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U.S. Says Ready to 'Deal With' Putin Despite 'Unfair' Election

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U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. **Oliver Contreras / The White House**

The United States said Monday that it recognizes President Vladimir Putin as the leader of Russia and is prepared to deal with him for another six years, while also emphasizing the March 15-17 presidential election was neither free nor fair.

"Nothing about the election outcome was unpredictable because Putin had closed the political space, had locked up political opponents. Some of his political opponents had tragically died," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said at a press briefing.

Russian election authorities said Monday that Putin won the race with 87.28% of the votes.

But independent observers and Western leaders have decried the results, pointing to widespread reports of fraud, as well as an unrelenting crackdown on any dissent within Russia that has only worsened since Moscow invaded Ukraine in 2022.

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“There was nothing free or fair about this election, and the outcome was preordained,” Sullivan said, but noted that “the reality is that President Putin is the President of Russia.”

“We’ve had to deal with that reality throughout the war in Ukraine, throughout the other aggression Russia has undertaken, throughout the other steps contrary to U.S. national interests that we have seen from this President and from the Russian Federation under his leadership,” he said.

“And we will continue to deal with that reality,” Sullivan added.

At the same time, Western leaders have condemned the Kremlin for holding elections in parts of occupied Ukraine that Moscow claims to have annexed.

Putin hailed the results of the 2024 presidential campaign as evidence that Russian society has thrown its “trust” and “hope” behind what he and the Russian authorities call a “special military operation.”

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