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# 30 Day Election Security Update from the Intelligence Community

FPC BRIEFING

EXPERTS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (ODNI)

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## SUMMARY

Protecting the 2024 U.S. elections from foreign malign influence is crucial for safeguarding democratic integrity and ensuring that election outcomes truly reflect the will of the American people. Foreign influence can undermine public trust in the electoral process and distort the democratic decision-making that underpins the nation's governance. Additionally, preventing foreign influence — efforts to shape election outcomes or undermine democratic processes — and interference — efforts to degrade or disrupt the United States' ability to hold an election — helps maintain national security and protects the sovereignty of the electoral system from external manipulation. Ensuring a secure and fair election environment reinforces the principles of democracy and supports the legitimacy of the electoral process.

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30 Day Election Security Update from the Intelligence Community - United States Department of State

On Monday, October 7th, as we mark 30 days before the U.S. elections, experts from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) will provide a summary of the current threat environment — concentrating on state and local elections — and how the Intelligence Community is prepared to monitor and mitigate foreign threats ahead of Election Day. Previous election security updates can be found on the [ODNI website](#).

## THE WASHINGTON FOREIGN PRESS CENTER, WASHINGTON, D.C.

**MODERATOR:** Hello, and welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center’s briefing on election security 30 days before Election Day. My name is Gini Staab at the U.S. Department of State, and I’m the moderator for today’s briefing. This briefing is on background. On the call today we have several experts. They will self-identify, and you can attribute their remarks to an ODNI official.

By participating in today’s call, you are agreeing to these ground rules. We will share the transcript of this briefing later today. For journalists joining us, please take a moment to rename yourself in the chat with your name, outlet, and country.

And with that, I’ll turn it over to ODNI. Thank you so much.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Hi there. Can I start with a mike check first? Can you hear me?

**MODERATOR:** Sounds good. Thank you so much, yes.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Okay. I’m going to try to speak up, but if you can’t hear me, please let me know.

Our update today focuses mostly on foreign actors seeking to influence races other than the one for president. Before we get into those details, I’ll begin by setting the scene. Today is 29 days out from Election Day, and a range of foreign actors continue to try to influence U.S. elections as we approach November. These activities include broad efforts aimed at undermining trust in U.S. democratic processes and exacerbating divisions in our society, while also seeking to shape voter preferences towards specific candidates.

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Our assessments about the activities and goals of Russia, Iran, and China are unchanged from earlier election security updates.

On the presidential race, the Intelligence Community continues to assess that Russia prefers the former president and Iran prefers the Vice President. We also continue to assess that China is not seeking to influence the presidential election.

As we approach Election Day, the Intelligence Community is also stressing that foreign efforts to undermine America's democracy won't end on November 5th. The Intelligence Community expects foreign influence actors to continue their campaigns by calling into question the validity of the election's results after the polls close. These foreign actors are almost certainly considering the possibility of another contested presidential election in a tight contest for control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Thus, in such a contested post-election atmosphere, foreign actors probably will use tactics similar to those they are using today to undermine trust in the integrity of the election and election processes, as well as to further exacerbate divisions among Americans.

Now, turning to foreign efforts to target congressional and other races, the Intelligence Community assesses some foreign actors – particularly Russia, China, and Cuba – are supporting or denigrating candidates involved in congressional, state, and local races. To determine which candidates to support or oppose, foreign actors evaluate how they think an individual candidate's foreign policy positions affect their national security interest.

I'll start by talking about the big three actors we've been tracking to date and moving on to others.

First, Russia: Moscow is leveraging a wide range of influence actors in an effort to influence congressional races, particularly to encourage the U.S. public to oppose pro-Ukraine policies and politicians. Russian influence actors have planned, and likely created and disseminated, content, particularly over social media, intended to encourage the election of congressional candidates that Moscow assesses will oppose aid to Ukraine.

(Simultaneous telephone call begins.)

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** China: Beijing is seeking to influence congressional races and candidates, regardless of political affiliation, perceived by Beijing to threaten its core interests, especially in

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relation (inaudible) to Taiwan.

Iran: The IC has not observed Tehran seeking to influence congressional or state and local races during this election cycle. This is consistent with Iran's approach in 2020, though the IC continues to monitor –

**MODERATOR:** [ODNI Official One], I'm sorry to interrupt you. Just one second. We have a call going on there as well that we can hear through your mike. Okay, so – sorry, [ODNI Official One], could you just pick that up again, please?

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Yeah. Stand by one moment.

(Simultaneous telephone call concludes.)

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Thanks very much. I think the mike caught all of that.

**MODERATOR:** Yes, sorry. That was quite loud. Yep.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Okay. This has got to be on my phone.

**MODERATOR:** Stand by, everyone, please.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** All right, we're going to try it again. (Inaudible) hearing me okay?

**MODERATOR:** Yes, just until the telephone call.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Okay.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** All right. I'm not really sure. Maybe go back to Russia? Any sense to where we —

**MODERATOR:** Yes, right there would be great. Mm-hmm.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** All right. Apologies for that. We're having some audio issues today. So Russia. Moscow is leveraging a wide range of influence actors in an effort to influence

congressional races, particularly to encourage the U.S. public to oppose pro-Ukraine policies and politicians. Russian influence actors have planned and likely created and disseminated content, particularly over social media, intended to encourage the election of congressional candidates that Moscow assesses will oppose aid to Ukraine.

China. Beijing is seeking to influence congressional races with candidates, regardless of party affiliation, perceived by Beijing to threaten its core interests, especially in relation of relations with Taiwan.

Iran. The IC has not observed Tehran seeking to influence congressional or state and local races during this election cycle. This is consistent with Tehran's approach in 2020, though the IC continues to monitor for any change to its strategy.

The IC is also monitoring other foreign actors who are conducting or have considered influence operations to support or oppose specific candidates beyond the presidential race. These operations are typically focused on particular candidates, tailored for specific demographics or constituencies, and use tactics such as posting on social media platforms, seeding articles in the U.S. media, or illicitly funding campaigns.

Cuba, for example, probably views this year's election as consequential. Havana almost certainly has considered influence efforts targeting some candidates. Havana may be, as it has done in previous cycles, trying to curry favor from congressional and sub-national politicians that it believes will support its preferred policies.

I'm going to pass to my colleague now.

**ODNI OFFICIAL TWO:** Hi. Thanks very much for joining us on this call. We're releasing this this election security update as part of our efforts to proactively share information about foreign threats to U.S. elections. As you've heard, the election security update we're releasing today addresses foreign adversary efforts to undermine trust in our democratic institutions and to shape voter preferences.

Since our last update, ODNI has continued to work alongside its interagency partners to proactively address foreign threats to U.S. elections. We continue to brief critical stakeholders, including Congress, state and local election officials, candidates, campaigns, and committees to exchange information with industry on evolving foreign threat actor tools, tactics, and

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procedures, to ensure that both we and they have an up-to-date perspective on the landscape and to provide (inaudible) and the broader – excuse me – up-to-date information on foreign threats to our elections. We will continue to publicly release as much information as possible, as we are today. We will issue our next election security update 15 days ahead of the election.

Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** I'm sorry, just one more interruption. We can't hear you, and a couple of the journalists are just saying they can't hear. Is it possible for you to get closer to the mike? I apologize.

**ODNI OFFICIAL TWO:** Okay, hi. Is this better?

**MODERATOR:** Excellent. Thank you so much.

**ODNI OFFICIAL TWO:** Okay, great. Hi. So thanks very much for joining us on this call. As I said, we're releasing this election security update today as part of our efforts to proactively share information about foreign threats to our elections. As you've heard, the document addresses foreign adversary efforts to undermine trust in our democratic institutions and to shape voter preferences.

Since our last update, ODNI has continued working alongside interagency partners to proactively address foreign threats to U.S. elections. We continue to brief critical stakeholders, including Congress, state and local election officials, candidates, campaigns, and committees, to exchange information with industry on evolving foreign threat actor tools, tactics, and procedures to ensure that both we and they have an up-to-date perspective on the landscape and to provide up-to-date information on foreign threats to our elections.

We will continue working to publicly release as much information as possible, as we are doing today, and we'll issue our next election security update 15 days ahead of the election. Let me turn it back to you now, Jenny, to carry us forward.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much and that was excellent. Wonderful. We really appreciate the audio was perfect there at the end. So thank you so much for those remarks and now I'd like to open it up for questions. As a reminder to journalists, please be sure your screenname includes your name and media outlet. To ask a question, click the raised hand icon on the bottom of your screen or type your question in the chat. We had – did have a couple advance questions that I'd

like to ask first. One is from Oskar Gorzynski from the Polish Press: "Do you have any assessment on how successful Russian influence operations have been to date, and how confident are you about the safety of voting systems and procedures from foreign interference?"

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Hi there. Can you hear me okay now?

**MODERATOR:** Wonderfully. Thank you.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** All right. The U.S. Intelligence Community does not evaluate the effectiveness of foreign influence operations because doing so would require us to evaluate protected free speech in the United States. So that is not a role for the Intelligence Community. As far as the safety of voting systems and procedures, what I would say there is we have not seen foreign efforts to date to attack the integrity of voting systems. A lot of the activity we're seeing so far is influence – influence operations or information operations, and some of those operations do question the integrity of the voting, if that distinction is clear.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much. Our next question comes from Saurabh Shukla from NewsMobile, India. "Are you aware of any disinformation campaign targeting election integrity from bad actors in Russia and China, and how are you dealing with this?"

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** As far as disinformation campaigns, we would say yes, there are information campaigns from some of these actors, particularly Russia and Iran, that seek to question the legitimacy or the integrity of the election, including election systems. And as we noted in our opening remarks, we expect these actors to continue their information operations after election day and after polls close to question the legitimacy of the election. And I'll turn to my colleague for anything to add on what we do about it.

**ODNI OFFICIAL TWO:** Sure. Hi. I mean, I can just add that our efforts with this election security update and others is to provide as much information as we can with the broader public about the types of activity that we're seeing. When we have intelligence about a particular threat, one that might target a particular individual, we have the ability to provide what we call defensive briefing or private notification directly to the target or the conduit about influence operations so that they can take steps to protect themselves and to mitigate that activity. Thanks.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much. And we'll now turn to Rahim Rashidi from Kurdistan TV, Iraq. Please unmute yourself and ask your question.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, thank you very much for this opportunity. We have seen several reports indicating that Iranian actors have tried to hack U.S. officials and interfered in the U.S. presidential election campaign. I know you're talking about Russia and China as well, but I am focused on Iran. How serious is this threat and what should the U.S. response be? Thank you very much.

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Hi there. Your statement is correct. Iran poses a significant foreign influence threat to U.S. elections. Our assessment is Iran continues efforts to fuel distrust in U.S. political institutions and increase social discord and, of course, as you noted and a variety of U.S. Government indictments and public statements have noted, efforts to influence the presidential race through the hack-and-leak operation against former President Trump.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. Nuaman Ishfaq Mughal from Parliament Times. Do you have a question, please?

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. Nuaman Ishfaq Mughal from Pakistan. My question is that in last month State Department sanctioned official Russian TV outlet RT for interference in election. Was any significant damage was done by RT before the sanctions?

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Hi there. As to your question about damage, that gets into the effectiveness of operations. But I'm happy to talk a bit about the way Russia conducts these operations or their approach, and their approach is essentially to better hide their hand. Russia uses a variety of techniques to obscure that it's Russian influence operations, and they conduct these operations through two primary means.

One is they use influence-for-hire firms, or commercial firms with expertise in these type of activities. So – and the other is to coopt witting and unwitting Americans to work on Russia's behalf, and those were some of the activities you highlighted. And both of these efforts are designed to launder their influence narratives through what are perceived as more authentic U.S. voices.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much. And now we'll turn to Paolo Mastrolilli from La Repubblica, Italy.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much for the briefing. This year while also a significant election here in Europe, in several country. I was wondering if during your research you noticed also some



malignant activity to interfere with democracy in Italy and in other European country. What did you notice and what should European country do in order to defend themselves?

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Yeah, that is a little outside the scope of the briefing. I apologize that we're not able to provide information on that today.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. And we have another advance question with regards to congressional elections. "What are you seeing in congressional elections in the battleground states, and do you – are you assessing that that is making a difference in the outcomes of these elections?"

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Russia in particular has targeted swing states for a variety of its influence efforts, and a lot of the operations we see across the country, but in swing states in particular, are information operations to include social media activity, fake websites that purport to be U.S. news websites, and similar activity. And again, we cannot comment on the effectiveness of these operations.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. And you've mentioned that Cuba has now entered the fray or is considering entering the fray into elections interference. Can you speak a little bit about Cuba and their experience in this election?

**ODNI OFFICIAL ONE:** Yes, sure. Havana is very focused on a few policy issues that it believes to be negatively impacting the regime, particularly the U.S. embargo on Cuba and other economic and travel restrictions, all of which Havana perceives as an effort to force regime change. Havana considers election influence activities as part of its standing requirements to influence those policies, and Florida is a prime target of their activities. To that end, we have observed Cuba tailoring influence activities based on its perception of a candidate's stances on policies toward Cuba. For example, in 2020 Havana intended to denigrate specific candidates in Florida and pushed influence narratives to the Latin American community in the United States.

**MODERATOR:** Okay, thank you so much. Unfortunately, that's all the time our briefers have for today. This ends our Q&A session. As a reminder, this briefing has been on background and you can attribute their remarks to ODNI officials. I want to give a special thanks to our briefers for sharing their time with us today, and to the journalists who've joined us via Zoom. Thank you. This concludes today's briefing.

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