

The media and the Mueller indictment: A conspiracy theory to end all conspiracy theories

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The announcement Friday by the US Department of Justice that a federal grand jury has returned criminal indictments against 13 Russian citizens and three Russian companies, charging illegal activities in the 2016 US presidential election, has become the occasion for a barrage of war propaganda in the American corporate media.

Leading the charge is the *New York Times*, which published a front-page “news” lead Sunday, authored by Peter Baker. The article was published online Saturday evening under the headline, “Trump’s Conspicuous Silence Leaves a Struggle Against Russia Without a Leader.” In the newspaper’s print edition, the “struggle” was upgraded to a “war ... being fought on the American side without a commander in chief.”

The indictments, the *Times* argues, “underscored the broader conclusion by the American government that Russia is engaged in a virtual war against the United States through 21st-century tools of disinformation and propaganda.” It noted that only a few days ago, the Trump administration “formally blamed Russia for an expansive cyberattack last year called NotPetya and threatened unspecified ‘international consequences’.”

Given that the US government has just issued a series of strategy documents that, among other conclusions, suggest that a significant cyberattack on the United States could justify retaliation with nuclear weapons, the implications of the argument put forward on the front page of the *Times* are chilling: What cyberattack could be more significant than an effort to hijack the US presidential election? By the logic of the leading “newspaper of record,” the US government would be justified in responding militarily to an alleged Russian election operation.

What is propounded in the media coverage is a conspiracy theory to end all conspiracy theories. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and much of the media are espousing paranoid views that were once associated with the John Birch Society, which notoriously claimed that President Dwight Eisenhower was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party.

This supposed conspiracy is described in breathless terms in media accounts: “sophisticated,” “massive,” of “breathtaking” scope, one with “tentacles” that “reached deeply into American political life.” Even if one accepts the facts of the indictment as alleged—and that is hardly a legitimate assumption, given the capacity of the FBI and other intelligence agencies for fabrication—nothing in the indictment comes close to supporting what is being claimed by the *Times* and other media outlets.

The 37-page document details an alleged operation of individuals in Russia to establish false identities on social media platforms and use them to influence political discussion in the US during the election. Conspicuously absent is any indication of direct Russian government involvement in the operation, which was funded by a Russian multimillionaire. Nor is there any claim that the Trump campaign collaborated with the activities of the Russian operatives, or that these activities had any impact on the course of the election.

Only two Russians actually traveled to the United States, visiting several states for what is described in the indictment, with inadvertent humor, as “intelligence-gathering” on the US political scene. The total resources for the effort, under \$15 million, could not pay for a serious campaign in a single major US state,

let alone influence a presidential election on which billions of dollars were being expended by the Democrats and Republicans.

The claim that this half-baked operation played any significant role in the outcome of the election is an absurdity. There were ample reasons for tens of millions of Americans, particularly working people, to be hostile to the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the favorite of Wall Street and the Pentagon. She ran a campaign of complacency and entitlement promising nothing to those suffering after eight years of supposed “economic recovery” under the Obama administration. That a section of working people, in desperation, cast their votes for Trump only testifies to the reactionary blind alley of the corporate-controlled two-party system.

One fact in the indictment is of genuine significance: the operation began in April 2014. This was well before Donald Trump was on anyone’s campaign radar screen except perhaps his own, and only a month after the right-wing US-backed political coup in Ukraine, which mobilized fascist mobs in the streets of Kyiv to drive an elected pro-Russian president out of office and replace him with an American stooge.

The Ukraine operation was the culmination of a decades-long effort costing an estimated \$5 billion, according to Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland. In other words, the supposed Russian operation in the US election was, if anything, a pinprick response to the devastating US attack on Russian influence in Ukraine, a country with long historical and ethnic ties to Russia, and with a large minority of its population speaking Russian at home.

The primary purpose of the indictment was to provide the media with a flimsy basis for headlines screaming about a massive operation by Russia to undermine American democracy.

What is fueling this campaign? First, there is the effort to condition the population for war with Russia.

The *Times* and the Democratic Party are acting as the media and political spokesmen for a section of the US military-intelligence apparatus that objects to any turning away from the ferociously anti-Russian axis of US foreign policy established during the second term of the Obama administration.

The US military-intelligence apparatus is escalating its anti-Russian military provocations, most recently

with an airstrike against Russian forces in Syria, apparently the most significant loss of life in a US-Russia conflict in history. The very fact that the Putin regime has downplayed the incident is an indication of its fears that this could become the spark for a much wider conflagration.

Second, there is the effort to present all social opposition within the United States as the product of Russian operations. The ruling class is terrified of the mounting social tensions within the United States. It is this fear that is motivating the extremely rapid moves to censor the Internet and suppress free speech.

The same issue of the *Times* that claims Russia is at war with the United States carried an attack on Facebook, headlined, “To Stir Discord in 2016, Russians Turned Most Often to Facebook.” According to the *Times*, Russia used the most widely used social media platform to foment political and social discontent in the United States. The implication: Facebook must implement even more aggressive censorship methods.

It would be fatally wrong to underestimate the right-wing character of the political conceptions being propounded by the *Times* and Democrats through the anti-Russian campaign. In the 20th century, only dictatorial regimes were able to get away with lying on the scale now being carried out by the advocates of the anti-Russia narrative. But Hitler’s “big lie” and Stalin’s doctoring of history are the political forerunners of the campaign being waged by the intelligence agents who work in the guise of “editors” and “journalists” at the *Times*.



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