

# REVISITING OBAMA ON THE WEAKNESS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

It has become fashionable, of late, for pundits to say President Obama failed to respond accordingly to the Russian hack last year. As I showed in this analysis of WaPo's 8300 word opus making that argument, such claims tend to give the views of the CIA and Democrats most emphasis, obscuring the degree to which even within the Intelligence Community there was less certainty than narrative reconstructions make out. They also tend to ignore some key events – like assassinations and indictments of Russian hackers – in claiming nothing has happened, effectively pretending that sanctions are the necessary and exclusive possible response. Significantly, they also tend to ignore ongoing developments, most notably the Shadow Brokers leaks and the global ransomware launched using it, that may constrain our possible responses for the moment.

In other words, the narrative condemning Obama inaction ignores a lot.

Such analyses also miss another important point, something Obama pointed out in his December speech on the Russian hack. It's a point I've been thinking a lot about recently, especially today.

To the extent the Russian hack was effective, Obama argued, it's because our own politics have made us vulnerable.

Our vulnerability to Russia or any other foreign power is directly related to how divided, partisan, dysfunctional our political process is. That's the thing that makes us vulnerable.

If fake news that's being released by some foreign government is almost identical to reports that are being

issued through partisan news venues, then it's not surprising that that foreign propaganda will have a greater effect, because it doesn't seem that far-fetched compared to some of the other stuff that folks are hearing from domestic propagandists.

To the extent that our political dialogue is such where everything is under suspicion, everybody is corrupt and everybody is doing things for partisan reasons, and all of our institutions are full of malevolent actors – if that's the storyline that's being put out there by whatever party is out of power, then when a foreign government introduces that same argument with facts that are made up, voters who have been listening to that stuff for years, who have been getting that stuff every day from talk radio or other venues, they're going to believe it.

So if we want to really reduce foreign influence on our elections, then we better think about how to make sure that our political process, our political dialogue is stronger than it's been.

I'm unsympathetic to Obama's complaints that people distrust our institutions. His DOJ, after all, failed to prosecute torturers, illegal wiretappers, and most of all, the banksters that crashed our economy. The distrust of our institutions, including the press that got us into the Iraq War, has been earned.

We need to start thinking about what they would need to do to earn trust anew.

But Obama is right about why the hack succeeded, to the extent it did. Almost everything Russia did – create fake scandals, try to tamper with the ability to vote – the Republicans (and occasionally, Democrats too) have been doing for decades. In fact, we now know that a long-time

GOP ratfucker, Peter W Smith, was even trolling hacker forums looking for someone who might have hacked Hillary's private server. So whatever the Russians did, they largely just joined the predictable and persistent GOP wave doing precisely the same.

And for decades, we have tolerated that – explicit voter suppression, fake scandals, cheating to win – from the GOP.

As I said last week, when Democrats were responding to Kris Kobach's latest attempt to suppress the vote, it's time for all patriotic Americans to establish and commit to a standard for our democracy, one that doesn't tolerate the same tactics a foreign government would use to its advantage.

We're stuck with the Republicans for at least two more years, and they're determined to do as much damage to our democracy to prevent paying any price for the crap they're currently pulling, so it may be longer than that. But we need to think of this about restoring our democracy, not just beating the other team.

Happy Fourth of July. May we find a way to keep the Republic.