

The frenzied anti-Russia campaign in anticipation of Biden presidency

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The past week has seen a virtual torrent of virulent anti-Russia propaganda spearheaded by the *New York Times* and centered on unsubstantiated allegations that Moscow is responsible for a supposed wholesale hack of US government computer systems.

The logic of this campaign to demonize Russia was made clear by Senator Dick Durbin in a speech delivered from the Senate floor Thursday. The alleged Russian hack, he said, was “virtually a declaration of war by Russia on the United States, and we should take it that seriously.”

Durbin added: “No, I’m not calling for an invasion myself or all-out war. I don’t want to see that happen, but it’s no longer a buddy-buddy arrangement between the United States and Vladimir Putin. When adversaries such as Russia torment us, tempt us, breach the security of our nation, we need to respond in kind.”

It is no doubt greatly reassuring that the second ranking Democrat in the US Senate is not in favor of invading or waging an “all-out war” with nuclear-armed Russia, a conflict that would kill tens of millions within minutes. But that, nonetheless, is the logic of his statements.

Democratic President-elect Joe Biden issued a similar statement, declaring that “we need to disrupt and deter our adversaries from undertaking significant cyber-attacks in the first place.” Biden continued: “We will do that by, among other things, imposing substantial costs on those responsible for such malicious attacks, including in coordination with our allies and partners. Our adversaries should know that, as President, I will not stand idly by in the face of cyber assaults on our nation.”

The underlying theme is that, for the last four years under Trump, Moscow has been allowed to get away with murder, and that an incoming Biden administration will make up for lost time with a massive escalation of US militarism against Russia, up to and potentially beyond the brink of war.

This ever-louder drumbeat for war and retaliation against Russia has unfolded under conditions in which no US government agency has stated that Russia was responsible for hacking its computers, much less presented any evidence to support such a charge. Russia has flatly denied responsibility. The only thing proven so far is the ramshackle character of Washington’s cyber-security systems.

The stage has been set for these threats by a form of “yellow journalism” that puts the lurid promotion of the Spanish-American war by William Randolph Hearst’s newspapers at the close of the 19th century in the shade.

The fact-free “scoop” of the Russian hack was broken by the *New York Times*’ David Sanger, a veteran reporter who helped fabricate the “weapons of mass destruction” narrative that paved the way to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, before making his name as a “cyber-security expert,” promoting the discredited claim of “Russian meddling” in the 2016 election. He published similar scare stories about the 2020 election being hacked by Moscow, and, when no evidence whatsoever of such an intervention materialized, moved on to the next propaganda campaign.

A member of multiple think tanks that bring together capitalist politicians, military and intelligence officials and corporate heads to discuss US imperialist strategy, Sanger is a trusted conduit for “leaks” and propaganda that the CIA and the Pentagon want to place in the public domain.

Sanger’s initial December 14 piece was typical of this genre, citing unnamed “federal and government experts” as asserting that the source of the latest hack was “almost certainly a Russian intelligence agency.”

This was followed a day later by another article written by Sanger and two other *Times* reporters baldly asserting, “The scope of a hack engineered by one of Russia’s premier intelligence agencies became clearer on Monday,” still without presenting any evidence that Moscow was responsible. It went on to cite multiple unnamed sources as saying that they were “struggling to determine the extent” of the incursion, i.e., whether there was any substance to Sanger’s reporting.

The hack, the article states, was “believed to be the work of Russia’s S.V.R., a successor to the K.G.B.” without making clear who said that they believed this to be true.

In what was now clearly an all-out propaganda campaign by the *Times*, these accounts were followed on December 16 by an article titled “Putin Intends To Put Biden On Tightrope,” which began with the assertion that the hack was “almost certainly orchestrated by the Kremlin,” and then descended into unsubstantiated assertions, demonization and insults that amounted to a piece of pro-war demagoguery.

An incoming Biden administration, the article states, will have to “check a Kremlin whose troops harass American forces in conflict zones overseas and whose state-sponsored hackers have interfered in presidential elections in the United States.”

“... the incoming president will face an even bolder Russian leader who advances his nation's interests—and challenges American ones—not only in what Moscow calls its near-abroad but also in Western Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Arctic” it continues.

And, Russian President Vladimir Putin is “emerging as a malignant player in domestic politics whose proxies flood social media with disinformation and seek to interfere in elections, with a clear bias against Democrats like Mr. Biden.”

It quotes former Trump administration National Security Council aide Fiona Hill as saying that Russia has been transformed from “a conventional nuclear power to an insidious hybrid threat.”

Not to be outdone by the *Times*' anti-Russian propaganda firehose, on Thursday the *Washington Post* published not one, but two editorials excoriating the Putin government. The first repeated the unsubstantiated charge of cyber-espionage by the Russian secret service and its alleged hacking group known as “Cozy Bear,” and the second repeating equally unsubstantiated charges that the Russian FSB was responsible for a failed attempt to assassinate the right-wing opposition figure Alexei Navalny with a nerve agent. For both unproven crimes, the *Post* demanded retaliation.

These editorials were followed up by a lunatic op-ed piece by Fareed Zakaria taking the Russian source of the hack as proven and going on to denounce “Vladimir Putin's Russia” for having “significantly expanded hybrid warfare, using methods to spread chaos among its adversaries.” The piece conflates the “Russian propaganda model” with Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the US election, concluding, “The problem is not just that Russia has hacked America's computer systems. It seems to have hacked our minds.” This incoherent column has all the earmarks of a “hack” pundit promoting a pro-war propaganda line.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is implacably opposed to the right-wing nationalist government of Vladimir Putin, which represents the interests of billionaire oligarchs who enriched themselves from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the theft of public property and the destruction of the social conditions of the Soviet working class through capitalist restoration.

But the portrayal of Russia as some monstrous “malign” and “insidious” country that is seeking world domination by means of “hybrid warfare” is ludicrous and, coming from the mouthpieces of the US military and intelligence apparatus, obscene.

Washington's military budget of over \$740 billion is more than ten times that of Moscow, which last year amounted to \$65.1 billion. While the US has some 200,000 troops deployed at 800 bases scattered across more than 70 countries, Russia has

approximately 30,000 troops deployed outside of its borders, with the exception of Syria, all of them in former Soviet republics.

The US and NATO stage nearly continuous provocative military exercises within firing range of Russia's borders. Meanwhile, US imperialism has conducted unending wars for the better part of three decades, killing and maiming millions.

Whoever “Cozy Bear” may be and whatever their relationship to the Russian secret service, the scale of their alleged cyber-espionage can hardly match the sprawling global operations of the National Security Agency, which surveils every phone call, email, text message and act of internet browsing across the planet and which, under the Obama administration, was bugging the cellphones of both the president of Brazil and the chancellor of Germany.

What is to account for the hysterical and ubiquitous character of the anti-Russia campaign, which, initiated by the *Times* and the *Post*, has been reproduced by every segment of US corporate print and broadcast media?

On the one hand, the issue of US policy toward Russia has been at the center of the Democratic Party's opposition to Trump since even before he took office. This has given political expression to concerns within factions of the military-intelligence apparatus that Trump has been insufficiently aggressive against Russia, which they see as an impediment to the pursuit of US global hegemony.

On the other hand, the whipping up of a war fever against Russia serves as a means of directing outward the immense social and political tensions building up in the United States under conditions of a raging COVID-19 pandemic, mass unemployment, poverty and hunger and ongoing threats of a coup by Trump and his supporters to overturn the results of the November election and establish a presidential dictatorship.

Representing the interests of Wall Street and the Pentagon, the Democratic Party fears above all the growth of popular opposition within the working class against not only Trump, but the entire ruling class and the capitalist system.

The flood of anti-Russian propaganda in the immediate wake of the Electoral College's vote to confirm Biden as the elected president of the US and with little more than a month till Inauguration Day serves as a warning. If the Democrats succeed in securing a peaceful transfer of power on January 20, it will be on the basis of a program of intensified war abroad and stepped-up attacks on the democratic and social rights of the working class at home.



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