

New York Times reports secret US cyberattacks on Russia

By Patrick Martin
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An article published on the front page of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* reveals that US intelligence agencies have carried out extensive cyberattacks against targets in Russia, including the country's electrical grid.

President Trump denounced the article as “treason” but there were no credible denials of the factual content of the article, which appears to originate among sections of the intelligence apparatus concerned that the attacks on Russia's infrastructure were in danger of escalating to full-fledged cyberwarfare, provoking a Russian response.

The *Times* article was co-authored by Nicole Perlroth, who specializes in reporting on cyberwarfare, and David Sanger, the newspaper's senior national security correspondent and a longstanding conduit for material that the military-intelligence apparatus wants to see in print.

In a sense, the report is not so much an exposé of a US campaign of sabotage that is illegal under international law—and incredibly reckless, given that it is directed against a nuclear-armed power—as a kind of boasting by the military-intelligence apparatus of its capabilities.

The article is based on interviews with current and former officials who “described the previously unreported deployment of American computer code inside Russia's grid and other targets...” Some US “reconnaissance probes” have been inside the Russian electrical power system since 2012, the *Times* reported, indicating that the penetration of Russian targets was initiated under the Obama administration (if not earlier) and predated the flare-up of US-Russian tensions in 2014 over Ukraine.

As opposed to passive monitoring, however, more recently “the American strategy has shifted more

toward offense, officials say, with the placement of potentially crippling malware inside the Russian system at a depth and with an aggressiveness that had never been tried before. It is intended partly as a warning, and partly to be poised to conduct cyberstrikes if a major conflict broke out between Washington and Moscow.”

The article suggests that the US and Russian intelligence agencies have already carried out a series of trial cyberattacks on each other's infrastructure, mainly in the form of power outages inflicted on the population of the two countries.

The article presents a chilling scenario: “The critical question—impossible to know without access to the classified details of the operation—is how deep into the Russian grid the United States has bored. Only then will it be clear whether it would be possible to plunge Russia into darkness or cripple its military—a question that may not be answerable until the code is activated.”

In other words, US military commanders, right up to the commander-in-chief in the White House, could well assume that cyber-attacks could actually prevent the Russian military from being able to respond to a preemptive US nuclear strike, allowing the Pentagon to incinerate its longtime enemy, killing tens of millions of people, without the danger of Russian retaliation.

This is the type of nuclear Pearl Harbor that US strategists dreamed of carrying out in the late 1940s, before the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb and established the balance of “mutually assured destruction.”

One can only imagine the reaction in the Russian military command to the publication of this article, which confirms their worst nightmares about the intentions and capabilities of Washington. Imagine the reaction in the American media if a similar Russian (or

Chinese, or Iranian) capability to interfere with or even shut down the US electrical grid were suddenly made public.

The response of the Trump administration to the publication of this report was revealing. No top US security official disputed the validity of the report, and both National Security Advisor John Bolton and National Security Agency Director Paul Nakasone indirectly confirmed it. This demonstrates that the report was not a journalistic “scoop,” but a semi-official warning to Russia by the Pentagon, using the *New York Times* as its press agent.

The media reaction to this seemingly blockbuster revelation was also instructive. There was virtually no follow-up in the press and little discussion on the Sunday television interview programs. It seems that the corporate media as a whole understood that the publication of the article on the front page of the *New York Times* had as its intended purpose getting the attention of the Kremlin, not the American people, and that any further attention to the story risked causing popular alarm.

Regardless, Trump responded to the publication of the article by declaring its publication a “virtual act of treason,” declaring the *New York Times* “must be held fully accountable!” He called the newspaper “the Enemy of the People,” before implying that he might remain in office beyond the term limit specified by the US constitution. “Do you think the people would demand that I stay longer? KEEP AMERICA GREAT”

Trump’s denunciation of the article was in sharp contrast to the statements of his aides, but it seems to have been sparked, not by the cyberwarfare revelations, but by two brief paragraphs in the article which claim that the president was deliberately given a less than fulsome account of the cyberattacks, for fear that he would either order the program halted, or leak the details to the Russians.

This particular claim, whether true or not, is another instance of the long-running campaign spearheaded by the *Times* and a section of the military-intelligence apparatus to portray Trump as either a dupe or an outright agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who cannot be trusted with the most important secrets of American imperialist skullduggery against Russia.

The *Times* article claims that approval for the latest escalation of the program was “slipped into the military

authorization bill passed by Congress last summer,” adding that “Under the law, those actions can now be authorized by the defense secretary without special presidential approval.” The implication of both claims is that Trump, with his well known inattention to details, was not aware of the full implications of the program and that it was being carried out to some extent behind his back.

There is one further aspect of the *Times* report worth noting. From a formal standpoint, the newspaper is carrying out exactly the journalistic activity for which Julian Assange now faces US demands for extradition and trial under the Espionage Act with a potential penalty of 175 years in prison: publishing information about closely held US national security secrets.

The difference, of course, is that Assange is an actual journalist, seeking information that the US government did not want to see made public, exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and diplomatic conspiracies around the world. The *New York Times*, Sanger & Co. serve as glorified stenographers, publishing what the military-intelligence apparatus wants to make public, not what it wishes to conceal.

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