



Power grid serving 65 million may be at risk in East, Midwest

BY BERNARD L. WEINSTEIN, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 02/11/19 07:00 AM EST
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Electricity is the most important and convenient way to consume energy. Without it, we'd literally be living in the "Dark Ages." However, we often forget that it takes energy to make energy.

With the electricity generation mix changing dramatically in recent years, this is no simple task. There is no more disputing it: the combination of [too few power plants being built](#) and too many serviceable power plants [being shuttered prematurely](#) threatens the viability of America's power supply. How well — or poorly — power systems address the problem will be critical to ensuring a reliable, affordable and secure supply of energy in the years ahead.

A decade ago, about 50 percent of the electricity consumed in the United States came from coal-fired generation plants. Today, [natural gas is the leader](#), providing more than 50 percent, while coal's share has dropped to less than 30 percent. In fact, [coal capacity](#) in the United States has fallen by more than a third since 2010, and another 25 percent of today's fleet is set to close by 2025.

Nuclear plants, which provide about 19 percent, also are [going offline](#). Five plants, with a combined capacity of 43 gigawatts, have shut down since 2013 and another eight, with a combined capacity of 85 gigawatts, are scheduled for retirement over the next six years. That's almost enough power to serve the entire state of California. The planned [closing of Indian Point](#) on the Hudson River alone will remove 2 gigawatts of power from the grid, an amount equal to nearly 25 percent of New York City's electricity consumption.

Unlike natural gas, coal and nuclear power are not dependent on just-in-time fuel delivery. Coal plants, in particular, have proven their value in ramping up electricity production in periods of extreme cold when other power sources cannot.

Wind and solar, though growing rapidly, account for only about [5 percent of generation capacity](#). However, growing dependence on renewables and gas poses serious challenges to grid stability and reliability.

Low prices do not mean that wind and solar can replace conventional

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power plants anytime soon. They are great when the wind is blowing and the sun is shining, but that is not always the case. Because large-scale battery storage at a reasonable cost is not yet on the horizon, utilities have to invest more in backup generation, which is typically natural gas peaking plants. Furthermore, wind and solar can't scale up fast enough to offset the loss of coal and nuclear power. And if federal and state subsidies to renewables should go away, the attractiveness of wind and solar investments is likely to diminish quickly.

Right now, domestic gas is cheap and abundant, but that won't always be the case. A global market for natural gas is evolving, and the United States is [becoming a major player](#). Indeed, within a few years, America is projected to become the world's second-largest exporter of [liquefied natural gas](#) (LNG). A decade from now, according to a recent forecast by the World Bank, average gas prices will be at least 50 percent higher than they are today, making gas-fired power generation a more expensive proposition.

Unlike renewables and natural gas peaking units, coal and nuclear plants are "always on," so the loss of this base-load power is the most serious threat to power grid integrity. Unfortunately, some system operators are not assigning value to the resiliency attributes of the base-load plants providing power to their grids. Such is the case with [PJM](#), the nation's largest regional transmission operator that provides electricity to 65 million people in 13 mid-eastern and mid-western states as well as the District of Columbia.

In an unusual move, senior executives of four utilities that rely on PJM to transmit their power — Public Service Enterprise Group, Exelon Corporation, FirstEnergy Corporation and Duke Energy — [recently sent a letter](#) to the grid operator imploring PJM to adopt market reforms that recognize the importance of their coal and nuclear plants in assuring grid resiliency and reliability. They argue that pricing in the wholesale market, which may be based on the marginal cost of natural gas or the feed-in tariffs of renewables, is not adequately compensating utilities for the reliability of their base-load power plants.

They also want PJM to recognize the importance of fuel diversity to grid reliability and the potential risks to the grid from premature retirements of coal and nuclear power plants.

All power grids, for that matter, must adopt pricing mechanisms that ensure fuel diversity and an adequate reserve margin. Otherwise, the nation's system operators will be unprepared for heatwaves, polar vortices, spikes in natural gas prices, cyber attacks and other disruptive events.

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TAGS POWER STATION GRID ENERGY STORAGE BASE LOAD RENEWABLE ENERGY PEAKING POWER PLANT

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The case for Russia collusion ... against the Democrats

BY JOHN SOLOMON, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 02/10/19 08:30 AM EST

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Now that both the House and Senate investigative committees [have cleared Donald Trump](#) of Democrat-inspired allegations of Russian collusion, it is worth revisiting one anecdote that escaped significant attention during the hysteria but continues to have U.S. security implications.

As secretary of State, Hillary Clinton worked with Russian leaders, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and then-President Dmitri Medvedev, to create U.S. technology partnerships with Moscow's version of Silicon Valley, a sprawling high-tech campus known as Skolkovo.

Clinton's handprint was everywhere on the 2009-2010 project, the tip of a diplomatic spear to reboot U.S.-Russian relations after years of hostility prompted by Vladimir Putin's military action against the former Soviet republic and now U.S. ally Georgia.

A donor to the Clinton Foundation, [Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg](#), led the Russian side of the effort, and several American donors to the Clinton charity got involved. Clinton's State Department facilitated U.S. companies working with the Russian project, and she personally invited Medvedev to visit Silicon Valley.

The collaboration occurred at the exact same time Bill Clinton made his now infamous trip to Russia to pick up a jaw-dropping \$500,000 check for a single speech.

The former president's trip secretly raised eyebrows inside his wife's State Department, [internal emails show](#).

That's because he asked permission to meet Vekselberg, the head of Skolkovo, and Arkady Dvorkovich, a senior official of Rosatom, the Russian nuclear giant seeking State's permission to buy Uranium One, a Canadian company with massive U.S. uranium reserves.

Years later, intelligence documents show, both the Skolkovo and Uranium One projects raised serious security concerns.

In 2013, the U.S. military's leading intelligence think tank in Europe sounded alarm that the Skolkovo project might be a front for economic and military espionage.

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“Skolkovo is an ambitious enterprise, aiming to promote technology transfer generally, by inbound direct investment, and occasionally, through selected acquisitions. As such, Skolkovo is arguably an overt alternative to clandestine industrial espionage — with the additional distinction that it can achieve such a transfer on a much larger scale and more efficiently,” [EUCOM's intelligence bulletin wrote in 2013](#).

“Implicit in Russia's development of Skolkovo is a critical question — a question that Russia may be asking itself — why bother spying on foreign companies and government laboratories if they will voluntarily hand over all the expertise Russia seeks?”

A year later, the [FBI went further and sent letters warning](#) several U.S. technology companies that had become entangled with Skolkovo that they risked possible espionage. And an agent in the bureau's Boston office wrote an extraordinary op-ed to publicize the alarm.

Skolkovo “may be a means for the Russian government to access our nation's sensitive or classified research development facilities and dual-use technologies with military and commercial application,” Assistant Special Agent in Charge Lucia Ziobro [wrote in the Boston Business Journal](#).

The FBI had equal concern about Rosatom's acquisition of Uranium One. An informer named William Douglas Campbell [had gotten inside the Russian nuclear giant](#) in 2009 and gathered evidence that Rosatom's agents in the United States were engaged in a racketeering scheme involving kickbacks, extortion and bribery.

Campbell also obtained written evidence that Putin wanted to buy Uranium One as part of a strategy to obtain monopolistic domination of the global uranium markets, including leverage over the U.S.

[Campbell also warned](#) that a major in-kind donor to the Clinton Global Initiative was simultaneously working for Rosatom while the decision for U.S. approval was pending before Hillary Clinton's department. Ultimately, her department and the Obama administration approved the transaction.

The evidence shows the Clintons financially benefited from Russia — personally and inside their charity — at the same time they were involved in U.S. government actions that rewarded Moscow and increased U.S. security risks.

The intersections between the Clintons, the Democrats and Russia carried into 2016, when a major political opposition research project designed to portray GOP rival Donald Trump as compromised by Moscow was launched by Clinton's presidential campaign and brought to the FBI.

Glenn Simpson's Fusion GPS research firm was secretly hired by the Clinton campaign and Democratic Party through their law firm, Perkins Coie.

Simpson then hired retired British intelligence operative Christopher Steele — whom the FBI learned was “desperate” to defeat Trump — to write an unverified dossier suggesting that Trump's campaign was colluding with Russia to hijack the election.

Simpson, Steele and Perkins Coie all walked Trump-Russia related allegations into the FBI the summer before the election, prompting agents who openly disliked Trump to launch a counterintelligence probe of the GOP nominee shortly before Election Day.

Simpson and Steele also went to the news media to air the allegations in what senior Justice Department official Bruce Ohr would later write was a "Hail Mary" effort to influence the election.

Congressional investigators have painstakingly pieced together evidence that shows the Clinton research project had extensive contact with Russians.

Ohr's notes show that Steele's main source of uncorroborated allegations against Trump came from an ex-Russian intelligence officer. "Much of the collection about the Trump campaign ties to Russia comes from a former Russian intelligence officer (? not entirely clear) who lives in the U.S.," Ohr scribbled.

Steele's dossier also relied on information from a Belarus-born Russian businessman, according to numerous reports and a book on the Russia scandal.

Steele and Simpson had Russian-tied business connections, too, while they formulated the dossier.

Steele worked for the lawyers for Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska and tried to leverage those connections to help the FBI get evidence from the Russian aluminum magnate against Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

The effort resulted in FBI agents visiting Deripaska in fall 2016. Deripaska told the agents that no collusion existed.

Likewise, Simpson worked in 2016 for the Russian company Prevezon — which was trying to escape U.S. government penalties — and one of its Russian lawyers, Natalia Veselnitskaya. In sworn testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Simpson admitted he dined with Veselnitskaya both the night before and the night after her infamous meeting with Donald Trump Jr. at Trump Tower in June 2016.

Simpson insists the two dinners sandwiching one of the seminal events in the Trump collusion narrative had nothing to do with the Trump Tower meeting, a claim many Republicans distrust.

Whatever the case, there's little doubt the main instigators of the Clinton-inspired allegations against Trump got information from Russians and were consorting with them during the political opposition project.

This past week, we learned from Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.) that his committee came to the same conclusion as the House: There is no evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

But now there is growing evidence — of Democratic connections to Russia. It's enough that former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) believes a probe should be opened.

There is “obvious collusion the Democrats had through Glenn Simpson and through Fusion GPS, that they were talking directly to Russia,” Nunes told Hill.TV’s “Rising” in an interview to be aired Monday.

Collusion can be criminal if it involves conspiracy to break federal laws, or it can involve perfectly legal, unwitting actions that still jeopardize America’s security against a “frenemy” like Russia.

There is clear evidence now that shows Hillary Clinton’s family and charity profited from Moscow and simultaneously facilitated official government actions benefiting Russia that have raised security concerns.

And there’s irrefutable evidence that her opposition research effort on Trump — one that inspired an FBI probe — was carried out by people who got information from Russia and were consorting with Russians.

It would seem those questions deserve at least some of the scrutiny afforded the Trump-Russia collusion inquiry that is now two-plus years old.

NOTE: This story has been updated from the original to correct that Uranium One is a Canadian company and to clarify that House and Senate investigating committees have cleared the president.

John Solomon is an award-winning investigative journalist whose work over the years has exposed U.S. and FBI intelligence failures before the Sept. 11 attacks, federal scientists’ misuse of foster children and veterans in drug experiments, and numerous cases of political corruption. He is The Hill’s executive vice president for video.

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