Outrage against Russian Electoral Meddling

What is the issue?

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- There is a palpable moral outrage in U.S. against the alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 Presidential elections.
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- Significantly, the outraged seem oblivious of the multiple U.S. sponsored electoral sabotages worldwide.
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Does the current moral outrage stand rational scrutiny?

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- U.S. President Trump and the Russian President Vladimir Putin recently met for a bilateral at Helsinki (Finland), which went well.
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- **Intelligence -** During the summit, Mr. Trump voiced that he didn't believe that Russia had any role in the 2016 electoral meddling.
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- As this was despite U.S. intelligence reports, there was widespread discontent within the U.S., and Mr. Trump had to retract his statement.
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- In this context, the false intelligence reports that caused the 2003 Iraqi war against Saddam Hussain seem conveniently forgotten.
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- **Diplomacy -** Usual joint press conference between big powers see global issues, like disarmament, conflicts in Syria and Ukraine being discussed.
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- But reporters at Helsinki had posed questions on the election meddling, which was clearly out of context and politically polarising.
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- In this context, it was prudent of Mr. Trump to have sounded positive of his Russian counterpart, as accusations would've doomed the summit.
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- Although, Mr. Trump could've sidestepped those questions (or rather just not had a summit currently), his responses were nonetheless decent enough.
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Why is the moral outrage against "Russia Gate" hypocritical?

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- Those outraged at the Russian role in sabotaging a democratic mandate within the U.S., claim ignorance to the various U.S. meddling activities elsewhere.
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- Notably, on various occasions, U.S. has influenced electoral outcomes and has even toppled democratically elected popular governments through its agents.
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- Significantly, during the 1996 Russian presidential elections, Clinton administration worked for the victory of incumbent "Boris Yeltsin".
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- Hefty IMF loans and a delegation of political consultants were dispatched to Russia just months before the election to defeat the resurgent Communists.
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- Notably, U.S. officials seemingly didn't even deny this meddling, as they were invested in the belief that they were spreading democracy through their acts.
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- Starting from the 1948 Italian elections, documented evidence of significant U.S. meddling has been found in about 81 elections worldwide till 2000.
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- In Italy, U.S. support had managed to sustain "Christian Democrats" in power from 1948-1994 and effectively stopped the advance of Communists.
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- Significantly, organisations like the CIA are alleged to have had dedicated branches within it to influence electoral outcomes elsewhere by all means.
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- Also, democratically elected leaders like Mosaddegh in Iran, Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala or Allende in Chile have been overthrown by U.S.

propped agents.
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How should the Russian meddling be viewed?

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- Election meddling is nothing new to USSR/Russia, which is said to have intervened at least 36 times in overseas elections between 1946 and 2000.
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- Even now, U.S. government sponsors several agencies such as the “National Endowment for Democracy” (NED) to influence foreign elections.
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- Notably, NED granted $23,000 in 2006 to a political adversary of Mr. Putin and two years ago $6.8 million to anti-Putin organisations in Russia.
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- Significantly, rather than allowing foreign populations to freely exercise their will, these interventions were designed to advance U.S. policy objectives.
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- Considering these historic precedence, it is important for all to view the current events in the broader context of real politicking.
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- Nonetheless, recognising the long history of states meddling in elections does not mean that it should be accepted much less condoned.
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Is the outrage against Trump’s Russian outreach political?

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- Trump has initiated a trade war with China, European Union, Canada, Mexico, and India – a policy that appeals to his supporters.
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- Although his logic that such an approach will generate more local jobs in the U.S. is spurious, he seems invested in his agenda.
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- Trump views that a Russian detente as a significant aspect of his trade policy, although it is likely to undermining the long held U.S. policy on Russia.
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- He also decries the need to muscle U.S. into central Asian politics (contrary to the bipartisan view), which is causing the political churn against Trump.
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Source: The Hindu

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