

Behind Hacking Allegations: Explosive Conflict over US Policy toward Russia

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Global Research, December 12, 2016
[World Socialist Web Site](#)

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Over the past three days, a conflict within the US ruling elite over foreign policy, centering on Russia, has exploded into public recriminations. It has taken the form of increasingly frenzied claims in the corporate-controlled media that “Russian hacking” targeted the US presidential election for the purpose of bringing about the election of Republican Donald Trump.

The campaign was sparked by back-to-back articles in the *Washington Post* Friday night and the *New York Times* Saturday, claiming that a secret new CIA assessment had determined that the Russian government had tried to help Trump win the presidency. This is the alleged motivation behind the hacking of emails from the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign, which were then supplied to WikiLeaks for public release.

The *Times* presented as proof of alleged Russian favoring of Trump the claim that hackers had also penetrated the Republican National Committee but had not released Republican emails because the goal was to discredit Clinton and not Trump. This report was flatly denied by Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus, who has been named chief of staff for the incoming Trump White House.

Trump himself made an appearance on Fox News Sunday and denounced the reports of Russian intervention as sour grapes by the Democrats to explain away their election defeat. “I think it’s ridiculous,” he said. “I think it’s just another excuse. I don’t believe it... I think the Democrats are putting it out because they suffered one of the greatest defeats in the history of politics in this country.”

The intensity of the divisions with the US ruling elite was demonstrated in the Trump transition team’s initial response to the reported CIA assessment, which noted sarcastically, “These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.”

As Glenn Greenwald noted in *The Intercept*:

“There is still no such evidence for any of these claims. What we have instead are assertions, disseminated by anonymous people, completely unaccompanied by any evidence, let alone proof. As a result, none of the purported evidence—still—can be publicly seen, reviewed, or discussed. Anonymous claims leaked to newspapers about what the CIA believes do not constitute proof, and certainly do not constitute reliable evidence that substitutes for actual evidence that can be reviewed.”

The immediate purpose of the Russian hacking claims, launched by Clinton and the Democratic Party on the eve of the Democratic convention in July, was to distract attention from the content of the leaked emails, which documented a conspiracy between the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee to undermine the primary campaign of Bernie Sanders.

It is now clear, however, that underlying the public conflict over the hacking allegations is a ferocious struggle over foreign policy. Trump speaks for a faction within the ruling class that wants to focus US policy on a more aggressive military, economic and diplomatic offensive against China. The Democrats and leading media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* speak for a faction of the intelligence establishment and the military that is opposed to any shift away from the aggressive and confrontational posture toward Russia.

This was underscored by an editorial posted Sunday night by the *Times* headlined “Russia’s Hand in America’s Election.” The *Times* repeats, again without providing any evidence, the claims of Russian hacking in support of Trump’s election campaign. It praises Clinton for having pledged that, if elected, she would “redouble efforts to punish and isolate Moscow for war crimes in Syria’s civil war and aggression toward Ukraine and other neighbors.” One might conclude that had Clinton won, her first act would have been to provoke a war with Russia, with the enthusiastic support of the *Times*.

Using extraordinary language, the editorial continues: “In Mr. Trump, the Russians had reason to see a malleable political novice, one who had surrounded himself with Kremlin lackeys.” It concludes by suggesting that, as a result of Russian intervention, “The election was indeed rigged.”

While the campaign on Trump and Russia escalates, neither the *Times* nor the Democrats devote a fraction of that energy to condemning the cabinet of billionaire reactionaries and generals Trump is assembling or his plans to dismantle Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and public education and eliminate all restrictions on corporate pollution of the environment and all regulations on the banks and big business.

They are entirely focused on preventing any shift under Trump away from the offensive against Russia. The hysterical and neo-McCarthyite character of their campaign was summed up in a commentary published on the Daily Beast web site by Clinton supporter Michael Tomasky, headlined “World War III: Democrats and America vs. Trump and Russia.” Tomasky characterized the *Washington Post* report on Trump and Russia and the *New York Times* follow-up as “Hiroshima” and “Nagasaki” for Trump, while suggesting that congressional Republicans who backed Trump, such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, were guilty of treason.

This campaign, reviving the methods of anticommunist witch-hunting, is aimed not only at Trump, but at anyone who raises questions about US foreign policy, implicitly branding them as Russian agents.

In his appearance Sunday on Fox, Trump indicated the foreign policy orientation he stands for when he placed a question mark over Washington’s decades-long “One China” policy acknowledging that Taiwan is not a sovereign nation, but rather part of China. “I fully understand the One-China policy,” Trump said. “But I don’t know why we have to be bound by a One-China policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things,”

including trade, currency devaluation, the South China Sea and North Korea.

There is no shred of pacifism or “appeasement” in Trump’s apparent shift away from confrontation with Russia. His extreme nationalist brand of militarism is simply focused on a different set of targets—or more precisely, the same targets as Obama, but in a different order. Trump is prioritizing China over Russia as a target of US economic, diplomatic and military pressure.

These rapid-fire events, in which intelligence agencies feed the media and the media seeks to stampede public opinion, only underscore the manipulative character of the election process as a whole. The real issues being fought out within the ruling elite—over what tactics and methods to employ against its global rivals—were concealed from the population while a barrage of slanders and scandals was unleashed to provide political cover for a further shift to the right.

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