



Obama's Ouster of Russians Has U.S. Political Implications

"I have ordered a number of actions in response to the Russian government's aggressive harassment of U.S. officials and cyber-operations aimed at the U.S. election," President Obama announced this week. He added, "These actions follow repeated private and public warnings that we have issued to the Russian government and are a necessary and appropriate response to efforts to harm U.S. interests in violation of established international norms of behavior."



Obama's statement was an explanation for his expulsion of 35 Russian intelligence operatives, and the sanctioning of five Russian entities and four individuals as a reaction to Obama's charge that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential campaign. Democrats contend that Russian hacking probably altered the outcome of the election in which former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump.

The president is giving the Russians 72 hours to get out of the country.

Obama stated that all Americans "should be alarmed by Russia's actions," however, because it interfered with U.S. election process." While Obama and other leading Democrats are not explicitly saying so, the impression has been left with many Americans that the Russians somehow hacked voting machines, switching votes from Clinton to Trump. This is reminiscent of the widespread but inaccurate belief that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. While the Bush administration never said directly that Iraq was behind 9/11, they certainly led millions of Americans to think so.

A similar ploy appears to be in the making with this "Russian hacking" story. Many Americans mistakenly believe that if the Russians "hacked" the election, this means they changed the results recorded on voting machines. The clever use of the word "election," instead of "campaign," for example, would understandably lead the casual observer to conclude that a foreign power, Russia, "stole" the election for Donald Trump.

What Obama, Clinton, and the DNC are complaining about is that the released e-mails demonstrated that Clinton and her allies at the DNC were involved in many questionable activities. The e-mails were published by WikiLeaks (which has flatly denied obtaining them from the Russians). In a clever political move, however, the Democrats have diverted attention away from the *content* of the leaks to the *source* of the leaks.

Obama recently said that he directly told Russian President Vladimir Putin in September to "knock it off" in his alleged hacking activities, supposedly directed toward altering the outcome of the U.S. election. Obama added that this alleged hacking was greatly reduced after this "stern" warning, which leads one to wonder why the Russian agents were not expelled then, instead of now.



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One could conclude that Obama's actions, only three weeks from the end of his term, were taken more for domestic political advantage than a true retaliatory action against the Russians.

Obama also claimed that American diplomats had "experienced an unacceptable level of harassment in Moscow by Russian security services and police over the last year," adding, "Such activities have consequences."

In addition to the expulsions, Obama also announced that the State Department will shut down two Russian compounds, one in Maryland and the other in New York, that are used by Russian personnel for intelligence-related purposes.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner issued a statement charging the Russians with other actions that had led to Obama's reaction. "The Russian government has impeded our diplomatic operations by, among other actions: forcing the closure of 28 American corners which hosted cultural programs and English-language teaching; blocking our efforts to begin the construction of a new, safer facility for our consulate general in St. Petersburg; and rejecting to improve perimeter security at the current, outdated facility in St. Petersburg."

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) added their own complaints about the Russians. While supporting the president's actions, they contended that the measures were inadequate, stating, "These intrusions are not just hacks. They were attacks on the United States by a foreign power and should be treated as such. Therefore, today's action alone by the White House is insufficient."

Then, the DNC statement revealed that its members intend to use these allegations of *Russian* hacking as a political weapon against the Republican Congress and the soon-to-be Republican president Donald Trump: "Now it's time for resident-elect Trump and the Republican leadership in Congress to put our national security before politics and show the American people that they are serious about protecting our democracy [sic]."

Obama promised to hold the Russians accountable, and said the U.S. would "work together" with American allies to "oppose Russia's efforts to undermine established international norms of behavior *and interfere with democratic governance*." (Emphasis added.) Again, it is clear that with less than a month left in his term, Obama and the Democrats intend to use this issue to question the legitimacy of the election of Trump.

Trump appears to understand this, arguing that is "time for our country to move on to bigger and better things. Nevertheless, in the interest of our country and its great people, I will meet with leaders of the intelligence community next week in order to be updated on the facts of this situation." (But if Trump really thinks the Democrats and the media will "move on" from this story, we can predict he would be mistaken. They will "move on" only if something more useful to attack Trump comes along).

Of course, the intelligence "community" is a part of the Obama administration, and they paint a dark picture of the Russians. The Department of Homeland Security reported that "These cyber-operations have included spearphishing campaigns targeting government organizations, critical infrastructure entities, think tanks, universities, political organizations and corporations leading to the theft of information."

Dimitry Peskov, a Russian government spokesman, charged that the Obama administration's sanctions are intended to "spoil" U.S. relations with Russia and "undermine" the presidency of Donald Trump. Still, Russian President Putin has so far declined to retaliate by expelling a like number of U.S. diplomats, despite the urging of his foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov. Lavrov argued that Putin should



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expel 31 U.S. diplomats from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and four more from the U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg. He insisted that Russia “cannot leave these sanctions unanswered.”

Peskov concluded that Obama’s sanctions are “groundless,” and are “aimed directly at undermining” U.S. and Russian relations. And, of course, since Obama will be out of the White House after January 20, that means relations between the Russians and the incoming Trump administration.

In short, the Obama/Clinton/DNC narrative appears to be that Trump was Putin’s preferred winner in the presidential race, and that Russian hacking was responsible for the release of multiple e-mails damaging to the Clinton campaign.

But one could just as easily make the case that Clinton should have been Putin’s preferred choice, not Trump. After all, shortly after Obama took over the White House in 2009, Secretary of State Clinton implied that the new U.S. administration wanted better relations with the Russians, even going so far as to give Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov a “reset button.”

Meeting with Lavrov in Geneva, Switzerland, she handed him a small green box with a ribbon. Inside there was a red button, with the Russian word “peregruzka” printed on it. “I would like to present you with a little gift that President Obama and Vice President Biden and I have been saying and that is: ‘We want to reset our relationship, and so we will do it together.’”

Unfortunately, the word was not the Russian word for “reset,” but rather their word for ‘overcharged.’ This led to some scrambling within the State Department to find the right Russian word for “reset.”

Regardless, it was clear that Clinton intended to “reset” at least her *personal* relations with the Russians.

An examination of some of the leaked Hillary Clinton e-mails reveals that perhaps the candidate who had a closer relationship with the Russian oligarchs was Clinton, not Trump. For example, while Clinton was secretary of state, the better relations with Putin’s Russia enabled the Clinton Foundation and its donors to make millions of dollars off a deal that sold Uranium One (and 25 percent of America’s strategic uranium production) to Russia.

In a recent article for *The New American*, C. Mitchell Shaw cited the involvement of Clinton campaign manager John Podesta in a “huge financial/national security scandal involving his position as an executive board member of Joule Global Sticthing, a company owned by Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg and Putin’s state-owned RUSNANO corporation.” Even more directly, Clinton, while she was secretary of state (and supposedly working for *American* national interests), “set up multi-billion dollar deals and transfers of U.S. technology to help Vladimir Putin build Skolkovo, Russia’s high-tech Silicone Valley, concerning which the FBI has issued ‘an extraordinary warning’ noting that Russia may use this cooperation to obtain America’s ‘sensitive or classified research development facilities and dual-use technologies.’”

But, when Trump is sworn in as president next month, we can expect that the mantra of the Democrats, backed by their progressive allies in the media, will be that he owes his election to the machinations of Vladimir Putin and the Russian government. This story would seem to be more about delegitimizing the incoming administration and influencing the outcome of future elections in the United States than about the just-concluded presidential election.

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