

Right-wing campaign on hacking allegations continues

## Democrats, Republicans call for new sanctions against Russia

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Prominent congressional Democrats and Republicans are calling for new sanctions against Russia as part of the ongoing campaign for an intensification of Washington's economic and military confrontation with Moscow.

No evidence has been presented to the public substantiating the drumbeat of charges that the Russian government, under the direct supervision of President Vladimir Putin, organized the hacking of Democratic Party email accounts and release of information damaging to the presidential campaign of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. This has not prevented the Democratic Party, a section of the Republican Party and most of the corporate-controlled media, spearheaded by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, from treating the allegations as fact and agitating for more severe reprisals against Moscow than those announced last week by President Barack Obama.

The anti-Russian campaign has echoes of the lies fabricated by the Bush administration and US intelligence agencies and promoted by the media about supposed weapons of mass destruction that preceded the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This time, however, the target is the second largest nuclear power in the world.

The hysterical and McCarthyite character of the propaganda offensive is a reflection of a bitter conflict within the state and the foreign policy and military/intelligence establishment over policy issues. President-elect Donald Trump and a section of the Republican Party are questioning the supposed intelligence linking the Kremlin to the election campaign hacks and pledging to seek improved relations with Moscow after Trump is inaugurated on

January 20. This faction considers the focus on Russia for possible military attack a distraction from the more pressing target: China.

Lined up on the other side are virtually the entire Democratic Party and prominent Republicans, led by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain. In remarks delivered while heading up a bipartisan congressional delegation visiting the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Ukraine and Georgia, McCain declared that the United States must "stand up to Putin." McCain called for tougher sanctions on top of Obama's expulsion of 35 diplomats and closure of Russian facilities in the US.

Joining McCain in the tour of flash points in the US/NATO military buildup in Eastern Europe were South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and Minnesota Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar. The trip was designed to demonstrate American support for the right-wing, anti-Russian regimes in these countries. In an interview on Ukrainian television, McCain called the alleged Russian hacking of Democratic National Committee email servers an "act of war," and added, "We have to make sure that there is a price to pay."

In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the US government-funded propaganda outlet, McCain and his colleagues rejected any "Faustian bargain" that might be negotiated between Trump and Putin aimed at easing tensions. Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called for the provision of "lethal defensive weapons" to the Ukrainian government, declaring, "We're going to do two things: We're going after Putin harder with tougher sanctions and we're going to be more helpful

to our friends, like here in Ukraine.” Graham ruled out congressional support for any deal by Trump to recognize Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula following a 2014 referendum in the former Ukrainian territory.

In Ukraine, McCain spent New Year’s Eve with his fellow senators posing for photo ops with Ukrainian troops involved in the counterinsurgency war against pro-Russian separatists in the country’s east.

The Democrats have played the leading role in promoting the allegations that Russia was behind the DNC email hacks. Representative Adam Schiff of Southern California, the highest-ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, vowed in an interview Sunday on ABC News’ “This Week” program that Congress would work to prevent Trump from reversing the Obama administration’s aggressive policy against Moscow. He said: “The direction is going to be even more vigorous, I’m convinced, in favor of stronger sanctions against Russia. You’re going to see Democrats and Republicans like McCain and Graham and others come together with a strong sanction package.”

Schiff attacked Trump for questioning the US spy apparatus. “If he’s going to have any credibility as president, he needs to stop talking this way,” Schiff declared. “He needs to stop denigrating the intelligence community... He’s going to have to rely on them.”

McCain has scheduled a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing for Thursday on the alleged Russian hacking. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Mike Rogers, head of the National Security Agency (NSA), have been called to testify.

Clapper has already perjured himself at least once before Congress, lying point-blank in 2013 when asked if the NSA spies on the American population.

In a television interview Sunday morning, Sean Spicer, Donald Trump’s transition spokesman and incoming press secretary, reiterated Trump’s skepticism toward the claims of Russian hacking in the US election campaign. Significantly, however, he sought to redirect the furor over alleged cyber warfare by pointing the finger at China.

“In 2015, China took over a million records, sensitive data on people like me who had worked in the government at any time,” Spicer said, referring to a similarly unsubstantiated media campaign against

China in the aftermath of the hacking of the federal government’s Office of Personnel Management database. “A White House statement wasn’t even issued. No action publicly was taken... So there is a question about whether there’s a political retribution here versus a diplomatic response,” he said.



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