

Congress grovels before the CIA as it escalates “Russian hacking” hysteria

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The political firestorm over allegations of Russian hacking in the US presidential election campaign reached a new peak with the hearing Thursday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, where three top intelligence officials testified for several hours. The three officials refused to provide any evidence to support the claims that the Russian government directed hacking into the email of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

Nor is there any such evidence in the 50-page report the intelligence agencies delivered to President Obama Thursday, to be followed by briefings of congressional leaders and President-elect Donald Trump on Friday. According to the *Washington Post*, “US officials said there are no major new bombshell disclosures even in the classified report,” let alone the declassified version that is to be made public on Monday.

This did not stop the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator John McCain, from describing the alleged hacking as “an act of war” and repeatedly urging the intelligence officials to embrace that terminology—language with the most ominous implications, given that the United States and Russia, between them, control more than 95 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons.

McCain’s bellicose comments were echoed by committee Democrats, who attacked Trump for his Twitter comments citing the lack of evidence of any Russian involvement and noting that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has publicly denied that Russia was the source for Democratic Party emails his organization made public.

Given the incessant campaign to transform the alleged hacking into a pretext for war with nuclear-armed Russia, let us conduct a reality check. What was actually uncovered by the hacking into the DNC and the Clinton campaign?

The material released by WikiLeaks exposed two major facets of the 2016 presidential campaign: the deliberate sabotage of the Bernie Sanders campaign by the DNC leadership, which put its thumb on the scale in favor of Clinton; and the abject subordination of Clinton to the financial aristocracy, documented in the transcripts of her speeches to Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street firms.

The term “hacking the election” has been thrown about, although US intelligence agencies have said there is no evidence that a single ballot was miscast or miscounted as a result of electronic interference with the conduct of the vote. The sole

consequence of the alleged hacking was the publication of true information about actions by Democratic Party officials and Clinton herself that discredited her campaign. It is this which the Democrats and their media supporters wish to suppress.

Press reports Thursday readily conceded that the “crime” in question was not the hacking of the material from the DNC and Podesta, but the delivery to WikiLeaks to make it public. The *New York Times* wrote that the alleged Russian hacking group “is blamed not just for taking emails from the DNC, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and Mr. Podesta, but also making them public,” an action which amounted to “turning a traditional espionage operation into an attempt to influence the election...”

A *Washington Post* columnist acknowledged, “We will stipulate that governments regularly spy on each other, and the United States also gathers intelligence on governments like Russia, China and India. The difference here is that intelligence operations allegedly led to the release of information to the public, via WikiLeaks and media coverage.”

Here, to put it plainly, is the real “crime,” as far as the US ruling elite is concerned: someone—the identity of the actual leaker or hacker is irrelevant—gave the American people access to material that documented the conspiracy of Democratic Party leaders against the democratic rights of the members of their own party who supported Sanders, and also demonstrated the class interests served by Hillary Clinton, the favorite of the party establishment.

It is remarkable that in the vast media furor over the alleged Russian hacking, there has been almost no reference to the content of the material revealed. The attitude of press organs of big business such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* suggests that if one of their reporters had received the DNC emails from an unknown source—as a *Times* reporter supposedly received Donald Trump’s tax return—the editors would have suppressed the information.

In fact, it is more than likely that this is exactly what happened. No one has asked the *Times* or the *Post* when they first learned of the DNC campaign against Sanders or received transcripts of Clinton’s speeches to Wall Street. It is doubtful that WikiLeaks was the first media outlet to do so. But WikiLeaks conducted themselves as actual journalists, not stenographers for the CIA and Pentagon, and made the secret documents public, damaging the candidate who was the overwhelming favorite of the military-intelligence leadership. For that and other exposures, Julian

Assange has earned the undying hatred of American imperialism and its servants—and the thanks of the international working class.

And what of Senator Sanders himself, and his liberal ally Senator Elizabeth Warren? As the campaign over alleged Russian hacking has unfolded in the media, these political cowards have prostrated themselves before the intelligence agencies. This fact exposes yet again the absurdity of their pretense to represent an opposition. They share the basic class outlook of the entire political establishment, Democratic and Republican, which regards the military-intelligence apparatus as its last line of defense against the working class, at home and abroad.

At Thursday's hearing, Republicans and Democrats took turns urging the spy chiefs to denounce Assange for the publication by WikiLeaks of US military and diplomatic communications that document war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and conspiracies against governments around the world—activities that make hacking the email of the DNC pale by comparison.

The *New York Times* wrote, "The gathering was extraordinary as much for its context as its content—a public, bipartisan display of support for the intelligence community that seemed aimed, at times, at an audience of one" (i.e., Trump).

Senators from the two parties—most of whom supported the Iraq war on the basis of lies about "weapons of mass destruction"—seemed to be in competition to demonstrate the most abject loyalty to the intelligence agencies. They were all speaking from talking points supplied by the intelligence agencies and the Pentagon. Senator Joseph Donnelly, an Indiana Democrat, was the most sycophantic, telling the spy chiefs that in a truth-telling competition with Assange and WikiLeaks, "We're on your side every time."

This theme was elaborated explicitly in an editorial in the Thursday edition of the *Washington Post*, which berated Trump for dismissing the claims of Russian hacking of the Democrats, which it described as an effort to "deny reality." Declaring that Trump would soon have to rely on "intelligence pros" to help him conduct US foreign policy, the editorial asked, "Why does Mr. Trump give Mr. Assange more weight than the U.S. intelligence agencies?"

Trump seemed to retreat in the face of the media barrage, tweeting his disapproval of Assange and his love for the intelligence agencies. But the *Post's* question should be turned back on the newspaper itself. Why should anyone believe Assange? Because WikiLeaks has conducted actual journalistic investigation, uncovering evidence of US government crimes and making it public.

The intelligence agencies, by contrast, are proven liars. No senator challenged the veracity of the panel of witnesses, who were headed by retired general James Clapper, the director of national intelligence. By rights, Clapper should have been jailed for perjury after his sworn testimony before Congress in March 2013. Asked point-blank, "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?" Clapper responded with the flat denial, "No, sir." Three months later, Edward Snowden revealed that the NSA has hundreds of programs to collect the telecommunications and Internet activities not only of every American, but of every human being on the planet.

The public, bipartisan display of support for the "intelligence community" is aimed at delegitimizing any opposition to the numberless crimes committed by the US military-intelligence apparatus against the population of the world, including the American people, on a daily basis.

The CIA is an organization dripping with blood, detested by hundreds of millions around the world, including in the United States, as the instigator of countless coups, massacres, assassinations and wars. From Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, to Indonesia in 1965 and Chile in 1973, to the bloodbaths in Central America in the 1980s, to today's mass repression in Egypt and drone warfare in a dozen countries, the CIA is a byword for criminality.

On Thursday, dozens of US senators prostrated themselves before the intelligence agencies. Some 40 years before, in a similar committee room, senators took sworn testimony about how the CIA had been running a "Murder Incorporated" in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

That investigation was a byproduct of the Watergate crisis that forced the resignation of President Richard Nixon. At the time, it was revealed that former CIA personnel had been employed at Nixon's Committee for the Re-Election of the President, or CREEP, and were involved in organizing the burglary of the Watergate hotel. The congressional inquiry led to the exposure of illegal spying on the American people and the infiltration of government agents into antiwar, civil rights, labor and socialist organizations.

Four decades ago, it was possible for the US ruling elite to conduct a limited "reform" of the CIA, which amounted to removing a few discredited officials and setting some limits on the agency's operations—limits that were quickly breached in practice. Today, even such a largely cosmetic exercise is impossible. Instead, the intelligence agencies demand unquestioning loyalty, and the Democrats and the media salute.



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