

# The media campaign on Russian hacking and the US debacle in Syria

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The publication Friday of the unclassified version of the report by US intelligence agencies has provided further evidence that the claims of Russian government hacking and leaking of Democratic Party emails have no foundation in fact.

The report is bereft of factual substantiation of the allegations made by the CIA and the director of national intelligence, James Clapper, in October that Russia illegally obtained documents from the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman, John Podesta.

The *New York Times*, the most shameless media promoter of the anti-Russia campaign, was forced to admit in a front-page news article published Friday evening that "what is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack."

It added, "Many in Washington expected the agencies to make a strong public case to erase any uncertainty. Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to 'trust us.'"

The *Washington Post* reported that the classified version likewise contains "no bombshells."

Yet the media has not abandoned its campaign of lies aimed at pressuring the incoming Trump administration to take a more aggressive line against Russia.

Speaking on the Sunday morning talk shows, media pundits and reporters, together with Republican warmongers Lindsey Graham and John McCain, sought to portray the intelligence report as an ironclad indictment of Russian "meddling" in the election.

Appearing on NBC News' "Meet the Press" program, Senator Graham demanded that president-elect Trump "make Russia pay a price for trying to interfere" in the election. Graham, just returned from a tour of the Baltic countries bordering Russia, where the United States is

deploying an additional 4,000 troops, declared, "I want a one/two punch against Russia. I want more sanctions to hit [Russian President Putin] harder... We want more trainers on the ground, 365 days a year, a permanent US military training presence in the Baltics, Ukraine and Georgia."

In the panel discussion following the interview, NBC news commentator Andrea Mitchell declared that Russia "weaponized" information it allegedly obtained by hacking the Democratic leadership. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks proclaimed, "Putin is a guy who murders journalists, who's destroyed the democratic process in his own country, and now suddenly he feels the freedom to try to do that in our country."

The continuing media offensive, presenting as indisputable truth allegations the government has been unable to substantiate, testifies to the fact that the campaign is driven by unstated (and unpopular) political aims, not by any foreign attack on America's "democratic process." Since the charges of Russian hacking directed against the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton were first made over five months ago, the aim has been to whip up public support for an increasingly confrontational posture toward Russia, particularly with regard to the civil war in Syria.

For nearly six years, the CIA has been engaged in a campaign for regime-change, funding and arming Islamist militias with the aim of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Russia's only Arab ally in the Middle East. In 2013, fabricated claims that the Syrian government had carried out chemical weapons attacks were used as a pretext for launching a full-scale air war against Assad. President Obama, facing popular opposition at home, divisions within the military establishment, and flagging support among the Washington's NATO allies, called off the air assault at the last minute.

There is little doubt that talks were underway between the Clinton campaign and the Obama administration, and planning was well advanced, for a massive US military escalation in Syria to be launched after the expected election victory of the Democratic candidate, who had the public support of dominant sections of the intelligence establishment. During the campaign, Clinton repeatedly called for the imposition of a “no fly” zone and other measures that posed a direct risk of military conflict with Russian forces operating in Syria. Had Clinton won, it is likely that the Obama administration would already be implementing war plans demanded by the CIA.

The election of Trump, which took the political establishment by surprise, threw these plans into disarray. This is not because Trump is any less committed to a policy of militarism and war. His “America First” mantra represents a turn to the unbridled assertion of American imperialist interests by any and all means against all perceived challengers. However, Trump speaks for a faction within the US ruling class and state that sees China as the more immediate enemy and deems an immediate escalation against Russia to be a distraction from the first order of business—taking on Beijing.

On Saturday, Trump shrugged off the previous day’s intelligence briefing and effectively reiterated his skepticism about the allegations of Russian hacking, tweeting, “Having a good relationship with Russia is a good thing, not a bad thing.”

The anti-Russian campaign erupted once again into a full-scale propaganda offensive when it became clear that Syrian government forces, backed by Russian air power and Iranian troops, were about to drive US-backed Islamist forces from their last major urban stronghold, eastern Aleppo. It is the humiliating defeat suffered by the US in Aleppo that to a considerable extent accounts for the hysterical character of the post-election campaign on Russian hacking.

Speaking on “Meet the Press” Sunday, outgoing Defense Secretary Ashton Carter strongly indicated as much. Throughout the interview, moderator-propagandist Chuck Todd egged on Carter, asking whether the alleged Russian interference in the election was “an act of war” and demanding to know if it warranted a “military response.” He pressed Carter on whether “this administration moved too slowly to punish the Russians.”

Carter declared that Russia had “doubled down on the Syrian civil war” and moved to “define its interests as being ones of frustrating the United States” in Syria, leading to the latest “aggressive act against our very

democracy.”

Fifteen years ago, official lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were used to drag the American people into war, setting off the ever-escalating wave of bloodletting in the Middle East. President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and their cabal of neoconservative ideologues went to great lengths to fabricate evidence that Iraq was seeking to produce nuclear weapons.

The CIA went so far as to force an Al Qaeda detainee captured in Afghanistan to make false confessions under torture that the terrorist organization was working with the Iraqi government to set up terrorist training camps, a lie repeated by Colin Powell in his 2003 speech at the United Nations justifying the looming war against Iraq.

The media played a critical role in disseminating the Bush administration’s “evidence,” including articles by *New York Times* reporters such as Judith Miller, who functioned as mouthpieces for the CIA.

Millions of people around the world knew these were lies. They knew that what was coming was a war for oil. They demonstrated against the impending war in their millions, carrying out the largest global anti-war demonstrations in human history.

Fifteen years later, the same types of lies are being trotted out by the media mouthpieces of the military/intelligence apparatus.

What is notable is that while the methods today are the same and the targets are even bigger, there is no organized opposition. This is not due to increased support for war. It is due to the role of the organizations that 15 years ago headed up the protests, using their influence at that time to channel anti-war sentiment behind the Democratic Party. Today, when eight years of the Obama administration have shattered all pretenses of the Democratic Party being anything other than a party of the military-intelligence establishment, the pseudo-left organizations have themselves become openly pro-imperialist and pro-war.



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