

U.S. Interference in Election Campaigns: Shakespeare Said It Best

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Much ado about nothing.

That's the "Russian interference" in the 2016 American election.

A group of Russians operating from a building in St. Petersburg, we are told in a February 16 US government indictment, sent out tweets, Facebook and YouTube postings, etc. to gain support for Trump and hurt Clinton even though most of these messages did not even mention Trump or Clinton; and many were sent out before Trump was even a candidate.

The Russian-interference indictment is predicated, apparently, on the idea that the United States is a backward, Third-World, Banana Republic, easily manipulated.

If the Democrats think it's so easy and so effective to sway voters in the United States why didn't the party do better?

At times the indictment tells us that the online advertising campaign, led by the shadowy Internet Research Agency of Russia, was meant to divide the American people, not influence the 2016 election. The Russians supposedly wished to cause "divisiveness" in the American people, particularly around controversial issues such as immigration, politics, energy policy, climate change, and race. "The indictment alleges that the Russian conspirators want to promote discord in the United States and undermine public confidence in democracy," said Rod J. Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general overseeing the inquiry. "We must not allow them to succeed."

Imagine that - the American people, whom we all know are living in blissful harmony and fraternity without any noticeable anger or hatred, would become divided! Damn those Russkis!

After the election of Trump as president in November 2016, the defendants "used false U.S. personas to organize and coordinate U.S. political rallies in support of then president-elect Trump, while simultaneously using other false U.S. personas to organize and coordinate U.S. political rallies protesting the results of the 2016 U.S. presidential election."

The indictment also states that defendants in New York organized a demonstration designed to "show your support for President-Elect Donald Trump" held on or about November 12, 2016. At the same time, defendants and their co-conspirators, organized another rally in New York called "Trump is NOT my President".

Much of the indictment and the news reports of the past year are replete with such

contradictions, lending credence to the suggestion that what actually lay behind the events was a “click-bait” scheme wherein certain individuals earned money based on the number of times a particular website is accessed. The mastermind behind this scheme is reported to be a Russian named **Yevgeny Prigozhin** of the above-named Internet Research Agency, which is named in the indictment.

The Russian operation began four years ago, well before Trump entered the presidential race, a fact that he quickly seized on in his defense. “Russia started their anti-US campaign in 2014, long before I announced that I would run for President,” he [wrote on Twitter](#). “The results of the election were not impacted. The Trump campaign did nothing wrong – no collusion!”

Point 95 of the Indictment summarizes the “click-bait” scheme as follows:

Defendants and their co-conspirators also used the accounts to receive money from real U.S. persons in exchange for posting promotions and advertisements on the ORGANIZATION-controlled social media pages. Defendants and their co-conspirators typically charged certain U.S. merchants and U.S. social media sites between 25 and 50 U.S. dollars per post for promotional content on their popular false U.S. persona accounts, including Being Patriotic, Defend the 2nd, and Blacktivist.

Although there’s no doubt that the Kremlin favored Trump over Clinton, the whole “Russian influence” storm may be based on a misunderstanding of commercial activities of a Russian marketing company in US social networks.

Here’s some Real interference in election campaigns

[Slightly abridged version of chapter 18 in William Blum’s [Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower](#); see it for notes]

Philippines, 1950s:

Flagrant manipulation by the CIA of the nation’s political life, featuring stage-managed elections with extensive disinformation campaigns, heavy financing of candidates, writing their speeches, drugging the drinks of one of the opponents of the CIA-supported candidate so he would appear incoherent; plotting the assassination of another candidate. The oblivious *New York Times* declared that “It is not without reason that the Philippines has been called “democracy’s showcase in Asia”.

Italy, 1948-1970s:

Multifarious campaigns to repeatedly sabotage the electoral chances of the Communist Party and ensure the election of the Christian Democrats, long-favored by Washington.

Lebanon, 1950s:

The CIA provided funds to support the campaigns of President Camille Chamoun and selected parliamentary candidates; other funds were targeted against candidates who had shown less than total enchantment with US interference in Lebanese politics.

Indonesia, 1955:

A million dollars were dispensed by the CIA to a centrist coalition's electoral campaign in a bid to cut into the support for President Sukarno's party and the Indonesian Communist Party.

Vietnam, 1955:

The US was instrumental in South Vietnam canceling the elections scheduled to unify North and South because of the certainty that the North Vietnamese communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, would easily win.

British Guiana/Guyana, 1953-64:

For 11 years, two of the oldest democracies in the world, Great Britain and the United States, went to great lengths to prevent Cheddi Jagan - three times the democratically elected leader - from occupying his office. Using a wide variety of tactics - from general strikes and disinformation to terrorism and British legalisms - the US and Britain forced Jagan out of office twice during this period.

Japan, 1958-1970s:

The CIA emptied the US treasury of millions to finance the conservative Liberal Democratic Party in parliamentary elections, "on a seat-by-seat basis", while doing what it could to weaken and undermine its opposition, the Japanese Socialist Party. The 1961-63 edition of the State Department's annual *Foreign Relations of the United States*, published in 1996, includes an unprecedented disclaimer that, because of material left out, a committee of distinguished historians thinks "this published compilation does not constitute a 'thorough, accurate, and reliable documentary record of major United States foreign policy decisions'" as required by law. The deleted material involved US actions from 1958-1960 in Japan, according to the State Department's historian.

Nepal, 1959:

By the CIA's own admission, it carried out an unspecified "covert action" on behalf of B.P. Koirala to help his Nepali Congress Party win the national parliamentary election. It was Nepal's first national election ever, and the CIA was there to initiate them into the wonderful workings of democracy.

Laos, 1960:

CIA agents stuffed ballot boxes to help a hand-picked strongman, Phoumi Nosavan, set up a pro-American government.

Brazil, 1962:

The CIA and the Agency for International Development expended millions of dollars in federal and state elections in support of candidates opposed to leftist President João Goulart, who won anyway.

Dominican Republic, 1962:

In October 1962, two months before election day, US Ambassador John Bartlow Martin got together with the candidates of the two major parties and handed them a written notice, in

Spanish and English, which he had prepared. It read in part: “The loser in the forthcoming election will, as soon as the election result is known, publicly congratulate the winner, publicly recognize him as the President of all the Dominican people, and publicly call upon his own supporters to so recognize him. ... Before taking office, the winner will offer Cabinet seats to members of the loser’s party. (They may decline).”

As matters turned out, the winner, Juan Bosch, was ousted in a military coup seven months later, a slap in the face of democracy which neither Martin nor any other American official did anything about.

Guatemala, 1963:

The US overthrew the regime of General Miguel Ydigoras because he was planning to step down in 1964, leaving the door open to an election; an election that Washington feared would be won by the former president, liberal reformer and critic of US foreign policy, Juan José Arévalo. Ydigoras’s replacement made no mention of elections.

Bolivia, 1966:

The CIA bestowed \$600,000 upon President René Barrientos and lesser sums to several right-wing parties in a successful effort to influence the outcome of national elections. Gulf Oil contributed two hundred thousand more to Barrientos.

Chile, 1964-70:

Major US interventions into national elections in 1964 and 1970, and congressional elections in the intervening years. Socialist Salvador Allende fell victim in 1964, but won in 1970 despite a multimillion-dollar CIA operation against him. The Agency then orchestrated his downfall in a 1973 military coup.

Portugal, 1974-5:

In the years following the coup in 1974 by military officers who talked like socialists, the CIA revved up its propaganda machine while funneling many millions of dollars to support “moderate” candidates, in particular Mario Soares and his (so-called) Socialist Party. At the same time, the Agency enlisted social-democratic parties of Western Europe to provide further funds and support to Soares. It worked. The Socialist Party became the dominant power.

Australia, 1974-75:

Despite providing considerable support for the opposition, the United States failed to defeat the Labor Party, which was strongly against the US war in Vietnam and CIA meddling in Australia. The CIA then used “legal” methods to unseat the man who won the election, Edward Gough Whitlam.

Jamaica, 1976:

A CIA campaign to defeat social democrat Michael Manley’s bid for reelection, featuring disinformation, arms shipments, labor unrest, economic destabilization, financial support for the opposition, and attempts upon Manley’s life. Despite it all, he was victorious.

Panama, 1984, 1989:

In 1984, the CIA helped finance a highly questionable presidential electoral victory for one of Manuel Noriega's men. The opposition cried "fraud", but the new president was welcomed at the White House. By 1989, Noriega was no longer a Washington favorite, so the CIA provided more than \$10 million dollars to his electoral opponents.

Nicaragua, 1984, 1990:

In 1984, the United States, trying to discredit the legitimacy of the Sandinista government's scheduled election, covertly persuaded the leading opposition coalition to not take part. A few days before election day, some other rightist parties on the ballot revealed that US diplomats had been pressing them to drop out of the race as well. The CIA also tried to split the Sandinista leadership by placing phoney full-page ads in neighboring countries. But the Sandinistas won handily in a very fair election monitored by hundreds of international observers.

Six years later, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Washington's specially created stand-in for the CIA, poured in millions of dollars to defeat Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas in the February elections. NED helped organize the Nicaraguan opposition, UNO, building up the parties and organizations that formed and supported this coalition.

Perhaps most telling of all, the Nicaraguan people were made painfully aware that a victory by the Sandinistas would mean a continuation of the relentlessly devastating war being waged against them by Washington through their proxy army, the Contras.

Haiti, 1987-1988:

After the Duvalier dictatorship came to an end in 1986, the country prepared for its first free elections ever. However, Haiti's main trade union leader declared that Washington was working to undermine the left. US aid organizations, he said, were encouraging people in the countryside to identify and reject the entire left as "communist". Meanwhile, the CIA was involved in a range of support for selected candidates until the US Senate Intelligence Committee ordered the Agency to cease its covert electoral action.

Bulgaria, 1990-1991 and Albania, 1991-1992:

With no regard for the fragility of these nascent democracies, the US interfered broadly in their elections and orchestrated the ousting of their elected socialist governments.

Russia, 1996:

For four months (March-June), a group of veteran American political consultants worked secretly in Moscow in support of Boris Yeltsin's presidential campaign. Boris Yeltsin was being counted on to run with the globalized-free market ball and it was imperative that he cross the goal line. The Americans emphasized sophisticated methods of message development, polling, focus groups, crowd staging, direct-mailing, etc., and advised against public debates with the Communists. Most of all they encouraged the Yeltsin campaign to "go negative" against the Communists, painting frightening pictures of what the Communists would do if they took power, including much civic upheaval and violence, and, of course, a return to the worst of Stalinism. Before the Americans came on board, Yeltsin was favored by only six percent of the electorate. In the first round of voting, he edged the

Communists 35 percent to 32, and was victorious in the second round 54 to 40 percent.

Mongolia, 1996:

The National Endowment for Democracy worked for several years with the opposition to the governing Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRR, the former Communists) who had won the 1992 election to achieve a very surprising electoral victory. In the six-year period leading up to the 1996 elections, NED spent close to a million dollars in a country with a population of some 2.5 million, the most significant result of which was to unite the opposition into a new coalition, the National Democratic Union. Borrowing from Newt Gingrich's Contract With America, the NED drafted a "Contract With the Mongolian Voter", which called for private property rights, a free press and the encouragement of foreign investment. The MPRR had already instituted Western-style economic reforms, which had led to widespread poverty and wiped out much of the communist social safety net. But the new government promised to accelerate the reforms, including the privatization of housing. By 1998 it was reported that the US National Security Agency had set up electronic listening posts in Outer Mongolia to intercept Chinese army communications, and the Mongolian intelligence service was using nomads to gather intelligence in China itself.

Bosnia, 1998:

Effectively an American protectorate, with Carlos Westendorp - the Spanish diplomat appointed to enforce Washington's offspring: the 1995 Dayton peace accords - as the colonial Governor-General. Before the September elections for a host of offices, Westendorp removed 14 Croatian candidates from the ballot because of alleged biased coverage aired in Bosnia by neighboring Croatia's state television and politicking by ethnic Croat army soldiers. After the election, Westendorp fired the elected president of the Bosnian Serb Republic, accusing him of creating instability. In this scenario those who appeared to support what the US and other Western powers wished were called "moderates", and allowed to run for and remain in office. Those who had other thoughts were labeled "hard-liners", and ran the risk of a different fate. When Westendorp was chosen to assume this position of "high representative" in Bosnia in May 1997, *The Guardian* of London wrote that

"The US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, praised the choice. But some critics already fear that Mr. Westendorp will prove too lightweight and end up as a cipher in American hands."

Nicaragua, 2001

Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega was once again a marked man. US State Department officials tried their best to publicly associate him with terrorism, including just after September 11 had taken place, and to shamelessly accuse Sandinista leaders of all manner of violations of human rights, civil rights, and democracy. The US ambassador literally campaigned for Ortega's opponent, Enrique Bolaños. A senior analyst in Nicaragua for Gallup, the international pollsters, was moved to declare:

"Never in my whole life have I seen a sitting ambassador get publicly involved in a sovereign country's electoral process, nor have I ever heard of it."

At the close of the campaign, Bolaños announced:

“If Ortega comes to power, that would provoke a closing of aid and investment, difficulties with exports, visas and family remittances. I’m not just saying this. The United States says this, too. We cannot close our eyes and risk our well-being and work. Say yes to Nicaragua, say no to terrorism.”

In the end, the Sandinistas lost the election by about ten percentage points after steadily leading in the polls during much of the campaign.

Bolivia, 2002

The American *bête noire* here was Evo Morales, Amerindian, former member of Congress, socialist, running on an anti-neoliberal, anti-big business, and anti-coca eradication campaign. The US Ambassador declared: “The Bolivian electorate must consider the consequences of choosing leaders somehow connected with drug trafficking and terrorism.” Following September 11, painting Officially Designated Enemies with the terrorist brush was *de rigueur* US foreign policy rhetoric.

The US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs warned that American aid to the country would be in danger if Mr. Morales was chosen. Then the ambassador and other US officials met with key figures from Bolivia’s main political parties in an effort to shore up support for Morales’s opponent, Sanchez de Lozada. Morales lost the vote.

Slovakia, 2002

To defeat Vladimir Meciar, former prime minister, a man who did not share Washington’s *weltanschauung* about globalization, the US ambassador explicitly warned the Slovakian people that electing him would hurt their chances of entry into the European Union and NATO. The US ambassador to NATO then arrived and issued his own warning. The National Endowment for Democracy was also on hand to influence the election. Meciar lost.

El Salvador, 2004

Washington’s target in this election was Schafik Handal, candidate of the FMLN, the leftist former guerrilla group. He said he would withdraw El Salvador’s 380 troops from Iraq as well as reviewing other pro-US policies; he would also take another look at the privatizations of Salvadoran industries, and would reinstate diplomatic relations with Cuba. His opponent was Tony Saca of the incumbent Arena Party, a pro-US, pro-free market organization of the extreme right, which in the bloody civil war days had featured death squads and the infamous assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

During a February visit to the country, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, met with all the presidential candidates except Handal. He warned of possible repercussions in US-Salvadoran relations if Handal were elected. Three Republican congressmen threatened to block the renewal of annual work visas for some 300,000 Salvadorans in the United States if El Salvador opted for the FMLN. And Congressman Thomas Tancredo of Colorado stated that if the FMLN won, “it could mean a radical change” in US policy on remittances to El Salvador.

Washington’s attitude was exploited by Arena and the generally conservative Salvadoran

press, who mounted a scare campaign, and it became widely believed that a Handal victory could result in mass deportations of Salvadorans from the United States and a drop in remittances. Arena won the election with about 57 percent of the vote to some 36 percent for the FMLN.

After the election, the US ambassador declared that Washington's policies concerning immigration and remittances had nothing to do with any election in El Salvador. There appears to be no record of such a statement being made in public *before* the election when it might have had a profound positive effect for the FMLN.

Afghanistan, 2004

The US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, went around putting great pressure on one candidate after another to withdraw from the presidential race so as to insure the victory for Washington's man, the incumbent, Hamid Karzai in the October election. There was nothing particularly subtle about it. Khalilzad told each one what he wanted and then asked them what they needed. Karzai, a long-time resident in the United States, was described by the *Washington Post* as "a known and respected figure at the State Department and National Security Council and on Capitol Hill."

"Our hearts have been broken because we thought we could have beaten Mr. Karzai if this had been a true election," said Sayed Mustafa Sadat Ophyani, campaign manager for Younis Qanooni, Karzai's leading rival. "But it is not. Mr. Khalilzad is putting a lot of pressure on us and does not allow us to fight a good election campaign."

None of the major candidates actually withdrew from the election, which Karzai won with about 56 percent of the votes.

The Cold War Forever

On March 7 British police said that a former Russian double agent, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious on a bench in Salisbury, a city southwest of London. The police said that Skripal had been "targeted specifically" with a nerve agent. Skripal was jailed in Russia in 2006 for passing state secrets to Britain. He was released in 2010 as part of a spy swap.

Because nerve agents are complex to make, they are typically not made by individuals, but rather by states. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has said that the Skripal case had "echoes" of what happened to Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB Operative who British officials believe was poisoned in London by Russian agents in 2006, becoming the first victim of lethal polonium-210-induced acute radiation syndrome. Before he died, he spoke about the misdeeds of the Russian secret service and delivered public deathbed accusations that Russian president Vladimir Putin was behind his unusual malady.

Because of this the Skripal poisoning looks like an open-and-shut case.

But hold on. Skripal was sent to Britain by the Russian government eight years ago in an exchange of spies. Why would they want to kill him now, and with Putin's election coming up? And with the quadrennial football (soccer) World Cup coming up soon to be played in Russia. Moscow is very proud of this, publicizing it every day on their international television stations (RT in the US). A murder like this could surely put a serious damper on the Moscow festivities. Boris Johnson has already dropped a threat: "Thinking ahead to the World Cup

this July, this summer, I think it would be very difficult to imagine that UK representation at that event could go ahead in the normal way and we would certainly have to consider that.” It was totally predictable.

Because political opposition is weak, and no obvious threat to the ruling United Russia Party, what would the government gain by an assassination of an opposition figure?

So if Russia is not responsible for Skripal’s poisoning, who is? Well I have an idea. I can’t give you the full name of the guilty party, but its initials are CIA. US-Russian Cold Wars produce unmitigated animosity. As but one example, the United States boycotted the Olympics that were held in the Soviet Union in 1980, because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union then boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Ideology and Evolution

New York Times editorial page editor James Bennet recently declared: “I think we are pro-capitalism. The *New York Times* is in favor of capitalism because it has been the greatest engine of, it’s been the greatest anti-poverty program and engine of progress that we’ve seen.” The man is correct as far as he goes. But there are two historical factors that enter into this discussion that he fails to consider:

1. Socialism may well have surpassed capitalism as an anti-poverty program and engine of progress if the United States and other capitalist powers had not subverted, destabilized, invaded, and/or overthrown every halfway serious attempt at socialism in the world. Not one socialist-oriented government, from Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960s, to Nicaragua and Chile in the 1970s, to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the 1990s, to Haiti and Venezuela in the 2000s has been allowed to rise or fall based on its own merits or lack of same, or allowed to relax its guard against the ever-threatening capital imperialists.
2. Evolution: Social and economic systems have evolved along with human beings. Humankind has roughly gone from slavery to feudalism to capitalism. There’s no reason to assume that this evolution has come to a grinding halt, particularly given the deep-seated needs of the world in the face of one overwhelming problem after another, most caused by putting profit before people.

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This article was originally published on [The Anti-Empire Report](#).

Notes

1. [U.S. Grand Jury Indictment, February 16, 2018](#)
2. *New York Times*, February 16, 2018
3. [“Mueller Indictment – The “Russian Influence” Is A Commercial Marketing Scheme,”](#) *Moon of Alabama*, February 17, 2018
4. *The Independent* (London), March 6, 2018
5. *Huffington Post*, February 27, 2018

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