

Clinton steps up anti-Russian campaign against Trump

Patrick Martin
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The Hillary Clinton presidential campaign has chosen to focus its efforts in the week before the first debate between Clinton and Donald Trump on an intensified effort to attack Trump from the right on foreign policy, portraying him as a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Former national security officials played the main role in this smear campaign, allowing the candidate to avoid getting her hands dirty. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former CIA deputy director Michael Morell took part in a joint press call Thursday in which they denounced Trump's alleged ties to Russia.

Albright declared that Trump's campaign slogan should be "Russia First" rather than "America First," adding, "The president's first and only motivation should be advancing America's interests, not their for-profit interests." She called for the moderator of the first debate to pose a question directly to Trump about business connections to Russia.

The former secretary of state also denounced Trump for failing to meet with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, the billionaire oligarch who came to power after the US-orchestrated right-wing coup that overthrew a pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich. Hillary Clinton met with Poroshenko Monday in New York City, where the Ukrainian official was attending the United Nations General Assembly, but Trump declined an invitation to do likewise.

Morell called on Trump to disclose all his overseas business interests. He said, "It seems to me — I can't prove this — but ... the positions he's taken on Russia are motivated by a support for his business interests."

The former spy chief said that he had spent a third of a century at the CIA assessing foreign leaders: "And if

I sort of turned that analytical spotlight on Donald Trump, I would tell you that his number one interest, the thing he cares about the most, is not the United States of America. It is Donald Trump. He cares more about himself than he does about anything else, including his nation."

He continued, "The definition of a patriot is somebody who puts ... nation above anything else in their life. So in that regard, Donald Trump is not a patriot."

Planted articles in major media outlets accompanied this effort, with *Newsweek* magazine publishing a report on the Trump Organization's business dealings in Russia, arguing that Trump would have extensive conflicts of interest should he become president. The magazine raised questions about Trump's alleged ties to Vladimir Potanin, a Russian mining and real estate billionaire.

ABC News chimed in Thursday with a lengthy report citing claims—without any supporting documentation—that wealthy Russians have invested large sums in Trump business ventures, making him susceptible to Russian economic pressure. Most of the deals cited by ABC are Russians buying condos in Trump-branded real estate developments in New York City and south Florida, in which Trump did not have an equity interest, but collected a licensing fee.

Trump declared in July that he has "zero investments in Russia," but this wording has been turned against him by the Clinton campaign and its supporters, who have suggested repeatedly that the investment flow is in the other direction, making Trump dependent on wealthy Russian investors who are themselves closely tied to the Kremlin.

There have also been suggestions—most recently floated this week by *Washington Post* columnist

Eugene Robinson, another Clinton advocate—that Trump refuses to release his tax returns because they would show substantial income or debts related to Russian investment.

The *Newsweek* article led to the publication of an open letter by 55 former US national security officials in the *New York Times*, “calling on Mr. Trump to disclose, in full, the nature of his business relationships overseas.” Morell was describing as the “driving force” behind the letter, along with Michael Vickers, former undersecretary of defense for intelligence.

Other signatories included nine former officials of the George W. Bush administration, including leading architects of the Iraq war like former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

A similar letter denouncing Trump and supporting Hillary Clinton was released this week signed by 75 retired senior diplomats, former ambassadors or other officials requiring Senate confirmation, none of them previously identified with either the Democratic or Republican parties.

The open letter declared that “none of us” will vote for Trump, while noting that the signatories “have proudly represented every President since Richard Nixon as ambassadors or senior State Department officials in Senate-confirmed positions. We have served Republican and Democratic Presidents with pride and enthusiasm.”

Among the most prominent of the signers was Ryan Crocker, former US ambassador to Syria, to Iraq during the US military occupation, and to Afghanistan during the current war against the Taliban. He said in a press interview, “I know Hillary Clinton a bit from my time in Afghanistan. I thought she was a terrific boss. She’s smart, focused, she knows how to make decisions.”

Other signers included Daniel Kurtzer, former US ambassador to Egypt and to Israel, Thomas Pickering, former US ambassador to the United Nations with a long record of working with death squad regimes in Central America, and Nicholas Burns, undersecretary of state for George W. Bush.

The letter from the 75 retired diplomats echoed the Clinton campaign attacks on Trump, saying, “shockingly, he has even offered praise and admiration for Vladimir Putin, the leader of Russia whose international activities and reported intrusions into our

democratic political process have been among the most damaging actions taken by any foreign leader since World War II.”

This was a reference to the claims—again, completely unsupported by evidence—that Russian intelligence agencies were responsible for hacking into the mail server of the Democratic National Committee, and the subsequent leaking of politically embarrassing materials to WikiLeaks.

This aspect of the anti-Russian campaign reached a new peak on Thursday, when two senior Democratic congressional leaders, Senator Dianne Feinstein and Representative Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrats on the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, issued a joint statement accusing Russia of “making a serious and concerted effort to influence the U.S. election.”

The statement was an effort to increase the pressure on the Obama administration to issue a formal determination of Russian responsibility for the hacking of the DNC, something which the US intelligence agencies have so far been unwilling to do publicly, although they have apparently said as much in secret briefings to the congressional committees.

The growing volume and hysteria of the anti-Russian campaign has a clear political purpose: if Clinton wins the November 8 election, she will portray her victory as a mandate for a much more aggressive posture against Russia, greatly increasing the danger of open military conflict between the countries with the two largest nuclear arsenals.



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