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Russians & DNC emails: The joke's on America

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📷 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton (Photo: AP)

Allegations that Russian intelligence agencies hacked into emails of the US Democratic Party's National Committee (DNC) and released them via WikiLeaks prove that the division between domestic and international politics is artificial. They tell us that the keenly anticipated matter of who rules America after President Barack Obama is being subjected to wilful influence and information operations by global actors.

Whether or not Russia was involved, the founder of WikiLeaks Julian Assange has unambiguously stated that he intends to deploy the weapon of web hacking to try and prevent Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton from making it to the White House. The militaristic foreign policies and conservative domestic policies which Ms Clinton espouses are anathema to radicals like Mr Assange, who fear that a hawkish Hillary Clinton presidency means a United States that resumes all-out warfare and destruction.

The 20,000 incriminating emails of the DNC that have been disclosed in cyberspace essentially show Ms Clinton to be what her Republican rival Donald Trump labels as a "rigged" or "crooked" candidate who bested her Leftist rival Bernie Sanders through institutional foul play.

Ms Clinton always carried the burdensome tag of “establishment figure” who is preferred by the moneyed and power elites within the Democratic Party. This reputation of wheeling-dealing and exchanging favours with the hoitytoity is now exposed with irrefutable evidence. It will damage her credibility as she prepares for the general election.

The instant resignation of DNC chairperson Debbie Wasserman Schultz as soon as the WikiLeaks trove hit American politics like a thunderbolt is an acknowledgement of the fact that the entire Democratic Party machine was blatantly misused to undermine the “outlier” Sanders and crown the “mainstream” Hillary.

In fact, this was also the situation in the 2008 primaries and caucuses, when Hillary was “the chosen one” of the Democratic Party elders who were beholden to the Clinton dynasty and favoured her over Obama. This cabal of entrenched interests tried their level best to sideline Obama, but he mobilised ordinary Americans like no politician in history and eventually forced the DNC to accept him. What the party bigwigs failed to do then, they have now succeeded by ensuring Sanders’ defeat.

Of course, Ms Clinton won 3.5 million more votes than Mr Sanders in this year’s primaries and that vast gap cannot entirely be explained by shenanigans of the DNC. The former squarely trounced the latter among racial minorities and women, and it would be wrong to deny her obvious strengths with specific voting blocks.

Yet, thanks to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “hybrid war” strategy or simply idealistic Left-wing Internet whistleblowers, Ms Clinton’s history-making, glass ceiling-shattering rise to become the Democratic nominee has lost its sheen. Although every votary for gender justice in America wants a woman to be President, a sombre mood has set in that it should have been a lady who was more honest compared to Ms Clinton.

Be it Russia or a different source, the foreign mischief-makers who embarrassed the DNC have not just queered the pitch for Ms Clinton but also resurrected fundamental misgivings about democracy in America. For Marxists and other critics of

Western liberal democracy, the American electoral system is fixed by a nexus of wealth, information monopoly and power brokering — that is, a mockery of the phrase “free and fair”.

An underdog like Mr Obama did emerge in 2008 to overturn this game, but this year’s election is seen as a return to the old manipulative process in which nominees are selected behind the scenes by coteries of political operatives and then anointed as the popular choices. To use Noam Chomsky’s formulation, it is “manufactured consent” where there is rarely a chance for a genuine people’s candidate to emerge and overthrow the status quo.

The extreme racism, pro-rich attitude and belligerent rhetoric of Donald Trump do make him a scarier candidate than Ms Clinton from a progressive standpoint. Yet, as angry adherents of Mr Sanders would aver, he has been “robbed” by the DNC to leave American voters with two harmful nominees who both represent capitalism and war. Opinion polls showing that Ms Clinton and Mr Trump are the two most unpopular candidates ever for an American presidential election reflect the bitterness that the primaries were all a setup in which ordinary people were shortchanged.

Time will tell who benefits from the DNC email scandal. The scenario of Mr Trump pillorying Ms Clinton about these emails — over and above the earlier controversy of her hiding and acting deviously on crucial matters as secretary of state via a private email server — and winning in November is not implausible. Emails may possibly bury the Clintons’ burning ambition of returning to the White House by hook or crook. On the other hand, if Ms Clinton does beat Mr Trump, the DNC emails will haunt her basic deficit of trust. She will govern with the handicap of doubts about her integrity.

Either way, a Hillary Clinton presidency that is light on legitimacy or a Trump presidency that is isolationist will enable countries vying for a multipolar world to hasten its advent. By their very nature, the American primaries open themselves up to extraordinary scrutiny. What technological advancements have done is to also give interested foreign players new web-based tools to intervene and skew the outcomes.

The US itself conducts countless acts of illegal cyber espionage and Internet hacking to keep tabs on domestic political developments in foreign countries. But this time, the shoe is on the other foot. To paraphrase the former President and potential first gentleman, Bill Clinton, "it's the emails, stupid".

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