NEWS FROM THE ELECTION FRONT: RUSSIA ATTACKED JOE BIDEN THROUGH "PROMINENT US INDIVIDUALS, SOME OF WHOM WERE CLOSE TO FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP"

Back in 2018, President Trump signed an Executive Order 13848, designed to stave off a law mandating sanctions in the event of election interference. The order nevertheless required reporting on election interference and provided the White House discretion to impose sanctions in the event of interference. Yesterday, the Director of Homeland Security and Director of National Intelligence released the reports mandated by an Executive Order, describing the known efforts to interfere in last year's election.

Trump's Intelligence Community Debunks Trump

Though Trump failed to comply publicly in 2019, his own EO mandates deadlines for — first — the DNI report assessing a broader range of possible election interference and then, 45 days later, the DHS/DOJ report describing interference with election infrastructure or influence operations.

> (a) Not later than 45 days after the conclusion of a United States election, the Director of National Intelligence, in consultation with the heads of any other appropriate executive departments

and agencies (agencies), shall conduct an assessment of any information indicating that a foreign government, or any person acting as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign government, has acted with the intent or purpose of interfering in that election. The assessment shall identify, to the maximum extent ascertainable, the nature of any foreign interference and any methods employed to execute it, the persons involved, and the foreign government or governments that authorized, directed, sponsored, or supported it. The Director of National Intelligence shall deliver this assessment and appropriate supporting information to the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Homeland Security.

(b) Within 45 days of receiving the assessment and information described in section 1(a) of this order, the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the heads of any other appropriate agencies and, as appropriate, State and local officials, shall deliver to the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of Defense a report evaluating, with respect to the United States election that is the subject of the assessment described in section 1(a):

(i) the extent to which any foreign interference that targeted election infrastructure materially affected the security or integrity of that infrastructure, the tabulation of votes, or the timely transmission of election results; and

> (ii) if any foreign interference
> involved activities targeting the
> infrastructure of, or pertaining to, a
> political organization, campaign, or
> candidate, the extent to which such
> activities materially affected the
> security or integrity of that
> infrastructure, including by
> unauthorized access to, disclosure or
> threatened disclosure of, or alteration
> or falsification of, information or
> data.

These deadlines should have been, for the DNI
Report, December 18, and for the DHS/DOJ report,
February 1.

The declassified DNI report released yesterday
was finished and distributed, in classified
form, on January 7.

> The document is a declassified version
> of a classified report that the IC
> provided to the President, senior
> Executive Branch officials, and
> Congressional leadership and
> intelligence oversight committees on
> January 7, 2021.

It was based off intelligence available as of
December 31.

The DHS report was completed in February.

Which is to say that these reports were done
substantially under the Trump Administration.

DHS Debunks the Kraken

The DHS report, based off the classified report
completed in February, finds that while Russian
and Iran breached some election infrastructure,
they did not manage to change any votes. It also
finds that those two countries plus China
managed to compromise party or campaign
infrastructure, with unknown goals, but that
none of the countries that accessed information

that *could* have been used in influence operations used the information.

The most important result, however, was that after checking via multiple different measures, the government found no evidence that dead Hugo Chavez or anyone else that Sidney Powell invoked in service of the Big Lie succeeded in changing any votes.

> We are aware of multiple public claims that one or more foreign governments—including Venezuela, Cuba, or China—owned, directed, or controlled election infrastructure used in the 2020 federal elections; implemented a scheme to manipulate election infrastructure; or tallied, changed, or otherwise manipulated vote counts. Following the election, the Department of Justice, including the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security, including CISA, investigated the public claims and determined that they are not credible.
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> We have no evidence—not through intelligence collection on the foreign actors themselves, not through physical security and cybersecurity monitoring of voting systems across the country, not through post-election audits, and not through any other means—that a foreign government or other actors compromised election infrastructure to manipulate election results.

DNI (Mostly) Debunks the DNI

Last summer, the Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe responded to Democratic concerns about Russia interfering in the election again by stating that China was too. This report largely debunks that claim.

> **We assess that China did not deploy**

interference efforts and considered but did not deploy influence efforts intended to change the outcome of the US presidential election. We have high confidence in this judgment. China sought stability in its relationship with the United States and did not view either election outcome as being advantageous enough for China to risk blowback if caught. Beijing probably believed that its traditional influence tools, primarily targeted economic measures and lobbying key individuals and interest groups, would be sufficient to achieve its goal of shaping US policy regardless of who won the election. **We did not identify China attempting to interfere with election infrastructure or provide funding to any candidates or parties**.

- *The IC assesses that Chinese state media criticism of the Trump administration's policies related to China and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic remained consistent in the lead-up to the election and was aimed at shaping perceptions of US policies and bolstering China's global position rather than to affect the 2020 US election. The coverage of the US election, in particular, was limited compared to other*

> *topics measured in total volume of content.*
> - *China has long sought to influence US politics by shaping political and social environments to press US officials to support China's positions and perspectives. We did not, however, see these capabilities deployed for the purpose of shaping the electoral outcome. [Bold original]*

The report describes that the National Intelligence Officer for Cyber had moderate confidence that China was trying to help Joe Biden win.

> Minority View The National Intelligence Officer for Cyber assesses that China took at least some steps to undermine former President Trump's reelection chances, primarily through social media and official public statements and media. The NIO agrees with the IC's view that Beijing was primarily focused on countering anti-China policies, but assesses that some of Beijing's influence efforts were intended to at least indirectly affect US candidates, political processes, and voter preferences, meeting the definition for election influence used in this report. The NIO agrees that we have no information suggesting China tried to interfere with election processes. The NIO has moderate confidence in these

> judgments.
>
> This view differs from the IC assessment because it gives more weight to indications that Beijing preferred former President Trump's defeat and the election of a more predictable member of the establishment instead, and that Beijing implemented some-and later increased-its election influence efforts, especially over the summer of 2020. The NIO assesses these indications are more persuasive than other information indicating that China decided not to intervene. The NIO further assesses that Beijing calibrated its influence efforts to avoid blowback.

That said, the day after this report was initially disseminated in classified form on January 7, Ratcliffe made clear that the Ombud believed this was a politicized view, and that more than just the Cyber NIO agreed (though didn't mention that the Ombud believed Russian intelligence had been politicized even worse).

> President Trump's political appointees clashed with career intelligence analysts over the extent to which Russia and China interfered or sought to interfere in the 2020 election, with each side accusing the other of politicization, according to a report by an intelligence community ombudsman.
>
> The findings by Barry A. Zulauf, the "analytic ombudsman" for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), describe an intelligence community afflicted by a "widespread perception in the workforce about politicization" of analysis on the topic of foreign election influence — one that he says threatens the legitimacy of the agencies' work.
>
> [snip]

> Citing Zulauf's report, Director of
> National Intelligence John Ratcliffe,
> chosen for the position by Trump last
> year, charged Thursday that career
> analysts in a recently completed
> classified assessment failed to capture
> the full scope of Chinese government
> influence on the election — a charge
> that some current and former officials
> say illustrates the issue of
> politicization, because it downplays the
> much larger role of Russia.

As late as October, then, another Intelligence
Officer had some confidence that what this
report deems China's regular influence-peddling
had an electoral component, but (as Ratcliffe
complained in January) it did not show up in
this report, which was entirely produced after
the Ombud weighed in.

The IC Now Associates
Konstantin Kilimnik
with FSB, not GRU

The long section on Russia's efforts to
influence the election get pretty damned close
to saying that the events surrounding Trump's
first impeachment and even the Hunter Biden
laptop were Russian backed (which is consistent
with intelligence warnings that were broadly
shared). It might as well have named Rudy
Giuliani (among others).

> **We assess that President Putin and the
> Russian state authorized and conducted
> influence operations against the 2020 US
> presidential election aimed at
> denigrating President Biden and the
> Democratic Party, supporting former
> President Trump, undermining public
> confidence in the electoral process, and
> exacerbating sociopolitical divisions in
> the US. Unlike in 2016, we did not see**

> **persistent Russian cyber efforts to gain access to election infrastructure**. We have high confidence in these judgments because a range of Russian state and proxy actors who all serve the Kremlin's interests worked to affect US public perceptions. We also have high confidence because of the consistency of themes in Russia's influence efforts across the various influence actors and throughout the campaign, as well as in Russian leaders' assessments of the candidates. **A key element of Moscow's strategy this election cycle was its use of people linked to Russian intelligence to launder influence narratives—including misleading or unsubstantiated allegations against President Biden—through US media organizations, US officials, and prominent US individuals,** *some of whom were close to former President Trump and his administration*.
>
> [snip]
>
> Derkach, Kilimnik, and their associates sought to use prominent US persons and media conduits to launder their narratives to US officials and audiences. These Russian proxies met with and provided materials to Trump administration-linked US persons to advocate for formal investigations; hired a US firm to petition US officials; and attempted to make contact with several senior US officials. They also made contact with established US media figures and helped produce a documentary that aired on a US television network in late January 2020. [Bold original, italics added]

The report likens what Russian entities were doing post-election with what Russia had planned in 2016.

> Even after the election, Russian online
> influence actors continued to promote
> narratives questioning the election
> results and disparaging President Biden
> and the Democratic Party. These efforts
> parallel plans Moscow had in place in
> 2016 to discredit a potential incoming
> Clinton administration, but which it
> scrapped after former President Trump's
> victory.

Perhaps the most interesting detail — on top of
revealing that Paul Manafort's former employee
remained involved in all this — is that this
report suggests Kilimnik has ties to FSB, not
GRU (though the report describes GRU's efforts
as well).

> A network of Ukraine-linked
> individuals—including Russian influence
> agent Konstantin Kilimnik—who were also
> connected to the Russian Federal
> Security Service (FSB) took steps
> throughout the election cycle to damage
> US ties to Ukraine, denigrate President
> Biden and his candidacy, and benefit
> former President Trump's prospects for
> reelection.

The most recent public reporting on Kilimnik was
the SSCI Report. And that suggested that
Kilimnik (along with at least one other Oleg
Deripaska deputy) was linked to GRU. Indeed,
Kilimnik has been described as a former GRU
officer. This suggests he may have ties, as well
or more recently, to FSB, which would have
interesting implications for the 2016 operation.

Update, 11/26/23: Link replaced.