

Bipartisan Experts Call for Independent Investigation Into Foreign Election Interference

It is the foundation of our democratic system of government that the American people are governed by unfettered choices made in free and fair elections in a system that has transparency and unimpeachable integrity. Elections are neither free nor fair when other nations attempt to surreptitiously affect them or change the outcome. This past presidential campaign, America's democracy was attacked by electronic hacking. Seventeen U.S. intelligence agencies say with high confidence that the Russian government was responsible. To understand fully and publicly what happened, how we were so vulnerable, and what we can do to protect our democracy in future elections, we the undersigned strongly encourage the Congress to create an independent, bipartisan commission to investigate efforts by the Russian Federation to influence or interfere with the U.S. presidential election in 2016.

Here's what we know: the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) identified the Russian government as being responsible for the electronic hacks into the servers or e-mails of the Democratic National Committee, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and John Podesta (Chairman of Secretary Hillary Clinton's campaign), as well as others. ODNI also confirmed that various states had their election systems scanned by servers owned by a Russian company. Further, independent, private-sector research teams have discovered efforts by Russian entities to push fake campaign-related news.

While this interference is the most significant the American electorate has ever seen in a national election, it has been occurring against our international allies for decades. That it was perpetuated against us demonstrates a bold escalation of interference that must be understood and stymied.

No American should tolerate these types of intrusions into the bedrock of our democracy. Our elections should always belong to us. When foreign interference occurs, both major political parties should unite and declare they will not tolerate it. As such, it is inconceivable that we not seek to understand all aspects of what happened, including the mechanism by which the electronic hacks took place, the manner in which information collected was provided to those who released it to the public, the motives behind these efforts to influence our election, ways we can prevent future electoral interference, and how we should respond to future attacks.

Some have questioned whether the Russian government, despite the conclusion of 17 of our intelligence agencies, was really responsible for the hacks. Such doubts only reinforce why an independent, inquiry should occur outside of Congress. Furthermore, it is essential that this commission be established outside of Congress, as that is the only way to ensure that the investigation is comprehensive and not siloed within a certain congressional committee's jurisdiction. This inquiry should occur immediately. Anything less than a swift investigation will leave us vulnerable to another attack and, possibly worse, permit and normalize future interference.

It is for these reasons that an independent, bipartisan-appointed commission - made up of experts who can focus on this issue exclusively - can provide the American people with credible,

complete results of what happened and make recommendations so that such state-sponsored interference never happens again. We urge Congress to create such an independent commission forthwith so that it may immediately get to work and protect our democracy.

Honorable Madeleine K. Albright
64th Secretary of State

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich
Former U.S. Ambassador to Australia

Dr. Eliot A. Cohen
Former Counselor of the Department of State

Lee H. Hamilton
Former Member of Congress and Vice Chair 9/11 Commission

General James L. Jones
Former National Security Advisor

Honorable David J. Kramer
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Ambassador Michael McFaul
Stanford University, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia

Michael Morell
Former Acting Director and Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency

Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Former Secretary of Defense

Paul Rosenzweig
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Department of Homeland Security

Mary Ruppert
Former Federal National Security Prosecutor, Department of Justice

Dr. Edward Schatz
Associate Professor, Political Science, University of Toronto

E. John Sebes
Chief Technology Officer, TrustTheVote Project and Co-Director, OSET Institute

Honorable Ellen Tauscher
Former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and former Member of Congress

Honorable Michael Vickers
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence