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Senate subpanel launches new Russia hacking probe
By MARTIN MATISHAK | 02/02/17 03:52 PM EST

A Senate subcommittee is joining the bevy of congressional investigations into Russia’s alleged tampering with the 2016 presidential election.

Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) — who oversee the Judiciary Committee’s subpanel on crime and terrorism — announced the contours of their probe in a joint statement Thursday.

“Our goal is simple — to the fullest extent possible we want to shine a light on Russian activities to undermine democracy,” the duo said.
“Our efforts will be guided by the belief that we have an obligation to follow the facts wherever they may lead,” they added.

The probe is the fifth congressional inquiry into Moscow’s alleged tampering with the 2016 election.

In the Senate, the Intelligence Committee is leading the highest-profile investigation, while the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees are also conducting their own examinations. In the House, the Intelligence panel has taken the lead.

But Graham has long indicated he aspired to conduct his own investigation, as well.

The South Carolina Republican has joined with GOP hawks like Armed Services Chairman John McCain of Arizona and many Democrats to stomp for a select committee to investigate the Kremlin's digital assault.

The intelligence community believes the cyber campaign — which included successful hacks of mostly Democratic targets and the strategic leaking of internal Democratic documents — eventually morphed into an influence campaign aimed at putting Donald Trump in the White House.

Republican leaders have rejected demands for a special committee to investigate the issue, arguing the existing committee structure is sufficient.

Graham and Whitehouse said their investigation has several goals.

It aims to “gain a full understanding” of the U.S. intelligence assessment that concluded Russia was responsible for last year's cyberattacks, and to learn more about the digital methods Moscow may have used to target foreign elections.

The probe will also explore how “to help prevent and deter future foreign influences from impacting American elections and institutions,” and ensure the FBI has the “tools it needs to keep its investigative work protected from political influence.”

The pair warned that “some” of their examination would take place behind closed doors “due to security concerns.” But the subpanel leaders also “hope to have an open discussion before the American people about Russia's strategies to undermine democracy.”

Leaders of other Senate panels examining election-season meddling are expected to meet soon as part of an informal, coordinated effort to keep one another appraised of their work and to not duplicate efforts.