

The New York Times steps up its anti-Russia campaign

Patrick Martin
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The CIA's principal house organ, the *New York Times*, published a lead editorial Sunday on the investigation into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election that is an incendiary and lying exercise in disinformation aimed at whipping up support for war with Russia.

The editorial was well-timed, coming on the morning of the same day that the US military shot down a Syrian warplane, setting off a dramatic escalation in the US conflict with Russia. The editors of the *Times* have the closest ties with US military and intelligence officials and no doubt were aware that something was being planned, if they were not briefed about the details.

Under the headline "Mr. Trump's Dangerous Indifference to Russia," the *Times* uses the language of war to assert: "A rival foreign power launched an aggressive cyberattack on the United States, interfering with the 2016 presidential election... The unprecedented nature of Russia's attack is getting lost in the swirling chaos of recent weeks, but it shouldn't be."

The *Times* presents zero evidence to back up a wild reference to "the sheer scope and audacity of the Russian efforts." The editorial simply declares, "American intelligence agencies have concluded," followed by a long list of allegations:

"Under direct orders from President Vladimir Putin, hackers connected to Russian military intelligence broke into the email accounts of senior officials at the Democratic National Committee and of Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, John Podesta. They passed tens of thousands of emails to the website WikiLeaks, which posted them throughout the last months of the campaign in an attempt to damage the Clinton campaign.

"Even more disturbing, hackers sought access to voter databases in at least 39 states, and in some cases

tried to alter or delete voter data. They also appear to have tried to take over the computers of more than 100 local election officials in the days before the November 8 vote."

Editorial page editor James Bennet presents not a single fact that supports the *Times*' assertions. What is the evidence that there were "direct orders" from Putin, or that hackers linked to Russian intelligence raided Democratic email accounts and supplied material to WikiLeaks, or that (other?) hackers tried to access voter databases and the computers of local election officials? The entire mountain of accusations is suspended in air.

If one traces back the charges to their original sources, they all turn out to be factually unsupported claims by US intelligence agencies, made either in public "findings" issued in October 2016 and January 2017, or in a series of leaks from within the military-intelligence apparatus, mainly to the *Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The most recent allegations, about alleged hacking into voter databases and local election computers, are based on a National Security Agency (NSA) report leaked to *The Intercept* web publication, which even *The Intercept* admitted contained no underlying evidence to substantiate the NSA's claims.

Not a single one of the reports in the *Times* or *Post* is the product of a genuine investigation by journalists. Instead, the main reporting on the "Russian hacking" affair consists of taking dictation from unidentified intelligence officials. In not a single case did these officials offer evidence to substantiate their claims, invariably made in the form of ambiguous phrases like "we assess," "we believe," "we assess with high confidence," etc. Such claims are worth no more than previous assertions that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction—a lie used to justify a war that has

killed more than one million people.

In its brazen contempt for basic standards of evidence, the *Times* ignores more plausible sources of the leaked Hillary Clinton campaign and Democratic Party information, such as an individual or individuals within the Democratic Party. The newspaper makes no mention of the content of the leaked emails, which document the efforts of the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee to sabotage the primary challenge of Bernie Sanders.

For all the rhetorical heat about a supposed Russia assault on “the integrity of American democracy,” as the *Times* puts it, there is no such outrage over the dozens of interventions by Washington to manipulate elections all over the world.

One recent study found 81 instances—not counting outright CIA-backed military coups—in which the US government financed political parties, organized disinformation campaigns, carried out assassinations, blackmailed candidates, or otherwise sought to install its own nominees by rigging elections in countries on every continent.

One of the most flagrant such examples was the 1996 presidential election in Russia, won by the US-backed Boris Yeltsin (See: “Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin: When the White House fixed a Russian election”).

Apart from its continuous interference in elections, the US government is engaged in non-stop snooping operations against foreign governments, even those with which it is supposedly allied. Just a few years ago, it was revealed that the Obama administration had hacked—yes, HACKED—the cell phone of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. Then-US President Obama acknowledged that the US does all sorts of “stuff” and offered a phony apology.

As for the *Times*, it has no reservations about serving as a conduit for fact-free propaganda from the US intelligence agencies. This points to the newspaper’s putrefaction in recent decades, seen above all in the fact that its leading personnel, particularly on its editorial pages and foreign affairs staff, consist of ex-officio spokesmen for US imperialism, including a stable of CIA flacks such as Nicholas Kristof, Roger Cohen and Thomas Friedman.

The editorial page editor, James Bennet, is the brother of right-wing Democratic Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado and son of Douglas Bennet, a top State

Department official in the Carter and Clinton administrations, whose career includes a stint heading the Agency for International Development (AID), a frequent instrument for CIA provocations.

The *Times*, channeling the intelligence agencies, has a definite political agenda. Powerful factions of the ruling class want to continue and intensify the anti-Russian foreign policy adopted by the Obama administration, particularly in the wake of the 2014 campaign to bring down the elected pro-Russian government in Ukraine and install an ultra-right, pro-US stooge regime.

A recent *Times* article, focused on Senate passage of new sanctions against Russia, spells out the issues relatively clearly. In “Leaders Wary of Trump May Have an Ally: Congress,” the *Times* asserts that congressional leaders, both Democratic and Republican, “are working to ensure that American foreign policy remains rooted in the trans-Atlantic alliance against traditional rivals like Russia.” It praises Republican efforts to advance “an anti-Trump foreign policy” and impose sanctions against Russia for its actions in backing the Syrian government.

In the eyes of the factions of the ruling class for which the *Times* speaks, the problem is not that Russia is interfering with “American democracy,” but that it is interfering with critical geo-strategic interests of American imperialism in Syria and the broader Middle East. The newspaper is attempting to condition American public opinion and overcome popular opposition to an escalating military confrontation with the world’s second-largest nuclear power.

For the working class, the fight against the Trump administration and the fight against its opponents in the political establishment is the same fight. It is a fight against the capitalist ruling class, which is preparing to inflict on the people of the entire world a new and catastrophic world war.



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