

THE WORLD

Russia says it's U.S. that's meddling

Moscow accuses Washington of interfering in its domestic affairs.

By SABRA AYLES

MOSCOW — When it comes to accusations that Russia hacked or otherwise interfered in last year's U.S. presidential election, the Kremlin has consistently denied any involvement. Now, some Russian officials are pointing the finger at Washington, saying it's America that is meddling in Moscow's domestic affairs. In fact, Kremlin officials say, the U.S. has been doing it for years. Hacking? The Kremlin's website receives daily attacks initiated "from within U.S. territories," Dmitry Peskov, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, told reporters earlier this month.

Information warfare and fake news? Washington-funded media outlets like Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America have long run what the Kremlin sees as an anti-Putin propaganda campaign aimed at supporting the Russian opposition. This week, the Russian parliament's upper chamber scheduled a hearing to examine the impact of alleged foreign meddling in Russia's domestic affairs. A new commission was set to focus on "protecting state sovereignty and preventing interference in Russia's domestic affairs." A special report prepared by a parliament committee said American media outlets engaged in biased and "anti-Russia" coverage of Russian parliamentary elections in 2016. Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and CNN in particular were criticized for their stories, which the report claimed unfairly "questioned the

democratic nature of the electoral system in Russia." "It is difficult to deny that during last year's parliamentary election campaign, these radio stations that are being financed from the United States were using journalism as a cover to spread one-sided propaganda and disinformation on the Russian electoral process," said Leonid Levin, a parliamentary deputy who presented the report to the parliament, known as the Duma, in May. Russian officials say what is at stake now are Russia's 2018 presidential and national elections. They said the government must act swiftly to counter any attempts by the United States and its allies to interfere. "There is no doubt that in the time that is left before the Russian presidential elections due next March, we will face very active and consistent attempts by the USA and its NATO allies to

influence the course of this election campaign," Konstantin Kosachev, the head of the Federation Council's Committee for International Relations, told reporters. Russia has long contended that the U.S. and its allies have improperly sought to influence the politics in those former Soviet and East Bloc nations that Moscow regards as properly within its perceived sphere of influence, including Ukraine, Georgia, Poland and the Baltic countries. In particular, Kremlin officials have pointed to the activities of U.S.-funded organizations such as the National Democratic Institute, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the International Republican Institute. The U.S. and other Western nations have spent billions of dollars over the last 25 years, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, supporting democracy-building

programs to support civil society, strengthen election processes, build political parties and promote independent media. While the West sees this as fostering democracy, Moscow has watched as these programs have indirectly given birth to anti-Kremlin movements in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. The Kremlin, and in particular, an increasingly authoritative Putin, viewed the pro-Western, "color revolutions" in the former Soviet republics of Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004 as U.S.-funded and organized street protests. Many of the groups which took to the streets during those revolutions were born out of Western-funded civil society, pro-democracy programs. In 2014, when hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian protesters in Kiev's central streets led to the ouster of a Moscow-friendly government, the Kremlin saw its closest neighbor and former ally sever its ties with Russia and turn toward Europe. Washington and European capitals threw their support behind the Ukrainian revolt against President Viktor Yanukovich, a strong Russia ally who was accused of bilking billions of dollars from the country's coffers. One of Putin's current fears, analysts say, is that the West, and particular the U.S., now intends to quietly promote the same kind of street protests to overthrow the Kremlin in favor of a Washington-friendly Russian leader. "Now there is one clear aggressor in Russia and it is the U.S., and the one clear defender is Russia," said Sergei Markov, a political analyst who is seen as sympathetic to the Kremlin. "Russia is not interested to propose its own puppet in the United States government, but the U.S. wants to repeat exactly what they did in Ukraine."

president Russia was said to be attempting to thwart in hacking efforts last year that targeted the Democratic National Committee and other entities. The Kremlin has reacted by cracking down on Western-funded non-governmental organizations in Russia. Groups receiving funding from outside Russia must now register as "foreign agents," a title that garners instant distrust in today's Russia. Independent media has been systematically shuttered, often through government pressure on landlords, or advertisers who risk losing their businesses if they continue to advertise with unsanctioned media. In the latest move, Roskomnadzor, Russia's telecom and information technology watchdog agency, announced on Friday that it would block the messaging social media app Telegram if the company did not comply with a Russian law requiring IT companies that collect data on Russian citizens to register within the country. Russia passed a law last year requiring social networks to store six months of user data on Russian servers, allowing the government access to any information contained there. Russia claims the law is a counter-terrorism tactic. Human rights groups assailed the law, calling it draconian. Telegram's developer, Pavel Durov, has so far refused the demands, prompting the Kremlin to accuse him of being "indifferent to terrorists and criminals." Durov is also the creator of VKontakte, Russia's version of Facebook. He fled the country in 2014 after clashing with the Kremlin over control of his internet company. "There might a small element of tit-for-tat" in the Duma's decision to create a commission to hold hearings on foreign meddling in Russian affairs, said Maxim V. Bratersky, a professor of international relations at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. Russians, for the most part, are not paying much attention to the ongoing U.S. hearing and investigations. Opinion polls have shown that few Russians believe the Kremlin was behind the alleged interference, either because they don't believe their government is capable of exerting such influence in the U.S., or because there is a sense that all countries try to influence their rivals' politics, so why should Russia not be involved?



Photographs by VICTOR MORIYAMA For The Times

MANY DRUG USERS from the neighborhood nicknamed Cracolandia resettled two blocks away in Princesa Isabel Square, where the municipal government estimates some 900 people are now living.

Brazil clears out 'Cracolandia'

But emptying the drug-infested area leaves addicts and others adrift.

By JILL LANGLOIS

SAO PAULO, Brazil — It was 6 a.m. on a Sunday when Rafael Matos da Silva was jolted awake by the repeated crashes of a battering ram against his front door. When he looked out the second-story window, police in riot gear yelled at him to come downstairs. He opened the door, and officers stormed inside, shoving Silva onto the sidewalk with other neighbors in their pajamas. The search turned up nothing, but the police told him to leave the door open because they might return. The operation last month was part of an effort by the new mayor of Sao Paulo to clean up the downtown neighborhood of Nova Luz, better known as Cracolandia for the easy availability of crack cocaine and what the federal government had concluded was the highest concentration of addicts in the world. But the sweep, which was aimed at arresting traffickers and seizing drugs and guns, won Mayor Joao Doria little support in the neighborhood from either the displaced addicts or the ordinary working-class residents living in the boarding houses. "There are hard-working people and families living here, not just traffickers," said Silva, who works two jobs as a doorman. "They didn't tell anyone ahead of time what was going to happen." The neighborhood felt like a combat zone as police descended on it with tear gas, pepper spray and dogs. The wall of a building being demolished by the municipal government crashed into



THE CLEARED neighborhood, formally known as Nova Luz. Working-class residents were displaced along with traffickers of crack cocaine.

the adjacent boarding house, injuring three people who were sleeping there. Investigators from the National Council on Human Rights visited the neighborhood a week later and concluded that residents had been treated inhumanely. The neighborhood had long been plagued by drugs, but the problem had been getting worse. In the year leading up to the raid, the number of crack users living there grew from 709 to 1,861, according to a government study. Dino Bueno Avenue had become an open-air drug market, with dealers setting up stalls to sell rocks of crack for about \$1.50 each. Doria, who took office in January and launched a program called Beautiful City, has portrayed the sweep a success. "Cracolandia is over," he declared. But the human rights investigators said that it was still very much in existence. Many drug users resettled two blocks away in Princesa Isabel Square, where the municipal government estimates some 900 people are now living. Resi-

dents call it the new Cracolandia. Most of the rest are dispersed and afraid to return to the neighborhood because the streets remain full of police. Cracolandia "is a cancer without a cure," said an addict named Bel, who was forced to move his tent. "When the cancer was just starting, nobody wanted to cure it. Now it's pitiful. There is no cure. There is no chance. It will never end. "For an addict, there is no right place," he said. "He'll use anywhere." The scattering of the addicts means that many no longer have access to drug treatment and other social services that were concentrated around the original Cracolandia. "The situation is very bad," said Leonardo Pinho, who led the human rights mission to Cracolandia. "They've lost the ability to get to public services that they have the right to and that they need." In 2014, then-Mayor Fernando Haddad had implemented a program called Open Arms, which provided

drug users in Cracolandia with jobs, access to treatment and vocational training, three meals a day and hotel rooms. Data released last August by the municipal government showed that 88% of those who participated in the program said they were using crack with less frequency, 83% said they had entered treatment, 64% had returned to the workforce and 53% had regained contact with their families. When Doria took office, he said that he would dismantle the program in favor of a state program that emphasized in-patient treatment, sometimes against the will of the addicts. Then he changed course and announced his own program, called Redemption. Pinho said that while the program has produced statistics suggesting a decline in traffickers and addicts, the effort is haphazard. Doria's press team said he would no longer comment on the situation in the Nova Luz neighborhood. Langlois is a special correspondent.

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