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## TRUMP TALKS TOUGH ON CHINA'S HACKING. WHY NOT RUSSIA'S?

30.01.2017

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POLITICO MAGAZINE, 29 Jan 2017

President Donald Trump is showing sharply different reactions to countries that hack the United States — calling out China but giving Russia a pass.

The divide has played out as Trump weighs whether to revoke the sanctions that former President Barack Obama imposed on Russia for its suspected interference in the 2016 presidential election. And it worries some experts and lawmakers who say that of the United States two big rivals in cyberspace, Russias hacking has been far more provocative.

Trump has repeatedly blamed China for a pair of massive hacks that pilfered highly sensitive documents on more than 20 million current and former federal workers □ in contrast to the Obama administrations refusal to publicly point the finger for those thefts. But it took three months for Trump and his aides to accept U.S. intelligence agencies conclusions that the Russian government was behind hacks of Democratic Party emails that helped undermine Hillary Clintons campaign.

While both cyberattacks were serious, senior lawmakers from both parties have called the election hacks □ and subsequent leaks of embarrassing internal documents □ an assault on U.S. democracy. But Trump repeatedly scoffed at attempts to pin the blame on Vladimir Putins regime, at one point speculating that the hacker who breached the Democrats emails could be someone sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds.

Trump is very quick on China, said Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But he always thinks that [with] Russia, theres another explanation.

To Cardin and other Democrats, the split is a sign that Trumps response to foreign-sponsored cyberattacks might be swayed by his domestic political aims.

Democrats □ and even some Republicans □ have expressed bewilderment at Trump and his team's pivot to China when pressed on Russian hacking, arguing that it is merely a diversionary tactic.

Its a political effort to distract attention from the seriousness of the Russian hacking of our election, said California Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee. This is a talking point to suggest there is somehow unequal treatment of Russia and China.

At the same time, many Republicans see Trumps rhetoric on China as a refreshing change, saying Obama was wrong to remain quiet about Beijing's role in stealing the security-clearance

documents from the federal Office of Personnel Management.

There are certain rules we have, and China violated them, said Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), who chairs the House Homeland Security Committees subpanel on counterterrorism and intelligence.

Some security experts, as well as Obamas intelligence leaders, have described the thefts of the personnel records as traditional espionage — something the U.S. tries to deter but which doesnt represent a shattering of international norms.

Obama was more aggressive in retaliating against cyberattacks on U.S. economic assets. For instance, his Justice Department brought criminal charges against five members of Chinas Peoples Liberation Army accused of hacking U.S. companies. But he and his intelligence agencies never explicitly blamed China for the OPM hacks, despite offering some strong hints in that direction.

Trump has shown no such reluctance. In fact, he and his top aides routinely turn to China and OPM whenever Russias role in the election-year hacks comes up.

Twenty-two million accounts were hacked in this country by China, Trump said early this month when asked about the topic during his only news conference as president-elect.

When the Chinese hacked the OPM, we didnt hear anything that happened after that, said Reince Priebus, now Trumps White House chief of staff, during an early January interview on CBSs Face the Nation.

Even key Trumps Cabinet picks have steered the Russian hacking conversation toward China.

When Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), Trumps pick to be attorney general, was asked about how he might respond to Moscows digital aggression, he responded: The problem may turn out to be, as in the Chinese hacking of hundreds of thousands of — maybe millions — of records, it has to be handled at a political level.

Trump's approach could presage a shift in how his administration will treat foreign governments suspected of digital snooping, cyber specialists say: calling out countries for digital snooping, if Trump dislikes them.

It certainly suggests that the strategy is going to be different, said Ian Wallace, co-director of the Cybersecurity Initiative at New America, a think tank founded by a former Obama administration official.

Trumps supporters hope the difference will be a greater willingness to stand up to China. Trump regularly inveighed against Beijing on the campaign trail, accusing it of manipulating its currency to harm U.S. companies.

U.S. intelligence chiefs have defended the low-key response to the OPM hacks, warning that naming and shaming for traditional spying can spawn a destructive tit-for-tat cycle. The United States has its own massive spying apparatus, they note.

People who live in glass houses need to think about throwing rocks, because this was an act of espionage, then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the Senate Intelligence Committee earlier this month.

Obama publicly retaliated against foreign hacking only a handful of times, including the election-related sanctions he levied on Russia and the indictments of the Chinese military hackers. His

administration also imposed economic reprisals against North Korea for a destructive cyberattack on Sony Pictures Entertainment, and brought indictments against Iranian-backed hackers accused of infiltrating the U.S. financial industry and the controls of a dam in New York state.

Many cyber specialists believe the Obama administrations restraint after the OPM hacks helped get Beijing to reach a deal in 2015, in which he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping pledged that neither country would hack the other for commercial gain. Since then, digital researchers said they have observed a decline in corporate hacking from China.

We actually got a lot of what we wanted out of China, said one former top White House cyber official.

Then again, some experts caution that Beijing might just be shifting tactics or better hiding its activity.

Lawmakers and tech specialists say its difficult to predict the Trump administration's ultimate cyber retaliation strategy. Some, including Wallace and Schiff, warn that Trumps China rhetoric is not necessarily the signal of a new policy.

Trump and his team have given minimal details about their international cyber policies, although Trump has vowed to make it a priority to bolster Americas digital weapons and hacking defenses.

We will be coming up with a major report on hacking defense, how do we stop this new phenomena, Trump said at the January news conference before his inauguration. He added: "Because the United States is hacked by everybody."

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