

Foreign Interference in Elections: Is It Real or Just Political Noise?

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A recently concluded British Parliamentary inquiry has determined that Russia may have [interfered in the 2016 Brexit referendum](#), which resulted in the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. But, ironically, it also concluded that Russia might not have interfered given the fact that the British government never bothered to try to find out if there had been any attempt made by the Kremlin to manipulate the voting.

The Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee [is reportedly perplexed](#) by the lack of official interest in what might have been a foreign intelligence operation that had major impact, all too plausible given that it is assumed that Moscow would have welcomed Brexit as a first step that will eventually put an end to European political and economic unity.

So, no one knows if Russia or anyone else interfered in Britain, which is perhaps just as well as inquiries into voting in the U.S. also in 2016 have likewise created nothing but confusion and no smoking pistol. And, of course there is a question of definitions of interference. Millions of pounds were spent on advertising by those pro- and con-Brexit, just as billions were spent in political adverts in the United States. Much of the "information" provided in that fashion was deliberately misleading, often fearmongering, both in the U.K. and the U.S., suggesting that the problem is much bigger than one country's possible attempt to influence the vote, if that even took place.

There were similar claims about Russian generated fake news and "a massive hacking attack" in the [French presidential election](#) in 2017, while Germany's Federal Election was notable for a [lack of any identifiable Kremlin interference](#) in spite of warnings from [some observers](#) that Berlin would be targeted.

So, while claims of Russian interference in elections are fairly common, they are difficult to prove in any serious way. And one should recognize that the "victimized" governments and political parties have strong motives to conjure up a foreign enemy to explain to the public why things are going wrong, be it for coronavirus fumbling or for general political ineptitude. To be sure, as the allure of blaming Russia has faded China is increasingly being targeted by American politicians as a scapegoat, indicating that there must always be a foreigner available to blame for one's problems.

The most recent nugget to come out of the U.S. Congress on foreign interference in elections originates with Adam Schiff, the sly head of the House Intelligence Committee. In an interview with MSNBC, [Schiff revealed](#) that U.S. intelligence has obtained information suggesting multiple nations could be trying to meddle in the 2020 U.S. elections, to include feeding or "laundering" possible disinformation through Congress.

Schiff explained how various nations use different tactics to get “fake news” messages through to the American voters. Some governments openly support a particular candidate or policy, while others like the Chinese provide misinformation during their trade negotiations with Washington. He observed that

“The Russians may get involved in hacking and dumping operations or social media campaigns. The Iranians may have their own tactics and techniques like the North Koreans may have theirs.”

A [letter](#) signed by Schiff, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Senate Intelligence Committee ranking member Mark Warner, D-Va has asked for a counterintelligence briefing for Congress regarding foreign efforts to interfere in the upcoming election. It includes

“We are gravely concerned, in particular, that Congress appears to be the target of a concerted foreign interference campaign, which seeks to launder and amplify disinformation in order to influence congressional activity, public debate, and the presidential election in November.”

Democratic Party presidential candidate presumptive Joe Biden also has confirmed that [he has received briefings](#) about Russian alleged plans to interfere in November saying

“The Russians are still engaged in trying to delegitimize our electoral process. China and others are engaged as well in activities that are designed for us to lose confidence in the outcome.”

Of course, there are a number of things to say about the claims that other nations are possibly planning to meddle in the voting. First, the list of possible players being presented by Schiff and others is all too convenient, kind of like a Congressional dream list of bad boys. Russia pops up because of longstanding claims about it, but China is a new entry in the game because it all ties up into a neat package, including the “Wuhan virus” and its challenges both to American economic supremacy and to U.S. naval power in the South China Sea. And of course, there are Iran and also North Korea.

One should ask what exactly China, Iran and North Korea stand to gain by attempting to “interfere” in the election? What message could they possibly be sending and what would be the mechanisms they would use to get their points of view across to a skeptical American public? In a campaign that will undoubtedly cost hundreds of billions of dollars in advertising and other “messaging,” what exactly is the possible place of Iran and North Korea?

There is also a lack of “realism” in the Schiff comments. By far the country that [interferes the most](#) in U.S. politics is Israel. Israel and its domestic Lobby [initiate legislation](#) relating to the Middle East and Israeli diplomats, lobbyists and soldiers all have [free access](#) both to Capitol Hill and to the Pentagon. If a Congressman dares to speak up against the Jewish state’s crimes he or she is [smeared in the media](#) and eventually forced out of office by a well-funded pro-Israel opponent. No other country gets away with all that. As it is highly likely that Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be pulling out all the stops to reelect Donald Trump in November, why isn’t the Jewish state included on Schiff’s list?

And then there is the tantalizing bit about concerns over disinformation being “laundered” through Congress. It is difficult to imagine what exactly Schiff is referring to as the corrupt gasbags in Congress already constitute one of the world’s biggest sources of false information, second only to the fully coopted U.S. mainstream media.

In any event, if some countries that are accustomed to being regularly targeted by the United States are taking advantage of an opportunity to somehow diminish America’s ability to meddle globally, no one should be surprised, but it is a politically driven fantasy to make the hysterical claim that the United States has now become the victim of some kind of vast multi-national conspiracy to interfere in its upcoming election.

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