

Split Widens Between Trump, CIA over Russian Hacking Allegations

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Divisions within the US state over allegations of Russian hacking of Democratic Party emails grew more embittered and public Wednesday following statements by Donald Trump that further distanced the president-elect from the CIA and other US intelligence agencies.

In a Twitter post late Tuesday, Trump questioned the veracity of a soon-to-be-released official report by the CIA, FBI and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper on the alleged Russian intervention into the 2016 US election. The intelligence officials are due to brief leaders of Congress on Thursday and Trump on Friday.

To date, no evidence has been presented to the public to substantiate the charges of Russian government hacking of the Democratic Party and the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton.

Trump alluded to this fact when he tweeted: “The ‘Intelligence’ briefing on so-called ‘Russian hacking’ was delayed until Friday, perhaps more time needed to build a case. Very strange!”

He followed this up with a tweet on Wednesday quoting approvingly from an interview conducted by Shawn Hannity of Fox News with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange: “Julian Assange said ‘a 14 year old could have hacked Podesta’—why was DNC so careless? Also said Russians did not give him the info!”

In the interview, Assange reaffirmed his earlier statements that the documents WikiLeaks published were not provided by the Russian government or “any state party.” He said that the email hacks of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Clinton Campaign Chairman John Podesta were likely the result of the Democratic Party’s amateurish security practices. “Podesta gave out that his password was the word ‘password,’” Assange said. “This is something a fourteen-year-old kid could have hacked.”

Trump’s comments left Democrats and the intelligence agencies aghast and outraged. The *Wall Street Journal* reported, “White House officials have been increasingly frustrated by Mr. Trump’s confrontations with intelligence officials,” quoting one official as saying, “It’s appalling... No president has ever taken on the CIA and come out looking good.”

The mood was summed up by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (Democrat of New York), who issued a thinly veiled threat against the president-elect. “Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you,” Schumer told MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow. “So even for a practical, supposedly hard-

nosed businessman, he's being really dumb to do this."

Democrats combined their denunciations of Trump for not accepting the statements of intelligence agencies and for being too close to Russian President Vladimir Putin with an escalation of the witch-hunt against Assange. "Today, Trump sided with Julian Assange—an alleged sex offender who has hidden out in the Ecuadorian embassy for years and has dumped millions of classified State Department documents that put US persons at risk—rather than our country's own intelligence professionals," declared Representative Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

Republicans more closely aligned to the CIA also spoke out against Trump's comments. "We have two choices: some guy living in an embassy on the run from the law... who has a history of undermining American democracy and releasing classified information to put our troops at risk, or the 17 intelligence agencies sworn to defend us," said Republican Senator Lindsey Graham."

In an indication of the policy disputes behind the conflict, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday evening that Trump "is working with top advisers on a plan that would restructure and pare back the nation's top spy agency... prompted by a belief that the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has become bloated and politicized."

The *Journal* reported that Trump's advisers "are working on a plan to restructure the Central Intelligence Agency, cutting back on staffing at its Virginia headquarters and pushing more people out into field posts around the world." A source close to the president-elect told the *Journal*, "Mr. Trump shares the view... that the intelligence community's position that Russians tried to help his campaign is an attempt to undermine his victory or say he didn't win."

The highly public conflict only two weeks before the inauguration of Trump points to the depth of the divisions that have arisen in the American state.

There is no progressive side in this faction fight. On the part of the White House, the CIA and substantial sections of the Republican Party, together with the majority of the American media, the hacking charges are aimed at creating as much pressure as possible to prevent any shift away from the Obama administration's highly provocative and confrontational economic, diplomatic and military campaign against Russia. The faction that has coalesced around Trump favors a more aggressive US policy first of all against China. Trump spokespeople have sought in comments and interviews to redirect the furor over alleged cyber-attacks away from Russia and toward China.

It is significant that the Democrats, while signaling their willingness to cooperate with Trump on pursuing aggressively protectionist policies and saying little about the ultra-right-wing cabinet he has assembled, make the defense of the intelligence agencies and the pursuit of a war-mongering policy against Russia the issues on which they remain intransigent.

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