

# Yes, the Russians Wanted Trump Over Hillary, But Their Real Goal Is to Divide Americans

By JIM SMITH

Prompted by last week's election results and the firing of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, I'm taking a break once again from writing about real estate to write about politics. But my intention is to be more educational than partisan. Once again, as in my June 21st column, I am speaking only for myself and not for Golden Real Estate or its wonderful — and largely apolitical — broker associates.

As a professional journalist myself (trained at the Washington Post during the turbulent summer of 1968) and educated about the Soviet Union in boarding school as a student of the Russian language, I know something about what led up to the 2016 election that I don't feel has been adequately conveyed by the media.

In addition to learning the Russian language from my prep school teacher, a Dutchman, I also learned about how the Soviets used information to control their own population, and how they used it to influence people of other nations. My education even included subscribing to the Soviet newspaper Izvestia, which probably put me on a CIA watch list back in the 1960s. I also traveled to the Soviet Union in 1978 as a tourist and again in the 1980s three times as part of "citizen diplomacy" groups sponsored by the Center for Soviet-American Dialogue in Bellingham, Washington. After the fall of the Soviet Union, I made one additional visit to Russia, this time as a tourist to Vladivostok, the Pacific naval port which is also the terminus of the famed Trans-Siberian Railroad.

From these and other experiences, I learned about the KGB, in which Vladimir Putin served with distinction, leading to his selection to succeed Boris Yeltsin as President of Russia. I'm speaking up now, because, unless you watched the excellent 2-part series "Putin's Revenge" on the PBS program Frontline (Google it), you may not fully comprehend how the Russians impacted the 2016 election or recognize the activities they continue to engage in today.

I never worried that Russians colluded with the Trump campaign or tried to **hack actual voting**, because I knew that their tactic is to **manipulate minds**. It was the Russians who invented the terms "disinformation" and "kompromat" (compromising material). I learned those terms in Russian class in the 1960s.

## Why Use Facebook Messenger?

Perhaps I'm showing my age, but I just don't understand why some people choose to communicate by Facebook Messenger instead of email. I get emails that so-and-so has sent me a message on Facebook, and I have to login to read it.

Wouldn't it make more sense — and be more considerate — to send the message in an email? Someone please explain this to me!

While on the topic of email, I find Windows' default typeface (10-pt. Calibri) hard-to-read. I have changed that default to readable 12-pt. Georgia.

If you use Outlook, you can change the default at File>Options>Mail>Stationery and Fonts.

The widespread adoption of social media, such as Facebook, supercharged the Russians' ability to influence "low information voters" — voters who aren't well enough informed to detect fake stories intended to influence their beliefs and voting behavior.

The Frontline program showed how Russia's Internet Research Agency has used social media to fire up **both sides of any issue** which has the potential of creating social and political division in America. They would seize on issues and events that were already dividing America, such as the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, and create social media posts both promoting and attacking what was happening.

Think about any event that happened in the past several years — such as the killings of blacks by white police officers, but also anything that would stir up the far right and/or liberals — and you can be sure that some of the social media postings appealing to each extreme were created by Russians working in the St. Petersburg, Russia, office of the Internet Research Agency. Such postings then triggered other events — think mass casualty events — which in turn were exploited using additional postings. It's a never-ending vicious circle. The Frontline program gave examples.

America is not the only target of Russia's meddling with public perceptions and opinions. Russians are even more keen on breaking up the European Union and NATO. Without a doubt, they did the same kind of meddling in European countries to stir up, for example, division over the influx of Syrian refugees.

The Brexit vote in England was probably influenced by a Russian disinformation campaign in that country. And that makes sense, because what would Russia like more, given Putin's commitment to making Russia great again, than to see the European Union weakened? Russia's Internet Research Agency is probably at work stirring up nationalist feelings in every European country. Promotion of nationalism in America also serves Russia's interest because it serves to weaken NATO and draw us out of other international agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The bottom line, as I see it so clearly, is that President Trump has served as a useful tool — without actual "collusion" — for the aggrandizement of the new Russia under Vladimir Putin. And everything that Trump does to further divide Americans against each other, whether promoted or not by the Internet Research Agency, serves to weaken the United States' position in the world, which, almost by definition,

strengthens Russia's position in the world.

In one of my "citizen diplomat" trips to the Soviet Union, I was struck by the fact that attractive young women were inexplicably introduced into some of the social events for our largely male delegation. When I heard about the "dossier" with compromising videos of Donald Trump the businessman with prostitutes — for whom I'd wager he did not pay — I suspected immediately that it was true. This and other "kompromat" could serve to keep our President from doing anything adverse to the Russian government.

It doesn't matter whether the campaign to weaken the First Amendment by creating mistrust of mainstream media with the "fake news" label is inspired or promoted by the Russians. Trump is doing a good enough job at that, and it does indeed weaken our society and ultimately our standing in the world, which must warm the hearts of our adversaries. The trade war with our allies and other countries — except Russia, it should be noted — can't hurt in that respect, either.

Ultimately, I have great faith in America, and I am heartened that one house of Congress will soon be under Democratic control, providing a check on the Republican Senate and the Trump administration. A crucial role of Congress is to provide oversight on every department and agency and to hold the administration accountable — something that the Republican Congress has declined to do lest it impact their individual political futures. Impeachment of President Trump is not necessary, however deserved it might be on constitutional grounds. It is sufficient just to have one house of Congress holding the rest of our government accountable for its actions.

Changing topics, it is common knowledge that more than 80% of the tax breaks in the Trump tax bill went to the very rich, with some relief to the middle class thrown in to garner popular support. Overlooked, however, is the impact on the non-profit sector. I'm concerned that Americans will donate less money to worthy charities as we approach the holiday season because of the doubling of the standard deduction. That one provision takes away the tax advantage of supporting charitable causes for a large number of taxpayers, but it is not being discussed.

I'm not letting it affect my own giving, but I worry that it could affect others' giving, and I'm looking forward to some entity doing a statistical analysis of the tax bill's effect on charitable giving this year and next.



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