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The modus operandi of imperialist propaganda

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Coming soon to a theater near you, a US imperialist propaganda blockbuster, the latest production from CIA Pictures, made in participation with Pentagon Entertainment, and with the collaboration of American Media Partners: Cyberwar North Korea.

Such an announcement would have been useful last week, to alert American public opinion to the impending avalanche of entirely unsubstantiated assertions by US government officials, rebroadcast uncritically by the major newspapers and television networks. The target of the blitz was North Korea, blamed for the hacking attack on Sony Pictures Entertainment, which led the studio to cancel the premiere of *The Interview* and withdraw the film from circulation.

Zero facts and evidence have been made public to support the claims of North Korean hacking. The isolated Stalinist regime was certainly hostile to the film, a comedy based on the premise that the CIA contracts two American journalists (played by James Franco and Seth Rogen), to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, after he agrees to be interviewed by them.

But Pyongyang has vociferously denied any role in the hacking attack on Sony, and proposed Saturday to join the US government in an investigation of the attack's origins, declaring, "Whoever is going to frame our country for a crime should present concrete evidence." This offer was quickly dismissed by Washington, which has presented no evidence whatsoever.

The FBI issued a statement Friday declaring that it had enough information to conclude that North Korea was responsible for the hacking attack, but it gave no details. President Obama pinned the blame on North Korea at his press conference later that day, but cited only the FBI statement.

Since then, the US media, with very few exceptions, has routinely described the event as “the first major, state-sponsored destructive computer-network attacks on American soil” (*New York Times*) and “North Korea’s cyberattack on Sony Pictures” (*Wall Street Journal*). North Korean responsibility for the Sony attack is reported by the television networks as unquestioned fact.

It has been left to the *Christian Science Monitor* to cite cautionary statements from security experts in Silicon Valley, to the effect that the presence of Korean-language code in the malware and the use of servers in China and Taiwan are not unusual for hackers, who grab bits of code from multiple sources, in many languages, and use vulnerable servers wherever they can be found.

“The speed at which US officials identified North Korean involvement in the Sony Pictures Entertainment hack surprised many experts familiar with the enormous challenges of pinpointing the origins of cyberattacks,” the online newspaper reported.

Pyongyang denounced the Sony film as a provocation commissioned by Washington for the purpose of destabilizing the North Korean government, a claim that, as the WSWS noted Saturday, is substantially true.

In a remarkable interview with the *New York Times*, given just before the film’s withdrawal from circulation, co-director Seth Rogen confirmed that he made the film in collaboration with the military-intelligence apparatus. “Throughout this process, we made relationships with certain people who work in the government as consultants, who I’m convinced are in the CIA,” Rogen said.

The North Korea-Sony affair is just the latest example of the type of provocation regularly employed by American imperialism to manipulate public opinion, either in support of US military and foreign policy, or, as appears likely in the current case, when the military-intelligence apparatus wishes to distract public attention from the exposure of its own crimes (last week’s report by the Senate Intelligence Committee on CIA torture).

Five months ago, the US government and the US media declared with one voice that the Russian government, or separatists armed by them, shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine, killing 298 people. The claim that Russian President Vladimir Putin was the moral author of mass murder became the basis for a full-blast propaganda campaign. But the official investigation into the MH-17 disaster, conducted by the Netherlands, home of most of the victims, could produce no evidence of Russian involvement in shooting down the plane.

A year earlier, the US government and the US media waged a similar campaign against Syria, charging the government of President Bashar al-Assad with responsibility for an alleged nerve gas attack on US-backed “rebel” forces outside Damascus. The Obama administration declared

that Assad had crossed a “red line” and ordered air strikes against Syria, only to pull back because of divisions among its allies, most notably in Britain, where parliament voted not to back such an attack. Months later, the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh uncovered evidence that the gas attack was staged by the “rebels” themselves to provide a pretext for US intervention.

These methods go on from administration to administration: Clinton used alleged atrocities in Kosovo as the pretext for bombing Serbia in 1999; Bush used bogus claims of “weapons of mass destruction” and ties to Al Qaeda as the pretext for the invasion of Iraq in 2003; Obama cited impending massacres in Benghazi as the pretext for the US-NATO bombing of Libya in 2011 and a CIA-backed Islamist uprising that culminated in the murder of Muammar Gaddafi.

There is a definite *modus operandi* at work. In each of these campaigns, the American government counts on the American media as a willing and entirely uncritical partner, pumping out propaganda to delude the American population. The technique is to demonize the leaders of the target countries, with Kim Jong-un only the latest in a long line, from Slobodan Milosevic to Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad and Putin.

Certain conclusions can be drawn. No one should believe anything that comes out of Washington, a cesspool of official lying and provocation and the principal organizer of military violence all over the world. And no one should believe anything simply because the entire American media repeats it, as there is no media so shamelessly uncritical of official lies as in the United States.