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USA

"A threat to democracy"

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Let's assume that Russia is actually guilty of everything it's accused of doing – which I'm personally guessing it probably is – to hack and interfere in the U.S. election (and others, including most recently France). At the very least, it seems clear that these charges are not ideologically motivated inventions like those infamous mythical Iraqi weapons-of-mass-destruction in 2003. In the present case, the reality of Russian hacking appears to be the informed judgment of journalists and intelligence professionals in the United States and elsewhere.

If it's true, what then does it amount to? Certainly, anyone on the left – and any student of history – knows that it's hardly worse than what the United States has routinely done in other countries' elections. Only the electronic technology is new. The list is too long to even survey here, but to take just one example from Italy's election way back in 1948:

The CIA, by its own admission, gave \$1 million to Italian "center parties" and was accused of publishing forged letters in order to discredit the leaders of the Italian Communist Party. The National Security Act of 1947, that made foreign covert operations possible, had been signed into law about six months earlier by the American President Harry S. Truman.

'We had bags of money that we delivered to selected politicians, to defray their political expenses, their campaign expenses, for posters, for pamphlets,' according to CIA operative F. Mark Wyatt. In order to influence the election, the US agencies undertook a campaign of writing ten million letters, made numerous short-wave radio broadcasts and funded the publishing of books and articles, all of which warned the Italians of what was believed to be the consequences of a communist victory. Time Magazine backed the campaign and featured the Christian Democrat leader and Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi on its cover and in its lead story on 19 April 1948.

The pattern continued throughout the Cold War and beyond – and that's not even counting murderous CIA-sponsored coups and assassinations in Guatemala, Iran, Congo, Indonesia, Chile and more. But if none of this is exactly late-breaking news, what is there to say about today's "threat to our democracy" at home?

The media know, of course, and some are even saying up front, that Donald Trump's shambolic firing of FBI Director James Comey is a blatant move to block the investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election, and the possible collusion of Trump campaign operatives. More importantly, what they're not saying is that as "a threat to our democracy" Russian hacking ranks no higher than third on the list. The much bigger "threats to our democracy" are the uncontrollable dark money from the Koch (Koch) Brothers and others in politics, combined with blatant gerrymandering and voter suppression by Republican-controlled state legislatures.

In fact, on the very day that the administration's initial account of the Comey firing was blowing apart, the Trump regime had just created a "voter fraud investigation commission" to put in place voter suppression on a nationwide scale. The Orwellian-titled "Presidential Commission on Election Integrity" is to be chaired by vice-president Pence with vice-chair Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach. Its purpose is to confirm Trump's fantasy that "millions" of ineligible and dead people voted for Hillary Clinton. It can be safely assumed that it will not investigate the removal of 200,000 people from Wisconsin's voter rolls – disproportionately Black and Democratic voters – nine times the amount of Trump's critically important 2016 victory there.

The Voting Rights Act is rapidly becoming a dead letter in big parts of the United States, and not only the deep

South.

Swirling Scandals

The real issue in the swirling scandals around the White House isn't James Comey, one way or the other. It's the future of a presidency that gives cesspools a bad name.

NBC news anchor Lester Holt missed the point in his highly acclaimed May 11 interview when he let Trump get away with saying he has "no businesses or property in Russia." The question is not about business "in Russia" but Trump's business and financial relations with Russian organized crime and politically connected figures in his businesses around the world including in the USA.

These entanglements are detailed by reporter Steven Rosenfeld in an Altnet article worth reading in detail. "Meanwhile, domestically," Rosenfeld suggests, "Trump seems to be copying what unfolded in Russia after the Soviet Union broke up and several dozen oligarchs and mobsters emerged with control of the country's mineral wealth...including the possibility that some of Trump's private investors from Russia could end up with stakes in newly freed-up U.S. mineral assets [on federal land]."

Let's be clear: The Republican leadership knows, as well as the rest of us, who and what Donald Trump is. The question will be whether and when he is no longer useful to pushing through their kleptocratic and socially medieval agenda. For now they still need him, and he's an asset to their voting base who believe the myth that Trump will solve the disastrous social crisis and disintegration of small-town and rural America.

For the moment, only a few Republican senators are breaking ranks. My guess is that when that dam breaks it will happen basically all at once – maybe if it becomes clear that Trump is dragging them down in the 2018 midterm – or sooner, or later, depending on all kinds of unpredictable events (e.g. a big financial downturn).

If it becomes necessary to dump Trump, there are many ways to do it – impeachment isn't necessary. It's not a news flash that this man is a crook, a swindler and the head of a corrupt family enterprise. That subjects him to blackmail, not only by Russia but by the U.S. system itself, if and when that option becomes important for the ruling class.

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