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**PUTIN: RUSSIA DOESN'T HACK BUT 'PATRIOTIC' INDIVIDUALS MIGHT**

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The Washington Post (01 June 2017)

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia □ President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that some patriotic individuals may have engaged in hacking but insisted Russia as a country has never done it, and he pledged Thursday to wait out U.S. political battles to forge constructive ties with President Donald Trump.

The Russian leader lamented what he described as Russo-phobic hysteria in the U.S. that makes it somewhat inconvenient to work with one another or even to talk, adding that someday this will have to stop.

U.S. intelligence agencies have accused Russia of hacking into Democratic Party emails, helping Trumps election victory, and the congressional and FBI investigations into the Trump campaigns ties with Russia have shattered Moscows hopes for a detente with Washington.

Speaking at a meeting with senior editors of leading international news agencies, Putin insisted that we never engage in that at the state level.

He alleged that some evidence pointing at Russian hackers participation in cyberattacks □ he didnt specify which — could have been falsified in an attempt to smear Russia.

I can imagine that some do it deliberately, staging a chain of attacks in such a way as to cast Russia as the origin of such an attack, Putin said. Modern technologies allow that to be done quite easily.

Putin added that while the Russian state has never been involved in hacking, it was theoretically possible that Russia-West tensions could have prompted some individuals to launch cyberattacks.

Hackers are free people, just like artists who wake up in the morning in a good mood and start painting, he said. The hackers are the same. They would wake up, read about something going on in interstate relations and if they feel patriotic, they may try to contribute to the fight against those who speak badly about Russia.

At the same time, Putin argued that hackers, wherever they come from, cant sway election outcomes because the public opinion isnt that easy to manipulate.

No hackers can have a radical impact on an election campaign in another country, adding that no information can be imprinted in voters minds, in the minds of a nation, and influence the final outcome and the final result. No hackers can influence election campaigns in any country of

Europe, Asia or America.

The Russian leader said the Russo-phobic hysteria in the U.S. is mostly aimed against the current president of the U.S. to prevent him from working normally. The goal is, Putin said, is to establish an atmosphere that is going to prevent us from addressing common issues, say with regard to terrorism.

He said Russia had been encouraged by Trumps campaign promises to improve Russia-U.S. ties and emphasized that Moscow still hopes to forge a constructive dialogue.

We are patient, we know how to wait and we will wait, Putin said.

The Russian president praised Trump as a straightforward person, a frank person and noted that while some see Trumps lack of political background as a disadvantage, he sees it as beneficial because he has a fresh set of eyes.

Asked if he could offer any advice to Trump, Putin said it would be counterproductive to give advice to a political counterpart and added that a person like President Trump doesnt need any advice, especially if it comes to political issues.

Russian meddling was also a concern in France, with Putin publicly expressing his sympathy for President Emmanuel Macrons rivals in the campaign. Macrons aides claimed in February that Russian groups were interfering with his campaign, and a document leak hit Macrons campaign in the final hours of the French race. Moscow has strongly denied all allegations of election meddling.

The head of the French governments cyber security agency, Guillaume Poupard, told The Associated Press on Thursday that it found no trace of a Russian hacking group in its investigations of a hack and document leak that hit Macrons election campaign. Poupard described the Macron campaign hack as not very technological and said the attack was so generic and simple that it could have been practically anyone.

Asked if Russian hackers could try to shape the outcome of German parliamentary elections later this year, Putin said: We never engaged in that on a state level, and have no intention of doing so.

He noted that Russia can work constructively with any German leader, adding that he had good ties with German Chancellor Angela Merkel despite some differences.

Russias relations with the West have been at post-Cold War lows over the Ukrainian crisis. The U.S. and the EU have slapped Moscow with sanctions over its annexation of Ukraines Crimean Peninsula and support for a pro-Russia insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

Putin said that economic restrictions against Russia have had zero effect, predicting that the current strain in relations will ease, because its counterproductive and harmful for all.

Touching on tensions in the Pacific, Putin said Russias military deployments on a group of Pacific islands also claimed by Japan have been caused by concerns about the U.S. military buildup in the region.

The four islands, called the Northern Territories in Japan and the southern Kurils in Russia, were seized by the former Soviet Union at the end of the World War II, preventing the two countries from signing a peace treaty.

Putin said the U.S. will likely continue to build up its missile shield in the region even if North Korea agrees to curb its nuclear and missile programs, in the same way it has continued to develop missile defenses in Europe despite a deal with Iran that curbed its nuclear program in exchange for lifting international sanctions.

We are concerned about our security, Putin said. We are thinking about ways to neutralize possible threats at long distance.

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Kaynak/Source: