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As election tightens, Clinton steps up right-wing appeals

By Patrick Martin

3 November 2016

Five days before Election Day, with the US presidential race significantly tightening, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton has stepped up her appeals for support from the military-intelligence apparatus. In a series of campaign appearances, she blasted Republican Donald Trump as unfit to be commander-in-chief, while Democratic Party operatives continued to push the manufactured claim that Trump is the candidate of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Virtually all national polls now show the Clinton-Trump race so close that the gap is within the margin of error or just outside it, with Clinton holding a small lead. She has a somewhat larger lead in the Electoral College, the mechanism that determines the actual victor.

Most projections suggest that four of the 10 most populous states—Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and North Carolina—will likely determine the outcome in the Electoral College. Trump needs to sweep all four to win because of Clinton's edge in the Northeast, the Pacific Coast and the upper Midwest. Trump leads in most of the South and the thinly populated states of the Great Plains and Mountain West.

Both campaigns have narrowed their efforts to the handful of most contested states. The Clinton campaign has focused on getting out the vote in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods

and on college campuses, concerned by indications that early voting numbers are lower than in 2012, when Barack Obama won a narrow reelection victory.

A report in Wednesday's *New York Times* highlighted these fears without explaining the reason for popular disaffection among previous Democratic Party voters: namely, widespread disappointment with the eight years of the Obama administration and the consistently right-wing character of the Clinton campaign.

Clinton has made little effort to appeal to the millions who voted for Bernie Sanders, her main challenger for the Democratic nomination. While Sanders attracted support, particularly from young people, with his claim to be a "democratic socialist" and his condemnation of the dominant role played by "the billionaire class," Clinton is an open defender of Wall Street, who told a rally last week, "I love having the support of real billionaires."

The right-wing orientation of Clinton and the Democrats has found its most noxious expression in the anti-Russian, anti-Putin campaign. After FBI Director James Comey sent a letter to Congress last Friday announcing new "investigative steps" against Clinton over her use of a private email server while secretary of state, the Clinton campaign initially noted that the letter was an extraordinary violation of longstanding Justice Department policy, which barred such actions within 60 days of an election in order to avoid prejudicing public opinion against a candidate.

But the focus of its response soon shifted to denouncing Comey for not making similar disclosures of inquiries directed against the Trump campaign in relation to the business activities of several of Trump's advisers, including former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, in Russia, Ukraine and other territories of the former Soviet Union. Clinton campaign chairman Robbie Mook attacked what he called a "double standard."

Congressional Democrats have escalated these attacks, with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid claiming that there are serious national security dangers involved in the alleged Trump-Russia connection. Pro-Clinton media have chimed in with a barrage of reports, including one claiming that there was a secret Internet communication channel between the headquarters of the Trump organization and Moscow-based Alfa Bank.

Perhaps the most strident comment was an op-ed column in the *Washington Post* penned by Eric Chenoweth, co-director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe. Chenoweth is a longtime anti-communist operative who previously worked for the Albert Shanker Institute and the international affairs departments of the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO.

In his column, Chenoweth denounced WikiLeaks' publication of emails from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, claiming that the US media was being turned into an instrument of "Russian intelligence services."

The writer declared: "What we are being introduced to—and what the free media is not defending itself against—is the confabulation of state propaganda and intelligence organs of the Russian government... What is terrifying is that it has become abundantly clear that US media

could not protect itself from a directed manipulation through use of fabricated documents right before the election.”

The purpose of the anti-Russia campaign is not only to manipulate public opinion, but above all to curry favor with the military-intelligence apparatus by suggesting that Trump is either unstable and unserious in his attitude to Russia or disloyal to the interests of American imperialism.

Clinton took up this theme in a speech reiterating her longstanding claim that she is far more qualified to be commander-in-chief because of her record as a hawkish secretary of state and advocate for the US military.

At the same time, Clinton has continued to paint Trump as a serial sexual assaulter and misogynist. This is part of her emphasis on issues of race, gender and sexual orientation, which are the obsessive preoccupations of the privileged upper-middle class layers that constitute the main popular base of the Democratic Party.

President Obama took up the Comey letter for the first time in an interview Wednesday in which he criticized the decision to notify Congress and the public on the eve of the election. “I do think that there is a norm, that when there are investigations, we don’t operate on innuendo, we don’t operate on incomplete information, we don’t operate on leaks,” he said.

There is a huge element of hypocrisy here, since the Democrats’ anti-Russia campaign consists entirely of unsupported allegations reinforced by the US intelligence agencies and promoted uncritically by the media.

The Republican Party and the Trump campaign have responded to the intervention of the FBI by escalating their threats to democratic rights, directed both against voters in minority neighborhoods, who may be targeted for political provocations on Election Day in an effort to suppress the Democratic vote, and in threats against Clinton herself, the constant target of demands to “lock her up” at Trump campaign rallies.

Several Republican officials have declared that impeachment proceedings against Clinton for alleged crimes bound up with her use of a private email server should be initiated immediately if she wins the election. Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin told a local newspaper, “I would say yes, high crime or misdemeanor. I believe she is in violation of both ...” House Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz said that hearings on the email server, the Benghazi affair, the Clinton Foundation and other issues would begin even before Clinton was inaugurated next January 20.

In an even more ominous note, a black church in Mississippi was burned and partially destroyed Tuesday night and defaced with pro-Trump graffiti. The fire destroyed much of the main sanctuary at Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church in Greenville, Mississippi. It came as a newspaper associated with the Ku Klux Klan, the *Crusader*, published an endorsement of Trump under the headline, “Make America Great Again.”

The very fact that despite such associations, Trump is still in a competitive race and has a serious chance of winning the presidency is an indictment of the right-wing, anti-working class character of the Democratic Party.

The 2016 election has boiled down to a contest between a billionaire demagogue who is encouraging fascistic and racist elements and a multi-millionaire reactionary who is the consensus choice of both Wall Street and the national-security establishment.