

Believing the Russian ‘Hacking’ Claim

Government lies are common when seducing a population to support a war, but the Russian “hacking” claims are unusual in that U.S. officials supply no evidence while the “fact” is just assumed, as David Swanson explains.

By David Swanson

When the U.S. public was told that Spain had blown up the *Maine*, or Vietnam had returned fire, or Iraq had stockpiled weapons, or Libya was planning a massacre, the claims were straightforward and disprovable.

Before people began referring to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, somebody had to lie that it had happened, and there had to be an understanding of what had supposedly happened. No investigation into whether anything had happened could have taken as its starting point the certainty that a Vietnamese attack or attacks had happened. And no investigation into whether a Vietnamese attack had happened could have focused its efforts on unrelated matters, such as whether anyone in Vietnam had ever done business with any relatives or colleagues of Robert McNamara.

All of this is otherwise with the idea that the Russian government determined the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. U.S. corporate media reports often claim that Russia did decide the election or tried to do that or wanted to try to do that. But they also often admit to not knowing whether any such thing is the case.

There is no established account, with or without evidence to support it, of exactly what Russia supposedly did. And yet there are countless articles casually referring, as if to established fact to the . . .

“Russian influence in the 2016 presidential election” ([Yahoo](#)).

“Russian attempts to disrupt the election” ([New York Times](#)).

“Russian ... interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election” ([ABC](#)).

“Russian influence over the 2016 presidential election” ([The Intercept](#)).

“a multi-pronged investigation to uncover the full extent of Russia’s election-meddling” ([Time](#)).

“Russian interference in the US election” ([CNN](#)).

“Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election” ([American Constitution](#))

Society).

“Russian hacking in US Election” (Business Standard).”

“Obama Strikes Back at Russia for Election Hacking” we’re told by the New York Times, but what is “election hacking”? Its definition seems to vary widely. And what evidence is there of Russia having done it?

The “Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections” even exists as a factual event in Wikipedia, not as an allegation or a theory. But the factual nature of it is not so much asserted as brushed aside.

Former CIA Director John Brennan, in the same Congressional testimony in which he took the principled stand “I don’t do evidence,” testified that “the fact that the Russians tried to influence resources and authority and power, and the fact that the Russians tried to influence that election so that the will of the American people was not going to be realized by that election, I find outrageous and something that we need to, with every last ounce of devotion to this country, resist and try to act to prevent further instances of that.” He provided no evidence.

Activists have even planned “demonstrations to call for urgent investigations into Russian interference in the US election.” They declare that “every day we learn more about the role Russian state-led hacking and information warfare played in the 2016 election.” (March for Truth.)

Belief that Russia helped put Trump in the White House is steadily rising in the U.S. public. Anything commonly referred to as fact will gain credibility. People will assume that at some point someone actually established that it was a fact.

Keeping the story in the news without evidence are articles about polling, about the opinions of celebrities, and about all kinds of tangentially related scandals, their investigations, and obstruction thereof. Most of the substance of most of the articles that lead off with reference to the “Russian influence on the election” is about White House officials having some sort of connections to the Russian government, or Russian businesses, or just Russians. It’s as if an investigation of Iraqi WMD claims focused on Blackwater murders or whether Scooter Libby had taken lessons in Arabic, or whether the photo of Saddam Hussein and Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands was taken by an Iraqi.

A general trend away from empirical evidence has been extensively noted and discussed. There is no more public evidence that Seth Rich (a Democratic National Committee staffer who was murdered last year) leaked Democratic emails than there is that the Russian government stole them. Yet both claims have passionate believers.

Still, the claims about Russia are unique in their wide proliferation, broad acceptance, and status as something to be constantly referred to as though already established, constantly augmented by other Russia-related stories that add nothing to the central claim. This phenomenon, in my view, is as dangerous as any lies and fabrications coming out of the racist right.

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