

US media warns of “Russian meddling” in Latin America

Alex González
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In the midst of growing tensions between the United States and Russia, sections of the US media are provocatively warning that Russia is bolstering its influence in Latin America at the expense of the US. These allegations are part of a broader crusade to beat the drums of war against Russia.

On April 8, the *Washington Post* published an article titled “The Soviet Union fought the Cold War in Nicaragua. Now Putin’s Russia is back,” alleging that a Russian compound in Managua, Nicaragua is a covert spying facility aimed against the United States.

The article reads, “The Nicaraguan government says it’s simply a tracking site of the Russian version of a GPS satellite system. But is it also an intelligence base intended to surveil the Americans?” Citing anonymous US officials, the article claims the goal of the new facility could be to intercept internet traffic running through the ARCOS 1 fiber-optic cable from Miami to Central America, supposedly in retaliation for the Obama administration’s scale-up of US and NATO troops near Russia’s borders in Eastern Europe.

In a similar article, the Washington, DC insider website *The Hill* claims Russian President Vladimir Putin is seeking to interfere in the Mexican elections in support of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), the leader and 2018 presidential candidate of the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena). The article openly admits there is no “hard evidence” to justify this allegation, but puts forward conjecture as fact.

The Hill quotes Christopher Wilson, deputy director of the Wilson Center Mexico Institute, who stated, “Russia meddles in elections, we know that...Russia’s biggest interest would be on wreaking some havoc on the U.S.-Mexico relationship.” Adapting himself to the neo-McCarthyite campaign being waged in the US,

Armando Ríos Peter, a Mexican senator for the Party of the Democratic Revolution, told the publication: “If [Russia] intervened in the United States, there’s every reason to think that Mexico is a target for attack.”

The United States ruling class wrote the book on “meddling” in Latin American affairs. Over the last century, the US has invaded several Latin American countries, orchestrated coups, backed right-wing deaths squads, and supported brutal dictators. Across Latin America, the words “Central Intelligence Agency” evoke memories of the most brutal and depraved crimes.

In Nicaragua, one of the two examples of alleged Russian meddling provided by the *Washington Post* and *The Hill*, the US backed the brutal dictatorship of the dynastic Somoza family for roughly three decades. After Anastasio Somoza’s removal from power in 1979, the US then supported the fascistic Contra rebels who murdered tens of thousands of peasants in the Nicaraguan Civil War. In the case of Mexico, US influence goes back to before the reign of Porfirio Díaz. The US has invaded Mexico three times and stole half of Mexico’s territory after the Mexican-American war of 1846-48.

More recently, it is US officials who have explicitly signaled that Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is not acceptable to the American ruling class. On April 5, Senator John McCain said: “If the election were tomorrow in Mexico, you would probably get a left-wing, anti-American president of Mexico. That can’t be good for America.”

John Kelly, Secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security, added: “It would not be good for America, or for Mexico.”

This amounts to an acknowledgement that the US is prepared to “meddle” in the Mexican elections. As CIA

Director Michael Pompeo stated at a speech Thursday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: “You know, we perform intelligence on [foreign] elections in the same way that we do with respect to everything else.”

US concerns against Russian meddling serve not only to promote the drive to war against Russia in Syria and Eastern Europe, but also to limit the influence of both Russia and China in Latin America, which US imperialism sees as its own “backyard.”

During the past decade, Russia has performed some naval drills with both Venezuela and Nicaragua and continues to give military and economic aid to the Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro. In 2015, Nicaragua’s parliament passed a resolution allowing Russian warships to dock in Nicaraguan ports, and the two countries are reportedly planning future joint military exercises. This comes nowhere near the regular military drills and billions of dollars spent by American imperialism in funding the region’s many right-wing governments.

In a February 3 article, the Wilson Center noted: “Russian military cooperation with the countries in the Western Hemisphere remains limited, and Moscow does not aspire to build a significant military presence in the region. Russia is unable to afford such a presence, and making a long-term financial commitment to Latin America is not the Kremlin’s goal.”

According to the Atlantic Council, Chinese trade in Latin America has increased by nearly 2,000 percent since 2000, and Latin America is collectively now China’s fourth largest trading partner. The Trump administration’s “America First” trade policies could further increase Chinese economic ties in the region as many Latin American countries seek to decrease their dependence on the US for fear of higher tariffs. Mexico currently sends over 80 percent of its manufacturing exports to the United States, with Nicaragua sending over 50 percent.

The US Army War College published a similar article in 2015 with regard to China titled, “Expanding the Rebalance: Confronting China in Latin America.” This article makes a similar case that Chinese influence is “creating economic interdependencies and undermining US influence and generating further political, social and economic tensions.”

The warnings by the corporate press and military think tanks that Russia and China are expanding their influence in the region presages a deepening involvement of US imperialism in the region. The new campaign sends a message: the US will not tolerate any challenges to its self-proclaimed and unlimited right to exploit Latin America.



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