

Indictment of Russian nationals used to campaign for censorship and war

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On Friday, the US Justice Department announced charges against 13 Russian nationals and three organizations for allegedly entering into a conspiracy to “interfere in the US political system.” The indictments are the first charges related to the 2016 elections filed by the investigation headed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, the former head of the FBI.

The indictments are primarily aimed at providing the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and major broadcast media outlets with fodder for their claim of massive Russian involvement in US politics, including through the manipulation of the 2016 elections. The campaign has been used to justify a regime of Internet censorship and condition the population for war against Russia.

The *New York Times* led its report on the indictments with a breathless proclamation that it shows “a sophisticated network designed to subvert the 2016 election and to support the Trump campaign.” Agents of the Russian government, the indictment supposedly proves, “posed as political activists and used the flash points of immigration, religion and race to manipulate a campaign in which those issues were already particularly divisive.”

There is much in the indictment that is highly suspicious, including one alleged transcript of a supposedly highly-trained agent extensively confessing her activities to family members as an excuse for having to work late. However, even if everything in it were taken at face value, it amounts to very little.

The document alleges that a Russian organization called the Internet Research Agency, tasked with carrying out operations all over the world and in Russia itself, had a monthly budget of approximately one million dollars.

By one estimate previously reported by the *New York*

Times and *Washington Post*, the Russian government supposedly spent about \$100,000 in ads on Facebook and Twitter during the 2016 election campaign to promote various issues. This figure constitutes approximately one-one thousandth of one percent of the total \$6.5 billion spent in the 2016 US election cycle.

The alleged foreign “meddling” is nothing but a rounding error compared to the massive election spending of billionaires and millionaires, who have been given almost unlimited influence by the 2010 Citizens United ruling and subsequent Supreme Court decisions.

Moreover, when it comes to meddling in the internal affairs of other countries, neither Russia, nor anyone else for that matter, can hold a candle to the United States.

During the 1990s, post-Soviet Russia was largely transformed into an American protectorate and an appendage of the CIA and US corporations. The United States buys candidates, creates parties, and sets up NGOs all over the world for the purpose of manipulating elections. And if these are not successful, it resorts to war and regime-change operations.

In a leaked December 2013 speech, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland admitted that the United States “invested over \$5 billion” to build “good governance” in Ukraine since 1991. A substantial portion of this \$5 billion was spent in promoting the 2013–2014 regime-change operation in Ukraine, which helped spark the civil war that continues to rage in that country.

The over-arching framework of the indictments, as with the anti-Russian campaign as a whole, is the claim that social and political conflict within the United States is the product of foreign interference. In announcing the indictment, Deputy Attorney General

Rod Rosenstein declared that “Russian conspirators want to promote discord in the United States and undermine public confidence in democracy,” adding, “We must not allow them to succeed.”

The American population does not need Vladimir Putin to undermine “public confidence in democracy.” After all, as Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights said after a visit to the United States last year, “There is no other developed country where so many voters are disenfranchised ... and where ordinary voters ultimately have so little impact on political outcomes.”

The American political establishment did not need the Russian government to organize the theft of the 2000 elections, handed to George W. Bush through a 5–4 vote in the Supreme Court, a decision accepted by the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party, in alliance with dominant factions of the military-intelligence apparatus, has focused its opposition to the Trump administration not on its reactionary domestic policy or war-mongering, but on its supposed collusion with Russia. This has been used to both fight out conflicts within the ruling class over foreign policy and to create the framework for domestic repression.

The greatest fear of the Democrats no less than the Republicans is not Putin, but the growth of opposition within the United States. Significantly, while the indictment claims that Russian “meddling” was largely aimed at disparaging Hillary Clinton to assist Trump, it goes on at considerable length to detail how Russian agents supposedly promoted left-wing political organizations, anti-war sentiment, and opposition to the US two-party system.

The indictment alleges that Russian agents aimed to “support Bernie Sanders,” and encourage Americans to “vote for a third-party US Presidential candidate.” One of the posts from an allegedly fraudulent “Russian” page read, “Choose peace and vote for Jill Stein. Trust me, it’s not a wasted vote.” Another called on American Muslims to boycott the election, declaring that Hillary Clinton “wants to continue the war on Muslims in the Middle East and voted yes for Invading Iraq.”

The present campaign has many similarities to the McCarthyite witch-hunts against “communist agents,” and the declarations by former FBI director J. Edgar

Hoover and Southern segregationists that the Civil Rights movement was the work of malevolent “outside agitators.”

In the context of a series of policy documents indicating that “cyber-warfare” would constitute grounds for military retaliation, the indictments also escalate the danger of US military conflict with Russia. Rosenstein declared, “The defendants allegedly conducted what they called information warfare against the United States.”

It will also be used to intensify the demand that internet companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter take even more aggressive action to censor information and work with the state to suppress free speech online.



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