

The Democratic Party and the anti-Russia hysteria

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Since the inauguration of Donald Trump just over two weeks ago, millions of people have demonstrated in the streets of cities throughout the US and internationally. They are motivated by deeply felt opposition to the national chauvinism and authoritarianism of the new administration, as expressed in particular in its anti-Muslim immigration and refugee order.

The criticisms of the Democratic Party, however, are centered on an entirely different issue. Continuing a theme developed by Hillary Clinton during the election campaign, the Democrats are seeking to channel opposition behind a politically foul and neo-McCarthyite campaign depicting Trump as an agent of Moscow and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The latest round of Russia-baiting was signaled, as usual, in the pages of the *New York Times*. Paul Krugman, who kicked off the “Russian hacking” campaign last summer with a *Times* column labeling Trump the “Siberian candidate,” began his op-ed piece last Monday with the words, “We’re just over a week into the Trump-Putin regime.”

Senator Elizabeth Warren took up the baton in a speech to the Progressive Congress Strategy Summit in Baltimore on Saturday, declaring: “In November, America elected Donald Trump. Yes, the Russians helped. Yes, the FBI director helped. Yes, he lost the popular vote by three million. But we cannot let ourselves off so easy.”

There followed much posturing as a “left” critic of the Democratic Party establishment, but endorsement of Russia-baiting was duly noted by another leading Democrat, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who gave full vent to her inner Joe McCarthy in an appearance on the NBC program “Meet the Press” on Sunday.

Asked about Warren’s criticism of the right-wing character of Democratic Party campaigns, Pelosi quickly changed the subject: “But let me just go back to the first part of the senator’s statement. I want to know what the Russians have on Donald Trump. I think we have to have an investigation by the FBI into his financial, personal and political connections to Russia.”

She continued, “And we want to see his tax returns so we can have truth...in the relationship between Putin, whom he admires, and Donald Trump.”

Former Democratic presidential contender Bernie Sanders sounded the same theme Sunday during an appearance on the CNN program “State of the Union.” He criticized Trump as “a president who I fear very much is moving us in a very authoritarian direction,” citing both his attacks on the courts and the media and the fact that he “attacks our intelligence agencies as operating in neo-Nazi fashion.” That was a reference to Trump’s criticism of the intelligence agencies for their role in peddling the “Russian hacking” narrative during the weeks following the November 8 election.

In the midst of this campaign, both Democratic and Republican critics of Trump are seizing on perhaps the only true thing that Trump has said.

Most of the politicians interviewed on the Sunday morning television programs, Democrats and Republicans, criticized Trump’s comments about Vladimir Putin made in a taped pre-Super Bowl interview with Bill O’Reilly of Fox. O’Reilly tried to elicit a condemnation of the Russian president, saying, “Putin’s a killer.” Trump replied, “We’ve got a lot of killers. What do you think? Our country’s so innocent?”

This provoked a wave of condemnation from politicians and media commentators about the “moral equivalence” drawn between the United States and

Russia. The Democratic senator from Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar, echoing the words of many others, told ABC News, “You cannot compare any leaders in our country to what Vladimir Putin has done. This is a man and a regime that has taken down a passenger plane in Ukraine, killing hundreds of people... This is a regime that, we believe—17 intelligence agencies in our own country have said—has tried to influence our own election. I don’t think there’s any comparison.”

If truth be told, the Russian government, for all Putin’s KGB past, is a rank amateur at mass killing compared to American imperialism.

Since the Second World War, which ended with the dropping of two US atomic bombs on Japanese cities, the victims of American imperialism number in the tens of millions: wars in Korea, Vietnam, Central America, the First Gulf War, the air war against Serbia, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the bombing of Libya, the destruction of Syria and Yemen, to say nothing of the bloodbaths conducted by CIA-backed stooge regimes in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The fifteen years of the “war on terror” have led to the deaths of more than one million people in the Middle East, with millions more turned into refugees. Not a day goes by in which American imperialism is not killing someone somewhere in the world. It was Barack Obama, not Vladimir Putin, who held regular “Terror Tuesdays” to personally approve drone missile assassinations of thousands of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia and other countries.

Klobuchar is being positioned as a potential Democratic presidential or vice-presidential candidate, burnishing her credentials with the military-intelligence apparatus by joining war hawk Republican senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham on a tour of US-NATO military operations in the Baltic states and Ukraine last month.

There are clear political calculations involved in the Democratic Party’s campaign on Russia. It serves, on the one hand, as a distraction, an effort to divert attention away from the right-wing, antidemocratic and pro-corporate character of the Trump administration’s policies, which the Democrats broadly support.

At the same time, the Democrats are seeking to exploit the opposition that exists to promote their own agenda. They represent a faction of the ruling class and

the military-intelligence apparatus that sees an anti-Russia policy as critical to the maintenance of NATO, deems Russia to be an intolerable obstacle to US domination of the Middle East, and believes that taking on China is not possible without first dealing with Russia.

All of this demonstrates that a fight against the Trump administration and the danger it represents requires a break with the Democratic Party. Any opposition that the Democrats express is entirely within the framework of the interests of the American ruling class and US imperialism. Genuine opposition must be rooted in the working class, connecting the fight against war and authoritarianism with opposition to social inequality and the capitalist system.



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