

The US government and the Russian election

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Over the past year, the Democratic Party and leading American media outlets have been monomaniacally focused on unsubstantiated allegations that the 2016 US elections were undermined by Russian interference.

It is worth considering these claims as one assesses the response to the decision of Russian officials to block Alexei Navalny from participating in the upcoming presidential election. The move has been met with self-righteous denunciations in the American and international press. Newspapers have run articles lauding Navalny as an “anti-corruption crusader” and the “democratic” face of “popular opposition” to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The *Washington Post* published an editorial condemning the move to bar Navalny. It declared that Navalny’s “real offenses were helping to lead opposition” to Putin’s “authoritarian” government and “bringing out tens of thousands of followers in cities across Russia this year to denounce the regime.”

The hypocrisy and cynicism here are breathtaking. While the alleged Russian “meddling” in the US elections consists of several tens of thousands of dollars in Facebook advertising, Navalny is almost entirely a creature of the US State Department.

A graduate of the Yale World Fellows Program, Navalny is listed on Yale’s website as a cofounder of the Democratic Alternative Movement, an organization shown in a leaked diplomatic cable to have received funding from the US government-backed National Endowment for Democracy, a fact it had concealed for “fear of appearing compromised by an American connection.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* gives no support to the Putin government’s crackdown on political opposition, but the posturing of the US press in defense of “human rights” and “democracy” is preposterous. The United States, the most unequal and undemocratic developed country in the world, the leading force for war and

dictatorship worldwide, is in no position to lecture others about “democracy.”

There is no other country that intervenes in the political affairs of foreign states so directly, regularly and shamelessly as the United States. American foreign policy is one massive intervention in the politics of other countries, running the gamut from propaganda, destabilization, financing of opposition parties, electoral fraud and coups to military bombardment and occupation, all of which taken together have killed more people than any government since Nazi Germany.

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 operations following the election of candidates the US opposed, as in Iran, Congo, Guatemala, Chile and many other nations.

The intervention of the US government and President Bill Clinton personally to secure the reelection of Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 Russian election was so brazen that *Time* magazine featured on its July 15, 1996 cover a caricature of Yeltsin holding an American flag, accompanied by the headline “Yanks to the Rescue.”

For its part, the US electoral system—with the vast influence exerted by billionaires and corporations and the maze of antidemocratic rules that impose huge hurdles for third-party candidates—blocks the overwhelming majority of the US population from having their voices heard.

Reporting on his visit to the United States this month, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights declared, “There is no other developed country where so many voters are disenfranchised...and where ordinary voters ultimately have so little impact on political outcomes.”

Despite substantial evidence that the entire Navalny

campaign represents an effort by the US intelligence agencies to intervene in Russian politics, the US press has found a way to tie Putin's moves against Navalny to the claim that the Kremlin is subverting American democracy.

"Even as he outlaws political competition in Russia, Mr. Putin continues to oversee attempts to undermine and tilt elections in the West," wrote the *Washington Post* in its editorial. "For him, democratic contests are a vulnerability, to be avoided at home and exploited abroad. In that sense, Western governments and Russia's democrats have a common cause in countering Mr. Putin."

According to the intelligence agencies for which the *Post* is a mouthpiece, the Russian government sought to intervene in the US election by promoting third-party candidates. Last week, the Senate Intelligence Committee announced that it is investigating Jill Stein, the Green Party's 2016 presidential candidate, on the grounds that her campaign received coverage on RT, the Russian-based TV network. This can be seen as nothing other than an effort to intimidate third parties and their supporters.

Through an incredible sleight of hand, the *Post* denounces the suppression of a third-party candidate in Russia while legitimizing efforts to brand supporters of the Green Party in the United States as traitors.

There is another problem with the official presentation of Navalny as the voice of popular opposition to the Russian oligarchy—the fact that he is a right-wing extremist who enjoys only marginal support among the Russian electorate.

While masking his right-wing politics behind the catchall of opposition to corruption, Navalny has a long history of extreme nationalism, connections to neo-Nazi groups, and the promotion of racist conceptions. In one YouTube video, he compares minorities within Russia to "cockroaches," adding that while cockroaches can be killed with a slipper, for humans he recommends a pistol. During the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Navalny repeatedly called Georgians "rodents" and demanded the eviction of all Georgians from Russia.

Writing in *Salon*, Danielle Ryan noted that while the US-aligned press hails Navalny as a hero, "What is reported less often about Navalny are his nationalist leanings, ties to neo-Nazi groups, xenophobic

comments and extreme anti-immigrant views. References to Navalny's nationalism in the West are usually buried or brushed off, while the headlines sing his praises."

The State Department's money is indeed backed up by overwhelmingly uncritical support in the US and international press. The *New York Times* has published 387 articles referencing Navalny, the *Washington Post* has published 344 and the *Financial Times* has run 299.

Despite the international coverage his campaign receives, and broad popular hostility to social inequality, which is almost as high in Russia as it is in the United States, Navalny has the support of just two percent of the electorate, according to a recent independent poll.

The political conflict between Putin and Navalny ultimately represents a struggle within the Russian kleptocracy, into which the United States is forcefully intervening. It is up to the working class of Russia to sweep away Putin and the oligarchy for which he speaks, not the US State Department and intelligence agencies.



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