

In wake of Mueller report: Democrats, media push anti-Russian hysteria

By Patrick Martin
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In the wake of the April 19 release of the report of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, the Democratic Party and the bulk of the corporate media have decided to intensify their campaign of anti-Russian slander and provocation. They are doubling down on their two-year effort to depict President Trump as a Russian stooge, rather than a representative of Wall Street who is seeking to build a fascist movement in America.

The tone for the past weekend was set by the *New York Times* in an editorial published in Saturday's print edition (see: "The Mueller report and the campaign against Russia"), which acknowledged the failure of the anti-Russia campaign to provide any evidence of coordination between the Trump campaign and alleged Russian "meddling" in the 2016 election.

The editorial nonetheless sought to salvage the effort by the military-intelligence apparatus to frame up Russian President Vladimir Putin as the alleged political mastermind of Trump's surprise electoral victory, arguing that in Mueller's report "one conclusion is categorical: 'The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion.'"

Actually, the Mueller report presents zero new evidence of Russian intervention in the 2016 campaign, relying entirely on the uncorroborated assertions of US intelligence agencies and their journalist mouthpieces like the *Times* itself. (A remarkable number of footnotes in the report cite press reports, most of them planted by the anti-Trump faction within the national security establishment).

But the focus on demonizing Russia was taken up by all of the Democrats and many of the pundits who appeared on the Sunday television interview programs on the five broadcast and cable networks.

On the ABC program "This Week," correspondent Terry Moran opined that the Russian role in 2016 was "the most serious and dastardly attack on the American election process in our history." Apparently, Moran has entirely forgotten the stolen election of 2000, when the US Supreme Court—not Moscow—intervened to shut down vote-counting in Florida and award the presidency to George W. Bush, a result sanctioned by the loser, Democrat Al Gore (who actually won the popular vote). The Democratic candidate indicated that he would not

attempt to become president over the opposition of the military brass.

Moran went on: "It was hacking of multiple computers, it was the effort to—to slant the election to one way, it was an attack on the count itself, trying to hack the counting machines to come up with a false result. It was the spread of fake news. All Americans should be united against that."

A reminder of basic facts is in order. No evidence has been produced, other than bare assertions by US intelligence agencies, that Russian operatives hacked the computers of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) or Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta. The official assessment is swallowed by the media without question, although it is certainly possible that Democratic Party insiders were responsible for the leaks.

The material obtained through the hacking was evidence of efforts by the DNC to back Clinton over Sanders in the primaries, and no one has questioned the authenticity of the leaked texts of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street audiences, in which she assured the bankers, behind closed doors, that a Clinton administration would serve their interests. This material was transmitted to WikiLeaks through an anonymous drop and published by the website during the campaign.

Both the DNC and Podesta have acknowledged that the material published was true and that WikiLeaks' presentation was accurate. DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz was forced to resign as a consequence. But it is WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange who was dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London and thrown into jail and is now being vilified in the media as he faces extradition to the United States and possible trial on capital charges.

As for the "attack on the count," there is no evidence of any significant hacking of vote-counting and tabulating. Nor has any Democrat claimed that the 2016 vote totals were altered, despite narrow losses to Trump in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, which cost Clinton the election in the Electoral College.

As for the much-vaunted social media campaign by Russian entities, the subject of thousands of pages and endless hours of media coverage, the total amount spent was no more than \$100,000—about the amount lavishly paid anchors like George Stephanopoulos make for a single Sunday program, where they

grovel before the political elite and spout the propaganda dictated by one or another faction of the state apparatus.

In their monomaniacal focus on the demon of alleged Russian intervention, the media hosts actually made Trump advocates like former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani seem reasonable by comparison—a remarkable, if entirely negative, accomplishment.

Giuliani appeared on Fox, CNN and NBC. The longest and most contentious interview was with NBC's Chuck Todd, the host of "Meet the Press." It is worth citing a little of their exchanges, in which Giuliani postured as the defender of civil liberties, comparing WikiLeaks to Daniel Ellsberg and the "theft" of the Pentagon Papers, while Todd adopted the authoritarian and repressive stance of Richard Nixon during Watergate, essentially advocating the criminal prosecution of Julian Assange, although he did not name him.

Giuliani: But everything they put out about Hillary Clinton was true. They didn't make things up. They shouldn't have stolen it. But the American people were just given more information about how deceptive, how manipulative her people and her campaign were...

Todd: But in 2016, I'm just curious. In 2016, the intelligence services knew that WikiLeaks was not a journalistic enterprise anymore. It may have started that way. That it was serving as a front for essentially foreign adversary intelligence dumps.

Todd continued on the theme that true information about Clinton should have been withheld from the American public because it was allegedly supplied by Russia.

Todd: But does it bother you at all that a foreign adversary wanted to manipulate our elections?

Giuliani: Sure it does. Absolutely.

Todd: So why participate in helping in their manipulation?

Giuliani: Nobody's participating in it.

Todd: Trumpeting WikiLeaks is participating in it.

The NBC host went on to denounce the use of "stolen material" and declare that he hoped NBC News did not use such material for its broadcasts. He made it clear that if a whistleblower approached him with evidence of American government crimes, he would immediately turn the person in to the FBI.

The Democrats who appeared on the talks shows tried to match the anti-Russian hyperbole of their interviewers. Representative Adam Schiff, the Democrat who heads the House Intelligence Committee, told Martha Raddatz of ABC News that the scandal of Trump's supposed connections to Russia was worse than Watergate.

"The obstruction of justice in particular in this case is far worse than anything that Richard Nixon did," he claimed. "The break-in by the Russians of the Democratic institutions, a foreign adversary far more significant than the plumbers breaking into the Democratic headquarters. So yes, I would say in every way this is more significant than Watergate.

"And the fact that a candidate for president and now

president of the United States would not only not stand up and resist Russian interference in our election but would welcome it goes well beyond anything Nixon did. The fact that the president of the United States would take Putin's side over his own intelligence agencies goes well beyond anything Richard Nixon did. So yes, I think it is far more serious than Watergate."

This is not just the position of party establishment figures like Schiff. Symone Sanders, former press spokesman for Bernie Sanders, now a CNN pundit, declared, "There's something wrong with taking help from the Russians... I actually have been shocked throughout this entire process to find that apparently it's not illegal."

Sanders called for Congress to pass legislation against taking "information from a foreign entity in your campaign... Let's make that illegal." Presumably, any candidate who reads the *Financial Times* and cites it against an opponent should now be locked up!

The hysterical character of the anti-Russia campaign, in addition to its overtly reactionary, neo-McCarthyite character, is an indication of profound political disorientation. Sections of the ruling elite have been thrown into panic by the first stirrings of a movement from below, from the working class, challenging the corporate two-party consensus on austerity and militarism.

They want to remove Trump in large measure because they distrust his ability to suppress such a mass movement of the working class against capitalism because of his blatant attacks on democratic rights and brazen support for the wealthy. They want a more effective but equally authoritarian and violent assault on working people.

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