

# US pushes fabricated claims of Russian hacking of virus research

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The global COVID-19 catastrophe is worsening by the hour, fueled by the homicidal back-to-work drive of all the major capitalist countries. Infection rates are rising and heading rapidly to 14 million. The number of deaths will soon hit 600,000. In the US, the epicenter of the pandemic, infections are setting new records on a nearly daily basis, deaths are rising sharply, testing has broken down and hospitals in many regions are at or over capacity.

But the *New York Times* chose to lead its front page on Friday with an article accusing Russian intelligence of “plotting to steal” US, British and Canadian research on a coronavirus vaccine. The article uncritically reports allegations made jointly on Thursday by intelligence agencies of the three countries that a shadowy entity they call APT29 has sought to hack the computer systems of Western companies, research organizations and government agencies involved in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

As with previous anti-Russian smears, including Moscow’s supposed manipulation of the US 2016 election and the more recent *New York Times* fabrication about Russian bounties to the Taliban to kill US troops, neither the intelligence agencies, the *Times* nor the media more broadly present any evidence to back up the lurid claims. The intelligence handouts are nevertheless, once again, immediately presented by the corporate media as unchallengeable fact.

The *Times*’ front-page coverage of the alleged Russian hacking contrasts with its response to this week’s attack on Twitter. The paper adopted a decidedly muted tone in reporting that some of the world’s most high-profile figures and companies, including Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Apple, had their Twitter accounts compromised.

For various reasons, including uncomfortable questions the attack raised about the ability of the technology companies to manipulate user accounts, the *Times* gives short shrift to this massive hack, only to concentrate on another alleged to have occurred against no specific target, at no specific times and with no evidence presented. The article does not even mention the Twitter hack, because to do so would invite the obvious conclusion that it does not take a nation-state to carry out a successful cyber-attack.

As usual, the *Times* for the most part cites unnamed “officials” in describing the alleged activities of APT29, also

dubbed “Cozy Bear.” It notes that government officials “would not identify victims of the hackings.” No dates or specific incidences of hacking are given. However, the newspaper cites Robert Hannigan, the former head of the British intelligence agency GCHQ, as naming as the “apparent” primary target Oxford University and the British-Swedish company AstraZeneca, which are jointly working on a vaccine.

US media reports acknowledge that there is no evidence that any data was actually stolen by the alleged hackers and that no information was compromised. The *Times* quotes Hannigan as saying that the hackers were not seeking to disrupt vaccine production.

The US National Security Agency on Thursday released an advisory (“APT29 targets COVID-19 vaccine development”) that is even flimsier. In a mere three and a half pages of text, it declares, without providing any evidence, that APT29 is “almost certainly” part of Russian intelligence. It then claims that the group has been targeting organizations involved in vaccine development in the US, UK and Canada “throughout 2020,” seeking through the use of malware to “gain a foothold” in the targeted computer systems. However, it is silent on whether it has succeeded in doing so.

The unsubstantiated accusations of vaccine research hacking are not limited to Russia. Last week, FBI Director Christopher Wray said China was “working to compromise American health care organizations” conducting COVID-19 research, a charge that was repeated by Attorney General William Barr in a speech in Michigan on Thursday.

What is behind these concocted smears against Russia and China?

There is a ferocious global struggle between competing corporations and nations to be the first to patent a vaccine for the coronavirus. At stake are billions of dollars for corporate CEOs, investors and bankers, and an immense geopolitical advantage for the country that wins the vaccine sweepstakes.

In a May 27 article on what it called “vaccine nationalism,” the *Wall Street Journal* wrote:

Pharmaceutical companies are bracing for export bans on future coronavirus vaccines and spreading production across different continents, on early signs of a high-stakes

geopolitical scramble to secure supplies for a scientific breakthrough that could confer enormous economic and political power...

A coronavirus vaccine would be a monumental prize for the first country able to manufacture it at scale, a civilizational triumph comparable to the moon landing. It would allow the winner to revive its economy months ahead of others and then select which allies get shipments next, centering the global recovery on its medical output.

The United States is most nakedly pursuing a nationalistic course, aimed at enriching American oligarchs and deploying the vaccine not as a means to save lives, but as a weapon against countries in the crosshairs of US imperialism. These include, in the first instance, China and Russia, but also Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, Cuba and others. The American ruling elite intends, moreover, to use a vaccine to gain leverage against its European "allies," particularly Germany.

Washington will withhold the vaccine from countries deemed impediments to its drive for global hegemony and reward those that fall into line behind its plans for war and conquest with access to the lifesaving drug.

As *Science* magazine wrote in May, the Trump administration's "warp speed" vaccine development program is based on "eschewing international cooperation—and any vaccine candidates from China," and aimed at developing vaccines "reserved for Americans."

The American ruling class is increasingly concerned that it may be losing the race for the vaccine. The World Health Organization reports that more than 160 vaccines are being developed and 23 have begun clinical trials on humans. Russia is developing 26 vaccines, two of which are undergoing clinical trials. Eight of the potential vaccines in various stages of human testing are being developed in China, the most of any country. The Chinese state-owned firm Sinopharm and another Chinese company have already announced they are entering final testing.

The *Washington Post* published an article on Thursday, the same day as the joint anti-Russia statement from the US, the UK and Canada, reporting progress in China's vaccine program. Earlier, the *Times* published an article on China that stated, "By some measures, it is winning the race, with four companies already testing their vaccine candidates on humans."

Also on Thursday, Reuters published an article reporting that Russia plans to produce 30 million doses of an experimental COVID-19 vaccine domestically this year, with the potential to manufacture a further 170 million abroad. It quoted Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, as saying, "We believe that based on the current results it will be approved in Russia in August and in some other countries in September...making it possibly the first vaccine to be approved

in the world."

Under no conditions is US imperialism prepared to allow either Russia or China to dominate the global market for a COVID-19 vaccine. It is seeking in advance to criminalize their efforts, very possibly as a prelude to banning the import of such a virus into the US and lesser powers dependent on it, such as the UK and Canada.

In regard to the development of a coronavirus vaccine, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters last month, "There should not be a divide between the haves and the have-nots." But the actual situation, determined by the class interests of the capitalist oligarchs who dominate the world, is precisely the opposite. The United States, in particular, is seeking to use control of a COVID-19 vaccine as a weapon.

Human lives are no consideration to the American financial oligarchy. The only consideration is the profits of US corporations and the dominance of American imperialism.

In a rational and humane society, the issue of secrecy in the development of a lifesaving virus, all the more in the midst of a deadly pandemic, would never even arise. All questions of personal gain or national advantage would be completely subordinated to the pursuit of a globally coordinated effort, utilizing the revolutionary gains in science and technology and the knowledge of experts in every country, to contain and ultimately eradicate the virus and provide the needed medical care and social support for all those impacted both physically and economically.

But that is impossible within the framework of capitalism. The obscene perversion of the effort to develop and make available a vaccine as a result of its subordination to corporate greed and the drive for geopolitical domination exposes the bankruptcy of capitalism. Human progress and life itself are incompatible with a system based on the accumulation of personal wealth by a corporate-financial elite and the division of the world into rival nation-states.

The struggle against the pandemic is the struggle, led by the international working class, to expropriate and overthrow the capitalist parasites and establish world socialism.

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