

Civic Minds

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Article Title: **The perfect weapon: how Russian cyber power invaded U.S. politics**

Section: Main, A1

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Students will examine the problem of how Russian cyber power has invaded U.S. politics.

CCSS Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.b

Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

Social Studies EALR 1: Civics

The student understands and applies knowledge of government, law, politics, and the nation's fundamental documents to make decisions about local, national, and international issues and to demonstrate thoughtful, participatory citizenship.

Social Studies EALR 3: Geography

Understands the cultural universals of place, time, family life, economics, communication, arts, recreation, food, clothing, shelter, transportation, government, and education.

- Analyzes and evaluates the social and political factors affecting cultural interactions.

Social Studies EALR 4: History

- Analyzes the motives and interests behind an interpretation of a recent event.

Social Studies EALR 5: Social Studies

- Analyzes consequences of positions on an issue or event.
- Analyzes the short-term and long-term implications of decisions affecting the global community.

Vocabulary

Look up the definition of ***cryptic***. Please write the definition and create a new sentence, using your own words.

It was the ***cryptic*** first sign of a cyberespionage and information-warfare campaign devised to disrupt the 2016 presidential election, the first such attempt by a foreign power in U.S. history.

Comprehension Questions

1. When Special Agent Adrian Hawkins of the FBI called the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in September 2015 to pass along some troubling news about its computer network, he was transferred, naturally, to the help desk. What was his alarming message?
2. Did the FBI already know about the Dukes?
3. It was the cryptic first sign of a cyberespionage and information-warfare campaign devised to disrupt the 2016 presidential election, the first such attempt by a foreign power in U.S. history. What started as an information-gathering operation, intelligence officials believe, ultimately morphed into what?
4. An examination of the Russian operation — based on interviews with dozens of players targeted in the attack, intelligence officials who investigated it and Obama administration officials who deliberated over the best response — reveals what?

5. The DNC's fumbling encounter with the FBI meant the best chance to halt the Russian intrusion was lost. Why?
6. What did the fallout include?
7. Who has become embroiled in an extraordinary public dispute over what evidence exists that President Vladimir Putin of Russia moved beyond mere espionage to deliberately try to subvert American democracy and pick the winner of the presidential election?
8. While there's no way to be certain of the ultimate effect of the hack, this much is clear: A low-cost, high-impact weapon that Russia had test-fired in elections from Ukraine to Europe was trained on the United States, with devastating effectiveness. For Russia, with an enfeebled economy and a nuclear arsenal it cannot use short of all-out war, cyber power proved the perfect weapon. Why?
9. With a click, a decade of emails that Podesta maintained in his Gmail account — a total of about _____ — were unlocked for the Russian hackers.
10. The United States had _____ of warning that Russia's intelligence agencies were trying to break into America's most sensitive computer networks. But the Russians have always managed to stay a step ahead.
11. And they've stayed largely out of the headlines, thanks to the Chinese — who took bigger risks, and often got caught. What did the Chinese government take?
12. But American officials did not imagine that the Russians would dare try those techniques inside the United States. They were largely focused on preventing what former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta warned was an approaching. What term did he use and what did it mean for the U.S. government?
13. In 2014 and 2015, a Russian hacking group began systematically targeting whom?
14. The Russians escalated again — breaking into systems not just for espionage, but to do what with the information?
15. The DNC hired Crowd-Strike, a cybersecurity firm, to do what?

Class Discussion Questions and Essay Prompts

Yared Tamene, the tech support contractor at the DNC who fielded the call, was no expert in cyberattacks. His first moves were to check Google for "the Dukes" and conduct a cursory search of the DNC computer system logs to look for hints of such a cyber intrusion. By his own account, he did not look too hard even after Hawkins called back repeatedly over the next several weeks — in part because he wasn't certain the caller was a real FBI agent and not an impostor.

- Why do you think more wasn't done when they were told about possible cyber intrusion?
- What could've been done to check whether the caller was a real FBI agent and not an impostor?
- Did this situation surprise you? Why or why not?

The DNC had a standard email spam-filtering service, intended to block phishing attacks and malware created to resemble legitimate email. But when Russian hackers started in on the DNC, the committee did not have the most advanced systems in place to track suspicious traffic, internal DNC memos show.

- Why didn't the United States government have the most advanced systems in order to protect government information and private emails?
- Did this new information surprise you? Why or why not?

Obama was briefed regularly on all this, but he made a decision that many in the White House now regret: He did not name Russians publicly, or issue sanctions. There was always a reason: fear of escalating a cyberwar, and concern that the U.S. needed Russia's cooperation in negotiations over Syria.

- What should have President Obama done?
- Were Obama's fears legitimate? Why or why not?

What seems clear is that Russian hacking, given its success, is not going to stop. Two weeks ago, the German intelligence chief, Bruno Kahl, warned that Russia might target elections in Germany next year. “The perpetrators have an interest to delegitimize the democratic process as such,” Kahl said. Now, he added, “Europe is in the focus of these attempts of disturbance, and Germany to a particularly great extent.”

But Russia has by no means forgotten the American target. On the day after the presidential election, the cybersecurity company Volexity reported five new waves of phishing emails, evidently from Cozy Bear, aimed at U.S. think tanks and nonprofits.

- What will happen if Russia and other countries continue to attack us, through the internet?
- Do you think Russia will stop hacking? Why or why not?
- If this continues, what could happen?
- How can the United States protect ourselves in the future?

Newspaper-related CBA activity: U.S. Policy

How the United States government interacts with the world affects people across the globe. Analyze and evaluate the causes and effects of US foreign policy on people in the United States and across the world.

- Using The Seattle Times print replica, find an article from this week that deals with world politics or foreign policy.
- What are the main points of view from someone living in that particular country? How is that “view” similar and different than your own opinion, regarding the specific issue the article is discussing?
- Why is it important to study and learn about foreign policy? How does it help you understand the world we live in, using current issues and events?

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