

Into the Fray...Why You Can Ignore Moscow's Election Meddling

Eric C. Anderson

Americans have an irrational, visceral reaction to reports of an outside power trying to manipulate the outcome of our elections. Why? I'm not sure. If you read through history, there is a faint track of would-be foreign interlopers trailing back to the days of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Rumors of stolen or stuffed ballot boxes. Stories of corrupt election officials paid to miscount the citizenry's contribution to our democracy. And conspiracy theories of foreigners misleading the press. All so that a despot or dictator somewhere outside of the U.S borders could determine who would sit atop the political hierarchy in Washington.

With damn little success.

The most significant danger to American democracy comes from within. Gerrymander districts and bribe office holders, spread malicious tales of drunken debauchery or scandalous sexual escapades. Open a Super PAC. Each a domestic effort to convince voters one candidate or another was unworthy of your energy, trust, and money.

With that in mind, we need to quell the fear of Moscow's maneuvers within the 2016 and 2018 elections. Let this be said up front; I am certain Mr. Putin's minions were told to exploit any opportunity to derail Hillary Clinton. The retired Secretary of State did not endear herself with the Kremlin. But, you would be hard-pressed to definitively demonstrate Russian hackers did more damage to Mrs. Clinton's

campaign than Mr. Comey's ill-timed announcements concerning her email practices.

Mr. Trump—like him or not—has assumed an appropriate posture as we stride toward the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Warn Moscow to behave and let Facebook filter the social media silliness. For the moment it appears the best Moscow can offer is roiling of the American culture wars. It makes for great theater. But is unlikely to change a single election outcome. Americans ultimately vote their pocketbook and love incumbents. Noise on the internet is not going to change those facts.

Congress has waded in with an offer of cash—\$380 million—to update our 50 different electronic voting systems. So far only Missouri appears interested in actually doing something with that money. Suggesting the problem playing in the press of Russian hacking was not as bad as you have been led to believe. Either that, or we have secretaries of state in 49 other constituencies who have abrogated their duties, which is highly unlikely.

So, who is winning in this [social media](#) messaging war? Moscow or Washington? I would contend the Russians are in over their heads. What draws headlines on the internet or in your local newspaper is interesting to reporters and the fringe extremists on the left and right. A majority of American voters do not fall into those three categories. A lesson the Russian Internet Research Agency has yet to internalize.

Walk to the ballot box in November with that in mind. Gossip, electronic or otherwise, inflame but does not inform. A truism that has provided this nation with a long history of loyal, elected public servants.



About the Author: Eric C. Anderson is a retired member of the U.S. Intelligence Community. He is also an author. His latest novel is "Anubis," the second book in a trilogy examining the rise of ISIS. "Byte," a first look at using cryptocurrency to upend politics in Moscow will be released in September by Dunn Books.