

# Crossfire Hurricane

## *The documented story of Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, and the 2016 election*

### **Purpose:**

This is intended to be a white paper on the story behind the Russian interference in the 2016 election and their ties to the campaign of then presidential candidate Donald Trump. This document is presented as a form of meta reporting that takes everything we know about what happened before, during, and after the 2016 election and presents it into a single narrative. The purpose is to lay these facts out in a manner that allows people to understand their context and explain all the concerns with this story.

### **Sourcing:**

Every fact in this paper is cited with a direct link to a source. Everything cited can be found in the most recent hyperlink. If you find yourself uncertain of the validity of anything, simply copying the sentence and pasting it into your favorite search engine should yield you sources for the citation.

This paper has attempted to avoid any partisan or questionable sources. Everything cited comes from the most reputable names in news reporting such as New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Politico, Fortune, The Guardian, Etc. Some of these sites have paywalls. I encourage you to subscribe to one or two of them, as their reporting has been vital to making this paper possible.

Furthermore, in many cases, the relevant pieces (often the opening paragraph) from the cited article appears in the paper quoted directly. These are always presented in *italics* to show they are quoted text. This is done intentionally to avoid anything being taken out of context.

### **Style:**

This is presented as a white paper. It is intended to read as a report that contains a large collection of facts. The sole purpose of this paper is to outline the various connections between Donald Trump, his associates, and key members of the Russian government. This paper also looks at the various timelines between the actions of Donald Trump and Russian officials. Everything presented is factual, and it is up to the reader to draw their own conclusion.

### **Conclusions:**

This paper makes few direct conclusions, and no direct accusations. There are no examples of “*we can assume,*” or “*if X happened, then Y must have happened, and that means Z.*” Nothing is assumed, and if we can not establish it, then it is not presented. This paper does contain editorialized sections that are all presented in **red** text to offset them from established and

citable facts. These editorialized sections serve only to frame the events to show why there is a concern about them happening in the context and/or timing they occurred.

**Naming:** This Paper was originally titled “The Russian White Paper.” However, in middle of May, 2018, the paper was renamed “CrossFire Hurricane.” This title comes from the [original FBI](#) name for their investigation into ties between the Campaign of then Candidate Trump and Russia’s attempts to interfere in the US elections of 2016.

# Russian elections and sanctions

On [December 4, 2011](#) The Russian government held elections for their lower house. These elections were mired in controversy with many accusations of voter tampering and ballot stuffing. [The results caused major protest in Moscow](#) with thousands assembling in the Red square and chanting *"Putin is a thief," and "Russia without Putin."*

Then Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton called for investigations into the elections](#), and said, *"We have serious concerns about the conduct of the election,"*

After Hillary Clinton's remarks, [Putin accused her and the United States of being behind the unrest in Moscow](#). Putin accused foreign nations of pouring millions of dollars into Russia to influence the nation's politics. Speaking to allies, Putin would say, *"The first thing that the secretary of state did was say that they were not honest and not fair, but she had not even yet received the material from the observers."*

*"She set the tone for some actors in our country and gave them a signal," Mr. Putin continued. "They heard the signal and with the support of the U.S. State Department began active work."*

[Vladimir Putin would go so far as to directly blame Hillary Clinton](#) of causing the protests by saying, *"She set the tone for some of our public figures inside the country, sent a signal to them. They heard this signal and launched active work with the U.S. State Department's support,*

This incident left a mark on Vladimir Putin. He felt personally threatened by the United States, and specifically Hillary Clinton. Many people felt [Russia's interference in the 2016 elections was political payback](#).

To understand why Putin was so willing to blame the US government for the protest in Moscow, we have to step back two months to the events in Libya. [On October 20, 2011](#), Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi was captured by US backed Libyan rebels. Gaddafi was drug into the streets where he was brutally tortured and then killed. A video of the event was posted on the internet. [The incident was said to have a profound effect on Putin](#) who compared the US intervention as a *"medieval call to the crusades."*

A [March 6, 2017](#) article in *The New Yorker* would best sum up how this affected Putin. *From Putin's perspective, this was a case study in Western intervention: stir up protests, give them rhetorical support and diplomatic cover, and, if that doesn't work, send in the fighter jets. From Putin's perspective, this was a case study in Western intervention: stir up protests, give them rhetorical support and diplomatic cover, and, if that doesn't work, send in the fighter jets.*

When the Moscow protest sprung up in 2011, Putin perceived this as a creation of the United States. It wasn't just offensive to Putin. He viewed the protest as a direct threat to his power by the United States, and specifically Hillary Clinton.

In 2004 [Viktor Yanukovych](#), a candidate supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin, ran for President of Ukraine and lost. In 2010, Yanukovych tried again and won, this time [with the assistance of an American political operative](#) named Paul Manafort. In late 2014, Ukraine was caught up in a wave of protest over President Yanukovych's refusal to sign onto a treaty with the European Union.

[By the end of February of 2014](#) Viktor Yanukovych had fled to Russia. Immediately, Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to intervene in Crimea for the stated purpose of protecting the interest of ethnic Russians living in Crimea. However, Vladimir Putin also had an interest in Crimea since it not only [plays a strategic role for the Russian Navy](#), but also serves as a port for [exporting petroleum](#) products such as oil and gas.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the [United States and her Western allies responded](#) with heavy trade sanctions. These sanctions were very specific and [targeted companies and business with close ties to Vladimir Putin](#). The sanctions went on to specifically target major companies involved in both [Banking \(Gazprombank and state-owned Vnesheconombank and in Oil and Gas \(Rosneft and Novatek\)](#). The impact of the sanctions on oil also coincided with a major drop in oil prices. These two factors were particularly disruptive because [68% of Russia's exports are oil and gas](#).

To understand the effects of these sanctions on Russia, it's important to realize that [Russia is primarily only a superpower](#) because of the number of nuclear weapons it has, and less because of economic reasons. Economically, [Russia has the 12th largest GDP](#) at 1.2 trillion dollars a year compared to \$1.5 trillion for Canada, \$1.7 trillion for Brazil, \$11 trillion in China, \$18 trillion for the United States, and \$16 trillion for the European Union. In fact [three states](#), California (\$2.6 Trillion), Texas (\$1.6 Trillion), and New York (\$1.4 trillion), each have a larger GDP than Russia.

The effects of the sanctions were to put the Russian economy on a near recessionary level with [dropping GDP, reduced value of the ruble, and double digit inflation](#). This downward economic spiral placed Putin in a position of having to respond.

These sanctions were in [addition to a set of sanctions placed on Russia in 2012 in response to the death of Sergei Magnitsky](#) in a Russian prison. In response, the United States passed the Magnitsky Act which [targeted specific Russian individuals](#) thought to have been associated with the death of Sergei Magnitsky. A few days later, Russia responded by blocking Americans from adopting Russian children. Later we would learn that [Magnitsky had discovered a Kremlin slush fund](#).

[Putin had an interest in breaking up and disrupting the West. While Russia was economically on par with many countries in Europe, it is rather small compared to the European Union as a whole and to the United States. As these two entities began to work together, Russia was further weakened as a global economic super power. The effects of the sanctions put an added](#)

stress on the Russian economy. Vladimir Putin had motivation to respond and attack the United States.

## The Russian Cyberwar on the US begins

In Early February of 2016 Andrey Krutskikh, a senior Kremlin adviser, gave a lecture at a Russian national information security forum. During the lecture, Krutskikh said; *"you think we are living in 2016. No, we are living in 1948. And do you know why? Because in 1949, the Soviet Union had its first atomic bomb test. And if until that moment, the Soviet Union was trying to reach agreement with [President Harry] Truman to ban nuclear weapons, and the Americans were not taking us seriously, in 1949 everything changed and they started talking to us on an equal footing."*

Krutskikh continued, *"I'm warning you: We are at the verge of having 'something' in the information arena, which will allow us to talk to the Americans as equals."*

These comments came just days after the US Iowa Caucus and days before the New Hampshire Primary.

By the time of Krutskikh's speech, the cyber attacks had already begun. In October of 2014 it was reported that *hackers thought to be working for the Russian government breached the unclassified White House computer networks in recent weeks, sources said, resulting in temporary disruptions to some services while cybersecurity teams worked to contain the intrusion.*

In November of 2014 the US State Department computers were hacked by the Russians. *Federal law enforcement, intelligence, and congressional officials briefed on the investigation say the hack of the State email system is the "worst ever" cyberattack intrusion against a federal agency. The attackers who breached State are also believed to be behind hacks on the White House's email system, and against several other federal agencies.*

In July of 2015 the US military's joint staff was also hacked by Russian hackers. *Now retired, Dempsey told CBS News in an exclusive interview that the attack was proceeding at an alarming speed. Within an hour, hackers had seized control of the unclassified email system used by the Pentagon's Joint Staff, the organization of some 3,500 military officers and civilians who work for the Chairman.*

In September of 2015 *"an agent from the FBI's Washington Field Office notified the Democratic National Committee that Russian hackers had compromised at least one DNC computer. It was the FBI's first direct contact with the DNC: a message left for a low-level computer technician,*

*who did not return the FBI's call." [...] "According to the DNC, the FBI kept calling the same computer help desk for weeks, never reaching out to DNC leaders and never making the short trip in person to DNC headquarters.*

*The FBI tells CNN it made repeated attempts to alert more senior DNC staff, including sharing information on how to identify breaches in their systems. In November 2015 the FBI called again with even more alarming news: a DNC computer was now transmitting information back to Russia.*

A [cybersecurity firm, Crowdstrike](#), would later conclude that the DNC emails had been hacked by two well known Russian hacking groups named "COZY BEAR and FANCY BEAR." From Crowdstrike's assessment: *COZY BEAR (also referred to in some industry reports as CozyDuke or APT 29) is the adversary group that last year successfully infiltrated the unclassified networks of the [White House](#), [State Department](#), and [US Joint Chiefs of Staff](#). In addition to the US government, they have targeted organizations across the Defense, Energy, Extractive, Financial, Insurance, Legal, Manufacturing Media, Think Tanks, Pharmaceutical, Research, and Technology industries, along with Universities.*

[Intel analysis](#) suggested that this kind of attack could have only have happened with Putin's involvement; *"The intelligence community has assessed that in order for this operation to have been executed, it could not have been done without the highest levels of the government, including the President himself." The US official said there are two entities in Russia capable of doing this kind of work, but would not name either one. The tools the Russians used are understood by the US and have a unique "signature."*

It's worth pointing out that during the same time that the DNC was hacked, [Russian hackers were able to break into Republican Party emails](#) as well. However, those emails were older and largely inactive accounts. To date none of the information stolen from GOP emails has been released to the public. We would later learn that [Republican Lindsey Graham's email account had also been hacked by Russians](#). Those emails have also never been released to the public.

**All of these attacks came from the same group of hackers, and they all began in 2014, just months after the second round of US Sanctions went into effect. It's important to look at these as a coordinated series of attacks instead of isolated incidents.**

In early autumn of 2017 Kaspersky Antivirus would become a center point for Russia's cyber attacks on the United States. In early September the [US Federal Government moved to ban all government employees and contractors from using Kaspersky Antivirus](#). The Department of Homeland Security issued a statement saying they were concerned *"about the ties between certain Kaspersky officials and Russian intelligence and other government agencies, and requirements under Russian law that allow Russian intelligence agencies to request or compel assistance from Kaspersky and to intercept communications transiting Russian networks."*

Later we would learn that Russian hackers had used Kaspersky to hack in and steal NSA hacking tools. We found about this because in 2015 Israeli government hackers saw something suspicious in the computers of a Moscow-based cybersecurity firm: hacking tools that could only have come from the National Security Agency. Israel notified the NSA, where alarmed officials immediately began a hunt for the breach, according to individuals familiar with the matter, who said an investigation by the agency revealed that the tools were in the possession of the Russian government. Israeli spies had found the hacking material on the network of Kaspersky Lab, the global anti-virus firm, now under a spotlight in the United States because of suspicions that its products facilitate Russian espionage.

While Russia was busy stepping up hacking against the United States, they were also busy working on another element of the cyber campaign, misinformation. In 2015 [Adrian Chen, of the New Yorker](#), exposed a Russian government disinformation campaign. A lot of the early work of this campaign was against Ukraine, but it also targeted western countries, specifically the United States.

Later in 2016 [Adrian Chen](#) would observe; "I created this list of Russian trolls when I was researching. And I check on it once in awhile, still. And a lot of them have turned into conservative accounts, like fake conservatives. I don't know what's going on, but they're all tweeting about Donald Trump and stuff." In his research from St. Petersburg, Chen discovered that Russian internet trolls - paid by the Kremlin to spread false information on the internet - have been behind a number of "highly coordinated campaigns" to deceive the American public. It's a brand of information warfare, known as "dezinformatsiya," that has been used by the Russians since at least the Cold War. The disinformation campaigns are only one "active measure" tool used by Russian intelligence to "sow discord among," and within, allies perceived hostile to Russia.

Also in in the [Summer of 2015](#), the United States Military began a training exercise called "Jade Helm 15." The eight-week exercise starting in July and planned for locations in Texas, New Mexico, California and other Southwestern states, they say, is part of a secret plan to impose martial law, take away people's guns, arrest political undesirables, launch an Obama-led hostile takeover of red-state Texas, or do some combination thereof.

The conspiracy theories around Jade Helm 15 got enough media attention that [Texas Governor Greg Abbott](#) called up the Texas National Guard to observe the exercise.

In [May of 2018](#), while appearing on a morning talk show, A former director of the CIA and NSA [Gen. Michael Hayden] said Wednesday that hysteria in Texas over a 2015 U.S. military training exercise called Jade Helm was fueled by Russians wanting to dominate "the information space," and that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's decision to send the Texas State Guard to monitor the operation gave them proof of the power of such misinformation campaigns.



Hayden would add, *“At that point, I’m figuring the Russians are saying, ‘We can go big time,’”* Hayden said of Abbott’s response. *“At that point, I think they made the decision, ‘We’re going to play in the electoral process.’”*

Before Donald Trump had begun his presidential bid in late 2015 Russia was already engaged in a multi pronged cyberwar against the United States of America. This war involved overt attempts to hack into US computer systems and a coordinated attempt to spread disinformation.

One other cyber attack occurred in November of 2013, and against Donald Trump’s business. At least 195 web addresses belonging to Trump, his family or his business empire were hijacked by hackers possibly operating out of Russia, *The Associated Press* has learned.

*The Trump Organization denied the domain names were ever compromised. But a review of internet records by the AP and cybersecurity experts shows otherwise. And it was not until this past week, after the Trump camp was asked about it by the AP, that the last of the tampered-with addresses were repaired.*

*[...]*

*After the hack, computer users who visited the Trump-related addresses were unwittingly redirected to servers in St. Petersburg, Russia, that cybersecurity experts said contained malicious software commonly used to steal passwords or hold files for ransom. Whether anyone fell victim to such tactics is unclear.*

These attacks in November of 2013, happened right before Donald Trump travelled to Moscow to for the Miss Universe Pageant. This event would place Donald Trump directly in the sphere of influence with Vladimir Putin.

## Donald Trump’s Business Dealings with Russia

Donald Trump got his start with real estate business in New York, but later spread up and down the Atlantic coast. He would eventually branch out to casinos, hotels, and golf properties as his primary ventures. Through all of his successes, Donald Trump’s businesses have largely been mired in both controversy and failure. On at least [four different occasions Trump properties have filed for bankruptcy](#). A [USA Today report](#) found that Donald Trump *“and his businesses have been involved in at least 3,500 legal actions in federal and state courts during the past three decades.”*

By the 2000s Donald Trump was having to rely more on foreign banks to get loans for his ventures. [A Wall Street Journal report](#) found that *“after doing significant business with Mr. Trump in the 1980s and 1990s, Wall Street banks pulled back in part due to their frustration with his*



*business practices."*

One of the banks Donald Trump turned to for a new source of capital was Deutsche Bank. By November 2008 [Donald Trump was carrying a \\$640 million dollar loan from Deutsche Bank](#), and had a \$40 million dollar payment that was past due. Deutsche Bank was initiating legal proceedings to collect when Donald Trump counter sued the bank. Both parties settled out of court in 2009, [Deutsche Bank went on to continue lending Donald Trump money](#) even while he was holding office as President.

Four months before Deutsche Bank initiated their lawsuit Donald Trump was involved in the [sale of a mansion in Palm Springs, Florida for \\$95 million dollars](#) to a Russian oligarch named Dmitry Rybolovlev. In 2005 Donald Trump had purchased the Mansion for \$41.5 million and the 50 million dollar return was called a "premium." Dmitry Rybolovlev never lived in the mansion, and [it was eventually torn down](#). Rybolovlev's wife accused him of using the purchase of the mansion to funnel and hide money that she was due, saying that Rybolovlev *"has a history of secreting and transferring assets in order to avoid his obligations."*

By the late 2000s Russian money laundering had become a global issue as Russian oligarchs were attempting to use all kinds of complicated schemes to transfer massive sums of wealth out of Russia. In 2017 Deutsche Bank was fined over [\\$630 million by both the US and UK governments for laundering over \\$10 billion in Russian interest](#).

*At the same time Donald Trump was borrowing money from a bank with known ties to Russian money laundering, a Russian oligarch purchased a piece of property from Trump in what appears to be an attempt to launder money. This transaction occurred precisely when Donald Trump was due to pay a large debt to that very bank. Also, Trump sold the Florida mansion for \$50 million more than it was bought even though this sale occurred right as the housing market was collapsing.*

The florida property sale was far from an isolated incident with Donald Trump selling property to Russians. [Records show that more than 1300 condos sold by Donald Trump were purchased by shell companies using cash](#). This specific method of payment is described as a primary means of laundering money by people who wish to remain anonymous.

In January of 2018 Buzzfeed would reveal that, *Trump condo sales that match Treasury's characteristics of possible money laundering totaled \$1.5 billion, BuzzFeed News calculated. They accounted for 21% of the 6,400 Trump condos sold in the US. Those figures include condos that Trump developed as well as condos that others developed in his name under licensing deals that pay Trump a fee or a percentage of sales.*

[Another Trump property in Florida which raises concerns are the six Trump towers in Sunny Isles Florida](#). Donald trump originally built 3 towers that opened just as the housing market was collapsing in 2008. *Many other projects in South Florida floundered in the lead-up to the national*

*housing collapse of 2008. But the Trump buildings were among those that survived, in part because the developers were able to turn to another business source seemingly immune to the factors dragging down the U.S. market: wealthy Russians looking to move their money out of the volatile post-Soviet economy.*

The community in Sunny Isles Florida would come to be known as “Little Moscow,” due to the number of Russian immigrants that moved to the area.

Trump Tower itself would be ground zero for a Russian money laundering indictment when *“for two years ending in 2013, the FBI had a court-approved warrant to eavesdrop on a sophisticated Russian organized crime money laundering network that operated out of unit 63A in Trump Tower in New York.”*

*The FBI investigation led to a federal grand jury indictment of more than 30 people, including one of the world’s most notorious Russian mafia bosses, Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov. Known as “Little Taiwanese,” he was the only target to slip away, and remains a fugitive from American justice.*

*Seven months after the April 2013 indictment and after Interpol issued a red notice for Tokhtakhounov, he appeared near Donald Trump in the VIP section of the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow. Trump had sold the Russian rights for Miss Universe to a billionaire Russian shopping mall developer.*

The Miss Universe Pageant of 2013 is another major point of contact between Donald Trump and Russian oligarchs connected to Vladimir Putin. In 2012 [music promoter Rob Goldstone began representing Emin Agalarov, the son of Russian oligarch Aras Agalarov](#). In spring of 2013 it was announced that Rob Goldstone would be a judge at the Miss America Pageant. Meanwhile, Emin Agalarov hired the winner of the Miss Universe Pageant for a video shoot. In June of 2013 Rob Goldstone met Donald Trump during the Miss America contest. The day after that meeting, Donald Trump announced the Miss Universe Pageant would be held in Moscow in November 2013 at Crocus City Hall, home of Aras Agalarov.

This meeting also put Trump directly into Vladimir Putin’s sphere where Aras Agalarov had close direct ties to Putin. Just two weeks prior to the Miss Universe Pageant in Moscow, [Agalarov had been awarded the Order of Honor by Putin](#) himself. Agalarov’s company, Crocus Group, had been awarded several large Russian state construction projects after previously completing work on a military base. Putin was originally scheduled to attend to the Miss Universe Pageant in Moscow, but had to change plans. [Putin sent Donald Trump](#) a personal note and a lacquer box to apologize for not attending.

While putting on the [Miss Universe Pageant in 2013 in Moscow](#), Donald Trump *also attended a private meeting with a leading Russian businessmen at Nobu, the high-end Japanese restaurant chain for which Agalarov owns the Moscow franchise. The dinner was arranged by Herman Gref, Putin’s former energy minister and now chief executive of the state-owned*

*Sberbank, Russia's biggest bank. The bank, which was another sponsor of Miss Universe, was later among the Russian companies sanctioned by the US over Russia's annexing part of Ukraine in 2014.*

Two days after the Pageant in Moscow, [Donald Trump Tweeted](#), “@AgalarovAras I had a great weekend with you and your family. You have done a FANTASTIC job. TRUMP TOWER-MOSCOW is next. EMIN was WOW!”

Eight days later [Sberbank announced](#) it was lending Aras Agalarov 55bn rubles (\$1.5 billion dollars) for “the financing of residential and commercial real estate projects in Moscow.”

The following year, in 2014, [Eric Trump \(son of Donald Trump\) would tell Golf writer James Dodson](#), “Well, we don't rely on American banks. We have all the funding we need out of Russia.”

[Also in January of 2014](#), Alferova Yulya, Advisor to the Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation tweeted a picture of herself with Donald Trump. The Tweet said, “I'm sure @realDonaldTrump will be great president! We'll support you from Russia! America needs ambitious leader!”

We later find out, from Special Counsel indictments, that the Russian operation to effect our election began in 2014. By 2014, Russia not only knew Donald Trump was likely going to run for president, but they were encouraging him to do so. At the same time, they were striking up multi billion dollar business deals with Donald Trump.

The entire Trump Tower Moscow project was designed to be a sweetheart deal for Trump. In [September of 2017 it was revealed that](#): Around the time presidential candidate Donald Trump was touting his real estate dealings at a Republican primary debate, a proposal was in the works to build a Trump Tower in Russia that would have given his company a \$4 million upfront fee, no upfront costs, a percentage of the sales, and control over marketing and design. And that's not all: the deal included the opportunity to name the hotel spa after his daughter Ivanka.

Beyond financial benefits, Trump Tower Moscow would have been a huge point of pride for Donald Trump. [A May 17, 2018 Buzzfeed article](#) described the plans as, a sheer, glass-encased obelisk situated on a river — would have soared above every other building in Moscow, the architectural drawings show. And the sharply angled skyscraper would have climaxed in a diamond-shaped pinnacle emblazoned with the word “Trump,” putting his name atop the continent's tallest structure

VTB Bank was later revealed to be one of the banks behind the [financing for Trump Tower Moscow](#). At the time Trump signed his letter of intent for Trump Tower Moscow, VTB Bank was under US Sanctions.

Later we would learn that part of the deal included [giving the \\$50 million dollar penthouse to Russian President Vladimir Putin](#). This would have potentially amounted to an [open bribe of the Russian President](#) and been a violation of US law known as the [Foreign Corrupt Practices Act](#). It's worth pointing out that Donald Trump has called the FCPA a "ridiculous," a "horrible law" that [made it difficult for U.S. companies to compete overseas](#).

Even though Donald Trump would repeatedly proclaim that he had nothing to do with Russia, we found out that while running for President, he had signed a letter of intent on a massive real estate project in Moscow. This project was funded by banks under US sanctions. Furthermore, Donald Trump attempted to keep this a secret and it was not disclosed until almost a year after the 2016 election.

What's more concerning is that Donald Trump signed a letter of intent to do business with a bank that was currently under US sanctions. This raises the immediate question of Trump's ability to separate his personal financial interest from the interest of the country he is currently leading.

It's also worth noting, that by early 2013, there was plenty of information out there suggesting a likely 2016 presidential run by Donald Trump. By [May of 2013 it was already being reported](#) that Donald Trump had spent over \$1 million on researching a campaign. According to Trump's special counsel Michael Cohen, *"The electoral research was commissioned. We did not spend \$1 million on this research for it just to sit on my bookshelf."*

[In 2015, Felix Sater was emailing Donald Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen about Trump Tower Moscow](#). In one of the emails, Sater wrote, *"Our boy can become president of the USA and we can engineer it," Mr. Sater wrote in an email. "I will get all of Putin's team to buy in on this, I will manage this process."*

Sater also promised to have financing lined up for Trump Tower Moscow from a Russian Bank that was under US sanctions and added, *"I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected."*

In a subsequent interview, Felix Sater discussed how [work on the proposed Trump Tower continued throughout the 2016 campaign](#) and did not end until December of 2016. What makes this so concerning is that not only was Candidate Trump pursuing a major real estate deal the Russian Government at the same time Russia was interfering in our elections to the benefit of Donald Trump, [he tried to conceal this from the American People](#).

[On December 18th of 2015](#), just two months before the official start of the 2016 primaries, Donald Trump appeared on MSBC's conservative Morning Joe's talk show. One of those topics was Vladimir Putin. During that conversation, the following exchange took place.

*TRUMP: When people call you "brilliant" it's always good, especially when the person heads up Russia.*

*HOST JOE SCARBOROUGH: Well, I mean, also is a person who kills journalists, political opponents and ...*

*WILLIE GEIST: Invades countries.*

*SCARBOROUGH: ... and invades countries, obviously that would be a concern, would it not?*

*TRUMP: He's running his country, and at least he's a leader, unlike what we have in this country.*

*SCARBOROUGH: But, again: He kills journalists that don't agree with him.*

*TRUMP: Well, I think that our country does plenty of killing, too, Joe.*

By the time Rob Goldstone and Aras Emin first contacted Donald Trump, there was every reason to believe that Donald Trump was likely to become a presidential candidate on the 2016 ballot (three years before the election). Two years before Donald Trump officially declared his candidacy Russian officials, with direct ties to Vladimir Putin, were financially courting Trump and his business interests. This would lead to an eventual proposed real estate deal between Donald Trump and Russian business interests. This deal was initially approved after Donald Trump declared his candidacy, and Donald Trump tried to hide it from the American people.

Furthermore, Donald Trump was already sending public overtures to Vladimir Putin by praising him publicly and offering him bribes. It wasn't just praise. Donald Trump publicly excused Putin's totalitarian regime by attacking his own country.

The ties between Donald Trump and Russia appear to go back at least 30 years. Donald Trump visited Russia for the first time on [July 4, 1987](#). The entire trip to Russia was initiated by the Russian Government, and would mark the first attempt by Trump and the Russian Government to do business together. According to Trump, *"In January 1987, I got a letter from Yuri Dubinin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, that began: 'It is a pleasure for me to relay some good news from Moscow.' It went on to say that the leading Soviet state agency for international tourism, Goscomintourist, had expressed interest in pursuing a joint venture to construct and manage a hotel in Moscow."*

It's worth pointing out that just two months after this trip, Donald Trump showed his first presidential ambitions. On [September 2, 1987](#), Donald Trump spent \$94,801 of his own money to buy full page ads in New York Times, the Washington Post and the Boston Globe. The ads were called "An open letter to the American People." The letter would touch on many of the same themes Trump would later go on to use in his 2016 campaign; *"The world is laughing at American politicians as we protect ships we don't own, carrying oil we don't need, destined for allies who won't help."*

Just months after his first business trip to Moscow, Donald Trump shows his first interest in running for president. In doing so, he calls for the United States to adopt an isolationist policy that would hurt the US and directly benefit the Soviet Union.

Even the Trump tower in Moscow was an idea 20 years in the making. Going back to 1996, Trump had repeatedly discussed a Trump Tower in Moscow. However, ever attempt at a deal never materialized, despite signing at least one letter of intent in in 2005.

## Paul Manafort and Roger Stone

Roger Stone was a veteran of the Nixon administration who had [worked closely with Jeb Magruder and Bart Porter](#). Magruder and Porter were both heavily involved in the dirty tricks efforts of Nixon's 1972 campaign. [According to G. Gordon Liddy](#), it was Magruder who told Liddy what information try and steal from the Democratic National Committee headquarters at The Watergate Hotel.

*During the 1972 campaign Roger Stone adopted the pseudonym Jason Rainier and made contributions in the name of the Young Socialist Alliance to the campaign of Pete McCloskey, who was challenging Nixon for the Republican nomination in 1972. Stone then sent a receipt to the Manchester Union Leader, to "prove" that Nixon's adversary was a left-wing stooge. Stone hired another Republican operative, who was given the pseudonym Sedan Chair II, to infiltrate the McGovern campaign. Stone's Watergate hijinks were revealed during congressional hearings in 1973, and the news cost Stone his job on the staff of Senator Robert Dole.*

Roger Stone spent his entire life as an admirer of Richard Nixon; largely because of what he perceived as Nixon's strength. Stone has carried such an admiration for Nixon that he has a [tattoo of Richard Nixon's smiling face](#) in the center of his back, and has repeatedly posted pictures of himself posing with a [bong shaped like Nixon](#).

Ever since working for Nixon, Roger Stone preferred the dirty side of politics. [During the the recount of the 2000 election](#) a "Stone-led squad of pro-Bush protestors stormed the Miami-Dade County election board, stopping the recount and advancing then-Governor George W. Bush one step closer to the White House."

In 2007 Stone was also implicated in making a [threatening phone call](#) to the father of then Gubernatorial candidate Eliot Spitzer. Even though his voice was recorded and easily identifiable, Roger Stone denied any involvement. This goes to a long standing strategy of Roger Stone, ["Attack, attack, attack—never defend" and "Admit nothing, deny everything, launch counterattack."](#)

In the early 1980s Roger Stone was partners with Paul Manafort (along with two other men) [in forming a public relations firm](#) named "Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly" (BMSK). Manafort got



his start in politics during the 1976 campaign of Gerald Ford. Manafort would go on to work for Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign, and eventually the Reagan administration.

While at BMSK Paul Manafort got his first taste of lobbying foreign leaders. In the late 1980s Manafort earned over \$950,000 a year working for the Philippines President, Ferdinand Marcos. Later while also working with BMSK, Manafort would lobby on behalf of tyrannical leaders in countries from Kenya to Somalia, and for Mobutu Seko of Zaire. In each of these cases Manafort was working with an authoritarian figure who was oppressing their people, opposing democracy, and enriching themselves through corruption.

Roger Stone would later say, BMSK "lined up most of the dictators in the world that we could find; pro-Western dictators, of course. The good ones."

In 2005 Paul Manafort worked for pro Putin oligarchs where he proposed a confidential strategy plan as early as June 2005 that he would influence politics, business dealings, and news coverage inside the United States, Europe, and former Soviet republics to benefit President Vladimir Putin's government, even as U.S.-Russia relations under Republican President George W. Bush grew worse.

Through the 80s and 90s Manafort worked on the campaigns of George Bush Sr. and Bob Dole; while Roger Stone assisted with the short lived campaigns of Arlen Specter, and also that of Bob Dole.

Donald Trump's campaign naturally attracted someone like Roger Stone. It was ultimately Roger Stone who recommended that Trump hire Paul Manafort to his campaign. On May 19th, 2016 Manafort became the campaign manager for Donald Trump. Ultimately, both Roger Stone and Paul Manafort would leave the Trump campaign just two weeks apart in August of 2016.

## The Early Warning Signs

In 2015 the UK and other European intelligence agencies had been sharing information with the US about contacts between Russia and members of Trump's team: "GCHQ first became aware in late 2015 of suspicious "interactions" between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents, a source close to UK intelligence said. This intelligence was passed to the US as part of a routine exchange of information, they added."

Over the next six months, until summer 2016, a number of Western agencies shared further information on contacts between Trump's inner circle and Russians, sources said. The European countries that passed on electronic intelligence - known as sigint - included Germany, Estonia, and Poland. Australia, a member of the "Five Eyes" spying alliance that also includes the US, UK, Canada, and New Zealand.

Before the campaign got into full swing, and before candidate Trump had even won a single



primary or caucus, there were already clear indications of improper contact between Donald Trump's campaign and Russian intelligence officials. These warning signs were present before Krutskikh delivered his warning about an impending cyber attack in the information arena.

As candidate Trump began to build his foreign policy team, the ties to Russia became stark and immediate. *Three days after Donald Trump named his campaign foreign policy team in March 2016, the youngest of the new advisers sent an email to seven campaign officials with the subject line: "Meeting with Russian Leadership - Including Putin."*

*The adviser, George Papadopoulos, offered to set up "a meeting between us and the Russian leadership to discuss US-Russia ties under President Trump," telling them his Russian contacts welcomed the opportunity, according to internal campaign emails read to The Washington Post.*

Another member of Trump's Foreign Policy Team was Carter Page. Page would later raise some concern because just two weeks before the Republican convention, he would travel to Moscow. *While there, Carter Page criticized American policies toward Russia at the New Economic School in Moscow in July, echoing the positions of President Vladimir V. Putin.*

Eventually a [FISA warrant was obtained](#) on Trump Foreign Policy advisory Carter Page citing *"there was probable cause to believe Page was acting as an agent of a foreign power, in this case Russia."* Officials were concerned because Carter Page had not only been an investment banker in Moscow, but he had made several pro Putin and anti American statements while in Russia.

Later we would find out that [in 2013 two Russian spies attempted to recruit Carter Page](#); *"Carter Page, met with one of three Russians who were eventually charged with being undeclared officers with Russia's foreign intelligence service, known as the S.V.R. The F.B.I. interviewed Mr. Page in 2013 as part of an investigation into the spy ring, but decided that he had not known the man was a spy, and the bureau never accused Mr. Page of wrongdoing."*

[In the fall of 2017](#) when called to testify before the Senate intelligence committee investigating Russia's interference into our election, Page said that he *is going to plead the Fifth Amendment to keep from turning over a "vast array" of documents the Senate Intelligence committee requested, which he said is "beyond the charter" of the inquiry.*

A third member of Donald Trump's Foreign Policy team was Michael Flynn. [In December of 2015](#) Michael Flynn was paid \$45,000 by Russia's english news network RT (Russia Today) for a speech. Flynn had also been paid over \$20,000 for two speeches earlier in 2015, including one to Kaspersky Labs.

The \$45,000 speech was for a Gala celebrating RT's 10th anniversary. [While at the Gala](#) Michael Flynn was seated next to Russian President, Vladimir Putin. American Green Party presidential Candidate Jill Stein was also seated at the same table. Three of the people at the

table with Flynn were under specific US sanctions due to Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

*It's also worth noting that in 2016 US intelligence intercepts of Russian conversations disclosed; Russian officials bragged in conversations during the presidential campaign that they had cultivated a strong relationship with former Trump adviser retired Gen. Michael Flynn and believed they could use him to influence Donald Trump and his team, sources told CNN. [...] The conversations picked up by US intelligence officials indicated the Russians regarded Flynn as an ally, sources said. That relationship developed throughout 2016, months before Flynn was caught on an intercepted call in December speaking with Russia's ambassador in Washington, Sergey Kislyak.*

Another sign that something was unusual with the Trump campaign came when Paul Manafort took over as Campaign Manager.

*The man who had run a pro Putin campaign in Ukraine, and had been paid directly by Putin officials to develop a plan to influence the west, was now running the presidential campaign of the de facto Republican Party nominee.*

The manner in which Manafort got on the campaign is worth observing. He offered to work for free, and sold himself as a "mortal enemy" of Republican insiders like Carl Rove.

*In other words, Paul Manafort advertised himself to Trump as the loyal soldier who would go after Trump's enemies, while demanding no payment from a man (Trump) who hated paying people. He knew exactly what to say to get Trump's attention. Again, Manafort was a long time business partner of Roger Stone who was already working for the Trump campaign and recommended that Trump hire Manafort.*

A month later Paul Manafort was offering Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska private meetings with Donald Trump. *Several of the exchanges, which took place between Manafort and a Kiev-based employee of his international political consulting practice, focused on money that Manafort believed he was owed by Eastern European clients. In one April exchange days after Trump named Manafort as a campaign strategist, Manafort referred to his positive press and growing reputation and asked, "How do we use to get whole?" Manafort spokesman Jason Maloni said Wednesday that the email exchanges reflected an "innocuous" effort to collect past debts.*

This would also fit with a report that Manafort was millions of dollars in debt to Russian interest. Specifically, Mr. Deripaska claimed that Mr. Manafort and his partners owed him \$19 million related to a failed investment in a Ukrainian cable television business.

We would later learn that Manafort was actually 60 million dollars in debt to Oleg Deripaska. An NBC News investigation reveals that \$26 million changed hands in the form of loan between a company linked to Manafort and the oligarch, Oleg Deripaska, a Russian billionaire with close ties to the Kremlin. The loan brings the total of their known business dealings to around \$60

*million over the past decade, according to financial documents filed in Cyprus and the Cayman Islands.*

*However, lawyers specializing in money laundering said the loans appeared unusual and merited further investigation. "Money launderers frequently will disguise payments as loans," said Stefan Cassella, a former federal prosecutor. "You can call it a loan, you can call it Mary Jane. If there's no intent to repay it, then it's not really a loan. It's just a payment."*

Despite the claims by Manafort's spokesman, Manafort was deeply in debt to Russian oligarchs, and was now attempting to use his position as Trump's campaign manager to cash in. Furthermore, there is evidence that Manafort was also helping Deripaska to launder money.

A month after Manafort's letter offering private meetings with Deripaska, [Oleg Deripaska was having at least one secret meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Prikhodko in August of 2016](#). This meeting took place over a three day period, and involved Deripaska flying Prikhodko to Norway on one of his personal private jet. One of the conversations recorded between the two men, showed them specifically talking about relations with the United States and the Obama administration. Later, Prikhodko was snuck off of Deripaska's yacht so the two men would not be seen together.

This story was exposed after a female escort of Deripaska leaked a video showing the two men on Deripaska's yacht. After the video was released, [the Russian government threatened to block both Youtube and Instagram](#) if they did not remove the video.

This revelation shows a direct line of communication from Trump's campaign to the Kremlin; from Manafort, to Deripaska, to Prikhodko, to Putin.

## The Trump Tower Meeting

[On June 3rd](#) Rob Goldstone sent an email to Donald Trump Jr. The email was an offer to set up a meeting with Russian officials who wanted to share some incriminating evidence they had on Hillary Clinton. Donald Trump Jr. responded to Goldstone, *"if it's what you say I love it."* Over the next few days Goldstone and Trump Jr. would email back and forth setting up the details of the meeting. On June 7th they decided to meet on Thursday, June 9th at 3pm in Trump Tower New York.

It's worth pointing out that this contact between Goldstone and Trump Jr occurred just two weeks after Paul Manafort had become Donald Trump's Campaign Manager, and [one month](#) after Candidate Trump wrapped up the Republican nomination,

Three hours after the meeting was set up, [Donald Trump](#) was giving a speech in which he *promised to deliver a major address detailing Mrs. Clinton's "corrupt dealings" to give "favorable treatment" to foreign governments, including "the Russians."*

The meeting, [which happened on June 9th](#), involved Donald Trump Jr., Paul Manafort, Jared Kushner, Rob Goldstone, two russian lobbyists, and two translators. [One of the lobbyists was Natalia Veselnitskaya](#), *a Moscow lawyer with powerful government contacts, she represented a military unit founded by the Federal Security Service in court cases in 2011 and 2012, court rulings seen by The Washington Post show.*

Another Russian at the meeting was [Rinat Akhmetshin](#) who *"openly described his years as an officer in the Soviet GRU, the military intelligence arm, serving in Afghanistan."*

[An eighth man at the meeting was Irakly Kaveladze](#) who *attended the meeting on behalf of Aras Agalarov, a billionaire real estate magnate with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin and a Trump family friend.*

*It wasn't until a year after the meeting that anyone found out about it. The disclosure of the meeting played out in a week long media circus that first included denials the meeting occurred, then later various contradicting reasons were given for the meeting.*

It's also worth noting that we know [Donald Trump was at Trump Tower while the meeting took place, and a mere 40 minutes after the meeting](#), Donald Trump sent out a tweet about Hillary Clinton's emails. [Trump Jr would claim](#) the meeting lasted 20-30 minutes.

On March 5, 2018, Sam Nunberg, an aid to Donald Trump during the time period, gave an on air interview to CNN's Jake Tapper. During that interview, [Nunberg explicitly stated that Donald Trump knew about the meeting a week before it happened.](#) *"He was talking about it a week before...I don't know why he went around trying to hide it,"* Nunberg said

Another person of interest at Trump Tower that day was Reince Priebus. White House correspondent [Jonathan Lemire spotted the Republican Party Chairman entering Trump Tower that morning.](#)

It is has also been speculated that this meeting [was a test run by the Russian Government to see how the Trump campaign would react](#); *"It bears all the hallmarks of a professionally planned, carefully orchestrated intelligence soft pitch designed to gauge receptivity, while leaving room for plausible deniability in case the approach is rejected. And the Trump campaign's willingness to take the meeting - and, more important, its failure to report the episode to U.S. authorities - may have been exactly the green light Russia was looking for to launch a more aggressive phase of intervention in the U.S. election."*

Later we would learn that [Donald Trump Jr. specifically asked the Russian Lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya](#), *she had evidence of illegal donations to the Clinton Foundation, the lawyer told the Senate Judiciary Committee in answers to written questions [...]* Once it became apparent that she did not have meaningful information about Clinton, Trump seemed to lose interest, *Veselnitskaya said, and the meeting petered out.*

To recap: Rob Goldstone, a music producer, who originally introduced Donald Trump to Aras Agalarov, offered to introduce Donald Trump Jr. to Russian officials with compromising intelligence on Hillary Clinton. Not only was Trump Jr. willing to have the meeting, he took Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner along. Furthermore, Donald Trump Jr. seemed to only be interested in dirty on Hillary Clinton.

What we have here is very clear evidence that three high level members of Trump's team were willing to sit down with Russian officials with the expectations of receiving compromising information on Hillary Clinton. We also have evidence that Donald Trump himself was aware of this meeting because he was at Trump Tower when it took place. The timeline of some of Trump's public statements about Hillary Clinton also match up with a timeline of the meeting.

When the story about the meeting first broke the [Trump administration made overt efforts to cover up the story](#). One concerning point though is the timeline of their coverups when compared to President Trump's meetings with President Vladimir Putin. The same day that reporters from the New York Times contacted the White House for a statement before breaking the story, President Trump was in Poland for a G20 Summit. During this summit Donald Trump met twice with Vladimir Putin. In one meeting, President Trump *"[took] possession of the notes of his own interpreter and instruct[ed] the linguist not to discuss what had transpired with other administration officials."*

In the second meeting, *the two presidents spoke for about 15 minutes during a dinner associated with the Group of 20 event. The only other person in attendance was Putin's interpreter. Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group, learned of the meeting, which, he said, Trump hadn't informed his advisers about afterward.*

When asked about the meeting later, President Trump told reporters, *"Actually, it was very interesting," Trump added, "we talked about adoptions. ... We talked about Russian adoption."*

Why all this matters is because the day after the story about the Trump Tower meeting broke, and the day after Donald Trump talked to Putin about adoptions [Donald Trump would personally dictate the first misleading statement](#) that the Trump Tower meeting was about adoptions.

Not only did Donald Trump's Campaign and Administration try to keep the Trump Tower meeting a secret from the public. The information that we have raises the very real possibility that

Donald Trump might have coordinated his cover story with Vladimir Putin.

# The Convention

Barely a week before the GOP convention, Donald Trump had still not finalized his choice for Vice President. He was leaning heavily towards New Jersey Governor Chris Christie when Paul Manafort stepped in. [On July 13th](#) Manafort arranged a meeting between Donald Trump and then Indiana governor Mike Pence; *what had previously been reported as a “lucky break” by the New York Times was actually a swift political maneuver devised by the now fired campaign manager. Set on changing Trump’s mind, he concocted a story that Trump’s plane had mechanical problems, forcing the soon-to-be Republican nominee to stay the night in Indianapolis for breakfast with the Pence family on Wednesday morning.*

Three days later, [On July 16th](#), Donald Trump nominated Mike Pence as his choice for Vice President. [This suggests that Paul Manafort \(who had been paid by pro Putin politicians and was heavily in debt to Pro Putin oligarchs\) played a direct role in Mike Pence becoming the Vice President of the United States.](#)

This was two days before the start of the Republican National Convention, which took place on July 18-21, 2016.

[On July 19, 2016](#), Donald Trump was briefed by counter intelligence experts with the FBI and informed that Russian spies would try and infiltrate his campaign.

[Three things occurred at the time of the convention that raises concern:](#)

First, Donald Trump made a point of [removing language calling for the support of “lethal defensive weapons” for Ukraine against Russia](#) from the GOP platform. This change came from Trump himself.

Second, [Sergey Kislyak \(the Russian Ambassador to the United States\) attended the GOP convention and met with high ranking members of Trump's campaign](#), including then Senator (and now Attorney General) Jeff Sessions, Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, and National Security adviser, Michael Flynn. It is worth pointing out that [Kislyak did not attend the Democratic Party convention](#).

Finally, the day after the Republican Convention was over, [Wikileaks released the DNC hacked](#)



emails.

Five days later Donald Trump looked directly into a camera and said, *"Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press."*

In short, while the Russian ambassador was meeting with Trump's people at the convention, Trump made an alteration to the GOP platform that was beneficial to Russia. The day after the convention, Russia used Wikileaks to release the DNC hacked emails. The response from Donald Trump was to tell Russia that they would be rewarded for more hacking.

It's also worth noting that according to an indictment filled by the Robert Mueller's Special Counsel on Russia interference, *on or about July 27, 2016, the conspirators attempted after hours to spearfish for the first time email accounts at a domain hosted by a third-party provider and used by Clinton's personal office. At or around the same time, they also targeted seventy-six email addresses at the domain for the Clinton campaign.*

Mere hours after Donald Trump publicly asking Russia to hack into Hillary Clinton's emails, they began an attempt to do exactly that.

Another member of Trump's campaign who met with Kislyak at the convention was Carter Page.

Barely a month after the GOP convention, Paul Manafort was forced to resign as Campaign Manager when allegations about his role in Ukraine began to surface. Specifically concerning was a ledger showing over \$12 million dollars in cash payments to Manafort by Ukrainian Viktor Yanukovych's Pro Russian political party. Almost a full year later Paul Manafort would later disclose a total of \$17 million in payments for his work in Ukraine. Hacked cell phone text messages from Paul Manafort's daughters would call this "blood money" while suggesting that he was responsible for people being killed in Ukraine.

It's worth adding that after his departure as campaign manager, Paul Manafort did not just go away. Even after the election was over, Paul Manafort was still living in Trump Tower, and advising President Elect Trump on cabinet picks. Manafort's long time friend, Roger Stone, was still in contact with and advising President Trump as recently as October of 2017.

More than a year after his departure it was learned that Paul Manafort had twice been the subject of a FISA warrant himself. First, in 2015, the FBI had a FISA warrant on Manafort that ended in early 2016. The *"second warrant was part of the FBI's efforts to investigate ties between Trump campaign associates and suspected Russian operatives."*

Manafort became the second member of Trump's inner circle to become the subject of a FISA warrant. Manafort and Page were both subject to these warrants through at least the fall of 2016 and spring of 2017.



One other event that happened at the convention is worth concern. While giving a speech during the republican convention, Mike Flynn led the crowds to chants of “Lock her up.” In fact, the theme of locking up and imprisoning Hillary Clinton was carried by Donald Trump himself. During the second presidential debate, President Trump would go so far as to threaten to put Hillary Clinton in jail.

Why this is concerning goes back to candidate Trump’s Campaign manager Paul Manafort and his involvement in the Ukraine elections. During the 2010 elections locking up Viktor Yanukovych’s political opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, became a theme of his campaign. After the election, Yanukovych ultimately did lock up Yulia Tymoshenko who would spend 2.5 years in prison before being released.

## The Republican Party Response

By August and September the only people denying Russia was behind the DNC hacks were ardent Republicans and Donald Trump supporters.

Congressman Devin Nunes went so far as to cancel a scheduled briefing with congress on the matter by former Director of the CIA John Brennan. Devin Nunes would later go on to serve on Trump’s transition team. Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell made a point of shutting down any conversation about the subject, dismissing the intelligence outright. However, *“a week later, McConnell and other congressional leaders issued a cautious statement that encouraged state election officials to ensure their networks were “secure from attack.” The release made no mention of Russia and emphasized that the lawmakers “would oppose any effort by the federal government” to encroach on the state’s’ authorities.”*

Later we would learn that an entire month before the GOP convention several Republican congressmen, including Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, were caught on tape discussing the idea that Putin pays Trump; *“There’s two people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump,” McCarthy (R-Calif.) said. According to a recording of the June 15, 2016, exchange, which was listened to and verified by The Washington Post. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher is a Californian Republican known in Congress as a fervent defender of Putin and Russia. Some of the lawmakers laughed at McCarthy’s comment. Then McCarthy quickly added: “Swear to God.”*

*Ryan instructed his Republican lieutenants to keep the conversation private, saying: “No leaks. . . This is how we know we’re a real family here.”*

While the conversation has been dismissed as a joke, it shows that a month before the Republican Convention, the financial ties between Trump and Russia were well established and

understood by Republicans.

This conversation would become even more relevant when [later it would be revealed that](#) “Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) met with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya in Moscow last year, just two months before the lawyer met with Donald Trump Jr. and other top Trump campaign aides.”

This meeting with Trump aids was a reference to the June 11, 2017 meeting between Trump Jr, Paul Manafort, Jared Kushner, and a Russian delegation about sharing sensitive information on Hillary Clinton.

Congressman Rohrabacher Russian connections became so severe, that in [October of 2017](#), Republican congressmen refused to pack anymore funding for Rohrabacher to take trips to Russia.

[In 2012](#) the FBI notified Congressman Rohrabacher that the Russian government considered him a valuable intelligence source and even had a codename for him.

[Campaign disclosures from Paul Manafort](#) showed that Manafort not only met with congressman Rohrabacher to discuss Ukraine, but donated \$1,000 to Rohrabacher’s campaign. *The following year, the California Republican became even more valuable, assuming the chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs subcommittee that oversees Russia policy. He sailed to re-election again and again, even as he developed ties to Vladimir V. Putin’s Russia.*

Even after the FBI had information showing Congressman Dana Rohrabacher was consider a Russian asset, the Republicans in congress allowed him to chair a committee that helped drive Russian foreign policy.

## Signs of Collusion During the Campaign

[On August 17th, 2016](#) candidate Trump received his first intelligence briefing. [In that briefing, he was informed that US intelligence officials](#) have drawn “direct links” between the hacking of the Democratic Party emails and Russian President, Vladimir Putin.

[Three weeks later at a Town Hall event, Donald Trump said](#), “If he says great things about me, I’m going to say great things about him. I’ve already said, he is really very much of a leader. I mean, you can say, ‘Oh, isn’t that a terrible thing’ -- the man has very strong control over a country,” Trump said. “Now, it’s a very different system, and I don’t happen to like the system. But certainly, in that system, he’s been a leader, far more than our president has been a leader.”

After two intelligence briefings (7/19 and 8/17) where Candidate Trump was told that Vladimir Putin was working to attack our democracy and that Russian spies would try and infiltrate his campaign, the response from Candidate Trump was to go out and publicly praise Vladimir Putin.

From August 14 through September 9 of 2016, Roger Stone was in direct communication with a person claiming to be Guccifer 2.0. The Guccifer 2.0 persona attempted to claim that they were responsible for hacking the DNC emails. On August 17, Guccifer 2.0 sent a message to Roger Stone offering to help. Later we would learn that the [Guccifer 2.0 persona was an officer working for the Russian military Intelligence \(GRU\)](#).

In a tweet on [August 21st](#), Roger stone claimed, *"It will soon be Podesta's time in the Barrel,"* seemingly predicting the Podesta email leak that would happen later in October.

In [September 2016](#) Vladimir Putin gave a press interview to Bloomberg in which he suggested we might never know who hacked the DNC emails. Putin went so far as to dismiss the importance of knowing who hacked the DNC emails as opposed to the substance. Putin told Bloomberg that what mattered most was the content of the emails.

[This sentiment was echoed later in September by Donald Trump himself](#) during the September 26th debate with Hillary Clinton when he said, *"I don't think anybody knows it was Russia that broke into the DNC. She's saying Russia, Russia, Russia, but I don't -- maybe it was. I mean, it could be Russia, but it could also be China," [...]* *"It could also be lots of other people. It also could be somebody sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds, OK?"*

However, *A senior U.S. intelligence official assured NBC News that cybersecurity and the Russian government's attempts to interfere in the 2016 election have been briefed to, and discussed extensively with, both parties' candidates, surrogates, and leadership since mid-August. "To profess not to know at this point is willful misrepresentation," said the official. "The intelligence community has walked a very thin line in not taking sides, but both candidates have all the information they need to be crystal clear."*

Donald Trump would eventually take the conversation [to the point of suggesting](#), *"maybe there is no hacking."*

Even though Donald Trump had been told in an intelligence briefing that Russia was behind the hacking, Donald Trump would publically use the same talking points as Vladimir Putin to dismiss those intelligence reports. Furthermore, Donald Trump would not even acknowledge that Russia was behind the hacking. This behavior was described by a senior intelligence officials as *"willful."*

We would later learn that a [Putin linked think tank](#) came up with plans to interfere in the election. One document *"recommended the Kremlin launch a propaganda campaign on social media and Russian state-backed global news outlets to encourage U.S. voters to elect a president who would take a softer line toward Russia than the administration of then President Barack Obama, the seven officials said."*

Yet another document *"drafted in October and distributed in the same way, warned that Democratic Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was likely to win the election. For that reason, it argued, it was better for Russia to end its pro-Trump propaganda and instead intensify its messaging about voter fraud to undermine the U.S. electoral system's legitimacy and damage Clinton's reputation in an effort to undermine her presidency, the seven officials said."*

However, the roots of this idea rest in Roger Stone who, on August 16th, published an editorial in "The Hill," entitled, "[Can the 2016 election be rigged? You bet.](#)" The idea that the election was rigged would go on to be echoed by [none other than Donald Trump](#), in a tweet on October 19th, *"The election is absolutely being rigged by the dishonest and distorted media pushing Crooked Hillary - but also at many polling places - SAD."*

Later [that night at the third presidential debate](#), Donald Trump refused to say if he would even accept the results of the election, saying; *"I will look at it at the time," Trump said, later adding, "I will keep you in suspense."*

The idea of a [rigged election became a hallmark of Donald Trump's campaign](#) during the final month of the election. At a campaign in Bangor, Maine, he would say *"The election is being rigged by corrupt media pushing false allegations and outright lies in an effort to elect Hillary Clinton president. But we are going to stop it. We are not going to back down."*

[The notion of a rigged election can also be traced back to the 2010 election in Ukraine](#) where Viktor Yanukovich, whose campaign was managed by Paul Manafort, also made similar charges.

[During a Senate hearing on March 30, 2017](#) Clint Watts, a Former FBI Specialist, and Senior fellow for the Foreign Policy Research Institute Program on National Security testified, *"Part of the reason active measures have worked in this U.S. election is because the commander-in-chief has used Russian active measures at times against his opponents," [...] "He denies the intel from the United States about Russia. He claimed that the election could be rigged; that was the number one theme pushed by RT Sputnik news," Watts said. "So part of the reason active measures works and it does today in terms of Trump Tower being wiretapped is because they parrot the same lines."*

[The testimony of Clint Watts puts the most precise exclamation point on the entire story. Not only has Donald Trump never blamed Russia for their interference in our election, he has actively sought to deflect attention from the investigation and has even taken steps to shut down the investigation. He has done this while echoing Kremlin talking points.](#)

On October 7th a now infamous Access Hollywood tape was leaked to the press which had candidate Donald Trump on tape bragging about committing sexual assault. [Within hours of the Access Hollywood news story breaking](#), Wikileaks dropped thousands of Russian hacked

emails from Clinton Campaign Chairman John Podesta. It was very clear the email drop was an attempt to deflect from the damage done by the Access Hollywood tape.

After the Podesta email leak, [Roger Stone would turn around and claim](#) he had no advanced knowledge of the leak. Roger Stone would claim that he was referring to some business interest of John Podesta. However, there were no news stories or incidents with any of Podesta's business interest at any time after Stone's tweet.

Later we would learn that on [August 4, 2016](#), Roger Stone emailed a friend and claimed that he'd previously had dinner with Julian Assange. On the same day, Roger Stone appeared on the conspiracy theory show Infowars and claimed that Wikileaks had damaging emails about Hillary Clinton. Stone also claimed that he had met with Donald Trump the day before, on August 3.

On [August 8, 2016](#) at a speech, Roger Stone would claim was asked to speculate about what the October Surprise would be. He replied, *"I actually have communicated with Assange. I believe the next tranche of his documents pertain to the Clinton Foundation"*

Just days before the Podesta email leak, [Stone also tweeted](#) *"Wednesday@HillaryClinton is done. #Wikileaks."* Also, [Roger Stone had made repeated claims](#) that he had back channel communications with Julian Assange of Wikileaks.

[By mid october 2017 Roger Stone](#) had reportedly complied with a request from lawmakers leading the Russia investigation to turn over the identity of his go-between to WikiLeaks.

[On January 25, 2019](#), Roger Stone would be arrested and indicted by the Special Counsel's office for his involvement as a go between of the Trump Campaign and Wikileaks. [Paragraph 35 of the Indictment](#) would outline how Roger Stone communicated with the Trump Campaign about the Wikileaks email dumps

*A. On multiple occasions, STONE told senior Trump Campaign officials about materials possessed by Organization 1 and the timing of future releases.*

*B. On or about October 3, 2016, STONE wrote to a supporter involved with the Trump Campaign, "Spoke to my friend in London last night. The payload is still coming."*

*C. On or about October 4, 2016, STONE told a high-ranking Trump Campaign official that the head of Organization 1 had a "[s]erious security concern" but would release "a load every week going forward."*

[One other event occurred on October 7th](#). Before the Access Hollywood tape or the Podesta emails being leaked, the Department of Homeland Security and Office of the Director of National

Intelligence issued a rare joint public statement saying, *"The U.S. Intelligence Community (USIC) is confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of e-mails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations."* The statement would go on to add, *"These thefts and disclosures are intended to interfere with the US election process."*

The events of October 7th raise a lot of concerns because they show that within hours of the US Government announcing that Russia is interfering in the US elections and the Trump Access Hollywood tape is leaked, Russia released more DNC emails via Wikileaks. Furthermore, this leak was predicted more than once by Roger Stone would later be indicted for his actions.

It's also worth pointing out that the day before, on [October 6 2018](#), Russian operatives working on a disinformation campaign fired off more than 18,000 tweets.

Five days after all of this, [on October 12, 2017](#), Wikileaks sent a direct message through Twitter to Donald Trump Jr thanking him for Trump sr. praising Wikileaks at recent campaign event. Wikileaks also told Trump Jr. *"Strongly suggest your dad tweets this link if he mentions us,"* *WikiLeaks went on, pointing Trump Jr. to the link wlsearch.tk, which it said would help Trump's followers dig through the trove of stolen documents and find stories. "There's many great stories the press are missing and we're sure some of your follows [sic] will find it,"* *WikiLeaks went on. "Btw we just released Podesta Emails Part 4."*

*Trump Jr. did not respond to this message. But just 15 minutes after it was sent, as The Wall Street Journal's Byron Tau [pointed out](#), Donald Trump himself [tweeted](#), "Very little pick-up by the dishonest media of incredible information provided by WikiLeaks. So dishonest! Rigged system!"*

## The Social Media Campaign

All of this was just part of an information warfare carried out against the United States by Russia. Their primary delivery tool became social media. [Twitter would later confirm](#) that over \$270,000 dollars in ads were purchased by Russian parties. Russian interest also purchased at least [\\$150,000 in ads backing Jill Stein, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump](#). At least one of the ads [targeted Black Lives Matters supporters in Ferguson and Baltimore](#).

[Russia went so far](#) as to use what became known as "troll farms" to create and distribute massive amounts of fake news. *On Twitter, as on Facebook, Russian fingerprints are on hundreds or thousands of fake accounts that regularly posted anti-Clinton messages. Many were automated Twitter accounts, called bots, that sometimes fired off identical messages seconds apart - and in the exact alphabetical order of their made-up names, according to the FireEye researchers. On Election Day, for instance, they found that one group of Twitter bots sent out the hashtag #WarAgainstDemocrats more than 1,700 times.*



One facebook group later traced back to Russia was targeting over 225,000 people with pro Texas and Anti-Hillary posts. At the end of October, when a Clinton win seemed inevitable, the page started posting pro-Texas secessionist messaging. The Texas secessionist movement was also widely covered by the english Russian News channel RT. After the election, a similar Calexit (California Secession) movement was also traced back to Russia.

The same Facebook page managed to get an anti-islamic rally in which *“On May 21, 2016 a handful of people turned out to protest the opening of a library at an Islamic Center in Houston, Texas. Two held up a banner proclaiming #WhiteLivesMatter. A counter-protest began across the street; video shows a noisy but non-violent confrontation.”*

This was not the only incident of Russian’s organizing public events. Facebook testimony would reveal that 129 events were organized by 13 Russian created pages. Approximately 338,300 unique accounts viewed these events. About 25,800 accounts marked that they were interested in an event, and about 62,500 marked that they were going to an event. We do not have data about the realization of these events.

Russian efforts to meddle in American politics did not end at Facebook and Twitter. A CNN investigation of a Russian-linked account shows its tentacles extended to YouTube, Tumblr, and even Pokémon Go. A campaign called “Don’t Shoot Us” claimed to be affiliated with Black Lives Matter, but was trying to portray the movement as a threat to further divide the nation. The Pokemon Go account was linked to a Tumblr account and took advantage of how social media platforms interacted with each other, which meant that the efforts used by Russians were able to have further reach than intended.

Also through Facebook, a substantial amount of information got cross-posted to the social media site Pinterest: *“We believe the fake Facebook content was so sophisticated that it tricked real Americans into saving it to Pinterest,” said Pinterest head of public policy Charlie Hale. “We’ve removed the content brought to our attention and continue to investigate.”*

The Russian Troll farms went so far as to use Youtube accounts to try and convince Clinton voters to just stay home. According to the YouTube page for “Williams and Calvin,” the Clintons are *“serial killers who are going to rape the whole nation.” Donald Trump can’t be racist because he’s a “businessman.” Hillary Clinton’s campaign was “fund[ed] by the Muslim.”*

*These are a sample of the videos put together by two black video bloggers calling themselves Williams and Calvin Johnson, whose social media pages investigators say are part of the broad Russian campaign to influence American politics. Across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube they purported to offer “a word of truth” to African-American audiences.*

The Russian efforts were so effective that Kellyanne Conway and Donald Trump Jr. pushed messages from an account operated from Russia’s ‘troll farm’—including allegations of voter



*fraud a week before Election Day. Some of the Trump campaign's most prominent names and supporters, including Trump's campaign manager, digital director, and son, pushed tweets from professional trolls paid by the Russian government in the heat of the 2016 election campaign.*

*The Twitter account @Ten\_GOP, which called itself the "Unofficial Twitter account of Tennessee Republicans," was operated from the Kremlin-backed "Russian troll farm," or Internet Research Agency.*

The @Ten\_GOP account was so effective that on as late as [September 17, 2017](#), President Trump himself retweeted the account, and thanked them.

[An Oxford Study](#) would later find that:

*(1) Nationally, Twitter users got more misinformation, polarizing and conspiratorial content than professionally produced news.*

*(2) Users in some states, however, shared more polarizing political news and information than users in other states.*

*(3) Average levels of misinformation were higher in swing states than in uncontested states, even when weighted for the relative size of the user population in each state.*

In the final weeks of the election, [Russian bots retweet Donald Trump's tweets more than half a million times](#); Twitter told the Senate Judiciary Committee that 50,000 automated accounts had ties to Russia and sent more than 2 million election-related tweets between September 1 and November 15, 2016, CNN Money reported. The bots retweeted Trump roughly 10 times more often than they did Hillary Clinton, according to Twitter's written statement, delivered to congress on January 19. These accounted for 4.25 percent of all of the retweets then-candidate Trump received during that period.

The use of social media by Russia did not stop after the election. As [recently as September 2017](#) Russian internet troll farms were found to be stoking the NFL national anthem debate.

Meanwhile, the Trump campaign was also using social media platforms to target specific demographics. [Brad Parscale, would later say](#); "Twitter is how [Trump] talked to the people, Facebook was going to be how he won," Parscale tells Stahl. Parscale says he used the majority of his digital ad budget on Facebook ads and explained how efficient they could be, particularly in reaching the rural vote. "So now Facebook lets you get to...15 people in the Florida Panhandle that I would never buy a TV commercial for"

The entire digital aspect of Trump's campaign was called "[Project Alamo](#)." The project relied on everyone *from European data scientists to gun-toting elderly call-center volunteers*. It also employed embedded employees from social media sites to help use all the features to specifically target demographics. That aspect of the campaign would be ramped up by Steve Bannon and the Mercer family; who have both been major shareholders in a London Company Cambridge Analytica, whose *statistical models isolated likely supporters whom Parscale bombarded with ads on Facebook*.

[All told](#) the Trump campaign ran up to 50,000 variants of its Facebook ads a day, learning which ones resonated best with voters. It also deployed so-called "dark posts." Which are non public paid posts that only appear in the news feeds of the people the advertiser chooses.

Cambridge Analytica was able to take targeting ads to a new level by going beyond the typical voter targeting - relying on online clues, like Facebook "likes," to give a hint at a user's political leanings and construct a picture of a voter's mental state. The "psychographic" picture Cambridge ostensibly provides to a campaign is the ability to tailor a specific message based on personality type.

Cambridge Analytica was used heavily by the Trump campaign. Ultimately it was Jared Kushner who laid the groundwork for the Trump's digital campaign and brought on Brad Parscale to run it as Trump's digital media director. Kushner and Parscale were said to be working side by side.

Steve Bannon, who replaced Paul Manafort as Trump's Campaign Manager, had previously sat on the board of Cambridge Analytica and owned between \$1-5 million worth of shares in the company.

We would find out later that Cambridge Analytica is a subject of Special Counsel Bob Mueller's investigation into Russia's role in the 2016 US election. One potential area of concern is the revelation that the chief executive [Alexander Nix] of a data-analytics firm that worked for President Donald Trump's campaign reached out to WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, to offer help organizing the Hillary Clinton related emails the website was releasing, according to a person familiar with the effort.

Later we would learn that Russian officials were able to access a large part of Cambridge Analytica Facebook data.

## The Transition from normal to Trumpism

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United State of America. Two days after the election, President-elect Trump met with President Barack Obama. In that meeting, Obama specifically warned Donald Trump about hiring Michael Flynn.

On November 18, 2016, Donald Trump announced Michael Flynn would be his national security adviser. Trump specifically stated, "General Flynn is one of the country's foremost experts on military and intelligence matters and he will be an invaluable asset to me and my administration."

The same day, the Trump team also announced Jeff Sessions would be the new attorney General.

On December 29, 2016, The Obama administration expelled 35 Russian diplomats in retaliation for Russian interference in the 2016 election.

December 30, 2016, it was announced that Vladimir Putin would not expel any US diplomats in response. This move came as a surprise considering that Russian foreign Minister Lavrov had just publicly called for a reciprocal action against the US.

On the same day, President elect Donald Trump tweeted, *Great move on delay (by V. Putin) - I always knew he was very smart!*

Trump also pinned this tweet to the top of his feed so it was the first thing people would see when visiting his twitter account.

We would later find out that Michael Flynn personally called Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak both the day before, and same day that Obama announced the new sanctions. During the call, which was picked up by US intelligence officials, Michael Flynn asked the Russian Ambassador not to escalate the situation.

Furthermore, Michael Flynn also talked to transition team officials both before and after the call.

Michael Flynn went to far as to tell business associates that the Russian sanctions would be “ripped up” as so as Trump was in office.

## The Presidency and Revelations

The Russia story had largely died down by the time Donald Trump took office. The news quickly shifted to the many missteps of the Trump administration in the early days of office. From a war with the press, to a failed Muslim ban, to a war of words with Mexico; every day seemed like a new adventure with President Trump. Every so often a news piece would show up about Russia, but it was always outplayed by the daily shenanigans of the Trump administration who were literally working in the dark because they were unable to figure out where the light switches in the white house were.

One of the stories that was drowned out included the revelation that one of the first acts of the Trump administration was to ease a set of sanctions with Russia. Most concerning is that these sanctions affected Russia's intelligence agency; Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (FSB. ) This is the same FSB that the US intelligence agencies had concluded was behind the hacking of the DNC emails.

Just over a month later, A grand jury in the northern district of California had indicted four defendants; including two officers of the Russian FSB for computer hacking, economic espionage, and other criminal offenses in connection with a conspiracy beginning in January 2014, to access Yahoo's network and the contents of webmail accounts.

This means the Treasury Department eased sanctions on a foreign organization under investigation by the Justice Department. More specifically, one of the Trump administration's first acts was to ease some of the sanctions on Russia.

This would not be the only time President Trump would help Russia with sanctions. In October of 2017 President Trump would allow a deadline to pass for imposing more sanctions on Russia. That was the second time the Trump administration would help Russia with sanctions.

On February 9th Mother Jones ran an article, "[The Mysterious Disappearance of the Biggest Scandal in Washington](#)." The article attempted to lay out the lack of press coverage about the matter, going so far as to suggest questions for then Communications Director, Sean Spicer.

Coincidentally on that same day; the the New Times reported that [Michael Flynn had spoken with Russian Ambassador Kislyak about sanctions](#) more than a month before Trump took office. One of the topics was sanctions against Russia.

This was a direct contradiction of statements [he made to the Washington Post](#) just one day before when he *"denied that he had discussed sanctions with Kislyak. Asked in an interview whether he had ever done so, he twice said, "No.""*

The following day (February 10th) President Trump denied any knowledge of Michael Flynn's conversation with Kislyak saying, *"I don't know about that. I haven't seen it."* He also vowed to *"look into it."*

However, on February 13th we learned that acting Attorney General Sally Yates had *"informed the Trump White House late last month that she believed Michael Flynn had misled senior administration officials about the nature of his communications with the Russian ambassador to the United States, and warned that the national security adviser was potentially vulnerable to Russian blackmail."*

Later that same night, 24 days into the Trump administration, [Michael Flynn](#) *"the national security adviser, resigned on the Monday night after it was revealed that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other top White House officials about his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States."*

Mike Pence claimed that February 9th, 2017 was the first he had heard about Flynn talking to the Russian Ambassador saying, *"Hearing that story today was the first I'd heard of it," Pence said, adding that he "fully supported" the decision that President Trump made to ask for General Flynn's resignation."*

On November 18th, 2016 Congressman Elijah Cummings, the ranking Democrat on the House oversight Committee, had sent Mike Pence (the head of the Trump transition team) [a letter](#)

detailing the concerns they had about Michael Flynn.

Later we would learn that *“Michael T. Flynn told President Trump’s transition team weeks before the inauguration that he was under federal investigation for secretly working as a paid lobbyist for Turkey during the campaign.”*

This investigation was entirely unrelated to the allegations of Russia meddling in our elections. Again, even after confirmed, Vice President Mike Pence denied he had any knowledge of Michael Flynn’s lobbying work.

This pattern of members of the Trump team making public statements, only to have those statements shown to be lies within days would continue to be a hallmark of the investigation into the ties between Donald Trump and Russia. Everything they say has to be corrected, usually more than once. More importantly, it would continue to paint a trend of people with no regard for the truth, even when faced with the possibility of having their lies exposed.

## The Cover Up

On March 20th, before the House Intelligence Committee, [James Comey officially confirmed the existence of an FBI investigation](#) into the Russian attempts to influence the election for Donald Trump.

Over the next week Devin Nunes, the Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, [took a series of steps to permanently disrupt the house investigation](#). First he cancelled a hearing set to take place on March 21 involving Sally Yates, and former CIA Director John Brennan, and former director of national intelligence James Clapper. In another more bizarre incident, Devin Nunes stopped a cab with himself and two aids, and disappeared into the night. The next morning he claimed he had to go to the White House to use a secure facility to view confidential information related to the investigation. He then claimed he had to return to the white house to tell them what he had found the night before at the white house. He did all of this while refusing to discuss with any of his colleagues what information he had.

Devin Nunes, and other Republicans, [became more obsessed with who unmasked certain Americans in foreign](#) communication intercepts. However, this was revealed to be a distraction by Republican Senator Burr who said, *“The unmasking thing was all created by Devin Nunes, and I’ll wait to go through our full evaluation to see if there was anything improper that happened.”*

It’s again important to remember that Congressman Devin Nunes [was on Donald Trump’s transition team](#), and had some interest in attempting to derail the investigations.

[On May 9th, 2017](#) President Donald Trump fired the director of the FBI James Comey. The letter authorizing the firing specifically referenced the Russia investigation with Trump saying, *“While I*

*greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless concur with the judgment of the Department of Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the bureau."*

Trump's reference to concurring with the DOJ was little more an attempt to create a reason to fire James Comey. [Jeff Sessions had specifically been tasked](#) with finding a reason.

This wasn't the only letter firing Comey that was written. While the details have yet to be released; [Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller allegedly](#) has in his possession an original two page letter Donald Trump and White House aide Stephen Miller drafted.

The firing of James Comey brought [immediate call backs to Richard Nixon](#) who fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox during a showdown over the Nixon Tapes.

Two days after firing James Comey, [Donald Trump would sit down with Lester Holt](#), and tell the world that his decision to fire James Comey was because of the Russia Investigation. Trump stated specifically, *"And in fact when I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made up story."*

The reality was that the Russia story was heating up. [James Comey had gone from getting weekly briefings to daily briefings on the matter](#), and just weeks before being fired, Comey had asked for more funds from the Justice Department.

The same day as the Lester Holt interview, we learned that Trump and Comey had dinner just one week after Trump was sworn in as President. At the dinner, [Comey alleged](#) that Trump expressed an expectations of loyalty.

Three days after firing FBI Director James Comey, President [Donald Trump tweeted](#) *"James Comey better hope that there are no "tapes" of our conversations before he starts leaking to the press."* The entire conversation was another in a long line of direct comparisons to Watergate, and the [subject of the existence of tapes took over the news cycle](#). Comey would later testify to the Senate that he *"hopes there are tapes."* Congress would demand Donald Trump release the tapes. Finally, on June 22, 2017, Donald Trump would tweet, *"With all of the recently reported electronic surveillance, intercepts, unmasking and illegal leaking of information, I have no idea whether there are "tapes" or recordings of my conversations with James Comey, but I did not make, and do not have, any such recordings,"*

Another point of contention between James Comey and Donald Trump was [Comey's refusal to end the investigation into former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn](#). *"I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go," Mr. Trump told Mr. Comey, according to the memo. "He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go."*



This was not the only direct attempt by President Trump to sideline an investigation. *President “Trump made separate appeals to the Director of National Intelligence, Daniel Coats, and to Adm. Michael S. Rogers, the Director of the National Security Agency; urging them to publicly deny the existence of any evidence of collusion during the 2016 election.”*

The day after firing James Comey, *Donald Trump invited Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov* into the oval office. The meeting ended up being controversial to the Russia investigation for multiple reasons. The only press allowed into the meeting was a Russian cameraman. Both Kislyak and Lavrov’s name have repeatedly come up in the Russia investigation, and both men are known Russian intelligence operatives.

Beyond that, President Trump also *divulged highly classified information to both Kislyak and Lavrov that the US had received from Israel.*

Furthermore, *Donald Trump told both Kislyak and Lavrov; “I just fired the head of the F.B.I. He was crazy, a real nut job,” Mr. Trump said, according to the document, which was read to The New York Times by an American official. “I faced great pressure because of Russia. That’s taken off.” Mr. Trump added, “I’m not under investigation.”*

*Not only did Trump fire the director of the FBI, he went on to tell people that he did it because of the Russia investigation, not once, but twice. All this happened while he invited known members of Russian intelligence into the Oval Office, and shared top secret intelligence. He then turned around and publicly threatened the recently fired FBI Director.*

What was most concerning about this was that it all appeared to be an attempted to shut down the investigation into Russia’s interference in our election. *Later we would find out that; law enforcement officials became so concerned by the president’s behavior that they began investigating whether he had been working on behalf of Russia against American interests, according to former law enforcement officials and others familiar with the investigation.*

*The inquiry carried explosive implications. Counterintelligence investigators had to consider whether the president’s own actions constituted a possible threat to national security. Agents also sought to determine whether Mr. Trump was knowingly working for Russia or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow’s influence.*

*The investigation the F.B.I. opened into Mr. Trump also had a criminal aspect, which has long been publicly known: whether his firing of Mr. Comey constituted obstruction of justice.*

This conversation gets to one of the hearts of the matter of the entire Trump Russia story. Benjamin Wittes would tie the story together by asking the most obvious question, *What if obstruction is the Collusion; if it is correct that the FBI’s principal interest in obstruction was not as a discrete criminal fact pattern but as a national security threat, this significantly blurs the distinction between the obstruction and collusion aspects of the investigation. In this*



*construction, obstruction was not a problem distinct from collusion, as has been generally imagined. Rather, in this construction, obstruction was the collusion, or at least part of it. The obstruction of justice statutes become, in this understanding, merely one set of statutes investigators might think about using to deal with a national security risk—specifically, the risk of a person on the U.S. side coordinating with or supporting Russian activity by shutting down the investigation.*

*It was about Russia. It was always about Russia. Full stop.*

The point, the whole point of the story comes down to this. The Russian government launched a coordinated cyber and information warfare attack against the United States of America. At every opportunity, both as Candidate and as President, Donald Trump has attempted to undermine any attempts to find out what the Russian Government was up to. As we will see, he did not stop with the firing of James Comey.

It would be no surprise that barely a week after firing FBI Director James Comey, [Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein](#) appointed a former head of the FBI, [Robert Mueller](#), as a special counselor to look into the Russia's meddling in our election. The scope of the investigation as laid out by Rosenstein was to broadly look at the specifics of Russia's attempts to meddle in our election. The letter of authorization also specifically referenced [28 C.F.R. § 600.4\(a\)](#)

*The jurisdiction of a Special Counsel shall also include the authority to investigate and prosecute federal crimes committed in the course of, and with intent to interfere with, the Special Counsel's investigation, such as perjury, obstruction of justice, destruction of evidence, and intimidation of witnesses; and to conduct appeals arising out of the matter being investigated and/or prosecute.*

This specific reference seems important because the manner in which President Trump handled the firing of James Comey raised the [question of obstruction of justice](#). Witness tampering was another concern raised when [Trump threatened to have tapes](#) of conversations with then FBI Director James Comey. This was the second time that witness tampering had been raised, the first being a [series of tweets President Trump sent out about Sally Yates](#) immediately before she was to testify before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee.

With the creation of the Special Counsel, [Attorney General Jeff Sessions offered to resign](#) after being insulted and degraded by President Trump. *"Mr. Sessions would later tell associates that the demeaning way the president addressed him was the most humiliating experience in decades of public life."*

This was not the first conflict between Jeff Sessions and Donald Trump. [Senator Jeff Sessions lied about](#) Russian contacts to the Judiciary committee hearing to approve his posting to the

Department of Justice. On March 2, 2017 Attorney General Jeff Sessions ultimately had to recuse himself from all matters involving the Russian investigation. President Trump was reportedly furious over Sessions' recusal. Trump would later publicly state; *"Jeff Sessions takes the job, gets into the job, recuses himself, which frankly I think is very unfair to the President," [...] "How do you take a job and then recuse yourself? If he would have recused himself before the job, I would have said, 'Thanks, Jeff, but I'm not going to take you.' It's extremely unfair -- and that's a mild word -- to the President."*

President Trump would go on to publicly attack Attorney General Jeff Sessions as "very weak."

Again, it's worth pointing out that Donald Trump was more than willing to publicly attack Jeff Sessions, but he has still yet to say anything critical of Vladimir Putin.

Jeff Sessions and Michael Flynn were not the only people who failed to disclose contacts with Russian diplomats. President Trump's son in law and adviser, Jared Kushner, left two different meetings with Russian officials off of his security clearance questionnaire.

One of them was especially concerning because it involved Kushner trying to use secure communications at the Russian Embassy to talk to Russia. On May 26, 2017 the Washington Post would report: *Ambassador Sergey Kislyak reported to his superiors in Moscow that Kushner, son-in-law and confidant to then-President-elect Trump, made the proposal during a meeting on Dec. 1 or 2 at Trump Tower, according to intercepts of Russian communications that were reviewed by U.S. officials. Kislyak said Kushner suggested using Russian diplomatic facilities in the United States for the communications. The meeting also was attended by Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser.*

It wasn't only Russian connections that Jared Kushner left off his forms. All told, Kushner left over 100 foreign contacts off his Jared Kushner also failed to disclose a \$285 million loan his company received from Deutsche Bank just one month prior to the election in 2016.

On June 26, 2017 the President unexpectedly tweeted that *"After consultation with my generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States government will not accept or allow ... transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the US military."*

Trump claimed that he had consulted with the military, but the Pentagon was taken by complete surprise with this tweet. Defense Secretary James Mattis was caught off guard by President Trump's announcement that he was banning transgender people from serving in the military, according to a New York Times report. Mattis, who was on vacation at the time of Trump's decision, only had one day's worth of notice before Trump tweeted his announcement of the policy, the paper reported. The report described him as "appalled." Sources close to the Defense secretary told the Times that Mattis was infuriated by the tweets, and saw them as an insult to transgender Americans currently serving in the military.

What we would find out later, is that on the morning of June 26th President Trump's former Campaign Manager Paul Manafort had his house raided by agents of the FBI.

Also that morning, before the raid occurred, President Trump attacked the acting head of the FBI, Andrew McCabe in two separate tweets

The first tweet called for McCabe's removal by attorney General Sessions. *"Why didn't A.G. Sessions replace Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe, a Comey friend who was in charge of Clinton investigation but got...."* A second tweet attempted to tie the head of the FBI to Clinton *"...big dollars (\$700,000) for his wife's political run from Hillary Clinton and her representatives. Drain the Swamp!"*

On August 25th, 2017 President Trump signed a presidential memo instructing the Defense Department to stop accepting transgender people who want to enlist in the military.

That same day news broke that Special counsel Robert Mueller had issued grand jury subpoenas for public relations firms that worked on an international campaign organized by former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort, [...] The six firms participated in a public relations effort headed by Manafort, whose ostensible mission was building support for Ukraine's entry into the European Union.

On both of these days, the big news story ended up being Trump's actions against transgender people and pushed rather incriminating stories about Paul Manafort off the leading edge of the news day. The FBI raid wasn't even reported until almost two weeks after the fact. Furthermore, President Trump threatened the head of the FBI on the same day as the raid on Manafort's house.

By the summer of 2017 the President of the United States, and virtually everyone around him, has had to retain lawyers specifically to deal with fallout from the Russia investigation. It reached the point where even Trump's personal lawyer Michael Cohen had to hire a lawyer to help him deal with the investigation.

In late October of 2017 President Trump was vowing to cover up to \$430,000 of legal fees for certain white house staffers.

As the Russia story continued to percolate through the news cycle, President Trump would continue to use his position and his twitter account to deflect from the story.

Six months into office Trump would tweet that the entire story about Russia hacking the DNC was "a hoax." He would continue to attack the United States free press over the issue. In October of 2017 President Trump would go so far as to accuse the FBI of being behind the fake news about the Russia story.

In mid October 2017 at the height of news stories talking about Russia using social media to assist interfere in the election, Trump would tweet, *"Crooked Hillary Clinton spent hundreds of millions of dollars more on Presidential Election than I did. Facebook was on her side, not*

mine!" Not only did this contradict the words of Trump's digital manager, but even Trump's own words from [January 2016](#) when he bragged *"Trump shows complete domination of Facebook conversation."* [Trump would also turn around three days later and say](#), *"I doubt I would be here if it weren't for social media, to be honest with you."*

With this, we see Donald Trump try and use Hillary Clinton to deflect from the Russia story, only to turn around and immediately contradict himself. There is perhaps no finer analogy for President Trump's role in the Russia story. We are constantly being asked to ignore the story from people whose credibility is suspect, and who systematically contradict their own story.

## Criminal Charges

[On Monday October 30, 2017](#) Paul Manafort and and Robert Gates surrendered to authorities after being indicted as part of Robert Mueller's Special Counsel investigation. [The indictment against Manafort and Gates contains 12 counts: conspiracy against the United States, conspiracy to launder money, unregistered agent of a foreign principal, false and misleading US Foreign Agents Registration Act statements, false statements, and seven counts of failure to file reports of foreign bank and financial accounts..](#)

[Also On October 30, 2017](#) it was revealed that George Papadopoulos had previously agreed to plead guilty to making false statements as part of the Russia investigation. Papadopoulos had actually plead guilty on October 5, however the plea had been sealed until the end of the month.

The investigation into Papadopoulos revealed that;  
*Shortly after, he met with a London-based professor with ties to Russia who took interest in him because of his role in Trump's campaign. That professor then introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman described as a relative of Putin. Further, the professor introduced Papadopoulos to an individual with connections to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

[Further revelations from Papadopoulos' plea showed that;](#) *Weeks before Democrats realized their computers had been hacked, a professor tied to the Russian government told a member of Donald Trump's campaign that the Russians held "thousands of emails" relating to Hillary Clinton, according to a court document made public Monday.*

A [summary](#) outlining the guilty plea of former Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos says an unnamed "professor" with ties to the Russian government told him around April 26, 2016, that he had learned that Russia had "dirt" on Clinton, including the emails

[This suggest that the campaign of Donald Trump was aware that Russia had the DNC emails before members of the DNC even knew that had been hacked.](#)

George Papadopoulos had also tried to set up a meetings between Trump's campaign and Russian officials, including even a meeting between Trump himself and Vladimir Putin [The reaction from candidate Donald Trump was:](#) *"He didn't say yes and he didn't say no," the official said, declining to be more specific about Trump's response to Papadopoulos.*

*But the chairman of Trump's national security team, then Alabama senator and now attorney general Jeff Sessions, shut down the idea of a Putin meeting at the March 31, 2016, gathering, according to the source. His reaction was confirmed with another source who had discussed Session's role.*

The same week as the first indictments were handed down, [Carter Page gave an interview to CNN](#). In this interview Page explained that he had not only made a trip to Russia during the 2016 campaign, but he had told Jeff Sessions about the trip.

These revelations all directly [contradicted several public statements by both Donald Trump and attorney General Jeff Sessions](#). There is a special concern with Jeff Sessions, because these new claims directly contradict testimony he gave under oath during his confirmation.

The lie was so concerning, that congressman [Ted Lieu \(D-CA\)](#) would go so far as to state, *"He lied under oath at least twice and most recently, both Carter Page and George Papadopoulos, based on their testimony and their statements, they show that Jeff Sessions contradicted himself when he said he was not aware of any campaign official talking to the Russians," Lieu said in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer.*

[On February 16, 2018](#), the Special Counsel office indicted 13 Russians for their involvement in interfering in the 2016 election. The indictment alleged that the activities began in 2014. The indictment alleged that the Russian Government budget was over \$1,250,000 a month.

On the same day, [another American reached a plea deal with the special prosecutor's office](#). Richard Penido plead guilty to identity theft charges for using stolen bank and credit card information.

The indictment against the 13 Russian citizens raised a number of alarming points. The first is that on page 3, [the indictment](#) alleges that *"as early as 2014, Defendant ORGANIZATION began operations to interfere with the US. political system, including the 2016 US. presidential election."*

*As we saw in the chapter on Russia's Cyberwar against the US, the first cyber attacks on the State Department occurred in late 2014. Again, it's important to look at all of this as all part of a larger operation.*

It's worth observing that at least one of Donald Trump's election campaign sites, [Trump2016.com](#), was registered on September 9, 2014.

Two weeks later, [on September 26, 2014, Donald Trump tweeted](#), *"I wonder if I run for PRESIDENT, will the haters and losers vote for me knowing that I will MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN? I say they will!"*

However, as early as [November 11, 2012, Donald Trump had already sought to register the trademark](#) for "Make America Great Again." This was just 5 days after the 2012 election.

When Donald Trump was hosting the Miss Universe Pageant in Moscow in 2013, one of the billionaires he met with was Artem Klyushin. On November 9, 2013, [Artem tweeted out a photo of himself with Donald Trump saying, "Discussing a project with @realDonaldTrump."](#)

In [January 2014](#), Artem's wife Alferova Yulya tweeted a picture of herself and Donald Trump saying, *"I'm sure @realDonaldTrump will be great president! We'll support you from Russia! America needs ambitious leader!"*

At the same time the Russian government was beginning an operation to interfere in the US elections, Donald Trump was gearing up to run for office. Furthermore, Russian nationals with business ties to Donald Trump appear to be aware of his intentions to run more than a year before he officially announced.

On June 15, 2018, [Paul Manafort had his bail suspended and was remanded to jail](#) while he awaits trial. The reason for his bail being revoked was due to witness tampering. What is more concerning is that he was getting assistance in the attempts to contact witness by a long time Russian friend Konstantin Kilimnik. [Mueller has also indicted Kilimnik for witness tampering.](#)

[Konstantin Kilimnik is important because he has been repeatedly linked to Russian military Intelligence, the GRU.](#) It's worth pointing out that it was the GRU who was behind hacking the DNC and the distributing the hacked emails to wikileaks. It was also the GRU who created the fake Guccifer 2.0 twitter account that tried to deflect attention away from Russia.

## Fox News "Feedbacks" into Obstruction

Beginning in January of 2018, four separate news events would show a pattern of the President and Foxnews working with other republicans to create a news cycle designed to undermine the entire Mueller investigation.

[On January 18, 2018](#) conservative pundit Sean Hannity opened his show on Fox News by attacking specially Counselor Robert Mueller;

*"I have a message tonight for the special counsel, Robert Mueller," Hannity said, opening his show. "Your witch hunt is now over. Time to close the doors."*

Hannity would go on to claim, *"Our sources are telling us that the abuse of power is far bigger than Watergate," Hannity said. "Remember, Watergate was a third-rate break-in. What we're talking about tonight is the systematic abuse of power, the weaponizing of those powerful tools of intelligence and the shredding of our Fourth Amendment, constitutional rights."*

The "abuse of power" Hannity was referring too were claimed to be laid out in a 4 page memo circulating through Congress. The memo has been put together by the staff of Congressman



Devin Nunes. The major news cycle on Fox News became about this new memo from Devin Nunes, and how it was going to change the entire Russia investigation. Even before it was released, [Fox News was pushing stories trying to play up the impact of the memo](#).

[On February 2, 2018](#) the Nunes memo was released after getting President Trump's approval. [Some key points in the memo](#) revolved around the use of the Steele Dossier in obtaining a FISA warrant on Carter Page. The memo alleged that the Steele Dossier was key to getting the FISA warrant and that the political nature of the Steele Dossier's origins were left out of the warrant. The memo further alleged that Christopher Steele had a bias against Donald Trump, and that the entire Dossier was suspect due to potential ties between Fusion GPS and the democratic party.

The morning after the memo was released, [President Trump claimed it totally vindicated](#) him in the investigation, tweeting;

*"This memo totally vindicates "Trump" in probe. But the Russian Witch Hunt goes on and on. Their was no Collusion and there was no Obstruction (the word now used because, after one year of looking endlessly and finding NOTHING, collusion is dead). This is an American disgrace!"*

Trump's son, Donald Trump jr, took the vindication theme a step further. [Donald Trump Jr. said](#), *"There is a little bit of sweet revenge in it for me and certainly probably the family."*

However, Republican [Trey Gowdy claimed the memo did nothing to undermine the Russia Investigation](#). Trey Gowdy, also a member of the House Intelligence Committee, is one of the the few people who had seen all the classified information that went into the Nunes memo.

*"To the extent the memo deals with the dossier and the FISA process, the dossier has nothing to do with the meeting at Trump Tower," Gowdy said. "The dossier has nothing to do with an email sent by Cambridge Analytica. The dossier really has nothing to do with George Papadopoulos' meeting in Great Britain. It also doesn't have anything to do with obstruction of justice."*

Even before the memo was released, [the FBI released a statement that questioned the validity of the memo](#); *"With regard to the House Intelligence Committee's memorandum, the FBI was provided a limited opportunity to review this memo the day before the committee voted to release it. As expressed during our initial review, we have grave concerns about material omissions of fact that fundamentally impact the memo's accuracy," the spokesperson said.*

The first thing everyone noticed, was that [the memo specifically states](#) that the initial investigation into ties between Donald Trump's campaign and Russia were originally started before the FBI ever saw the Steele Dossier. This basically undercut any other point the memo was trying to make.

Furthermore, the Nunes memo was immediately criticized for being wrong, taking things out of

context, and cherry picking information. Within two days of the memo release, Republicans were forced to admit that the political nature of the Dossier had been disclosed in the FISA warrant. The memo claimed that Deputy FBI Director McCabe testified before congress that a FISA Warrant would have never been issued without the Steele Dossier. However, that fact was also immediately shown to be incorrect. In fact, the FISA warrant on Carter Page was 50 pages long. The entire Steele Dossier was only 35 pages. Also, the warrant only used the parts of the Steele Dossier that applied to Carter Page.

When asked in a committee meeting, Devin Nunes would refuse to answer if his staff worked with the White House in drafting the memo. This is at least the second time that there was evidence that Devin Nunes had partnered with the White House in efforts to undermine the Russia Investigation. It's also worth observing, that as soon as the memo was released, Devin Nunes made his first appearance to discuss the topic on Fox News. Also, Fox News and another conservative news outlet, Washington Examiner, had key points from the memo before it was publicly released.

Meanwhile, the leading Democrat, Adam Schiff, put together a 10 page memo to counter the memo from Nunes. Donald Trump refused to allow the Democratic memo to be released. Trump's refusal to release the Democratic Party Memo drew immediate criticism. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi went so far as to ask "What does the President have to hide?";

An important point about the entire Nunes Memo story is how Fox News played a role in not only hyping the story, but in working with President Donald Trump on releasing the memo. In their conversations, Trump and Hannity discussed the Nunes memo's supposed bombshell-level significance, and how it could shed light on the alleged anti-Trump bias and "corruption" at the FBI. On these calls, Trump has directly referenced specific recent Hannity segments related to #ReleaseTheMemo, according to one of three sources with knowledge of their conversations.

It's also worth observing that as soon as news broke about the Nunes Memo, a social media campaign #releasethememo sprung up and began to dominate social media platforms like twitter. This campaign was largely driven by Russian bots on social media site like Twitter.

*The frequency with which the accounts have been promoting the hashtag has spiked by 233,000% over the past 48 hours, according to the site. The accounts' references to the "memo," meanwhile, have increased by 68,000%.*

*The most-shared domain among the accounts has been WikiLeaks, and the most-shared URL has been a link to WikiLeaks' "submit" page*

This is especially concerning because we not only see the Fox News feedback loop occurring in real time, but we are watching that loop be amplified by Russian operates trying to sow discord in the US.

On January 27 2018, Sean Hannity's twitter account went offline. While it was down, a woman in Texas who was "bored with the flu," created a fake Hannity twitter account. Within hours of setting up the account, the woman was getting messages from Wikileaks's Julian Assange who

believed the account belonged to San Hannity. Through private (direct) messages, Julian Assange suggested they talk through “other channels.” Assange also said he had information on Senator Mark Warner of Virginia. Senator Warner co chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee who is currently investigating Russia’s interference in the 2016 US elections.

Again it’s worth pointing out that [Mike Pompeo, the current director of the CIA, has publicly referred to Wikileaks](#) as a “a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia”

Less than 2 weeks later, [on February 8, 2018](#), Fox News broke an exclusive story about text messages from Mark Warner trying to secure a meeting with Christopher Steele who compiled the Steele Dossier.

Within an hour of the story coming out, [Republican Senator Marco Rubio released a tweet that](#) basically debunked the point of the story. “*Sen. Warner fully disclosed this to the committee four months ago. Has had zero impact on our work,*” Rubio said.

Within a few hours of the story being released, [President Trump tweeted about the story](#), “*Wow! -Senator Mark Warner got caught having extensive contact with a lobbyist for a Russian oligarch. Warner did not want a “paper trail” on a “private” meeting (in London) he requested with Steele of fraudulent Dossier fame. All tied into Crooked Hillary.*”

It’s worth observing that the same day the story about Mark Warner came out, Secretary of State [Rex Tillerson gave an interview in which he indicated that Russia had every intention to interfere in our 2018 election.](#)

*“The point is that if their intention is to interfere, they’re going to find ways to do that,” Tillerson told Fox News. “I think it’s important we just continue to say to Russia, look, you think we don’t see what you’re doing. We do see it, and you need to stop.”*

Both Fox News and President Trump decided to largely ignore Rex Tillerson’s statements and instead make a big deal of Mark Warner’s text messages. Both President Trump, and Fox News are more concerned about undermining the Russia investigation, than securing our elections or dealing with the fact that the Russian government has attacked us, and continues to do so.

[On January 25, 2018](#) we found out that President Trump had tried to fire Robert Mueller who is overseeing the investigation into Russia’s interference in the 201 election. The only reason Mueller was not fired is because Presidential Special Counsel Donald McGahn threatened to quit. The story was a big deal not just because it harkened back to Nixon firing Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, but because Donald Trump had already fired James Comey over the Russia investigation.

The night the story broke, Fox news began immediately deflecting from the ramifications. [Tucker](#)

Carlson ignored the story to spend an entire show talking about a 15 year old picture of Barack Obama and Louis Farrakhan. Sean Hannity tried suggesting that the New York Times story was wrong. Later in his show, Hannity had to admit that sources at Fox News had confirmed the story. Hannity then defended the president before quickly cutting to footage of a car chase.

The next morning, Fox and Friends went so far as to ask if anyone even cared.

*"It's something we have to tell you about because it is a headline in The New York Times," co-host Ainsley Earhardt said on "Fox & Friends" before dismissing the news.*

*"What do you think about that? Do ya even care?" she asked.*

For the next twelve hours after the story broke, Foxnews did everything they could to undermine the narrative. Newt Gingrich and Mike Huckabee both appeared on Fox News to dismiss and downplay the story. Others tried to deny the story was true, even after Fox News had confirmed it was true.

This ultimately creates what has come to be called the "Fox news feedback loop," between the cable news channel and President Trump. Not only does Donald Trump watch Fox News most of the day, he even calls Fox News hosts to give them feedback on their shows. One staffer from Fox News went so far as to say, "One sure strategy has been to follow Trump's lead and continue attacking the Clintons."

On February 12, 2018, Newt Gingrich would appear on Fox News and state, "In any reasonable system of law, Secretary Clinton would already be in jail. All of her senior aides would be in jail."

## President Trump provides aid and comfort to Russia

On February 9th, 2017 Donald Trump did an on camera interview with Fox Commentator Bill O'Reilly. During the interview, O'Reilly asked President Trump about his thoughts on Putin. When Bill O'Reilly pointed out "But he's a killer," President Trump responded, "There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?"

What had already been an observed pattern of Donald Trump refusing to criticize Vladimir Putin, rose to Trump actively throwing his own country under the bus to defend Putin.

On the same day as the O'Reilly interview, Russian/Croatian Chess Grandmaster Garry Kasparov observed, "Trump has criticized: Republicans, Democrats, the Pope, US elections, CIA, FBI, NATO, Meryl Streep. Trump hasn't criticized: Vladimir Putin."

New York Times has put together a list of the more than 372 people Trump has attacked on Twitter. Vladimir Putin is not on the list. However, everyone from Samuel L. Jackson, to George Will, and every major news organization in the country is on the list.

Meanwhile, CNN put together a complete list of the 80 times Trump has talked about Putin. Every time was a glowing compliment mixed with an appreciation for Putin's strength.

On July 7, 2017, during the G8 Summit, President Trump and Vladimir Putin had a private

meeting. What made this concerning was the only people present during the meeting was Trump, Putin, and Putin's private translator. Again, [this was one day before the revelation of the Trump Tower Meeting](#) and just after the Trump Administration had been asked for a statement.

[The conversation was a breach of national security protocol](#), and several white house staffers, including National Security Adviser HR McMaster warned President Trump against the meeting. The concern was less about there only being one translator, and more about there being no record. As it stands now, the only people who know what was discussed at this meeting is Trump, Putin, and Putin's translator.

Conservative columnist, and former Bush speechwriter, [David Frum would observe](#), *"Trump has things to say to Putin that he wants literally nobody in the US govt to hear, very much including his own National Security team."*

[In November on 2017](#), Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin had three short meetings in Danang, Vietnam. After those meetings, President Trump would say about Putin, *"He said he didn't meddle. He said he didn't meddle. I asked him again. You can only ask so many times," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew from Da Nang to Hanoi in Vietnam. Trump spoke to Putin three times on the sidelines of summit here, where the Russia meddling issue arose.*

*"Every time he sees me, he says, 'I didn't do that,' " Trump said. "And I believe, I really believe, that when he tells me that, he means it."*

*"I think he is very insulted by it," Trump added.*

Trump's statements were so shocking that Republican Senator [John McCain would issue an official statement](#), *"There's nothing 'America First' about taking the word of a KGB colonel over that of the American intelligence community."*

Former Director of National Intelligence, and 40 year intelligence veteran, [James Capper would take it a step further on CNN](#). *"This past weekend is a great demonstration to me of what a great case officer Vladimir Putin is," Clapper said on CNN. "He knows how to handle an asset, and that's what he's doing with the president.*

***It's important to understand that while President Trump attempts to block and deflect from the investigation, Russia continues to attack and threaten the United States.***

Meanwhile, in December of 2017, we discovered that [Russian submarines had been spending time around undersea internet cables belonging to NATO countries](#); *"We are now seeing 'Russian underwater activity in the vicinity of undersea cables that I don't believe we have ever seen," said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Andrew Lennon, the commander of NATO's submarine forces. "Russia is clearly taking an interest in NATO and NATO nations' undersea infrastructure."*

So far, President Trump has expressed no concern over this revelation.

[On February 8, 2018](#) we found out that *In an exclusive interview with NBC News, Jeanette Manfra, the head of cybersecurity at the Department of Homeland Security, said she couldn't*

*talk about classified information publicly, but in 2016, "We saw a targeting of 21 states and an exceptionally small number of them were actually successfully penetrated."*

This is the same day that Fox News was hyping the story about Senator Warner's text messages. While President Trump made no statement about the breach of our voting systems, [he did tweet about the Mark Warner story](#).

[On February 14, 2018](#) republicans in congress voting along party lines to eliminate the only federal agency tasked with protecting our voting machines.

[On February 12, 2018](#) Rachel Maddow would show that there have been at least 8 occasions where Americans found out about Donald Trump communicating with Russians from Russian media.

[On February 13, 2018](#), Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee that, *"There should be no doubt that Russia perceives its past efforts as successful and views the 2018 US midterm elections as a potential target for Russian influence operations."*

[DNI chief Dan Coats would go on to add](#), *"Frankly, the United States is under attack,"* Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats told the Senate Intelligence Committee, adding that Russia is attempting to *"degrade our democratic values and weaken our alliances."*

[During the same congressional testimony](#), FBI director Christopher Wray specifically testified that at no point had President Trump directed him to address the issue of Russian interference in our elections.

[While all of this was playing out, President Trump allowed the deadline for implementing new sanctions pass.](#)

[In late July, 2017](#), congress passed a new round of Sanctions on Russia with huge bipartisan support. Only 5 members of congress voted against them.

In response, [on July 30th, 2017](#) Vladimir Putin ejected over 755 members of the US embassy staff in Moscow and President Trump went so far as to thank Putin, *"I want to thank him because we're trying to cut down our payroll, and as far as I'm concerned I'm very thankful that he let go a large number of people because now we have a smaller payroll."*

For perspective, in [September of 2017](#), President Trump attacked the mayor of hurricane ravished San Juan, Puerto Rico (whose people are US citizens.) He had still yet to say a single critical word about Vladimir Putin.

On [August 2, 2017](#), President Trump reluctantly signed a new series of sanctions into effect.

On [January 30, 2018](#), President Trump informed congress he was not going to implement the new sanctions. The same day the Treasury department put out a report on Russian Oligarchs, but [that report was little more than a summary of a Forbes list of 200 wealthiest Russians..](#)



This is interesting because in 2015, [Trump himself had said that Forbes “doesn't know what they're talking about.”](#)

As of [March 4, 2018](#), the State Department has yet to spend any of the \$120 million budget it has to counter Russia meddling in our 2018 election. Furthermore, *As a result, not one of the 23 analysts working in the department's Global Engagement Center — which has been tasked with countering Moscow's disinformation campaign — speaks Russia.*

In [late December of 2017](#), President Trump signed off on a \$41.5 million dollar arms sale to Ukraine. This was the largest arms sale to Ukraine since 2014. However, [President Trump has told Whitehouse officials to not publicly talk about his policy moves with regards to Russia](#); *“He doesn't want us to bring it up,” one White House official said. “It is not something he wants to talk about.”*

On [March 4, 2018](#) two former Russian nationals were poisoned in by a nerve agent in the United Kingdom. The poison was traced back to the Kremlin, and isn't the first known murder in the UK that can be traced back to Putin. [In 2006](#), a former Russian and outspoken critic of Vladimir Putin was killed after being poisoned by polonium-20.

Two weeks later, on [March 20, 2018](#), President Trump and Vladimir Putin had a phone call. During the phone call, Trump congratulates Putin on winning re-election to his third term as President of Russia. This was despite his briefing materials had a note in all caps saying, *“DO NOT CONGRATULATE.”* Trump also failed to bring up neither Putin's meddling in our election in 2016 nor the nerve agent poisoning in the UK.

The concern was that not only were there widespread examples of [ballot stuffing](#), but the election was mired in controversy with Vladimir [Putin going so far as to violently incarcerate his main political opponent](#), and even [locking up critics of Putin](#).

Later we would learn that during the March 20th phone call, [President Trump extended an invitation to meet with Vladimir Putin at the White House](#).

[In one phone call, President Trump not only offered congratulation to Putin on winning an election that was rife with fraud. He refused to criticize Putin for any of his authoritarian behavior and even extended an invitation for Putin to visit the White House.](#)

In May of 2018, President Trump began a policy of attacking the western allies of the United States. Specifically, he announced [massive tariffs on steel and aluminum](#) from western countries such as Canada, Mexico, and European allies.

In early June of 2018, President Trump attended the G7 meeting in Canada. While at the meeting, [Trump would attack the Prime Minister of the host country Justin Trudeau by calling him weak](#), and threatening more tariffs on Canada.

While at the G-7 meeting in June, President [Trump went so far as to call for re-admitting Russia into G-7](#) again. It's worth pointing out that the reason Russia was kicked out of the group was

specifically because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Trump went so far as to actually blame former President Barack Obama for Russia invading Ukraine. However, President [Trump would go so far as to parrot Putin's talking point](#) that Crimea is part of Russia because everyone speaks the same Russian.

After the G7 meeting, [Russian state TV would proclaim, "Crimea is ours, Trump is ours."](#)

[What we have here is President Trump specifically attacking the allies of the United States while praising and even offering assistance to Russia.](#)

On July 15 2018, Donald Trump held summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki Finland. During this a joint press conference, Donald Trump would publicly state that he did not believe Russia was behind the hacking of the DNC. While standing next to Putin, [President Trump said, doesn't "see any reason why" Russia would be responsible.](#)

*"I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today,"*

President Trump's comments brought immediate rebuke from both sides of the political aisle. Republican Senator [John McCain would go as far as to say, "Today's press conference in Helsinki was one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory. The damage inflicted by President Trump's naivete, egotism, false equivalence, and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate. But it is clear that the summit in Helsinki was a tragic mistake.](#)

*"President Trump proved not only unable, but unwilling to stand up to Putin. He and Putin seemed to be speaking from the same script as the president made a conscious choice to defend a tyrant against the fair questions of a free press, and to grant Putin an uncontested platform to spew propaganda and lies to the world."*

Multiple Congressmen have gone so far as to suggest that [Trump's translator during the private one on one meeting with Putin should come forward and testify](#) about the meeting.

