

Trump vs. the Democrats: Two reactionary factions fight over foreign policy

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Monday's scheduled meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin has been preceded by a massive barrage of propaganda from the Democrats, their allied media outlets and the US intelligence agencies demanding that Trump intensify military pressure on Russia.

This campaign has centered around an indictment released Friday by US Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein of 12 Russian military/intelligence officers for allegedly hacking the servers of the Democratic National Committee and the email account of Clinton Campaign Chairman John Podesta, and subsequently turning the emails over to WikiLeaks for publication.

The release of the indictment, which makes sweeping assertions but cites no evidence, is a cynical and transparent attempt by the US intelligence agencies, working with the Democrats, to reorient the foreign policy of the Trump administration towards geopolitical conflict with Russia.

This campaign has reached a hysterical frenzy, in which major TV stations and newspapers are warning that Donald Trump is about to sell out US national interests to Vladimir Putin.

The *New York Times* headlined its lead story Sunday, "Just Sitting Down With Trump, Putin Comes Out Ahead," declaring "All [Putin] really needs to make his meeting with Mr. Trump a success is for it to take place without any major friction."

Such claims are as preposterous as the underlying narrative about Russian "meddling" in the 2016 election. Trump, a representative of the rapacious and parasitic American financial oligarchy, has no intention of "selling out" US imperialist interests.

Rather, the bitter differences that have emerged in the run-up to the summit revolve around disagreements between Trump and the Democrats over how best to

secure the interests of the American ruling class throughout the world.

Trump favors an approach aimed at leveraging the United States' preeminent position in the global economy and geopolitical order to forge bilateral trade agreements to improve the US trade balance. In so doing, he has placed EU countries, and in particular Germany, on his list of targets. In an interview with CBS ahead of the summit, he declared that the United States' greatest economic "foe" is the EU, alongside other "foes" like Russia and China.

This was an extension of Trump's statements during last week's NATO summit, when he chided Germany for purchasing natural gas from Russia instead of the United States.

The Democrats, speaking for dominant elements of the US state intelligence bureaucracy, see the pursuit of US military and geostrategic aims in Eurasia as more vital than Trump's focus on trade. This accounts for their obsessive fixation with Russia, the encirclement and isolation of which is a key element of the effort to secure US global hegemony through military means.

The Democrats' focus on Russia also serves other, equally vital purposes. The perpetual escalation of military tensions with Moscow is aimed at unifying the European Union, in alliance with the United States, against a common enemy.

It has, moreover, provided a rationale for the Democrats' loss in the 2016 election and the crackdown on political opposition through Internet censorship, based on the claim that Russia is fueling political dissent to "sow divisions" in American society. By associating WikiLeaks with the supposed Russian conspiracy, the Democrats justify the ongoing campaign against the organization's founder, Julian Assange.

In relation to foreign policy, bound up with the demand for more aggressive action against Russia is the concern that Trump is insufficiently committed to the seven-year-old campaign for regime-change in Syria.

In an op-ed last week, “Is Trump handing Putin a victory in Syria?” *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius declared, “The catastrophic war in Syria is nearing what could be a diplomatic endgame, as the United States, Russia and Israel shape a deal that would preserve power for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in exchange for Russian pledges to restrain Iranian influence.”

Sections of the foreign policy establishment are speaking in particularly blunt terms of the failure of US efforts to confront Russia in Syria and Ukraine. The events of recent years have shown that “The United States cannot coerce Russia into doing its will,” wrote Michael Kimmage in *Foreign Affairs*. “In Ukraine and Syria, Washington has attempted to isolate Russia, hoping that Putin will meet US demands so he can come in from the cold... So far, coercion and isolation have both failed.”

However, the factions of the state intelligence apparatus for which the Democrats speak see these setbacks to the United States’ foreign policy as an argument for doubling down. In another article in *Foreign Affairs*, “Don’t Get Out of Syria,” Jennifer Cafarella, of the Institute for the Study of War, argues that the United States must redouble its efforts if it is to maintain a toehold in the country.

Cafarella warns, “The south [of Syria] will likely fall to forces allied with the regime unless the United States acts immediately.” She advises the US to “invest now in building leverage for future decisive action by strengthening the military and governance capabilities of its partners on the ground, regaining the trust of Syria’s rebelling population, rebuilding rebel forces, and denying Assad the international legitimacy he so desperately craves.”

Rather than opposing Trump’s reactionary attacks on fundamental democratic rights, his criminal immigration policies and his massive expansion of military spending, the Democrats have focused all their efforts on demanding that the US pursue a more aggressive foreign policy against Russia. Indeed, the Russian indictments are seen as an opportunity to shift

attention away from the mass outrage over the horrific treatment of immigrant workers by the Trump administration.

Given the fact that neither greater US involvement in the Middle East nor war with nuclear-armed Russia has any substantial support in the US population, the Democrats’ policies serve only to legitimize Trump.

The struggle playing out over the summit in Helsinki is between two ferociously right-wing factions of the American oligarchy and military/intelligence bureaucracy. There is no “anti-war,” much less progressive faction in this filthy and reactionary mud fight.



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