



**SIA Blog**  
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**Attack on ‘Olympus’:**  
*Do the Russian hacks during the 2016  
US Presidential campaign constitute an attack on the United States?*

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**T**hings are getting rather tense in the US, where outgoing US President Obama has pledged to investigate the level of Russian cyber influence on the Trump victory. The senior levels of the [US intelligence](#) establishment suggest that Trump won as a consequence of ‘hackers’ at the order of Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#). Were this proven to be true, it would destroy the myth that Trump was elected by the will of the people of the United States – in spite of there being enough evidence to suggest that at least half the US electorate were indeed disenchanted by Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, and with the entire political status quo in Washington D.C.

But if Russia did indeed launch a cyber attack on the US with the aim of destabilizing America’s political system that for decades has stood as the exemplar of democratic

liberties and the physical protector of ‘the West’, what would be the appropriate response?

Hypothetically, having successfully elected a Russian stooge to the White House should constitute an unprecedented breach of national security with far reaching strategic implications.

An impeachment of Trump may well spell the end of his presidency before it begins. But what if he truly was not aware of the level of Russian actions on his behalf? What if Trump was duped into thinking that the brilliance of his campaign alone won him the election?

The Republican Party may well have command of both Houses of Congress, with many of its members [distancing](#) themselves from Donald Trump, however, would they have the gall to support Trump’s metaphorical ‘public execution’ led by an outgoing US Democratic president they have been and still are in opposition to?

This scenario is quite intriguing. Ultimately, if the Obama investigation demonstrates clearly that Trump benefited from Russian actions (with or without his knowledge), it is likely that some bipartisan political contrivance will be found to prevent Trump from taking power.

Where that leaves the presidency is anyone’s guess, though the good money is that Vice President Pence would succeed Trump. The Republican dominated House would be supportive – but those who elected Trump would be furious in this case of the ‘establishment strikes back’. An armed anti-establishment insurgency might arise from this, leaving the United States weakened and gravely disunited.

All great powers fall. It is an inescapable historic fact. What makes us think that the American Republic, a global superpower for 71 years, could avoid such a fate – riddled as it is with its own multiple internal contradictions?

That then leaves the thorny issue of what to do about Russia.

Assuming that the US can correct itself and keep its citizens from rebelling against ‘the swamp’ in an age of total deniability through the Internet, can Russia be brought to account, and if so, how? And was the Trump presidential victory an attack on the US?

The US intelligence services have exceptional access to the [Internet](#) and other electronic means of communication. It could run a disinformation campaign against President Putin or members of his inner circle.

A successful American-led disinformation campaign against Putin might win the US its revenge, but may also break the Russian Federation apart, leading to many unforeseen strategic issues such as oversight of Russian nuclear weapons in rebellious breakaway provinces, or the rise of rogue military commanders taking charge.

A Russia, confronted by a US electronic campaign, might well chose to escalate a confrontation to a more kinetic struggle, distracting the US from the cyber domain into areas where the US and its allies may have difficulties operating.

A great US President once said: '*[the only thing we have to fear is fear itself](#)*'. And fearing further retaliation from Russia may well be the undoing of the United States.

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