

Belarus Opposition Leader Is U.S. Protege – Russia Spy Chief

By [AFP](#)

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Svetlana Tikhanovskaya's campaign proved a surprise success and she claimed victory over longtime leader Alexander Lukashenko in disputed polls. **Tatyana Zenkovich / EPA / TASS**

Russia's foreign intelligence chief on Wednesday accused the United States of protecting Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and allocating \$20 million to promote anti-government protests that erupted after disputed presidential elections.

Sergei Naryshkin, who heads the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), said Washington had taken the former presidential candidate Tikhanovskaya and other activists "firmly under its wing" in a statement published by Russian news agencies.

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Tikhanovskaya, a 38-year-old former English teacher and translator and more recently a

full-time mother, stood for president after the jailing of her husband, popular video blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky.

Her campaign proved a surprise success and she claimed victory over longtime leader Alexander Lukashenko in disputed polls.

Tikhanovskaya took shelter in neighboring Lithuania after coming under official pressure and many of her leading supporters have since been forced out of Belarus or jailed.

Naryshkin said the West had started to prepare protests long before the Aug. 9 election, adding that the U.S. had given various rights groups \$20 million in funding from last year.

The money went to "independent bloggers," he said, while "experienced American instructors" gave training to the most promising activists in countries including Poland and Ukraine.

"The protests from the start were well-organized in nature and coordinated from abroad," Naryshkin said.

"According to the SVR's information, the U.S. is playing a crucial role in the current events in Belarus."

Color revolution 'textbook'

Lukashenko has already flung accusations at various countries over the mass protests calling for an end to his rule, initially accusing Russia of seeking to destabilize the country but later blaming countries including Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Britain.

"We know who is in charge (of protests), who wants something to happen in Belarus and so we're not letting down our guard and we're ready to respond to any challenge," Lukashenko told a meeting with top officials on Wednesday.

He said the United States was "primarily" behind protests through its "network of foundations to support so-called democracy."

He alleged that protest organizers had used a "textbook for color revolutions," referring to the overthrow of pro-Kremlin leaders in other ex-Soviet states such as Ukraine.

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