

The lying campaign on Russian hacking

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On Thursday, US President Barack Obama announced a series of measures targeting Russia, presented as retaliation for alleged cyber attacks carried out by the government of Vladimir Putin. The moves include the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats and the imposition of economic sanctions against Russian intelligence agencies and officials.

The media, led by the *New York Times*, praised the actions, with the *Times* declaring in a lead editorial that “there should be no doubt about the correctness of President Obama’s decision to retaliate against Russia for hacking American computers and trying to influence the 2016 presidential election.”

The US media does not see fit to mention that the government making the accusations against Russia runs the world’s largest hacking and cyber espionage program, the aim of which, according to documents released by Edward Snowden, is to collect or hack all the data in the world, under the slogan “Collect it all... Exploit it all.”

This is the government that, with Israel, created and released the Stuxnet worm to attack Iran, and was shown to have tapped the phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and spied on Internet connections at the United Nations. As for “influencing” the elections of other countries, a history of the covert operations by the US and its intelligence agencies to manipulate political events, swing elections and overthrow elected governments around the world would comprise several volumes.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to surmise that Russia, like any other country, carries out espionage over the Internet. But in this case, the allegations that Russia hacked into the Democratic National Committee are unsubstantiated.

Neither the White House, nor the US intelligence agencies, nor the media, nor any private security firm has produced any information that would lead an

impartial person with basic knowledge of communications technology to conclude that Russia carried out a major cyber attack against the United States.

In his statement announcing the moves against Russia, Obama declared, “In October, my administration publicized our assessment that Russia took actions intended to interfere with the US election process.”

Obama was referring, in a deliberately vague manner, to a statement published October 7 by James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, declaring that “the Intelligence Community... is confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of e-mails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations.”

The aim of Clapper’s statement, issued in the run-up to the November election, was to discredit the revelations published by WikiLeaks that the Democratic National Committee rigged the primary process to secure the victory of Hillary Clinton over her challenger for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination, Bernie Sanders.

Clapper’s statement, a mere three paragraphs in length, like all of the allegations by the White House on this issue, was characterized by its generality and lack of specific details. Its use of the term “confident” is highly significant, as it denotes a lower level of conviction than the word “certain.”

Simultaneously with Obama’s statement on Thursday, Clapper’s Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report on alleged Russian hacking in the 2016 election.

The document contains no specific allegations, much less evidence, of attempts to access confidential data. Given that the actual content of the document is so scanty, it is not surprising that the statement hedges its findings, declaring, “The US Government can confirm

that the Russian government, including Russia's civilian and military intelligence services, conducted many of the activities generally described by a number of... security companies."

The facts laid out in the document released by Clapper are so weak that the *New York Times*' lead article on Friday was forced to point out that the evidence in the report "fell short of anything that would directly tie senior officers of the GRU or the FSB [Russian intelligence agencies]... to a plan to influence the election."

Why then, in the absence of any evidence, does the *New York Times* declare, "It would have been irresponsible for [Obama] to leave office next month and allow President Vladimir Putin to think that he could with impunity try to undermine American democracy."

That there are no facts to justify such retaliation does not concern the "newspaper of record." This is because it, like the rest of the US media, does not serve to question or check the false assertions of the US government, but rather to propagate them.

There are echoes in the present campaign of the Bush administration's false claims of "weapons of mass destruction" that were used to launch the war in Iraq in 2003. Then, as now, the *Times* and other publications not only repeated and amplified the administration's lies, but actively developed a false narrative of events as part of the government's propaganda effort to justify war.

Obama's latest actions are part of an extended anti-Russian campaign by the White House and the *New York Times*, which has been accelerated by the collapse of the US-backed regime-change effort in Syria.

This campaign takes place in the context of substantial divisions within the American state over the target of US military aggression. The faction for which the *New York Times* speaks is seeking a more direct intervention against Russia, while President-elect Donald Trump and the section of the state with which he is aligned see a conflict with Russia as a distraction from the real enemy: China.

To this end, the Obama administration has sought to create new "facts on the ground" before leaving office that would lead the Trump administration into a confrontation with Russia. Earlier this month, the White House announced that it was accelerating the

deployment of 4,000 US/NATO troops to the Russian border, meaning they will be in place by the time the new administration takes office.

Alongside this military buildup, the White House, the *Times* and much of the American media have sought to whip up the most hysterical anti-Russian campaign since the 1940s and early 1950s—carrying with it the stench of that period's McCarthyite witch-hunts. The main concern of the *Times*, as spelled out in an editorial published four days after Trump's election, is to ensure that the incoming administration does not "go soft on Russia."



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