

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

August 8, 2017

Putin's Miscalculation

Russian leader Putin finally conceded defeat and ordered sanctions against the U.S. in response to the U.S. Congress's sanctions levied against him. It did not go at all how he planned.

Putin believed that he could secretly affect the outcome of the U.S. presidential election. That was his first mistake. He didn't realize that the Russian hackers who released the Democrat's emails could be traced. I have no doubt that they also hacked the Republican Party but withheld the data to use as leverage later on.

Putin's second miscalculation was that nobody would find out about all the contacts Trump's campaign officials had with representatives of the Russian government. He failed to take into account the robustness of our news media organizations and the ability of reporters to ferret out secrets. He thought they would be like Russian news media where everyone either worked for the government's interests or were killed for asking too many questions.

The only reason Putin got as far as he did was because Obama and ex-FBI Director Comey kept quiet and did nothing. Obama could have spoken out and imposed sanctions in the fall of 2016. Obama's arrogant belief that Trump couldn't possibly win was his big mistake. He may be remembered for the many good things he did as president, but there will always be the footnote regarding his failure to stop Russian meddling in the presidential election which resulted in Trump winning.

Comey was investigating Trump's Russian contacts and kept quiet about it while broadcasting the news of his investigation of Hilary Clinton's emails. When this became known, Trump believed that Comey was a fellow conspirator and acted accordingly. Imagine Trump's surprise when Comey refused to play along and squash the Russian investigation as Trump requested.

But getting back to Putin, he finally realized he overplayed his hand. Heavy-handed tactics may work in a closed society like Russia, but our society and free press make the sort of secrecy Putin needed to succeed impossible to obtain. Putin is worse off now than if he would have stayed out of the election and let Hilary win.