

In run-up to Trump-Putin summit, Mueller charges 12 Russian officers with DNC email hack

By Bill Van Auken
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A grand jury indictment announced in Washington Friday morning has charged a dozen Russians, alleged officers in the GRU, the main Russian military intelligence agency, with hacking and leaking emails from senior Democratic Party officials and the 2016 Hillary Clinton presidential campaign.

The charges, brought by special counsel Robert Mueller as part of his probe into Russian “meddling” in the US election and possible complicity of the Trump campaign, were presented at a Justice Department press conference by Rod Rosenstein. The deputy US attorney general declared, “The Internet allows foreign adversaries to attack America in new and unexpected ways.”

He added, “There will be adversaries who work to exacerbate domestic differences and try to confuse, divide and conquer us.”

Rosenstein acknowledged that the indictment included no charges of collusion between any American citizens and the alleged Russian hackers. He added, “There is no allegation that the conspiracy changed the vote count or affected any election result.”

The timing of the indictment as well as its contents suggest that its real purposes are of a political rather than a legal character. The likelihood of any of the Russians named in the indictment standing trial in a US court is nil.

The release came as US President Donald Trump was meeting with Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle and on the eve of a planned summit Monday between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland.

Rosenstein said he had informed Trump of the upcoming indictment earlier this week. “I’m going to

allow the president to speak for himself,” he said. “It was important for the president to know what information was uncovered because he has to make very important decisions for the country.”

The announcement of the criminal charges against the 12 Russians provoked a wave of hysteria from the US television news networks. Leading Democrats, including Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer and the ranking Democratic members of the Senate and House intelligence committees, Mark Warner and Adam Schiff, demanded that Trump call off his meeting with Putin.

“Glad-handing with Vladimir Putin on the heels of these indictments would be an insult to our democracy,” said Schumer. Warner warned that “the president could be taken advantage of,” and Schiff charged that Trump “plainly lacks the courage—or the motive—to confront” Putin.

The Democratic Party, rather than challenge Trump’s fascistic immigration policy, his attacks on social programs and conditions for the working class or his administration’s buildup to war, has made the claims of Russian “meddling” the axis of its political differences with the Republican president.

Underlying this line of attack are sharp divisions within the US ruling establishment over foreign policy strategy. Trump’s planned meeting with Putin has been preceded by a series of worried editorials and opinion columns in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, all of them warning that the meeting in Helsinki could lead to a de-escalation of US military pressure on Russia, particularly in relation to the failing US-backed war for regime change in Syria.

Typical was a piece in the *Times* by Susan Rice, Obama's former national security advisor, who writes: "Mr. Trump has already delivered to Mr. Putin much of the benefit he might have sought by supporting Mr. Trump's election. The balance due is the agenda for Helsinki." Her greatest concern is that Trump may "prematurely withdraw United States forces, thus ceding total victory to Russia, Mr. Assad and Iran."

All the breathless reports in the media and the fulminations of leading Democrats notwithstanding, the 29-page, 11-count indictment handed down on Friday presents not a shred of evidence linking the individual alleged Russian military intelligence officers named to the acts of computer hacking, which are described in extreme detail. All that exists at this point are allegations.

If such evidence exists, its source is no doubt the US intelligence agencies themselves. The activities of Washington's cyberwarfare apparatus involve far more intrusive hacking of governments, political parties and individuals in Russia and all over the world. It is quite capable of manufacturing evidence to back up conclusions already arrived at for political reasons. Given its source in highly secretive US military and intelligence agencies, there is little chance that material evidence linking the indicted Russians to the DNC hacks would ever be presented in open court.

The indictment claims that the DNC emails were funneled through an online persona "Guccifer 2.0" to a website "maintained by an organization ('Organization1'), that had previously posted documents stolen from U.S. persons, entities, and the U.S. government." The reference is clearly to WikiLeaks, which made public secret documents exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as worldwide State Department conspiracies and CIA spying and cyberwarfare operations. WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange has repeatedly insisted that the source of the DNC material was not the Russian government.

The indictment also makes no mention of the content of the hacked emails, which exposed the attempts of the Democratic Party establishment to rig the party's primaries to assure the victory of Clinton and the defeat of her challenger, Bernie Sanders.

Friday's indictment marks the second time that the probe by Mueller, the former head of the FBI, has

produced an indictment against a group of Russian citizens. In February, criminal charges were presented against 13 Russian nationals and three Russian companies for alleged interference in the 2016 US election.

That indictment claimed that the Russians had "posed as political activists and used the flash points of immigration, religion and race to manipulate a campaign in which those issues were already particularly divisive." This "meddling" reportedly involved spending \$100,000 for ads on Facebook and Twitter during the 2016 election campaign, an amount equal to approximately one-one thousandth of one percent of the total \$6.5 billion spent in the 2016 US election cycle.

It is noteworthy that, while the latest charges involve no allegations of what the Justice Department described in its previous indictment as "information warfare against the United States," Rosenstein still presented them with reference to alleged Russian attempts to "to exacerbate domestic differences" and "confuse" and "divide" the American people.

This official narrative, attributing the mounting class tensions and social divisions in the US, along with the disintegration of American democracy, to alleged Russian "meddling" and interventions on social media is being used not only to promote military confrontation with Moscow, but also to justify the drive to censor the Internet and silence socialist, anti-war and progressive views.

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