ON RESPONSIBLE SOURCING FOR DNC HACK STORIES

For some reason Lawfare thinks it is interesting that the two Democratic members of the Gang of Four — who have apparently not figured out there's a difference between the hack (allegedly done by Russia) and the dissemination (done by Wikileaks, which has different motivations) are calling for information on the DNC hack to be released.

> The recent hack into the servers of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the subsequent release via WikiLeaks of a cache of 20,000 internal e-mails, demonstrated yet again the vulnerability of our institutions to cyber intrusion and exploitation. In its timing, content, and manner of release, the email dissemination was clearly intended to undermine the Democratic Party and the presidential campaign of Secretary Hillary Clinton, and disrupt the Democratic Party's convention in Philadelphia.
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> [snip]
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> Specifically, we ask that the Administration consider declassifying and releasing, subject to redactions to protect sources and methods, any Intelligence Community assessments regarding the incident, including any that might illuminate potential Russian motivations for what would be an unprecedented interference in a U.S. Presidential race, and why President Putin could potentially feel compelled to authorize such an operation, given the high likelihood of eventual attribution.

For some equally bizarre reason, WaPo thinks Devin Nunes' claim — in the same breath as he claims Donald Trump's repeated calls on Russia to release Hillary's email were sarcastic — that there is "no evidence, absolutely no evidence" that Russia hacked the DNC to influence the election is credible.

> Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, told The Washington Post in an interview Wednesday that speculation about Russian attempts to sway the presidential election is unfounded.
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> "There is no evidence, absolutely no evidence, that the Russians are trying to influence the U.S. election," Nunes said, repeatedly swatting away the suggestion made by some Democrats that the Russians may be using their intelligence and hacking capabilities to boost Donald Trump's chances.
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> "There is evidence that the Russians are actively trying to hack into the United States — but it's not only the Russians doing that. The Russians and the Chinese have been all over our networks for many years."

These are two obvious (because they're on the record) examples of partisans using their access to classified information to try to boost or refute a narrative that the Hillary Clinton campaign has explicitly adopted: focusing on the alleged Russian source of the hack rather on the content of the things the hack shows.

Kudos to Richard Burr, who is facing a surprisingly tough reelection campaign, for being the one Gang of Four member not to get involved in the partisan bullshit on this.

There are plenty of people with no known interest in either seeing a Trump or a Clinton presidency that have some measure of expertise on this issue (this is the rare moment, for

example, when I'm welcoming the fact that FBI agents are sieves for inappropriate leaks). So no outlet should be posting something that obviously primarily serves the narrative one or the other candidate wants to adopt on the DNC hack without a giant sign saying "look at what partisans have been instructed to say by the campaign." That's all the more true for positions, like the Gang of Four, that we'd prefer to be as little politicized as possible. Please don't encourage those people to use their positions to serve a partisan narrative, I beg of you!

For the same reason I'm peeved that Harry Reid suggested the Intelligence Community give Trump fake intelligence briefings. Haven't we learned our lesson about politicizing intelligence?

More generally, I think journalists should be especially careful at this point to make it clear whether their anonymous sources have a partisan dog in this fight, because zero of those people should be considered to be unbiased when they make claims about the DNC hack.

A very special case of that comes in stories like this, where Neocon ideologue Eliot Cohen, identified as Bush appointee, is quoted attacking Trump for suggesting Russia should leak anymore emails.

> But now Republican-aligned foreign policy experts are also weighing in along similar lines.
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> "It's appalling," Dr. Eliot A. Cohen, who was counselor of the State Department during the second term of George W. Bush's presidency, said to me today. "Calling on a foreign government to go after your opponent in an American election?"
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> Cohen recently organized an open letter from a range of GOP national security leaders that denounced Trump in harsh terms, arguing that Trump's "own statements" indicate that "he would use

> the authority of his office to act in ways that make America less safe, and which would diminish our standing in the world." The letter said: "As committed and loyal Republicans, we are unable to support a Party ticket with Mr. Trump at its head. We commit ourselves to working energetically to prevent the election of someone so utterly unfitted to the office."
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> But this latest from Trump, by pushing the envelope once again, raises the question of whether other prominent Republicans are ever going to join in.
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> For instance, to my knowledge, top national security advisers to George W. Bush, such as Stephen Hadley and Condoleezza Rice (who was also secretary of state), have yet to comment on anything we've heard thus far from Trump. Also, there could theoretically come a point where figures like former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and possibly even Dubya and George H.W. Bush feel compelled to weigh in.
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> Meanwhile, senior Republican elected officials who have backed Trump continue to refrain from taking on his comments forcefully or directly. Some Republicans actually defended Trump's comments today. Paul Ryan's spokesman issued a statement saying this: "Russia is a global menace led by a devious thug. Putin should stay out of this election."

I feel differently about Trump's asinine comment than I do about attribution of the attack. I'm all in favor of Hillary's campaign attacking Trump for it, and frankly Cohen is a far more credible person to do so than Jake Sullivan and Leon Panetta, who also launched such attacks yesterday, because as far as I know Cohen has not mishandled classified information like the other two have.

But I would prefer if, rather than IDing Cohen as one of the Republicans who signed a letter opposing Trump, Greg Sargent had IDed him as someone who has also spoken affirmatively for Hillary.

> On foreign policy, Hillary Clinton is far better: She believes in the old consensus and will take tough lines on China and, increasingly, Russia. She does not hesitate to make the case for human rights as a key part of our foreign policy. True, under pressure from her own left wing, she has backtracked on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a set of trade deals that supports American interests by creating a counterbalance to China and American values by protecting workers' rights. But she might edge back toward supporting it, once in.

Admittedly, this was at a time when Cohen and others still hoped some Mike Bloomberg like savior would offer them a third choice; that was before Bloomberg gave a very prominent speech endorsing Hillary last night.

Here's the thing. The Neocons (led by Robert Kagan, who's wife got named as a target of Russian aggression in the Feinstein-Schiff letter) are functioning as surrogates for Hillary just like top Democrats are. They are, just like Democrats are, now scrambling to turn their endorsements into both policy and personnel wins. Therefore we should no more trust the independence of a pro-Hillary Neocon — even if he did work for George Bush — than we would trust the many Democrats who have used their power to help Hillary win this election. Progressives should be very wary about the promises Hillary has made to get the growing number of Neocons (and people like Bloomberg) to so aggressively endorse her. Because those endorsements will come with payback, just like union or superdelegate endorsements do.

In any case, it’s hard enough to tease out attribution for two separate hacks and the subsequent publication of the hacked data by Wikileaks. Relying on obviously self-interested people as sources only further obscures the process.

Update: The Grammar Police actually nagged me to fix “whose/who’s” error in the Kagan sentence. Fun!