

Barack Obama promises retaliation against Russia over hacking during US election

Outgoing president says US will respond to cyberattacks by Moscow 'at a time and place of our choosing', as Donald Trump rejects reports of interference

US will retaliate against Russia over election hacking, vows Barack Obama - audio

Julian Borger in Washington

Friday 16 December 2016 11.43 GMT

Barack Obama has warned that the US will retaliate for Russian cyberattacks during the presidential election.

In an interview on National Public Radio on Friday morning, the US president said he is waiting for a final report he has ordered into a range of Russian hacking attacks, but promised there would be a response.

"I think there is no doubt that when any foreign government tries to impact the integrity of our elections ... we need to take action," Obama said. "And we will - at a time and place of our own choosing.

"Some of it may be explicit and publicised; some of it may not be."

The CIA has judged that the Russian cyber attacks, including the hacking of emails from the Democratic National Committee, were intended to influence the election in Donald Trump's favour, according to reports. The FBI agrees that there was Russian hacking but has not as yet concluded it was intended to favour the Republican contender.

Senators from both parties have called for a congressional enquiry, while Trump himself has rejected the reports and his office has derided the CIA.

Trump weighed in on Twitter to ask if it was the "same cyberattack where it was revealed that head of the DNC illegally gave Hillary the questions to the debate?" One of the hacked emails, from interim DNC head Donna Brazile, said that a woman from Flint, Michigan, would ask at a primary debate with Bernie Sanders what Clinton would do as president to help people in the town suffering from a lead-contaminated water supply.

He earlier tweeted: "If Russia, or some other entity, was hacking, why did the White House wait so long to act? Why did they only complain after Hillary lost?"

In fact, the intelligence community had issued its statement on 7 October, a full month before polling day.

Obama said he would reserve judgment on Moscow's intentions pending a final report but he said the impact of the intervention was clear. The debate over motivation, he said "does not in any way, I think, detract from the basic point that everyone during the election perceived

accurately - that in fact what the Russian hack had done was create more problems for the Clinton campaign than it had for the Trump campaign”.

He added: “There’s no doubt that it contributed to an atmosphere in which the only focus for weeks at a time, months at a time were Hillary’s emails, the Clinton Foundation, political gossip surrounding the DNC.”

The president did not attempt to gauge the full impact of the intervention, but insisted it had had an effect.

“Elections can always turn out differently,” he said. “You never know which factors are going to make a difference. But I have no doubt that it had some impact, just based on the coverage.”

In the NPR interview, Obama expressed incredulity at Republican party support for Trump’s foreign policy positions, which have been uniformly supportive of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

“This is somebody, the former head of the KGB, who is responsible for crushing democracy in Russia, muzzling the press, throwing political dissidents in jail, countering American efforts to expand freedom at every turn; is currently making decisions that’s leading to a slaughter in Syria,” the outgoing president said.

“And a big chunk of the Republican party, which prided itself during the Reagan era and for decades that followed as being the bulwark against Russian influence, now suddenly is embracing him.”

Earlier on Thursday, the White House went its furthest yet in joining the dots between Trump and Putin.

Press secretary Josh Earnest pointed reporters to a unanimous statement from all 17 intelligence agencies, issued in October, that found “only Russia’s senior-most officials could have authorized these activities”.

The press secretary said that in his personal view, that sentence was “not intended to be subtle”, adding that it was “pretty obvious that they were referring to the senior-most government official in Russia”.

Ben Rhodes, Obama’s deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, agreed. “I don’t think things happen in the Russian government of this consequence without Vladimir Putin knowing about it,” he told MSNBC.

But Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told state TV channel Rossiya-24 he was “dumbstruck” by the reports of Putin’s alleged involvement. “I think this is just silly, and the futility of the attempt to convince somebody of this is absolutely obvious,” he said.

Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday of the hacking accusation that the US should “either stop talking about it or finally produce some evidence, otherwise it all begins to look unseemly”.

The White House said Obama would hold a press conference in Washington on Friday at 2.15pm ET (7.15pm GMT) before leaving for his annual family vacation in Hawaii.

More news

Topics

US politics Barack Obama Donald Trump Russia Vladimir Putin

Reuse this content