

Obama's parting shot at Russia

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As one of his final initiatives before handing over the White House to Donald Trump, President Barack Obama has ordered US intelligence agencies to conduct a “full review” of alleged attempts by Russia to interfere in the 2016 presidential election.

Obama's top counterterrorism advisor, Lisa Monaco, told reporters Friday, “We may have crossed into a new threshold, and it is incumbent upon us to take stock of that, to review, to conduct some after-action, to understand what has happened and to impart some lessons learned.”

Later, Obama's press spokesman told a White House news conference that the investigation was “a huge priority.”

“This is a major priority for the president of the United States,” said Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz. “He directed his intelligence community and national security officials to take this on. He expects that report to be issued to him before he leaves office.”

What “new threshold” has been crossed? Why is this issue a “huge priority,” six weeks before Donald Trump comes to power at the head of the most right-wing government in US history?

The charge that Moscow sought to influence the US election was made in October by the US government, which has presented absolutely no evidence to back up its claims of Russian hacking.

Even if it were true, the “threshold” of interference in foreign elections was passed by Washington itself long ago. Over the last seven decades, the CIA has intervened on countless occasions to rig elections or overthrow elected officials seen as insufficiently loyal to the interests of US imperialism. Its public arm, the National Endowment for Democracy, has continued such operations from Georgia and Ukraine to Venezuela, Honduras and Haiti.

Obama has himself boasted that Washington has the greatest cyber war capabilities of any nation on the planet, and it has regularly employed them, while

developing plans for disabling attacks against the civilian infrastructure of Russia, China and Iran. The United States has hacked the phones and emails of world leaders from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff.

What precisely is Russia accused of having done?

Last month, a White House official issued a statement declaring that the election had been “free and fair from a cybersecurity perspective.” In other words, there was no Russian hacking of the vote. He added that the election results “accurately reflect the will of the American people,” a grotesque lie, given that Donald Trump is set to take office after losing the popular vote by a margin of as many as 3 million votes. This statement was made in opposition to efforts initiated by the Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein to force a recount in the key industrial states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

What remains of charges of Russian interference are allegations that the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin helped expose secrets the Democratic Party was keeping from its own voters—in particular, the duplicitous efforts of the Democratic National Committee to sabotage the campaign of Bernie Sanders and guarantee the presidential nomination to Hillary Clinton. Moscow is further charged with hacking into the emails of Clinton's campaign manager, John Podesta, so as to make public Clinton's speeches pledging fealty to Wall Street bankers and the corrupt activities of both the Democratic Party and the Clinton Foundation.

As the *New York Times* put it delicately on Friday, speaking of the review ordered by Obama: “It is unclear if the contents of the review will be made public.” The proof will not be presented to the American people because it doesn't exist.

In the end, Moscow is being blamed for revealing inconvenient political truths to the American people that Obama, Clinton and the Democrats wanted to keep

from them.

That this is a “huge priority” says a great deal about the politics of the Obama administration. In the same speech announcing the probe, the counterterrorism adviser made it clear that Obama has no intention of taking any action to close down the Guantanamo prison camp in Cuba, something he promised to do within his first year in office. He will hand over the infamous facility to Trump, who has vowed to fill it up and resume torture.

The administration has made it clear that it will not oppose Trump’s nomination of former Marine Gen. James “Mad dog” Mattis as defense secretary, even though his appointment requires the overriding of a provision meant to keep recently serving uniformed officers out of the post in order to maintain civilian control of the military.

Obama has said nothing as Trump packs his cabinet with a collection of right-wing billionaires and semi-fascists bent on carrying out a war against the working class and democratic rights. Instead, the White House press secretary has declared that Trump “should be given wide latitude in assembling his team.”

On Friday, Deputy Press Secretary Shultz again stressed that the administration was not questioning the election result, saying the intelligence probe Obama had ordered was “not an effort to challenge the outcome of the election.” He added that Obama “has actually gone out of his way to make sure that we are providing for a seamless transition of power” to Trump.

So what is this probe really about? The aim is to poison relations between Washington and Moscow as much as possible between now and inauguration day in order to ensure that Trump continues US imperialism’s preparations for military confrontation with Russia, which is seen as the principal obstacle to Washington’s drive to assert its hegemony over Eurasia.

The Democratic Party and Clinton ran to the right of Trump during the election campaign on the question of Russia and war, portraying Trump as “Putin’s puppet” because of his suggestions that NATO was outmoded and that he could negotiate with Moscow, including on a common policy in regard to Syria.

Had she won, Clinton would have claimed a mandate to escalate the US intervention in Syria and step up NATO’s provocative military buildup on Russia’s

borders in Eastern Europe.

The *New York Times*, which functioned as a de facto campaign organ of Clinton and the Democrats during the election, published a lead editorial in its first Sunday edition following the vote with the headline “The Danger of Going Soft on Russia.”

This week, Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives sent a letter to Obama asking him to brief Congress on alleged Russian efforts to influence the election. Top House Democrats have also introduced a bill to create an independent commission to study the hacks.

Senate Republicans are launching their own probe into alleged Russian interference in the election. The Republican-controlled House has passed legislation imposing sanctions on any country supporting the Syrian government in its war with US-backed Islamist militias, a measure clearly aimed against Moscow. And the Pentagon budget bill includes millions of dollars in lethal military aid to Ukraine, an open provocation against Russia.

Meanwhile, the retired military brass that Trump has brought into his cabinet—Mattis as defense secretary and John Kelly as homeland security secretary—have both spoken out strongly in support of the US military buildup against Russia.

In the end, as the most right-wing government in US history prepares to take office, all sections of America’s ruling establishment are united in the drive to prepare for world war.

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