

# Cheney delivers a statement on Russian meddling: It's an 'act of war'

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By **Kristine Phillips** March 28

Former vice president Richard B. Cheney became the latest Republican to condemn Russia's reported meddling in the presidential election, likening the “cyberattack on the United States” to an “act of war.”

Cheney on Monday delivered criticisms of Russian President Vladimir Putin's policies and his government's alleged orchestration of hackings to interfere with the election. Cheney, who supported Donald Trump's presidential election, was speaking at a global business summit in New Delhi.

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“There's not any argument at this stage that somehow the election of President Trump was not legitimate, but there's no question that there was a very serious effort made by Mr. Putin and his government, his organization to interfere in major ways with our basic, fundamental democratic process,” he said. “In some quarters, that would be considered an act of war.”

Cheney, who once accused Russia of stifling religious and political rights, isn't the first politician to use the phrase “act of war” to describe the reported hackings.

“When you attack a country, it's an act of war,” Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said in December during an interview on Ukrainian TV, according to CNN. “And so we have to make sure that there is a price to pay so that we can perhaps persuade Russians to stop this kind of attacks on our very fundamentals of democracy.”

However, a leading scholar of international law on cyber operations said that although interfering with another country's democratic process is alarming, it does not amount to an “act of war.”

“I'm no friend of the Russians,” Michael Schmitt, chairman of the U.S. Naval War College's International Law Department, told The Washington Post's Ellen Nakashima. But Moscow's hacking and dumping of Democratic emails to WikiLeaks “is not an initiation of armed conflict. It's not a violation of the U.N. charter's prohibition on the use of force. It's not a situation that would allow the U.S. to respond in a self-defense militarily.”

Schmitt, though, said that Russia's violation of the international law barring intervention in a state's internal affairs would give the United States grounds to undertake “countermeasures” that would otherwise be unlawful, Nakashima wrote.

In December, The Post reported that intelligence agencies have identified individuals with connections to the Russian government who provided WikiLeaks with a trove of hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee and others with the intention of hurting Hillary Clinton's chances of becoming president.

Both chambers of Congress have launched probes into alleged Russian hacking that intelligence agencies believe was designed to help Trump win the White House. Leaders of the Senate and House intelligence committees, which are in charge of investigations, have both pledged to look into links between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin.

FBI Director James B. Comey also confirmed during a public hearing before the House Intelligence Committee last week that his agency is investigating just that.

In his speech at the YES Bank and the Economic Times Presents Global Business Summit, Cheney said the Russian interference in the election is “the kind of conduct and activity we'll see going forward,” citing Putin's desire to reestablish control over nations that were part of the old Soviet Union.

“I would not underestimate the weight that we, as Americans, assign to the Russian attempts to interfere with our internal political processes,” he said.

Cheney's remarks come as the president, who has long praised Putin, continues to dismiss possible links between his campaign and the Kremlin as nonsense.

Trump said in a couple of tweets Monday night that the House Intelligence Committee should, instead, look into Bill and Hillary Clinton's alleged Russian ties.

The congressional probes also have been anything but smooth sailing.

Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chair of the House Intelligence Committee and a Trump ally, for instance, admitted Monday that he secretly went to the White House last week to view intelligence files he later cited as proof of potentially improper surveillance on the president, [The Post reported](#). The revelation has raised doubts about the impartiality of the investigation into Russia and set off calls for Nunes's removal as chairman.

[The Post also revealed Tuesday](#) that administration officials tried to block Sally Yates from testifying in the House investigation, telling the former acting attorney general in a recent letter that officials believe her possible testimony are covered by presidential communication privilege.

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