



Microsoft's Digital Crimes Unit in Redmond, Wash. The Department of Homeland Security plans to deploy small teams of cyberexperts to some states just before the election.

Where are the Russians?

ELECTION, FROM PAGE 1

ronment, they certainly wouldn't want to act until the very last moment."

Whether a Russian change of tactics is unfolding is just one of many mysteries surrounding a national election in the United States that is taking place after the most sophisticated effort ever discovered in which a foreign power tried to divide Americans, and ultimately seek to alter the outcome.

If there is a lesson from 2016, it was that America was constantly taken by surprise — by the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and prominent Democrats, by the publication of internal emails, by efforts to get inside the voter-registration rolls of 20 states. In 2018, there are new and different warning signs: The Iranians have shown up, and states and local governments have done surprisingly little to harden their infrastructure. The Chinese are players, but not in the ways that President Trump and Vice President Pence have suggested.

And the Russians haven't exactly gone away. While there are few signs of pre-election intrusions into voter-registration systems, the social media campaigns never ended; some accelerated immediately after the 2016 elections. When the United States indicted Maria Butina, a Russian who was accused of running influence campaigns while an American University student, the government suspected Russian groups budgeted millions of dollars for continuing influence campaigns.

"We shouldn't be surprised by any of this," Mr. Huntley said last month at a Zeitgeist, an annual gathering of Google's leadership and many of its customers outside of Phoenix. "It's like fighting the last war. When I was in the military academy people told us all the next wars were going to look like the first Gulf War. They didn't. And in cyber, the next war won't look like 2016."

So in the last days of the campaign, here are six points from the 2018 cyber-political battlefield:

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

In 2016, the Iranians were nowhere to be seen in the American election process. This year, they showed up in such force that Facebook announced last month that it was taking down a series of Iranian posts, mostly, it seemed, to demonstrate that the company's radar, switched off two years ago, is now on high alert.

Intelligence officials and cybersecurity companies say the Iranians mostly appear to be copying techniques that they learned from watching the Russians, especially in social media. But there is a twist: The Russians and the Iranians are clearly not in political agreement here. While both have sought to exacerbate political and social divides, the Russians clearly showed a preference for Mr. Trump as Election Day approached, according to the conclusions published after the election by American intelligence agencies.

The Iranians are playing the other side. "They don't like what happened to the nuclear deal," Yasmin Green, the director of research and development for Jigsaw, a unit of Alphabet, which is Google's parent company. Speaking at a TimesTalks event held by The New York Times and Deloitte on Tuesday night in Washington, Ms. Green, one of the country's leading experts on the uses and abuses of social media, noted that Mr. Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, and his reimposition of drastic sanctions, has made the Iranians determined to cripple him.



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JOHN MINICILLO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Top, the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center in Arlington, Va. Above, early voting in Cincinnati in October.

"Not only are they anti-this administration," she said, they are "pro-liberal."

By comparison with the Russians, the Iranian hackers are still pretty unsophisticated and largely inept at imitating down-the-street-neighbors when posting to Facebook and Reddit. One ad showed a frowning Mr. Trump, and declared him "The Worst, Most Hated President in American History," the

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kind of extreme declaration one might expect of Mr. Trump himself. Others sought to undercut American confidence in the way Washington operates, by showing two men shaking hands above a conference table and passing money below it. ("We call it bribery — they call it lobbying.")

The number of these posts appeared small — about 82 Facebook pages, groups and accounts — but they generated more than a million followers.

"It's still early days and while we have found no ties to the Iranian government, we can't say for sure who is responsible," Nathaniel Gleicher, the head of cybersecurity policy at Facebook, declared in a blog. In other words, Facebook was making clear that this year it's awake and that the mass purges of delib-

erate misinformation, nonexistent in the 2016 cycle, would accelerate.

RUSSIA'S FOCUS IS ON UKRAINE

In 2016, America's big mistake was failing to understand what had been happening in Ukraine. Every technique that Mr. Putin's hackers, whether the network break-in artists at the G.R.U. or the producers of fake social-media posts at the Internet Research Agency in St. Petersburg, used in the United States they tested in Kiev and the Donbass, the separatist area where the Russians have been stoking civil war.

So it is no surprise, said Tom Burt, the vice president for customer security and trust at Microsoft, that the most active battleground is, once again, Ukraine. In the Microsoft Cybercrime Center, a giant digital map of the world shows cyberattack activity, but the number of attacks are adjusted for the size of the population. Ukraine shows up in bright red. The United States, with 330 million people, or seven times the population of Ukraine, shows up in white, a sign of relative calm. "We're seeing activity in the U.S., but we're seeing it at levels less than we saw in 2016, said Mr. Burt, cautioning that Microsoft, with its network of machines using Office software, is more likely to see hacking of accounts than social media activity.

THE ROLE OF THE CHINESE

The question of China's involvement was raised first by Mr. Trump and then

by Mr. Pence, who said in a speech that "Beijing has mobilized covert actors, front groups, and propaganda outlets to shift Americans' perception of Chinese policies," and said a "senior career member of our intelligence community recently told me what the Russians are doing pales in comparison" to Chinese interference.

But Mr. Trump and Mr. Pence were borrowing the terminology of cyberattacks to describe something very different: Efforts by China to publish policy arguments, often in newspaper supplements that have been paid for by the Chinese government for years, to make its case. There is no evidence, officials and outside experts say, of the kind of hacking that Russia has engaged in, or even much social-media use. (In Asia and Australia, in contrast, the Chinese have been busy on social media.)

When three Democratic senators asked Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence, for an unclassified letter explaining what the Chinese were doing in the 2018 election, to truth-test the administration's arguments, Mr. Coats avoided any potential contradictions with his boss by sending a classified answer.

"You can't have it both ways," Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, said. Mr. Coats, he said, "has an obligation to the American people to provide a public response to our questions, particularly since this is about America's elections and the security of our democracy."

TUESDAY RISK: A CYBERSURPRISE

It wouldn't take much to disrupt Tuesday's vote in a few important swing districts, and that's what the United States government — and many private security experts — are worried about.

The Department of Homeland Security says it will be deploying small teams of cyberexperts to important states — presumably those that are most vulnerable, or have close races — just before the election. But it is not hard to imagine different scenarios that could cause disruption, or just create the illusion of disruption.

A last-minute attack on county or state voter-registration systems, just to knock them off-line, would create an uproar from voters who might show up at the polls and find they could not vote. A strike at power grids, turning out the lights at polling places, or just disrupting transportation systems could suppress turnout and lead to charges of manipulation.

THE MISSING EVIDENCE

In 2016, the evidence of the extent of Russian operations on social media did not become clear until months after the election was over — and then, time and again, Facebook had to admit it had missed all the warning signs. Mark Zuckerberg, a company founder, moved from arguing that to think fake news and divisive posts "influence the election in any way is a pretty crazy idea" to ordering the hiring of thousands of Facebook monitors to make sure it never happened again.

But there are no guarantees. Months after the midterms are over, evidence of covert internet action that is currently going unnoticed may well surface. As the Russians and others embrace artificial intelligence techniques, and get better at targeting messages, they may well find ways to route around the phalanx of new social-media police. Ms. Green says that is unavoidable.

"It's still retroactive," she said of monitoring social media. "We haven't figured out how to do this in real time."

Trump pulls his party off preferred message

President's strident tone on immigration drowns out good news on jobs

BY ASTEAD W. HERNDON AND SYDNEY EMBER

In normal political times, a glowing report on the United States economy just before Election Day would be a gift to the party in power and a uniform talking point for its candidates. But President Trump's blistering message of nativist fear has become the dominant theme of the Republican campaign's last days before Tuesday's midterm vote, threatening to overshadow the good economic news.

This is a political bind Republicans did not envision. They spent the final months of 2017 working on a package of sweeping tax cuts they hoped could be the centerpiece of their 2018 campaign message, buttressed by a soaring stock market and a low unemployment rate. And they got what they wanted, passing a \$1.5 trillion tax bill last December.

The new jobs report released Friday highlighted the continued strength of the economy. Employers added about 250,000 jobs in October, and the unemployment rate remained at 3.7 percent, a nearly 50-year low.

But Mr. Trump again has upended the traditional political playbook. Candidates are frequently forced to answer for his inflammatory and baseless tweets. And at the political rallies that are becoming a daily event as the election draws closer, the president has waded into racially fraught waters, using a broad brush to paint immigrants as villainous and dangerous.

"They all say, 'Speak about the economy, speak about the economy,'" Mr. Trump said Friday during a rally in West Virginia. "Well, we have the greatest economy in the history of our country. But sometimes it's not as exciting to talk about the economy."

On the campaign trail, Republican candidates have taken a split-screen approach to Mr. Trump's nationalist message; many, recognizing its political potency with the conservative base, are continuing to embrace it.

Democrats have "open borders psychosis," Kris Kobach, the hard-right Republican candidate for governor in Kansas, told a crowd in Kansas City, Mo., during a rally on Friday with Vice President Mike Pence. Earlier in the day, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas began a stump speech by boasting about the economy, but he quickly shifted to a more foreboding theme closely aligned to Mr. Trump's warnings about a migrant "invasion."

"You mean the people of Texas want to stop the caravan?" bellowed Mr. Cruz, who is in a competitive, closely watched race against Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic challenger. The crowd responded with chants of "build the wall."

Other Republicans, however, are straining to avoid the president's strident language and focusing instead on an economy-first message.

In Winterset, Iowa, Representative David Young, a Republican in a very close race, spent the bulk of an address to voters talking about the strong economy and Republican job creation.

"Right now we're seeing a real economy renaissance going on in the country," he said. "Here in rural Iowa, the incredible things going on with our economy are quite spectacular. I just want to keep the federal government out of your way so people can work, small businesses can grow, larger businesses can hire more people, we can keep the economy growing like today."

In campaign appearances, two Illinois Republicans locked in tough races in Chicago's suburbs played down the immigration issue. Randy Hultgren, the incumbent in the 14th Congressional District, appeared at a metal forging plant Friday and did not mention Mr.

Trump's immigration speech at the White House the day before.

Peter Roskam, a Republican who is facing his own tough challenge, told McClatchy news reporters that the immigration rhetoric was not important to his constituency. That message "skips right past this district," Mr. Roskam said. "This district hears that and kind of shrugs."

A top aide to Paul D. Ryan, the retiring speaker of the House of Representatives, also pleaded with Republicans to tout the jobs report. "Were going to spend all day and weekend talking about the strong economy, right?" the aide, Brendan Buck, wrote on Twitter.

One problem for Republicans trying to extol the economy is that the tax cuts did not turn out to be the political windfall they envisioned. Polls showed the tax breaks enjoyed only middling popularity as many Americans came to see them as a gift to the richest Americans that did little to address the problem of wage stagnation.

Some Democrats have actually turned the tax package into a weapon against their opponents. One is Danny O'Connor, a Democrat running in a tight race against a Republican incumbent, Troy Balderson, in Ohio. In the lead-up to a special election in August — they are squaring off again in Tuesday's general election — Mr. O'Connor and his backers spent more money attacking the tax cuts than Mr. Balderson and his allies spent defending it.

Traditional Republican pollsters and strategists said hewing too closely to Mr. Trump's incendiary strategy could

A political bind that Republicans did not envision.

contain more risk than reward for candidates in the campaign's final days. They warn of a possible backlash among minority voters and college-educated whites, two groups that could be especially crucial in deciding congressional control. Polling suggests that the same suburban independents who broke for Mr. Trump in the final days of the 2016 election could shift back to Democrats this time around.

And Republican campaign veterans said that while Mr. Trump's fear-mongering is firing up his base, it could energize other voters who were previously apathetic to vote for a Democrat on Tuesday.

"The problem is Republicans have a good story to tell in the economy," said Mike Murphy, a former adviser to Jeb Bush, John McCain and Mitt Romney. "But the Republican with the largest microphone only wants to go on these rants about immigration."

That could prove particularly risky in competitive races for the House of Representatives. Republicans are defending many seats in diverse metropolitan regions where the president's heated language could prove a hindrance.

In the Senate, both parties have clung to nervous optimism about the half-dozen most competitive races. But in Missouri, which has one of the most closely watched Senate races, officials in both parties said internal polling indicated Senator Claire McCaskill, a Democrat, had gained ground in her race against her Republican challenger, Josh Hawley, the state's attorney general.

Jeff Kaufmann, the chairman of the Iowa Republican Party, said he did not think Mr. Trump's closing message was harmful, even if it was not aligned with the economic arguments the state's Republican candidates were offering. "As long as the noneconomic issues that he is talking about do not run counter to the core of what defines us as a state, I don't think he is a distraction," Mr. Kaufmann said. "I almost think his presence and his energy at this point in our midterms is more important than specifically what he is saying."



Senator Ted Cruz of Texas in Fort Worth. He has shifted from talking about the economy to a theme aligned with the president's warnings about a migrant "invasion."

CORRECTIONS

• An article on Wednesday about potential successors to Angela Merkel as leader of Germany's Christian Democrats misstated who was the youngest member of Parliament in 2002. Jens Spahn was the youngest member to be directly elected to the Parliament, known as the Bundestag, but a younger

member entered Parliament through a party list.

• An article on Oct. 29 about Muslim Uighurs fleeing China misspelled the surname of a project manager for the World Uyghur Congress. He is Peter Irwin, not Erwin.