

“Trump Asks Russia”: The Hillary Email Baiting Sets Off Stupidity Storm

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... Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press. Let's see if that happens. That'll be next. - Donald Trump [at a news conference July 27, 2016](#)

That's the money quote that was widely reported as what Republican Presidential nominee Donald Trump said that day about Russia and Hillary Clinton's emails. It is hard to read those sentences as anything but cynical joking, but most of the media, the empty-headed commentariat, and Democratic shills all made a [fundamentally bad-faith effort](#) to inflate the joke into something sinister to serve their various agendas.

Trump's offhand comment was almost universally misreported in a provocative, interpretive, and stupid manner - [even Democracy NOW!](#) headlined the story: "Trump Asks Russia to Hack Hillary Clinton's Email." That is just wrong.

There is nothing in Trump's snide remarks inviting anyone to hack anything. [Trump expresses "hope"](#) that Russia can "find" 30,000 emails that are missing because Clinton had them deleted from her private server after unilaterally deciding they were not government property. It would be more accurate to say that Clinton hacked herself to eliminate the emails, except she didn't need to hack, she just needed reassurance from other pliable lawyers that destroying potential evidence was no problem.

As for any invitation to the Russians to hack Clinton's emails now, that's so stupid that it's more than likely *deliberately* stupid. Clinton's private server was disconnected many months ago (or years?) and is literally hack-proof. It's also in FBI custody. And there's no reason to believe it would be worth hacking by anyone, since Clinton has already deleted, disabled, or destroyed pretty much everything on it.

Saying that "Donald Trump invites Russia to hack into Clinton's emails," [as the Los Angeles Times](#) did July 27, is at best dishonest mindless sensationalism, but most likely a deliberate political lie. A more accurate interpretation of what Trump actually said would be along the lines of: maybe Russia can find Clinton's deleted emails somewhere, in the cloud or something, since the U.S. government has failed to figure out what's been concealed from the American public (or has kept it concealed). If Trump was [baiting the Democrats](#), they took the bait - hook, line, and sinker.

Trump called for selective transparency

Trump implied that if the Russians could find Clinton's missing emails, they should share them with the media and "probably be rewarded mightily." There is nothing wrong in asking

for this particular transparency, which is [clearly in the public interest](#). But Trump is no more honest than the rest. If reciprocity is a measure of fairness, then he should also be calling for the Russians, or some 15-year-old geek in a basement somewhere, to hack the IRS and release Trump's tax returns. That, compared to hacking Clinton's out of service servers, is at least a theoretical possibility.

Compounding its duplicity, the L.A. Times went on to reiterate the lie that has become a widespread media meme: "Donald Trump dared a foreign government to commit espionage on the U.S. to hurt his rival...." Not only are Clinton's emails beyond the reach of any hacker, it would be impossible to commit espionage even if it were possible to hack them. Clinton had a private server precisely to keep her emails outside U.S. government control and any prying eyes, official or not. Even when the Clinton server was up and running, hacking it would have been legally and morally ambiguous. That hack would have been essentially a crime against another criminal set-up.

The larger context for this herding of the media wagons around the Clinton candidacy was the actual hack of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) email system that went undetected for about a year. When [Wikileaks started releasing DNC emails](#), attachments, and voice mails on July 22, the Democratic Party's professional staff was revealed to be small-minded, biased, and dishonest. That was actually a public service. It was also no great surprise, especially to Sanders supporters, but it was a bit startling to see it all revealed so nakedly and shamelessly.

Corrupt DNC exposed just as convention about to begin

Damage control suddenly became a Democratic Party necessity lest the party's venality and corruption become the issue. Within days of the exposure of the campaign, the government rushed to the rescue. Led by the Democrat-in-chief (who kept his hands clean), the partisan executive branch countered with anonymous leaked stories, attributing the DNC hack to one of its favorite scapegoats, Russia. Right on cue, Clinton allies were [accusing Trump of treason](#). Welcome to Cold War II (which has been on for awhile now, actually). The basic framing meme, as it appeared in a [New York Times lede July 26](#), was straight forwardly disingenuous:

American intelligence agencies have told the White House they now have "high confidence" that the Russian government was behind the [theft of emails and documents](#) from the [Democratic National Committee](#), according to federal officials who have been briefed on the evidence.

This is old school Red-baiting (applied to a no longer Red Russia) with even less intellectual integrity than McCarthy-era smearing. No wonder that no evidence was produced by these unnamed spooks, all they had to do was impugn Putin, Putin, Putin, and people's minds started shutting down with pre-programmed fear. A few days later head spook (and the first to go on record) James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, kept the story alive by pretending to downplay it (sort of) in good spook fashion, while also slyly influencing the presidential election. Some of [what Clapper said about the DNC hacks](#):

Was this to just stir up trouble or was this ultimately to try to influence an election? Of course, that's a serious - a serious - proposition... We don't know enough [yet] to ... ascribe a motivation, regardless of who it may have

been. [Emphasis added]

Having said the intelligence community doesn't know who did it or why, intelligence chief Clapper went on to identify and ascribe motive to – you guessed it – Russia:

They believe we're trying to influence political developments in Russia, we're trying to affect change, and so their natural response is to retaliate and do unto us as they think we've done to them.

Is there any reason to think the U.S. doesn't do this stuff to Russia when the U.S. does it to Germany and other allies? Clapper knows better, that's why he made an apparent allusion to the movie "Casablanca," winking to the insiders while hoping most people don't get it:

I'm somewhat taken aback by the hyperventilation on this.... I'm shocked someone did some hacking – that's never happened before.

In "Casablanca," Captain Renault, a cynical state official, bowing to the Gestapo, decides to shut down Rick's café because of illegal gambling:

Captain Renault: I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here! [a croupier hands Renault a pile of money]

Croupier: Your winnings, sir.

Captain Renault: [sotto voce] Oh, thank you very much.

And so it is with DNI Clapper, who is shocked to find that hacking is going on in the world, although he stops just short of admitting the U.S. presumably is or tries to be at the cutting edge of world hackery. In Clapper's case, his "winnings" would be [a wider acceptance by Americans](#) of others doing to them what their own government does to others – as well as to Americans:

I think we're going to be in a state of suppression of extremism in whatever manifestation or form it takes, whether it's al Qaeda or ISIS or some other group that's spawned. This is going to be a long-haul proposition, and I think the same is true in the whole realm of cybersecurity.... I think we just need to accept that, and not be quite so excitable at yet another instance of it.

Wait, say what? Weren't we talking about Russia, or did al Qaeda or ISIS hack the DNC? Or did they all? Is there anyone who didn't hack the DNC?

Political hacking is so much worse than, say, torture, or assassination

In what plays like a comic version of good cop/bad cop, former CIA Director Leon Panetta, an avowed Clinton partisan who spoke at the Democratic Convention, used his speech to add to the hyperventilation over the DNC emails release. Panetta, long a [defender of Bush-era torture](#), raised the stakes of the false political charge that Trump asked Russia to hack Clinton. Panetta, without a scintilla of evidence on display, claimed that Trump was asking

Russia to involve itself in the U.S. presidential election on Trump's behalf, [all but calling it treason](#) (which others have done):

He asked the Russians to interfere in American politics.... Think about that for a moment. Donald Trump wants to be president of the United States [and] Donald Trump is asking one of our adversaries to engage in hacking or intelligence efforts against the United States to affect our election.

It would be at least as true to argue that Trump asked the Russians to contribute to American justice, which has failed to hold Clinton meaningfully accountable for her missing emails, or any other aspect of her unilateral effort to personally privatize a corner of government.

Panetta also repeated the lie that Trump asked Russia to hack the currently unhackable Clinton computers. Then he expanded that deceit to include the entire Clinton campaign, which he dishonestly equated with the United States. It's worth remembering that Trump's remarks were directed at the emails that have gone missing from Clinton's private server when she was Secretary of State (2009-2013). The inspector general of the State Department has found that Clinton's server was vulnerable to outside intruders during all or most of the time Clinton was responsible for managing its security. In that respect, it's possible or even likely that Russia (and others) could have copied and kept *all* of Clinton's emails, both the ones she turned over and the ones she deleted. That state of affairs is in itself another kind of joke. It's also an unresolved Clinton scandal. For Trump to make fun of it as he did is to mock a perverse reality. It's a reality that Panetta, like other Clinton loyalists, would like to deny it into non-existence, or at least distract from it with his own unreality. Panetta's demagoguery would have you conclude that Putin is actually Trump's metaphorical running mate:

No presidential candidate who's running to be president of the United States ought to be asking a foreign country, particularly Russia, to engage in hacking or intelligence efforts to try to determine what the Democratic candidate may or may not be doing.... This just is beyond my own understanding of the responsibilities that candidates have to be loyal to their country and to their country alone, not to reach out to somebody like Putin and Russia, and try to engage them in an effort to try to, in effect, conduct a conspiracy against another party....

Keeping the public's eye off the ball is no laughing matter

Panetta is a smart, experienced guy, so he must be aware of what a colossal joke this is, even though CNN chose to swallow it whole. The DNC hack had little to do with the current presidential campaign and almost everything to do with the Democrats' covert campaign against Bernie Sanders. Any honorable Democrat would denounce that. DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz resigned under pressure, without noticeable contrition, and Hillary Clinton promptly rewarded her with an [honorary chairmanship of the Clinton campaign](#). The last thing Clinton wants is to run against the specter of a martyred Sanders. She would much, much prefer to run against Vladimir Putin and his imaginary alliance with Donald Trump. This is consistent with her decades-long demonization of Russia and support for American/NATO soft aggression against Russia initiated by President Clinton more than 20 years ago.

By omission, Panetta endorses this Clinton policy of needlessly risking war, making endangerment equivalent to patriotic loyalty and, in time-dishonored fashion, equating the reduction of war between Russia and the U.S. somehow with disloyalty. It's neo-liberal logic, so it doesn't have to make sense. Especially not when it's part of the framing of a false campaign trope.

"The Russians are hacking, the Russians are hacking" cry is already losing steam. [New reports](#) that someone hacked the [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee](#) (DCCC) or [the Clinton campaign itself](#) were downplayed or later [minimized in quasi-denial](#). Early in the week, even before Trump's provocation, [Robert Mackey of The Intercept](#) had assessed the sketchiness of evidence that the Russians were to blame.

Principled pushback against Panetta would not be difficult. For all his disdain for Putin's Russia, Panetta has long been [a champion of American authoritarianism](#) that is unmatched in the world: the "right" of the president of the U.S. to assassinate by drone, in any foreign country, any person the president determines, [in secret, with no due process](#), to be a legitimate target, even a U.S. citizen. There's a difference between hacking and beheading. Is there any other chief executive in the world with such freedom to kill people with no accountability?

It is a reality of American life these days that there is little public objection to having a President exercise arbitrary, life-or-death power over any one of 7.4 billion people in the world. More common than objection to this plain crime against humanity is widespread acceptance, and sometimes even gratitude for the president's "restraint" in assassinating only a few hundred people, maybe only half of them innocent civilians.

Hillary Clinton has not opposed the U.S. having an executioner-in-chief. Neither has Donald Trump objected. Even Bernie Sanders hasn't objected, although he said the power should be used carefully and sparingly. Trump's sarcastic joke about 30,000 missing emails may not have been all that funny, but the self-serving windbagery and open deceit the joke provoked are actually hilarious, or would be if the stakes were not so high. Unless something unexpected happens, come January 2017, either Trump or Clinton will have the power to kill at will.

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