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The dark side of American politics

29 July 2015

An “Editor’s Note” published on page two of Tuesday’s *New York Times* confirms that the supposed “newspaper of record” in the United States served as the instrument for a politically-motivated dirty trick directed at the presidential campaign of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Last Thursday’s online edition of the *Times*, and its Friday print edition, claimed that the inspectors general of the State Department and the intelligence agencies had requested a “criminal investigation” into whether Clinton “mishandled sensitive government information” in the private email account through which she carried out communications during her four years at the State Department.

The front-page report, under a three-column headline, touched off a media firestorm over the weekend, with suggestions that the launching of a criminal probe into Clinton’s email practices could doom her campaign. The issue dominated the Sunday talk shows on all the television networks and was virtually the sole topic of discussion on ultra-right talk radio and Fox News.

In the Tuesday “Editor’s Note,” the *Times* admitted that its account was false. There was no request for a “criminal investigation,” or for an inquiry into Clinton’s own conduct. Instead, the request was a “security referral” into “whether sensitive government information was mishandled” in a handful of emails that passed through Clinton’s mail server. There was no allegation of potentially criminal conduct and no specific reference to Clinton’s personal role.

However, although the *Times* maintained that the July 23-July 24 article “was based on multiple high-level government sources,” the newspaper did not report which of these sources supplied the false information about Clinton. This is certainly a relevant and newsworthy issue: either key Obama aides, or top officials of the Justice Department, State Department or intelligence agencies, have leaked a report targeting the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. The two scenarios are not, of course, mutually exclusive, given Obama’s intimate ties with the intelligence apparatus.

If Obama loyalists were the source, that would suggest subterranean divisions within the Democratic Party wing of the political establishment. That this may be the case is reinforced by Obama’s public musing, during his ongoing trip to Africa, that if it were not for the constitutional prohibition, he could run for and win a third term in the White House, a clear suggestion that he finds the current Democratic presidential field lacking.

If Justice, State or CIA/NSA officials were the source of the leak, this would indicate significant opposition within the apparatus of the state itself either to Clinton’s campaign in particular, or to the prospect of any Democrat succeeding Obama in the White House. This would be even more important to report to the American people, since it would constitute a deliberate—and illegal—intervention into the US elections by agencies and officials who are accustomed to manipulating the political process in countries around the world.

The record of the *Times* over the last two decades reinforces the likelihood of the second scenario, in which Friday’s article was a deliberate provocation emanating from the intelligence agencies. Again and again, from the fabrications of Judith Miller about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to more recent charges of Syrian government gas attacks, Russian missiles shooting down a Malaysian jetliner and Chinese military hackers invading US government computer systems, the *Times* has been a conduit for entirely unsubstantiated claims, emanating from undisclosed sources, that promote the interests of sections of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The *Times* gives no accounting of the source of the attack on the Clinton campaign because it is not an independent publication in any genuine sense, but rather the house organ of factions within the US financial and political elite and military/intelligence establishment that use its pages to manipulate public opinion in support of their desired policies.

The bogus report of a Clinton “criminal referral” is only one of a series of incidents that suggest that the 2016 presidential campaign is becoming the focal point for an extraordinary escalation of political tensions within the US ruling elite.

In the past week alone, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, positioning himself as the most right-wing of the Republican presidential hopefuls, publicly denounced Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as a liar. One of Cruz’s rivals for the Christian fundamentalist bloc, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, blasted the six-nation nuclear agreement with Iran, claiming that President Obama “will take the Israelis and march them to the door of the oven.”

These statements follow a series of increasingly provocative and bigoted comments by billionaire Donald Trump targeting the 2008 Republican presidential nominee John McCain and

many of Trump's 2016 rivals. Trump currently leads opinion polls of likely Republican primary voters and has held the largest rallies of any of the Republican candidates.

What these episodes suggest is that the underlying social conflicts within the United States are beginning to overload a political system that is rotted through and through. The two officially recognized political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, are controlled by corporate interests and increasingly removed from the real concerns of the great mass of the American people.

There is mounting discontent over protracted economic slump, declining living standards and ever-deepening social inequality. Neither capitalist party has anything genuine to offer to working people. Both are seeking to divert and channel the rising social anger, the Democrats through the "left" demagoguery of Bernie Sanders, the Republicans through increasingly vitriolic attacks on scapegoats such as immigrant workers.

It is impossible to predict, more than 15 months before Election Day, how the deepening crisis of American imperialism, and of world capitalism as a whole, will be reflected through the medium of the US presidential election campaign. Suffice it to say that there will be twists and turns and sudden political shocks, foreshadowing the entry of the American working class into mass struggles against the capitalist system.