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Obama Vows Revenge Against Russia for ‘Election Hacks’

By Jason Ditz
December 15, 2016

The White House today sought to endorse recent NBC News reports which accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of “personally” directing hacks against the US election to get Donald Trump elected, with Press Secretary Josh Earnest insisting it was “pretty obvious” that Putin had directly participated in the hacking.

President Obama, speaking to NPR, also endorsed the underlying narrative, though he said there were several possible motivations for Russia to hack the US vote and that the US intelligence community hadn’t settled on a single one yet.

Irrespective of the lack of evidence and despite nebulous motives, however, President Obama did vow that the US would carry out some form of retaliatory move against Russia, saying he would do so “at a time and place of our own choosing.”

While such threats have been common enough among administration officials throughout the scandal, Obama took the matter a step farther, saying that some of the revenge attacks may “be explicit and publicized.” He did not offer details on the form that they may take.

In the past, however, US officials have suggested they would consider a “large enough” hack to be equivalent to conventional military attack and respond militarily to it. Officials also suggested back in November that the US might knock out Russia’s entire electrical grid in revenge for the putative election hack.

So while it remains unclear exactly how far President Obama is willing to go on the basis of an allegation for which no good public evidence actually exists, the signs are that he is considering something substantial, in no small part because he is facing growing criticism from other Democrats for not “doing more” against Russia.

President Obama is delivering his final briefing on Friday afternoon at 2:15, and is expected to address the moves against Russia as a part of that. That he qualified the promise of revenge as at a “time and place of our own choosing,” suggests it probably isn’t going to be immediate.