

Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin: When the White House fixed a Russian election

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For the past nine months, the Democratic Party and what passes for the liberal media have been spearheading a neo-McCarthyite campaign backed by powerful sections of the US intelligence apparatus and based on unsubstantiated allegations that the Russian government and President Vladimir Putin interfered in the US presidential election.

Trump is being presented by these forces as a political stooge of Putin, with Moscow routinely labeled a “hostile foreign power.” This contrived scandal has been bolstered by FBI and congressional inquiries organized to investigate claims that the Trump election campaign colluded with the Russian government to damage the campaign of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and tip the election to Trump.

Behind this political witch hunt is a ferocious struggle over US imperialist foreign policy, centering on opposition to Trump’s inclination to seek improved relations with Russia and shift, at least for the present, from the virulently hostile and aggressive policy toward Moscow carried out by the Obama administration.

To fuel this campaign, the public has been inundated with sanctimonious expressions of horror and shock that a country would seek to manipulate elections taking place in another country. Republican Senator John McCain described Russia’s alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential election an “act of war.” Last week, in his testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, fired FBI Director James Comey said of Russia, “they will be back... they are coming for America.”

The presentation of the US electoral system as a model of democracy is a transparent fraud. It is a system that legally sanctions the buying of candidates, parties and elections by a super-rich financial oligarchy. Moreover, the Democratic Party emails allegedly hacked and leaked by the Russian government documented real, and illegal, manipulation of the electoral process, in the form of efforts by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign to sabotage the campaign of Bernie Sanders for the party’s presidential nomination.

When it comes to manipulating foreign elections, the American ruling elite and its media and political stooges know whereof they speak. The United States is the world leader in interfering in other countries’ elections. Professor Dov Levin of Carnegie Mellon University has assembled a database documenting as many as 81 occasions between 1946 and 2000 when Washington interfered in elections in other countries. This number does not include military coups or regime-change efforts following the election of candidates the US opposed, as in Iran, Congo, Guatemala, Chile and many other nations.

In fact, the number of countries whose elections have been affected by US meddling is much higher. There is scarcely a country, large or small, where the CIA, the State Department, the Pentagon or their various nongovernmental agencies, including the AFL-CIO, have not intervened in an attempt to obtain the election result desired by Washington. This includes nominal “allies” such as Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Australia and Japan.

One fairly recent election stands out for the brazen and open manner in

which the United States government, directed from the White House, intervened to put its candidate in office in a foreign land. The targeted country was none other than Russia.

In 1996, the White House and President Bill Clinton personally mounted a massive campaign to secure the reelection of Boris Yeltsin, whose comprador regime had been installed in the first place to oversee the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism. One of the ironies of the current contrived scandal over alleged Russian intervention in the 2016 election is the fact that the supposed victim, Hillary Clinton, is the wife of the president who oversaw the very real interference by Washington in the Russian election 20 years earlier.

By the time Yeltsin announced in early 1996 that he would be running for a second term in the presidential election scheduled for that summer, he had become one of the most despised figures in Russia, having presided over the catastrophic consequences of the privatization of the Russian economy. The impact included a GDP decline of 50 percent, hyperinflation, rampant corruption, skyrocketing violent crime, the collapse of medical services, food and fuel shortages, nonpayment of wages and pensions, and a plunge in life expectancy. Added to this toxic mix was Yeltsin’s highly unpopular war with Chechnya.

By late 1993, these policies had provoked such massive opposition that Yeltsin, by means of a dictatorial decree, dissolved the parliament. In response, opponents in Moscow took over government buildings. To put down the rebellion, Yeltsin, using critical intelligence provided by Washington, called out the military, shelled the parliament building and in the ensuing bombing and shooting killed an estimated 2,000 people. This was the supposed hero of democracy whom the United States backed in the 1996 election.

The oligarchs and generals who supported Yeltsin urged him to cancel or postpone the election, fearing that Gennady Zyuganov, the right-wing nationalist leader of the Stalinist Communist Party, would win. Instead, US political operatives were sent to Russia to rescue Yeltsin from likely political defeat.

Far from concealing this intervention, the American ruling elite boasted of its success after Yeltsin’s victory. *Time* magazine made it the cover story of its July 15, 1996 edition.

The ten-page article detailed the behind-the-scenes operations of three American political operatives who helped Yeltsin achieve a victory “that will keep reform in Russia alive.” The three Americans were Joe Shumate, George Gorton and Richard Dresner.

Joe Shumate was the former deputy chief of staff under California Republican Governor Pete Wilson. He later went on to serve as a political consultant for various California Republican politicians.

George Gorton was a Republican political consultant who served on the national campaigns of presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. Besides his work on Yeltsin’s campaign, he helped lead national political campaigns in Panama, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Canada. As the national college director for the Committee to Reelect President

Nixon, he was implicated during the Watergate scandal for paying students to infiltrate antiwar groups.

Richard Dresner was a New York-based political consultant who had earlier joined with Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's principal political aide, to help Clinton get elected governor of Arkansas.

These three Americans arrived in Russia in late February 1996 and worked for four months, from March 1 to the presidential election held on July 3. They were paid \$250,000 plus all expenses and had an unlimited budget for polling, focus groups and other research.

To hide their identities, they described themselves as representing Americans eager to sell thin-screen televisions in Russia. They were housed in a government-secured hotel guarded by policemen armed with machine guns.

Based upon their initial polling, they determined that Yeltsin was favored by only 6 percent of the electorate and was "trusted" as a competent leader by an even smaller proportion. "Stalin had higher positives and lower negatives than Yeltsin," said Dresner.

"We actually tested the two in polls and focus groups. More than 60 percent of the electorate believed Yeltsin was corrupt; more than 65 percent believed he had wrecked the economy. We were in a deep, deep hole."

At about the same time that the American political operatives were arriving in Moscow, the International Monetary Fund, at the "urging" of the US, granted a \$10.2 billion loan to Russia that enabled the government to spend huge sums paying long-overdue back wages and pensions to millions of Russians, with some checks arriving shortly before the election.

Based upon their focus groups, the Americans determined that most voters worried about civil war. "That allowed us to move beyond simple Red-bashing," says Shumate. "That's why Yeltsin and his surrogates and our advertising all highlighted the possibility of unrest if Yeltsin lost. Many people felt some nostalgia for what the communists had done for Russia and no one liked the president—but they liked the possibility of riots and class warfare even less... 'Stick with Yeltsin and at least you'll have calm'—that was the line we wanted to convey," said Dresner.

Although the Americans' negative ads, media manipulation and dirty tricks proved helpful in closing this large gap, the intervention of President Bill Clinton was desperately needed, particularly because Yeltsin was rejecting much of the Americans' advice.

As *Time* wrote: "But Yeltsin resisted—and that caused the team to reach out to Bill Clinton's all-purpose political aide, Dick Morris.

"Communicating in code—Clinton was called the governor of California, Yeltsin the governor of Texas—the Americans sought Morris' help. They had earlier worked together to script Clinton's summit meeting with Yeltsin in mid-April. The main goal then was to have Clinton swallow hard and say nothing as Yeltsin lectured him about Russia's great power prerogatives. 'The idea was to have Yeltsin stand up to the West, just like the Communists insisted they would do if Zyuganov won,' says a Clinton administration official. 'By having Yeltsin posture during that summit without Clinton's getting bent out of shape, Yeltsin portrayed himself as a leader to be reckoned with. That helped Yeltsin in Russia, and we were for Yeltsin.'"

The *Time* article further states, "The American team wanted Clinton to call Yeltsin to urge that he appear in his ads. The request reached Clinton—that much is known—but no one will say whether the call was made."

Though the *Time* article leaves Clinton's role unanswered, Morris, who later became a vocal critic of the Clintons, said during an interview in September 2016 on "America Talks Live," "When I worked for Clinton, Clinton called me and said, 'I want to get Yeltsin elected as president of Russia against Gennady Zyuganov,' who was the communist who was running against him. Putin was Zyuganov's major backer.

"It became public that Clinton would meet with me every week. We would review the polling that was being done for Yeltsin by a colleague of mine, who was sending it to me every week. He, Clinton and I would go through it and Bill would pick up the hotline and talk to Yeltsin and tell him what commercials to run, where to campaign, what positions to take. He basically became Yeltsin's political consultant."

As the campaign was drawing to a close, the American political operatives were observed by a *Time* reporter. With their cover blown, the operatives agreed to provide *Time* with an exclusive story detailing their operation, provided the story not be published until after the election.

Two weeks after Yeltsin's stunning victory, the *Time* article was published and concluded by stating: "Last week Russia took a historic step away from its totalitarian past. Democracy triumphed—and along with it came the tools of modern campaigns, including the trickery and slickery Americans know so well. If those tools are not always admirable, the result they helped achieve in Russia surely is. But just as in America, the consultants can only take Yeltsin so far."

This *Time* article was later followed by a featured story on the ABC News program "Nightline." Additionally, these events were depicted in the 2003 Showtime movie titled *Spinning Boris*, starring Jeff Goldblum and Liev Schreiber.

Many believe that despite the pervasive interference by the US in the 1996 election, it still was not enough to elect Yeltsin, and that he actually lost. They view the result as an outright fraud, supported by the US.

Comments purportedly made in February 2012 by then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev lend credence to this view. A *Time* article dated February 24, 2012 indicated that during a meeting with leaders of opposition parties who were complaining about recent election fraud, Medvedev said that Yeltsin was not the winner of the 1996 election.

According to the article, Sergei Babkin, the leader of an opposition party, was the first to reveal the details of that closed-door meeting during a radio interview the following day. "He (Medvedev) brought up the presidential elections of 1996 and said, 'There is hardly any doubt who won [that race]. It was not Boris Nikolaevich Yeltsin.'"

If one accepts this view, it could be asserted that the true purpose of publicizing the involvement of American political operatives in Yeltsin's campaign was to provide a sophisticated cover for a more direct subversion of the 1996 Russian election—the theft by fraud of the Russian presidency.

This history underscores the utter hypocrisy of the CIA/Democratic Party/media effort to whip up anti-Russian hysteria in order to prepare aggression against Russia for its alleged involvement in what historically has been America's specialty—determining the outcome of other countries' elections.



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