

Demands for US intervention against “Russian meddling” in Mexico’s presidential election

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Leading United States and Mexican politicians, along with prominent media outlets, are reviving a campaign over alleged Russian interference in the upcoming Mexican presidential elections. In what is now a well-rehearsed theme, Russia is accused of using social media to “sow divisions,” this time to favor the candidacy of Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the “left” National Regeneration Movement (Morena).

In what amounts to a demand for direct US intervention in Mexico’s July presidential election, a bipartisan group of three US senators addressed a letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on the eve of his departure for Mexico Thursday on the first leg of a Latin American tour.

Democratic Senators Robert Menendez and Tim Kaine, along with Republican Marco Rubio—all members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere—repeated unsubstantiated charges of Russian “meddling” in Mexico’s election, adding that this was “simply the latest chapter of Russia’s malign influence throughout Latin America that threatens to destabilize the region.”

In response, the three urged Tillerson to strengthen “democracy and governance” programs run by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an agency that has repeatedly intervened in the region to promote politicians and parties aligned with Washington, performing overtly the kind of operations previously carried out by the CIA.

Claims of Russian interference in Mexico were initially aired last year as a way of preparing public opinion for war against Russia. The campaign is being rekindled under conditions in which López Obrador continues to be the presidential frontrunner, with a

recent poll showing him with twice the support of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate, former finance minister José Antonio Meade Kuribreña.

As with allegations of Russian interference in the US presidential election, the Brexit referendum and Catalonia’s independence vote, the claims are entirely unsubstantiated and rest largely on the unquestioned word of intelligence agencies. In a video initially posted by the Mexican newspaper *Reforma* in early January, US National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster said that there were “initial signs” of a Russian campaign to influence Mexico’s presidential election. The fact that McMaster did not offer any concrete evidence did not prevent the US and Mexican media from parroting claims that Russia is seeking to “exploit divisions” to swing the election in favor of López Obrador.

In a recent article titled “A Mexican presidential candidate is getting an unexpected boost from Trump—and Putin,” the *Washington Post* writes: “Mexicans don’t need Russian social-media manipulators to tell them that their democracy is flawed and their politicians are prone to corruption...But in an election that could turn out to be close (much like the United States), a little help from Russians amplifying the message on social media could end up making a decisive difference.”

A *Bloomberg* piece, titled “Don’t Let Mexico’s Elections Become Putin’s Next Target,” openly calls for Mexican authorities to take steps to monitor and censor the Internet, particularly social media. “Mexico remains extremely vulnerable to the Russian interference that occurred in the 2016 US election,”

writes Bloomberg. “Facebook, Twitter and Google are important sources of information for many Mexicans...Mexico needs to learn from the US experience and safeguard its electoral process from outside tampering.”

Several articles have focused on the role that RT (formerly known as Russia Today) has played in allegedly promoting the López Obrador campaign. Reports point to RT’s critical coverage of the Mexican government and airtime given to John Ackerman, a researcher at Mexico’s National Autonomous University (UNAM) and supporter of López Obrador. López Obrador has said that he would tap Ackerman’s wife, Irma Sandoval, for the post of Secretariat of the Civil Service if he were to win.

“That a future cabinet member of the presidential campaign frontrunner is married to a close collaborator of Russia Today is a dilemma that would alarm any country in the world during our times,” complains the newspaper *El Universal*, in what amounts to a neo-McCarthyite smear.

In November, the US Justice Department forced RT America to register as a “foreign agent” because of its alleged intervention in the 2016 elections.

Leading members of the PRI, including the president of the PRI National Executive Committee, Enrique Ochoa Reza, have taken up these unsubstantiated allegations in an effort to discredit López Obrador. Ochoa Reza has admitted that the PRI does not have any data, nor has it conducted any independent investigations. Instead, basing itself solely on what has been published by the *Washington Post*, the party has urged the National Electoral Institute (INE) to open an investigation.

In an escalation of the campaign to link López Obrador to Moscow, last week thousands of residents in the state of Puebla received anonymous calls ahead of the candidate’s state tour. The calls played a pre-recorded message claiming that López Obrador wanted to dismantle the Peña Nieto administration’s energy “reform” in order to deliver Mexico’s oil to Russia.

López Obrador has reacted to the campaign by openly mocking it. He created a video on social media with him looking out to the sea in Veracruz. “I am waiting for the Russian submarine with gold from Moscow,” he says jokingly. “I am now Andres Manuelovich.”

In a country that has been under the thumb of US

imperialism for over a century, claims of “Russian meddling” strike a particularly desperate and false note. As media outlets openly acknowledge, Mexico’s social crisis was not fabricated by Moscow. Rather, the entrenched inequality in the country is the product of the capitalist system’s subordination of the needs of the working class—whether it be jobs, education, health care, retirement or cultural life—to the enrichment of a tiny layer of the population.

By whipping up fears of the Russian bogeyman, the US government is in fact guilty of the very actions that Russia is being demonized for: interfering in the election of another country to push an outcome that is more suitable to its own interests.

Morena’s program will do nothing to address the root cause of Mexico’s social ills. However, dominant sections of the US and Mexican bourgeoisie are vehemently opposed even to their tepid and cosmetic proposals and to the possibility that, despite López Obrador’s best efforts, the working class could quickly escape Morena’s grip and seek more radical measures to guarantee its social rights.

The July Mexican presidential elections promise to be an explosive event. Faced with an unpopular candidate, the PRI may seize on allegations of “Russian meddling” to cripple Morena’s electoral rights, or even to overturn the elections.

Claims of social media abuse by Russia to “sow divisions” and spread “fake news” are part of an international campaign to censor the Internet to prevent social discontent from intersecting with a socialist program. To protect the democratic right of the working class to free and open sources of information, the *World Socialist Web Site* has launched an International Coalition to Fight Internet Censorship for socialist, left-wing, and progressive websites.



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