Democratic Party's anti-Putin rhetoric prepares escalation of Syrian War

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On Friday evening, the *New York Times* published a lead story under the headline, "Russian Spies Said to Hack Systems Used in Clinton's Run," alleging that hackers associated with the Russian government infiltrated computer systems linked with the campaign of Hillary Clinton.

This inflammatory piece was the latest in a series of articles and columns that have appeared over the past several days in the *Times* and other news outlets claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin is involved in an attempt to influence the 2016 election.

Friday's report, like those that have preceded it, contained not a single fact to support the explosive allegations made in its headline.

It is not until the end of the article that the reader learns that all of its claims are based on the statements of a source that insists on remaining anonymous. There is no reason to believe that this so-called source has provided the *Times* with any information to back up his or her claims. No one knows who this person is, assuming he or she even exists, or whether this information was not made up out of the whole cloth by the *Times*.

Earlier last week, the *Times* declared that American intelligence agencies had "high confidence" that "the Russian government was behind the theft of emails and documents from the Democratic National Committee," based on similar statements from unnamed, anonymous sources. The DNC emails were released by WikiLeaks.

This campaign fits the classic definition of an amalgam: a series of disconnected assertions about unsubstantiated events usually for the purpose of framing up a targeted party or parties.

The ongoing campaign to present the release by WikiLeaks of documents showing widespread election fraud by the DNC is aimed at attacking the candidacy of Donald Trump from the right by portraying him, in the words of *Times* columnist Paul Krugman, as a "Siberian candidate" beholden to Putin.

It is bad enough that the *Times* is seeking to whip up anti-Russian sentiment for the purposes of swaying the results of an election, but its campaign is even more sinister. The *Times*, and the section of the ruling class for which it speaks, is seeking to exploit the supercharged electoral environment to instigate popular hostility to Russia, which in turn is aimed at providing a broader popular base for full-sale American intervention in the Middle East.

The ongoing anti-Putin propaganda campaign comes in the aftermath of a number of developments that have sharpened US tensions with Russia. First, last month's attempted military coup in Turkey, which clearly had American backing, was thwarted by 11th hour intelligence provided to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an by Russia.

In the weeks leading up to the coup, Erdo?an had made a rapprochement with the Putin government, going so far as to apologize on June 27 for the downing of a Russian Su-24 bomber last November and declaring Russia a "friend and strategic partner."

Simultaneously with its overtures toward Russia, Turkey has backed off from its support for "rebels" fighting the government of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, many of whom were affiliated with the Islamic State.

"Turkey has been cracking down on some of the transit of foreign fighters who are flowing into as well as out of Turkey," John Brennan, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, complained to *Yahoo News* two days after Erdo?an's apology to Russia.

The closure of Turkey as an avenue for Islamist fighters to flow into Syria, together with ongoing

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Russian operations against ISIS forces and US-backed rebels, has led to a series of reversals for the CIA's Islamist proxy forces in Syria. Aleppo, Syria's largest city, is on the verge of being cleared of ISIS/rebel forces by the Syrian government.

In 2013, the Obama administration decided to pull back from its threat to intervene more directly in Syria in the face of divisions within the ruling class and overwhelming popular opposition to the instigation of yet another war.

Now, however, the entire CIA-sponsored insurgency is facing comprehensive defeat without a rapid and massive escalation of American military involvement. This would be a major political setback for American efforts to dominate the Middle East.

As the *Times* put it last week, "The fall of eastern Aleppo to government forces would be a major turning point in the war and would solidify Russia's place as the most prominent foreign power involved in the conflict."

It is to be noted that in recent days the US media has been trumpeting the imminent fall of Aleppo as a human rights disaster, while saying virtually nothing about recent American bombings in nearby cities that have resulted in the loss of hundreds of civilian lives.

The Democratic Party platform includes a bitter denunciation of Russia, which it accuses of "propping up the Assad regime in Syria, which is so brutally attacking its own citizens." The platform declares that a Clinton administration "will not hesitate to stand up to Russian aggression." This is the sort of rhetoric that was associated with the the extreme right-wing Goldwater faction of the Republican Party at the height of the Cold War. It is now being used by the Democratic Party, and this must be viewed as an indication that its policy makers are planning a major escalation of US military operations.

In the lexicon of American politics, there is something known as an "October surprise:" the deliberate provocation of a foreign policy crisis to rally the population around the flag, galvanize public support for military intervention and ensure the victory of the candidate favored by the party in power.

There may be in these events the making of an October surprise, or perhaps one that takes place in September… or even August.

Even as the issue of war has been kept deliberately in the background of the 2016 elections, hardly mentioned at the conventions of either party, the escalating and increasingly virulent denunciations of Russia make it clear that the stage is being set for an escalation of direct military involvement in Syria, possibly resulting in a war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

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