

# US Congress overwhelmingly passes sanctions bill targeting Russia

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The US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill on Tuesday that places new sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea, and limits the Trump administration's ability to overturn them. The vote was 419–3 on a measure that will significantly increase geopolitical conflicts between the United States and its major rivals—not only Russia, but also the imperialist powers in Europe.

The bill will now move to the Senate, where an earlier version (without the North Korea sanctions) was approved by a similar margin, 97–2, in June. Trump has given mixed signals about whether he will sign the bill, but the veto-proof majorities in both houses of Congress mean that it is almost certain to be adopted into law.

The new sanctions expose the essential issues behind the “election hacking” campaign of the US media and political establishment, spearheaded by the intelligence agencies that are opposed to any shift away from the anti-Russia policy developed under the Obama administration. The near-unanimous vote in both houses of Congress (all “no” votes in the House were from Republicans) testifies to the degree to which the CIA, NSA and other spy agencies directly control the institutions of the state and the personnel that compose them.

The real issues at stake in the bitter internecine conflict within the ruling class were spelled out in a *Washington Post* editorial Monday (“Congress’s drastic—but necessary—rebuke to Trump”). The *Post*, which along with the *New York Times* has been a leading media voice in the anti-Russia campaign, hailed the bill as necessary to protect the “vital interests” of the US.

The sanctions agreement, the *Post* wrote, placed “Trump’s policy toward the regime of Vladimir Putin

in receivership, preventing him from lifting sanctions without congressional agreement.” Trump has displayed an “inexplicable affinity” toward Russia, the newspaper wrote, and has cast doubt on Russia’s intervention in the US election campaign.

“For the US intelligence community,” the *Post* asserted, “there is no such doubt... Mr. Trump’s refusal to accept those conclusions, and the possibility that he might reverse sanctions imposed on Russia for that interference and for its military invasion of Ukraine, has generated an extraordinary consensus in an otherwise polarized Congress.”

None of the allegations made by the *Post* about Russia’s involvement in the election can be proven, and the declarations of the “US intelligence community” are no more believable than the claims that the government of Saddam Hussein possessed “weapons of mass destruction” prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Even if one were to accept the conclusions as true, there is no doubt that Clinton was working with all manner of governments to advance her election campaign.

The real issue is not Russian “hacking,” but the geostrategic interests of American imperialism. As the *Post* makes clear, its main concern is that Russia has obstructed the operations of US intelligence agencies and the military in Ukraine and Syria. The reference to the “military invasion of Ukraine” refers to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the internal civil war that followed the 2014 regime-change operation organized by the US, and spearheaded by fascistic organizations, to unseat a pro-Russian government.

The editorial later complains that Trump’s actions are handing Russia “major concessions for nothing,” including “the withdrawal of US support for rebel forces in Syria.” This refers to Trump’s decision to end

CIA support for Syrian opposition forces, dominated by Al Qaeda, who have been waging a US-backed civil war to unseat Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The editorial acknowledges that the sanctions bill “could have some unintended consequences,” including on “US-European coordination on Russia.” It is “nevertheless essential” because “Trump cannot be trusted to protect vital US interests against persistent Russian aggression.”

What are these “vital US interests”? They do not involve the Trump administration’s assault on health care, its brutal assault on immigrant workers, or its militarist agenda. Rather they refer to the interests of the ruling class in dominating the Middle East and its vast energy resources and expanding US power in Eastern Europe. For the factions of the ruling class for which the *Post* speaks, moreover, US aggression against Russia is seen as essential for keeping the European powers in line and for taking on China.

The new bill will be adopted under conditions of explosive geopolitical tensions that can very rapidly escalate into a direct military conflict involving nuclear-armed powers. Within just the past 24 hours, the US fired warning shots at an Iranian vessel; the Chinese military intercepted a US aircraft; the *Wall Street Journal* reported on preparations by China for a US war against North Korea; and China staged joint military operations with Russia in the Baltic Sea.

The various countries affected by the bill will take it as a clear sign that the US intends to sharply pursue its economic and military confrontation with them. A leaked European Union memo reported the statements from European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker that the EU “should stand ready to act within days” of the bill’s passage, and that the sanctions “could impact a potentially large number of European companies doing legitimate business under EU measures with Russian entities.”

The Trump administration, increasingly embattled and isolated, could decide that the best way to resolve its internal crisis is to start a war—perhaps with Iran or North Korea. And if Trump’s opponents are successful in forcing a change in his policy or in removing him, it will mean a shift toward an even more aggressive policy in the Middle East and, above all, against Russia.

However bitter the divisions within the state, the

American ruling class is driven by a relentless logic. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought with it not an “end of history,” but a quarter century of unending and expanding war, in which the ruling class has sought to reverse the decline of American capitalism and maintain its global economic position through the use of military force. This mad and reckless policy is now bringing the entire world to the brink of a Third World War.



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