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Clinton's Defeat and the Fake News Conspiracy

By Jonathan Cook
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Nasareth.

There is an astounding double standard being applied to the US presidential election result.

A few weeks ago the corporate media were appalled that Donald Trump demurred on whether he would accept the vote if it went against him. It was proof of his anti-democratic, authoritarian instincts.

But now he has won, the same media outlets are cheerleading the establishment's full-frontal assault on the legitimacy of a Trump presidency. That campaign is being headed by the failed candidate, Hillary Clinton, after a lengthy softening-up operation by US intelligence agencies, led by the CIA.

According to the prevailing claim, Russian president Vladimir Putin stole the election on behalf of Trump (apparently by resorting to the US playbook on psy-ops). Trump is not truly a US president, it seems. He's Russia's placeman in the White House – a Moscovian candidate.

An assessment of the losing side's claims should be considered separately from the issue of who won the popular mandate. It is irrelevant that Clinton gained more votes than Trump. For good or bad, the US has operated an inherently unrepresentative electoral college since the 18th century. That has provided plenty of time to demand electoral reform. Concern about the electoral college now, only because it elected Trump, is simply ugly partisan politics, not political principle.

Launching last week what looked like a potential comeback, Clinton stepped up the establishment's attack on the result. She argued that Putin had personally directed the hacking operation that lost her the presidency. He had sought to foil the wishes of the US electorate in revenge for her claims in 2011, when Secretary of State, that Russia's parliamentary elections had been rigged.

"Putin publicly blamed me for the outpouring of outrage by his own people, and that is the direct line between what he said back then and what he did in this election," Clinton told campaign donors at meeting in New York.

CIA's evidence-free claims

Clinton's allegations, of course, did not arrive in a vacuum. For weeks the CIA and other intelligence agencies have been making evidence-free claims that Russia was behind the release of embarrassing emails from the Democratic party leadership. The last hold-out against this campaign, James Comey, the head of the FBI, was reported late last week to have caved in and joined the anti-Putin camp.

The Washington Post quoted CIA director John Brennan saying: "Earlier this week, I met separately with [the FBI's] James Comey and [director of national intelligence] Jim Clapper, and there is strong consensus among us on the scope, nature, and intent of Russian interference in our presidential election."

Craig Murray, a former British ambassador turned whistleblower on British government collusion in torture, has said he personally received the leaked emails on behalf of Wikileaks. The data came, he said, not from Russian security agencies, or even from freelance Russian hackers, but from a disillusioned Democratic party insider. Russia experts in the US have similarly discounted the anti-Putin claims, as have former US intelligence agents.

But either way, what is being overlooked in the furore is that none of the information that has come to light about the Democratic party was false. (Though the US intelligence services did

indeed try to make that claim initially). The emails are real and provide an accurate account of the Democratic party's anti-democratic machinations, including efforts to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders, Clinton's challenger.

If Russia did indeed seek to influence the election by releasing truthful information that made Clinton and her allies look bad that would be far more legitimate interference than the US has engaged in against countless countries around the globe. For decades the US has been actively involved in using its military might to overthrow regimes in Latin America and the Middle East. It has also compromised the sovereignty of innumerable states, by sending killer-drones into their airspace, manipulating their media and funding colour revolutions.

The NSA is not archiving every bit of digital information it can lay its hands on for no reason. The US seeks global dominance, whether the rest of the globe wants it or not.

The 'fake news' threat

The corporate media have been lapping up the CIA's evidence-free allegations as hungrily as an underfed kitten. Not only have they been credulously regurgitating the dubious claims of the same US intelligence agencies that knowingly spread lies about Iraq's WMD, but they have added their own dangerous spin to them.

The media have suddenly woken up to the supposed threat to western democracies posed by "fake news". The implication is that it was "fake news" that swept Trump to power. A properly informed electorate, on this view, would never have made such a patently ridiculous choice as Trump. Instead, Clinton would have been rightfully crowned president.

"Fake news", of course, does not concern the systematic deceptions promoted by the corporate media. It does not include the demonstrable lies – like those Iraqi WMDs – spread by western governments and intelligence agencies through the corporate media. It does not even refer to the press corps' habitual reports – demonstrating a seemingly gargantuan gullibility – that take at face value the endless state propaganda against Official Enemies, whether Cuba, Venezuela, Libya or Syria. Or Russia and now Trump.

No, "fake news" is produced only by bloggers and independent websites, and is promoted on social media. Those peddling "fake news" are writers, journalists and activists whose pay packets do not depend on continuing employment by western state-run media like the BBC, billionaire proprietors like Rupert Murdoch, or global corporations like Times-Warner.

It is worth noting that the leaked Democratic emails, whether the leaking was done by Russia or not, were certainly not "fake news". They were documented truth. But the leaks are being actively conflated with "fake news".

Shutting down dissent

There have always been patently ridiculous stories in marginal, and not so marginal, mainstream media, whether it was reports of Elvis coming back from the dead or the millennium computer

bug that was going to bring civilisation to an end when we entered the year 2000. That problem has not substantially changed, it has simply moved on to new platforms like social media.

Much more significantly, the systematic deceptions perpetrated by corporate media for many decades have left swathes of western publics distrustful and cynical. Social media has only added to widespread alienation because it has made it easier to expose to readers these mainstream deceptions. Trump, like Brexit, is a symptom of the growing disorientation and estrangement felt by western electorates.

But the claim of “fake news” does usefully offer western security agencies, establishment politicians and the corporate media a powerful weapon to silence their critics. After all, these critics have no platform other than independent websites and social media. Shut down the sites and you shut up your opponents.

The campaign against a Trump presidency will exploit claims of foreign, hostile interference in the US election as a pretext to crack down on homegrown dissent. Putin is not waging a war on US democracy. Rather, US democracy is proving itself increasingly inconvenient to those who expect to dictate electoral outcomes.