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## [The logic of the Kremlin Gate](#)



Russia was accused of hacking the Democratic Party's servers in a summer 2016 scandal and the Trump Team was consequently rumored to enjoy close ties with Moscow. The [attempted coup](#) in Montenegro, attempts to discredit Emmanuel Macron during the presidential campaign in France and the threat of potential interference in the upcoming German election are also parts of the same picture. Therefore, a couple of questions arise: what are the Kremlin's goals and why, exactly, has it resorted to "dirty" tactics?

### **The Kremlin's motivation**

The Kremlin's behavior today stems from its absolute lack of understanding of the contemporary world including global processes, rules and leaders. Besides, Russia has failed to carry out effective modernization aimed at transforming the country into a competitive player in the global economy.

This lack of understanding could be observed ten years ago, too, as evidenced in Vladimir Putin's Munich speech and has only become worse as time has passed. Inconsistencies of European integration have been interpreted with volumes of Oswald Spengler in hand. According to the Kremlin, the Arab spring resulted either from the popularity of Twitter or Washington's magical ability to organize color revolutions. Green energy, shale revolution, private space exploration as well as other landmark achievements in the history of

mankind were all ignored by Moscow initially. When it became impossible to turn a blind eye to what was happening, Russia explained these successes by the fact that exceptional financial support was provided by Western governments.

Moscow finally ceased to understand the US at all which became apparent during Barack Obama's presidency. On the one hand, the 2009-2010 "reset" (which in fact meant forgiveness for Russia's war against Georgia), the "chemical deal" with Putin instead of a blow dealt against Assad in Syria in 2013 and the general lack of interest in Russia were interpreted as American weakness. Hence, the conclusion was reached that the Kremlin would be granted further concessions should it make enough efforts and continue to push the West.

On the other hand, Washington continued to ignore the Russian narrative in the sphere of international security. The ongoing decline of Russian-American cooperation and the so-called Magnitsky list have brought about a serious dissonance. Russia did push the West and show the initiative and yet this yielded nothing other than growing widespread contempt. This dissonance must have given rise to hatred for Obama as presented by all Russian state-owned media by 2016.

Moreover, all the projects of "strategic economic cooperation" Moscow counted on have been discontinued one by one post-September 2011 whether oil industry projects, engineering or high tech. The reason for this is clear - it concerned Putin's decision to return to the Kremlin. The Russian ruling class underestimated the consequences of refusing to comply with the Constitution.

Obviously, the fact that the Americans, Europeans and the rest of the world refused to recognize the legitimacy of Russia's attempts to subdue Ukraine in 2014 prompted surprise and fury in Moscow. Besides, the world refused to tolerate the occupation of Crimea and several regions of the Donbas. The Russian authorities began to fear the imposition of sanctions primarily aimed at curtailing their room for maneuver. The problem is that Russia is accumulating a backlog without Western technologies and investment which threatens the preservation of power and wealth of the current power elite.

At the same time, the Kremlin remains entirely convinced that Western elites are as immoral, cynical and unscrupulous as their Russian counterparts. Moreover, Moscow believes that the existing order was not arrived at via objective processes and values set out during the Enlightenment but resulted from a desire to snatch power and seize available resources. Thus, we are dealing with a bizarre mixture of conspiracy theories and clichés from Nietzsche, Spengler, Ilyin and others as well as an acute lack of knowledge of humanities.

Such a perception of reality has resulted in a burning desire to get rid of the world order, perceived as uncomfortable by Moscow. And some believe that this ambitious feat is attainable.

### **The ultimate goal of the Russian power elite**

The idea is that interference in political campaigns of both Americans and Europeans constitutes a means by which the Russian authorities can discredit democracy as such. This is necessary to demoralize both Western societies and Western elites. Ideally, this should lead to the disintegration of Euro-Atlantic unity including the EU and NATO. This is the ultimate goal as set out by the Russian power elite.

It was not the State Duma election but the US presidential election which was high on the Kremlin's agenda in 2016. Moscow began to act when two candidates - Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump - won the primaries. Truth be told, the Russian authorities had little doubt about Clinton's chances of victory. Their aim was to undermine her victory, underline the clan-like, dynastic nature of American politics and expose traces of political corruption. Ultimately, the Kremlin wanted to compromise, or better yet, paralyze the political system of the country it regards as its main enemy.

It is important to correctly interpret the joy with which Trump's unexpected victory was met in Moscow. He was not some sort of "Manchurian Candidate" - it is difficult to translate the movie's plot into reality. Contacts between the Trump Team and Russian officials is not a sin per se. The Kremlin rejoiced when Trump won as there was a glimmer of hope that a new reset was underway. Had Clinton been elected, all hope would have been lost.

Similar goals were pursued by Moscow in spring 2017 during the presidential campaign in France. Loans

extended to the National Front and the dirty information campaign against Macron were aimed at discrediting the French political system primarily in the eyes of the French. Russia is expected to step up its efforts on the eve and during the two rounds of the parliamentary election scheduled for June 11 and 18, especially since Putin's meeting with the incumbent president of France was hardly successful.

Understandably, Russia will hardly remain passive during the election in Germany to be held in September 2017 since an opportunity exists to take advantage of the weakening popularity of the CDU/CSU. It is not that Moscow is under any illusion that Martin Schulze from the SPD will become Chancellor (although the Kremlin has always felt comfortable cooperating with this particular party and its leaders). After all, it is highly unlikely. Still, a Germany lacking in confidence and immersed in internal political squabbles would do Russia just fine.

The Kremlin's attempts to disrupt situations in [other countries](#) seem quite consistent. Although the facilitation of an attempted coup in Montenegro stands out, it can be regarded as an "emergency" measure. Since Montenegro's accession to NATO, Russian officials and intelligence officers have been forbidden by Russian law from entering the state. Hundreds, if not thousands of them, have [purchased](#) real estate in the country. In fact, the Kremlin's "operation" was directly aimed at protecting the interests of representatives of the Russian ruling class.

It is noteworthy that Russia's interference in the internal affairs of Western countries will continue as long as the current political regime is in place and as long as this regime has means by which to create problems. It is also noteworthy that the Kremlin obviously has a tendency to underestimate Western political institutions and places its stake on personal communication and human avarice.

### **The intermediate level: actual performers**

However, there is also an intermediate level - actual performers. These are ministries, state-owned corporations, and individuals. There is a constant competition among these service providers. The story behind the hacker groups Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear is a telling example. These groups are allegedly linked to the Russia's Military Intelligence Service (GRU) and Federal Security Service (FSB) (or Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)), respectively.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is hardly satisfied with the fact that contacts with all Russian diplomats are regarded as "toxic" by Western politicians due to poorly-coordinated activities of Russian intelligence. The reason is obvious: degradation of legal power institutions, lack of parliamentary control, lack of a system of checks and balances as such and even a lack of expertise when it comes to decision-making. All of this intensifies competition, prompting erratic behavior.

In addition, every player seeks not only to increase their gravitas within the state apparatus but also to obtain additional funding. Naturally, the competition of initiatives begins: some try hacking servers; some leak classified correspondence; some try to establish a dialogue with Western politicians; some try to bribe them; some try to mudsling at individuals disliked by the Kremlin.

At first glance, this is seemingly a well-coordinated campaign but Moscow's destructive approach need not be coordinated in fact. This ploy is fraught with scandal but the Kremlin could not care less about reputation when survival is at stake.

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