

Trump-Putin meeting deepens divisions in US establishment on Russia policy

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US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin met for more than two hours Friday on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg, amid the growing threat of a military clash between the world's two biggest nuclear powers, whether in Syria or Eastern Europe. After the meeting, which lasted far longer than the half-hour that had been planned, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in separate statements announced an agreement on a ceasefire and establishment of a so-called "de-escalation zone" in southwestern Syria.

Lavrov said the ceasefire was set to take effect at noon Damascus time on July 9. Tillerson called it a "defined agreement" and added that the two leaders had a "lengthy discussion of other areas in Syria where we can work together."

At a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe following his meeting with Trump, Putin said other topics the two discussed included Ukraine, cybersecurity and fighting terrorism.

On North Korea, Tillerson acknowledged there was no agreement, telling reporters, "The Russians see it a little differently than we do, so we're going to continue those discussions and ask them to do more." But he described Trump and Putin as having "positive chemistry" in their first meeting, and said their discussions had been "very constructive."

The US secretary of state said that Trump opened the meeting by raising the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US election. Trump, he said, returned to the question several times and pressed it "robustly." But after Putin repeated his previous denials of any Russian meddling, the two agreed to move on. "I think what the two presidents, I think rightly, focused on is how do we move forward," Tillerson said.

This outcome of the meeting, upon which the American media has been fixated for days, will only exacerbate the political warfare within the American ruling class and state over US policy toward Russia. The internecine conflict that has been raging for nearly a year is centered on divergent but equally reactionary and war-mongering positions on US imperialist policy.

Trump speaks for a faction that wants to wean Russia away from China and Iran in order to focus US aggression on China. His opponents, the dominant sections of the intelligence apparatus, in alliance with the Democratic Party and a section of Republicans, want to escalate the confrontation with Russia in both Syria and Eastern Europe. It sees neutralizing Russia as an essential precondition for settling accounts with US imperialism's most serious rival, China.

The Democrats, working hand in glove with the CIA, have been conducting an hysterical campaign on the basis of concocted allegations that the Russian government intervened in the US election in favor of Trump, whose campaign supposedly colluded with Moscow. An indication of its response to Friday's meeting between Trump and Putin was provided by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (Democrat of New York). Schumer called the meeting "disgraceful." He said in a statement, "President Trump had an obligation to bring up Russia's interference in our election with Putin, but he has an equal obligation to take the word of our Intelligence Community rather than that of the Russian president."

Nicholas Kristof, whose specialty on the *New York Times* editorial board is authoring propaganda pieces that seek to cloak US imperialist wars in the garb of "human rights," published a McCarthyite-style column following the meeting that began with a grab bag of longstanding, largely unsubstantiated allegations

against Putin:

“In Hamburg, Germany, President Trump is thundering against the free press that covers him, while getting lovey-dovey with the leader of a country that attacked American and French elections, that invaded Ukraine, that helped slaughter civilians in Syria, that was involved in shooting down a civilian airliner over Ukraine, that murders critics, and that brutalizes gay people in Chechnya.”

The renewed frenzy in the media and among Democrats directed against Trump’s supposed “softness” toward Russia—and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad—actually began on Thursday, following Trump’s joint press conference in Warsaw with Polish President Andrzej Duda. While Trump’s subsequent speech at the monument to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 against German occupation—a fascistic rant that presented Islam as a threat to Western civilization and praised god, country and the “will to survive”—received generally positive reviews in the US media, Trump’s press conference was roundly condemned.

This is because Trump again questioned the claims of US intelligence agencies—asserted without any factual substantiation—that the Russian government had hacked the emails of the Democratic Party and the Hillary Clinton campaign and leaked damaging information to WikiLeaks in order to tip the election toward Trump.

In response to a question from NBC correspondent Hallie Jackson, Trump said, “I think it was Russia, but I think it was probably other people and/or countries, and I see nothing wrong with that statement. Nobody really knows.”

But what particularly enraged the White House’s establishment critics was the fact that Trump raised the example of the false intelligence reports on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that were used to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

This prompted a parade of Democrats and media pundits to appear on the cable news networks on Thursday denouncing Trump for “undermining” the US intelligence agencies while on foreign soil.

Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, declared, “The president’s comments today, again casting doubt on whether Russia was behind the blatant interference in our election and suggesting—his own intelligence agencies to the contrary—that nobody really knows, continue to

directly undermine US interests.”

CNN interviewed the former director of national intelligence, James Clapper, who said the intelligence agencies “saw no evidence whatsoever that it was anyone involved in this other than the Russians.” Clapper denounced Trump for failing to take a hard line on Russia, saying it encouraged Putin to “keep doing what he’s doing.”

CNN published an article Thursday, timed for the eve of Trump’s meeting with Putin, headlined “Russia steps up spying efforts after election.” The article, in typical fashion, cited, with one exception, unnamed “current and former” US officials, who made vague assertions about increased Russian spying that were not only devoid of substantiation, but lacking in specific facts. This obviously planted propaganda piece argued for a more aggressive policy toward Russia, hinting at military action.

“The officials say they believe one of the biggest US adversaries feels emboldened by the lack of a significant retaliatory response from both the Trump and Obama administrations,” CNN wrote. This article was cited throughout the day as authoritative proof that Trump’s coddling of Putin was threatening “American democracy” and undermining US interests around the world.



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