

Washington Post falsely accuses Russia of hacking Vermont power company

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The *Washington Post* has been compelled to correct an article which falsely claimed that Russia had hacked into the electrical grid of a Vermont electrical power company. It has since been revealed that the laptop that was allegedly penetrated by malware was not even connected to the electrical grid, according to a statement from Burlington Electric that read, “We detected suspicious internet traffic in a single Burlington Electric Department computer not connected to our organization’s grid systems.”

This did not prevent the newspaper from running the story without so much as checking with the company in question to see if it was true. The story had been read by countless readers on social media before it was retracted. By that time, readers around the world had only seen the headline: “Russian operation hacked a Vermont utility, showing risk to U.S. electrical grid security, officials say.”

No evidence of foreign hacking was revealed by the article, other than the statements from anonymous US officials and authorities. On Friday, Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin declared in a statement, “Vermonters and all Americans should be both alarmed and outraged that one of the world’s leading thugs, Vladimir Putin, has been attempting to hack our electric grid, which we rely upon to support our quality-of-life, economy, health, and safety,” adding, “This episode should highlight the urgent need for our federal government to vigorously pursue and put an end to this sort of Russian meddling.”

Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy also chimed in, “This is beyond hackers having electronic joy rides—this is now about trying to access utilities to potentially manipulate the grid and shut it down in the middle of winter. That is a direct threat to Vermont and we do not take it lightly.”

Not to be outdone, Democratic Representative Peter Welch of Vermont said, “They (Russia) will hack everywhere, even Vermont, in pursuit of opportunities to disrupt our country. We must remain vigilant, which is why I support President Obama’s sanctions against Russia and its attacks on our country and what it stands for.”

The newspaper also quoted an anonymous government official who stated ominously, “The question remains: Are they in other systems and what was the intent?”

This most recent propaganda piece is in line with the media campaign to demonize Russia and Vladimir Putin. It follows President Obama’s deliberate ratcheting up of tensions with the nuclear-armed power, including new sanctions and the expulsion of Russian diplomats from the country.

Eventually, the *Post* was forced to issue a correction, which read, “An earlier version of this story incorrectly said that Russian hackers had penetrated the US electric grid. Authorities say there is no indication of that so far.” The provocative headline accusing Russian hackers of breaching the power grid remained however.

Remarkably, the *Post* published the story live on its website without bothering to fact check with the power company mentioned in the article. The Burlington Electric Department issued a statement an hour and a half after the story was published through the local paper, the *Burlington Free Press*. According to Kalev Leetaru of *Forbes.com*, the *Post* did not contact someone from the company until 10 minutes after publication, by which time the original article with its menacing headline had been viewed all over the world.

The only “evidence” that the malware-infected laptop was hacked by Russia was the *Post*’s claim that the malware was “Russian made.” Russian malware can in

fact be purchased online anywhere by anyone.

There is a savage irony in the fact that the *Post* decries the spread of “fake news,” i.e., news that is not censored by the government and corporate media. The *Post* recently promoted a neo-McCarthyite website called “Prop or Not” which accused Wikileaks, CounterPunch, and other critical and left-wing websites of being propaganda outfits of the Russian government.

In the Vermont power plant hacking story, the *Washington Post* has once again revealed itself as an arm of the US military-intelligence apparatus.



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