

# [***FBI watching if US support for Ukraine will spur Russian risk taking in 2024 election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0D-HK01-JBSS-S014-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; US intelligence officials are watching closely to see if the [*United States' support for Ukraine*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/23/politics/us-ukraine-military-aid-package/index.html) will lead the Russian government to take more risks in potentially interfering in the 2024 presidential election, a senior FBI official told reporters Thursday.

FBI officials are concerned that the [*war in Ukraine*](https://www.cnn.com/world/europe/ukraine) - and [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden)'s reliable backing of Kyiv - might be an "animating event for the Russians," the FBI official said at a briefing with reporters about election security efforts. "We're certainly... keeping our eye out to make sure that that's not increasing [their] risk taking."

The FBI briefed reporters on the condition that the senior FBI officials not be named.

A clear divide has emerged in US ***politics***, with Democrats largely backing Biden's financial and military support for Ukraine, and some leading Republicans, including [*former President Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-foreign-aid-loan-senate-package/index.html) and [*congressional GOP hardliners*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/17/politics/mike-johnson-ukraine-aid/index.html), increasingly backing away from the foreign aid.

US officials are concerned that, with [*US military aid to Ukraine*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/24/politics/biden-signs-foreign-aid-bill/index.html) potentially on the line in the November election, Russia could be motivated to more aggressively meddle in the 2024 election than it did in 2020. But US officials have not publicly identified any examples of that happening yet.

In the 2020 election, Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to denigrate Biden, support Trump and undermine confidence in the US electoral process, according to a declassified [*US intelligence report*](https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf). But Russia's actions in 2020 weren't as brazen or far-reaching as its [*hack-and-leak operations*](https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/06/politics/intelligence-report-putin-election/index.html) to help Trump and undermine Hillary Clinton's candidacy in 2016, according to US intelligence agencies.

The FBI official's comments on Thursday echo those made by a senior National Security Agency official in March.

"I think where we diverge in this election cycle is Russia is very motivated to make sure that that the focus on support to Ukraine is disrupted," Rob Joyce, who headed NSA's Cybersecurity Directorate before retiring in late March, told reporters. "I think you'll see the themes of their activities all pushed through a lens of what is going to erode support for Ukraine."

Asked by CNN if that makes Russia more likely to interfere in the 2024 US elections compared to 2020, Joyce said: "I don't know that it makes them more likely, but it does make them dangerous."

During Thursday's FBI press briefing, a second senior FBI official said that Russia likely views [*US election infrastructure*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/01/politics/election-officials-security-survey/index.html), including state and local government networks, as "legitimate targets" for cyber-espionage and data collection.

"Russia can use their access to those government networks to undermine confidence in the US election integrity and bolster influence operations," the second FBI official said.

The FBI officials also singled out China and Iran as other governments that could be willing to interfere in or influence the 2024 US election.

In the 2020 election, China [*considered*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/17/politics/us-intel-report-trump-china-election-interference-claims/index.html) conducting influence operations aimed at changing the outcome of the election but chose not to, according to the [*US intelligence report*](https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf). Iran, meanwhile, conducted a "multipronged covert influence campaign" aimed at hurting Trump's election bid, the report said.

Artificial intelligence, the first FBI official said, increases the ability of sophisticated state actors "to scale their operations and ... really build them out larger than we've seen previously."

CNN's Marshall Cohen contributed to this report.

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