

New York Times chides Trump for insufficient aggression against Russia

Bill Van Auken
17 March 2018

The day after the Trump administration imposed its most punishing series of sanctions to date against Russia, the *New York Times* weighed in with an editorial titled “Finally, Trump Has Something Bad to Say About Russia ... And, not surprisingly, it still falls short.”

An announcement from the Treasury Department Thursday unveiled a set of punitive measures against 19 Russian individuals and five organizations, including the country’s two main intelligence agencies, the Federal Security Service, or FSB, and the GRU, the intelligence arm of Russia’s military.

The statement cited the unsubstantiated allegations of Russia’s “attempted interference in US elections,” essentially citing the same individuals and entities as the indictments issued by special counsel Robert Mueller, with some additions.

The Russian “meddling” campaign has been the focus of the *Times* since before the 2016 presidential election. It has treated the claims made by US intelligence agencies and operatives as incontrovertible facts, magnifying the minuscule activities of a fly-by-night operation in St. Petersburg that placed content on social media into a full-scale war on “America democracy” and an attempt to “sow discord” in what supposedly was an otherwise satisfied and united US society.

In addition to the trumped-up charges about election interference, the Treasury Department cited a new, and significantly more ominous, pretext for the imposition of sanctions. It claimed that Russia had carried out cyberattacks targeting “multiple U.S. critical infrastructure sectors, including the energy, nuclear, commercial facilities, water, aviation, and critical manufacturing sectors.”

No evidence has been given to support these

allegations, but, given recent US national security documents changing US policy to include cyberattacks as a justification for retaliation with nuclear weapons, the charge is a deadly serious matter.

In tandem with the sanctions, Trump joined with the heads of government in the UK, Germany and France in issuing a joint statement indicting Russia for alleged responsibility for a nerve gas attack in the UK that has hospitalized a former Russian intelligence officer and his daughter. Once again, no evidence whatsoever has been produced to substantiate the responsibility of the Russian government, which has denied any involvement and demanded—to no avail—that the British government provide samples of the substance allegedly used in the attack.

The sanctions and the statement have produced the tensest standoff between Moscow and the Western powers since the height of the Cold War. Issued in the context of military confrontations in Syria and an increasingly tense military standoff in Eastern Europe, they have significantly heightened the threat of a catastrophic confrontation between the world’s major nuclear powers.

But for the editorial board of the *Times*, these provocative measures do not go nearly far enough.

“While such steps are encouraging, only a more robust, unified response from the United States and its NATO allies would impede President Vladimir Putin from expanding his pattern of heinous behavior,” the editorial declares.

“The penalties must go further,” the *Times* demands. It chides Trump for failing to issue a more bellicose statement Thursday and contrasts him unfavorably with his right-wing and provocative ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who declared the alleged attack on the former Russian spy in the UK a “defining

moment” and demanded action to “hold Russia accountable.” It also lauded National Security Adviser Gen. H.R. McMaster, who is reportedly about to be fired by Trump, for indicting Russia for being “complicit in Assad’s atrocities” in Syria.

The editorial goes on to criticize the joint statement by the four major NATO powers for saying “nothing about joint action” and even condemns British Prime Minister Theresa May, who ordered the expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats from London, along with a number of other measures, saying she “didn’t go far enough.”

All of this war mongering is founded on lies and hypocrisy. The editors of the *Times* are outraged by Russia’s “meddling in the US elections” by means of a paltry presence on social media and its supposed “hacking” of Democratic National Committee email accounts.

Yet it has no problem with the wholesale “meddling” of Washington, which has spent billions to rig elections, create parties, fund candidates and spread propaganda to shape the governments of former Soviet bloc countries—and, indeed, those of countries around the world—to serve US interests. It takes no notice of the massive “hacking” operation of the US government and its intelligence agencies, led by the National Security Agency (NSA), which was revealed to have hacked even the cell phones of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff.

As for “atrocities in Syria,” the *Times* has led the rest of the media in a “human rights” outcry over civilian casualties inflicted by the brutal Russian-backed Syrian government siege of the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, but remained largely silent on the massacres of thousands of civilians by US airstrikes and artillery bombardments in the Syrian city of Raqqa and the Iraqi city of Mosul, both reduced to rubble.

The *Times* outlook is guided by its editorial page editor James Bennet, a state-connected figure whose brother is a right-wing Democratic senator from Colorado and whose father was a State Department official who headed the Agency for International Development (AID), an instrument for CIA provocations in countries around the world.

The newspaper’s reaction to the latest tensions with Russia largely conform with the positions taken by leading figures in the Democratic Party. Senate

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer dismissed the Trump administration’s sanctions Thursday, declaring that they were “not enough.” Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said that the measures were only a “first step” and demanded to know “why it’s taken the administration so long to lay out these sanctions.”

The Democratic Party has not concentrated its fire against Trump based on his attacks on immigrants, assault on democratic rights and right-wing social and economic policies centered on tax cuts for the corporations and the rich and destruction of social benefits for the working class. Rather, it has served as the political advocate for sections of the military-intelligence apparatus opposed to any abandonment of the strongly anti-Russian policy adopted under the Obama administration. In attempting to subordinate all opposition to Trump to this right-wing militarist agenda, the Democrats are promoting not only war, but also the suppression and criminalization of all popular opposition to America’s ruling capitalist establishment.

As for the *Times*, all of its hyperbole about “Russian aggression,” Syrian “atrocities” and “heinous behavior” is rooted, not in any defense of democracy, human rights or morality, but in the geostrategic interests of US imperialism. Russia stands as an obstacle to the drive to impose US hegemony by military means over the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the broader Eurasian landmass.

In promoting anti-Russian hysteria, the *Times* is playing a critical role in attempting to condition public opinion to the preparation for a war that threatens the survival of humanity.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact