


Substantial Disruption



Who Elected The Blond Bear?

By Mike Tully

There was a television documentary in the Sixties, in the depth of the Cold War, that examined how nuclear war with the Soviet Union would impact two cities in the United States: New York City and Tucson. New York was an obvious choice, given its prominence, but Tucson? In the 1960s, Tucson was home to a Strategic Air Command (SAC) facility and ringed by an array of 18 Titan missiles armed with nuclear warheads, which made it a primary Soviet target. The documentarians' cold assessment: at least a million people would perish in New York City; nobody in Tucson would survive.

A few days after that documentary, I dove under my desk at school as a siren wailed, a Death Banshee signaling a make-believe nuclear attack. My school was less than ten miles from Tucson's SAC base and pretty much in the bullseye of the missile ring. I had seen the documentary, yet I played along, diving under my desk with my classmates when the siren wailed, acting like it would make a difference when I understood if I wasn't incinerated by the fireball I'd be pulverized by the shock wave. We knew a lot about the effects of a nuclear blast back then, as we knew we were helpless pawns in history's most dangerous chess match. That's why we visited Jellystone Park.

There's something about rehearsing your own annihilation that makes you want to escape into a cartoon world where nobody dies and enemy spies are clumsy dolts. The fertile minds of [Hanna-Barbera](#) gave us such a world, although it wasn't a perfect escape. The bad guys who were foiled by [Rocky the Flying Squirrel and his pal, Bullwinkle the Moose](#), were named [Boris](#) and [Natasha](#). They were laughable and inept in their attempt to spy on Americans in places such as "Frostbite Falls, Minnesota," in service of the evil "Pottsylvania," a stand-in for the Soviet Union. The good guys always won. Meanwhile, in "Jellystone Park," we rooted for a bad guy to win: [Yogi Bear](#). Proud, brown Yogi chafed at being confined to Jellystone and constantly battled his white overseer, Ranger Smith. There were echoes of the real world in Frostbite Falls and Jellystone, but no bombs, nooses, or fire hoses. That all stayed in the world we escaped.

The bears and spies remained. Today the bears are not the fecklessly amiable Yogi and the spies are not the bumbling Boris and Natasha. They spy on us, turn us against each other, weaponize our speech, steal our secrets, tell us lies, and organize us into mobs. The spies are not Boris and Natasha but "Doris and Natasha," human listening devices disguised as tourists who trolled at least nine states from the Vegas Strip to Times Square, learning about American DNA so others could fashion a pathogen to attack it. They assaulted us with a virus built from our own cultural genetics and, in a close election, may have chosen our President.

When Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein [announced the indictment](#) against 13 Russians for unlawful interference in the 2016 election and other crimes, he carefully noted the document did not state the Russians tipped the election. That's the standard line among politicians and commentators and makes sense, to a point. When several causes might logically lead to a result, it's difficult to isolate any one as singularly responsible. To exploit an old metaphor, when you focus on the straw that broke the camel's back, you disavow the contribution of all the other straws.

The Russian campaign to help Donald Trump and damage Hillary Clinton might have been the final straw. One cannot disregard Clinton's self-inflicted damage from the private email server or former FBI Director James Comey's errant cannonballs, both of which hurt the Clinton campaign and narrowed the polls. But would they have been enough to give the election to Trump without Russian agents who spent millions to purchase phony political ads, create fictitious Internet users and groups, organize Americans into flash mobs, and even pay actors to portray Clinton in prison garb? Would they have been enough without Russian efforts to attack Clinton and encourage Bernie Sanders supporters to vote for Trump or just sit out the election? Would they have been enough without Russian efforts to suppress the black vote through social media messaging? And would they have been enough without Russian support for Jill Stein, whose vote totals [in two key swing states](#) exceeded Trump's winning margin? It used to be an article of faith that there was no reason to believe the Russians elected Trump. The indictment shows it's at least possible, if not more likely than not.

That should trigger a political Pentecost and stampede to action, since American democracy is in peril. Our leadership is failing us. The President cannot make a negative comment about Vladimir Putin and disparages evidence of Russian interference. His allies in the House and Senate, who must have kept their fingers crossed when they took the Oath of Office, either fail to call him out or conspire with him against law enforcement. The Democrats are a minority party unable to take the car keys while the Republican elephant has vodka on its breath.

Fortunately, we still have elections and the basic wisdom of the American people. All of us can point to voters' decisions that may not strike us as wise, but that's a consequence of pluralism. Democracy is a marathon, not a sprint, and we usually wind up at the front. Americans may not be perfect, but we have what it takes under the circumstances.

We only have to be smarter than the average bear.