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U.S. Presidential Debates 2016: 'No Doubt' Russia Used Cyberattacks, Says Clinton

By Katie Marie Davies

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David Goldman / AP

Sparks flew in the first U.S. presidential debate, with Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton declaring that Russian hackers were targeting the United States.

She faced off against Republican Party candidate Donald Trump in a televised debate focusing on "Securing America" on Monday night.

Debate moderator, American journalist Lester Holt, first brought Russia into discussion by questioning Clinton on recent cyber-attacks against U.S. institutions.

Officials from the U.S. Democratic National Committee (DNC) were targeted by a cyber attack in July which leaked of thousands of private emails. Some cyber security experts, and a

number of Democratic Party members, have accused Russia of sponsoring the attack. The White House has made no official accusations.

Clinton used the debate to repeat allegations that the Kremlin had organized the hack. "There's no doubt now that Russia has used cyber-attacks against all kinds of organizations in our country and I'm deeply concerned about this," Clinton said.

"This is one of their [Russia's] preferred methods of trying to wreak havoc and collect information."

Clinton, who served as secretary of state under U.S. President Barack Obama, also accused Trump of "encouraging" the attacks.

Trump had previously called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to find
the 30,000 emails
believed to be "missing"
from the data released in the DNC hack.

He denied that Russia had been proven to be behind the attacks.

"I don't think anybody knows it was Russia that broke into the DNC," Trump said. "It could be Russia but it could be China, it could be lots of people. It could be somebody that sits on their bed that weighs 400 pounds. You don't know who broke into the DNC."

Trump has previously been criticized for his admiration of Putin, having described him as a "strong leader" on several occasions. The businessman attempted to clarify his position in March, saying that, "strong doesn't mean good."

"Putin is a strong leader, absolutely," he said. "Now I don't say that in a good way or a bad way. I say it as a fact."

The Kremlin has denied all claims of its involvement in cyber-attacks against U.S. institutions as "absurd" and "insulting."

There will be two more debates before Americans head to the polls on Tuesday, Nov. 8. Record viewing figures of
some 100 million were predicted for the debate.

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