

As Trump administration prepares to withdraw from nuclear missile treaty

US charges new Russian conspiracy to interfere in midterm elections

By Will Morrow
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In the latest escalation of the US intelligence agencies' anti-Russian campaign, federal prosecutors yesterday published previously sealed criminal charges of "interference" in the 2018 midterm elections against a Russian national.

The same day, the director of national intelligence, the FBI and the Department of Justice published a joint statement warning of unspecified "ongoing campaigns" by Russia, Iran and China—all the principal targets of US military aggression—to undermine and infiltrate American democracy and influence the upcoming elections.

Both statements have been released without any substantiation or the slightest evidence, but have been immediately accepted as gospel truth and amplified by a servile US corporate media. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* published a combined total of four prominent online reports on the charges within a matter of hours.

The coordinated release and media campaign serves two purposes. First, it is aimed at legitimizing censorship of the internet by claiming that social opposition is the product of misinformation campaigns on social media carried out by Russia and other hostile foreign nations.

Second, it presents the US as being under siege in an effort to condition public opinion for an intensification of military tensions and preparations for war.

Also yesterday afternoon, the *New York Times*, a central mouthpiece of the military-intelligence establishment's anti-Russian campaign, reported that the Trump administration will pull out of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia next week.

The INF treaty was signed by President Ronald Reagan and what was then the Soviet Union. It bans ground-launched short- and medium-range missiles capable of striking targets at distances between 500 and 5,500

kilometers. Washington has repeatedly charged Russia with violating the INF treaty but has provided no evidence for the allegations. Russia has denied violating the accord.

Withdrawal from the treaty would mark a new stage in the US military buildup against Russia and the preparations for nuclear war.

The danger of a direct military conflict between the world's two largest nuclear powers was underscored earlier this month when the US ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, threatened a preemptive military strike on Russia. Hutchison told a press gathering in Brussels that if Moscow did not cease development of a missile that Washington claims violates the INF treaty, the Pentagon was prepared to "take out" the missile.

Friday's *Times* article was written by David Sanger and William Broad, both highly connected in the American state. It claims that Trump's national security advisor John Bolton will tell Putin during a scheduled meeting next week that the US will withdraw from the treaty. The *Guardian* reported yesterday, based on unnamed sources, that Bolton was demanding that the president withdraw from the nuclear arms control treaty, and had already briefed European counterparts on the plans.

The criminal complaint by federal prosecutors filed in the US Federal Court for the Eastern District of Virginia names Elena Alekseevna Khusyaynova, a 44-year-old resident of St Petersburg. It claims that Khusyaynova was the chief accountant for a Russian network, named "Project Lakhta," which sought to "spread distrust toward candidates for US political office and the US political system."

The document claims that this network created fake social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, posing as American citizens, to post divisive political content and support protests inside the US. This operation had a "strategic goal, which continues to this day, to sow division

and discord in the US political system, including by creating social and political polarization, undermining faith in democratic institutions, and influencing US elections, including the upcoming 2018 midterm election.”

In the first place, even assuming that the unsubstantiated allegations contained in the document are true—and there is no reason to assume this—the claim that “social and political polarization” and the undermining of “faith in democratic institutions” in the American population is the outcome of Russian interference is absurd.

The US is a country where three people possess as much wealth as the bottom half of the population, where one man (Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos) earns as much in three seconds as his employees do in a year, where police murder over 1,000 people every year, where polls show a growth in support for socialism and opposition to capitalism, and where the political system is dominated by two corporate-controlled and pro-war parties that are broadly hated by the mass of workers and youth.

The charges claim that as the accountant for Project Lakhta, Khusyaynova oversaw a total budget of \$35 million between January 2016 and June 2018. However, it admits that only a tiny portion of this money was spent on actual social media activities. For example, it claims that between January and June, 2018, the organization spent \$60,000 to purchase advertisements on Facebook, \$6,000 on Instagram, and another \$18,000 on “bloggers” and “developing accounts” on Twitter—a grand total of \$84,000—in order to influence the outcome of the 2018 US midterm elections.

This amount of money is approximately 0.0015 percent of the more than \$5 billion that has already been raised by and for federal, state and local campaigns in this year’s midterm elections, which have already become the most expensive non-presidential elections in US history. Whichever party is elected on November 6 will answer not to Moscow, but to the American financial aristocracy that bankrolls both political parties.

According to the charges, “Project Lakhta” is funded by several Russian companies, including Concord, a firm that is owned by Yevgeny V. Prigozhin. The document contains no evidence of any involvement by the Russian government in the group’s alleged activities. It claims that Concord “had been paid by the Russian government.”

Prigozhin and Concord were among the 13 individuals and three firms indicted in February as part of the investigation by Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 federal elections. All of the charges, including the latest against Khusyaynova, have been directed against individuals residing outside of the US, ensuring that there are no arrests or trials to test the allegations.

The charge against Khusyaynova was filed on September 28. The *Washington Post's* report cited unnamed officials explaining the domestic political purpose for the release yesterday. They cited “a desire to raise public awareness about Russian political influence campaigns—to warn voters that such activity was not limited to the 2016 campaign and that fake online personas are still trying to manipulate Americans heading to the polls in a matter of days.”

The report released jointly yesterday by the intelligence agencies is, if anything, even more devoid of evidence. It declares that “we are concerned about ongoing campaigns” by foreign countries, including “activities which may seek to influence voter perceptions and decision-making in the 2018 and 2020 US elections.” Other “elements of these campaigns can take many forms,” it states, including “using social media to amplify divisive issues,” “sponsoring content in English-language media like RT and Sputnik,” and promoting “disinformation” through “sympathetic spokespersons.”

The logical corollary of these arguments is that political opposition in the United States, the outcome of “disinformation” through “sympathetic spokespersons,” must be criminalized and suppressed.

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