

Russia relations: dossier alleging ties between Trump and Russia stokes partisan divide

Key events in January

Jan. 5: Republican congressional leaders refer dossier author for DOJ investigation

- Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) referred Christopher Steele, author of the opposition dossier on alleged ties between Trump and Russia, for a criminal investigation by the Department of Justice
- The senators and committee aides have implied that concern arose because of an alleged discrepancy between Steele's assertions, though the details are classified



"Maybe there is some innocent explanation for the inconsistencies we have seen, but it seems unlikely." – Grassley, Jan. 5

Jan. 8: It is revealed that Mueller is likely to seek an interview with Trump

- On January 8th, news broke that special counsel Robert Mueller informed Trump's legal team in late December that his office would likely seek an interview with Trump
- Trump's legal team has been in contact with FBI officials about the possible interview and alternative format options, which could occur in the next few weeks

Jan. 9: Democratic leaders strike out independently with key interview transcript

- On January 9th, Dianne Feinstein (CA), the Senate Judiciary Committee's ranking Democrat, bypassed Chairman Charles Grassley (R-IA) to publish the interview transcript of a critical witness, Glenn Simpson, in the Russia investigation
- Democrats have increasingly viewed recent GOP actions as efforts to undermine the Russia investigation; one aide called the DOJ referral for Mr. Steele "a breaking point" for Dems



"The American people deserve the opportunity to see what he said and judge for themselves." – Feinstein, Jan. 9

Jan. 10: Trump attacks Feinstein via Twitter



Trump
Jan. 10

"The fact that Sneaky Dianne Feinstein, who has on numerous occasions stated that collusion between Trump/Russia has not been found, would release testimony in such an underhanded and possibly illegal way, totally without authorization, is a disgrace. Must have tough Primary!"

Sources: Jordain Carney, "GOP senators request criminal investigation of Trump dossier author," The Hill, Jan. 5, 2018; Matt Flegenheimer, "Fusion GPS Founder Hauled From the Shadows for the Russia Election Investigation," NYT, Jan. 8, 2018; Nicholas Fandoms et al., "Democratic Senator Releases Transcript of Interview With Dossier Firm," NYT, Jan. 9, 2018; Carol D. Leonnig, "Mueller indicates he is likely to seek interview with Trump," Washington Post, Jan. 8, 2018; Mary Claire Jalonick & Chad Day, "GOP Senators Target Trump Dossier Author Christopher Steele in Russia Investigation," Time, Jan. 5, 2018.

Russia relations: Trump's dismissed national security advisor, Michael Flynn, pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI



Michael Flynn pleads guilty to lying to FBI

- Trump's former national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn, pleaded guilty on Dec. 1 to lying to the FBI about conversations with Sergey I. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador, last December
- As part of Flynn's plea agreement, released documents indicated that Flynn's conversations with the Russian ambassador were part of a coordinated effort by Trump aides to create foreign policy before Trump entered office – despite the White House's claims that Flynn acted independently

Possible implications

- Flynn has agreed to cooperate with the FBI in Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election
- While the documents do not mention Trump directly, his lawyers believe that Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, may be implicated
- Experts believe that Flynn's plea may inform the special counsel's examination into whether Trump obstructed justice when he fired James Comey in May 2017



Trump tweeted multiple times after the announcement of Flynn's plea agreement, criticizing the FBI and appearing to admit knowledge of Flynn's lie prior to firing him



Trump, Dec. 2

"I had to fire General Flynn because he lied to the Vice President and the FBI"



Trump, Dec. 3

"After years of Comey, with the phony and dishonest Clinton investigation (and more), running the FBI, its reputation is in Tatters - worst in History!"



Trump, Dec. 3

"I never asked Comey to stop investigating Flynn. Just more Fake News covering another Comey lie!"

Sources: Matt Ford and Adam Serwer, "Robert Mueller's first charges," The Atlantic, Oct 27, 2017. Ryan Lucas, "Special Council Mueller unveils charges against 3 Trump aides," NPR, Oct 30, 2017; John Wagner, "I never asked Comey to stop investigating Flynn": Trump goes on tweetstorm about the FBI," Dec. 3, 2017; John Wagner, et al., "Trump says he has nothing to fear from Flynn, then stokes new controversy with tweet," Washington Post, Dec. 2, 2017.

Russia relations: 3 former Trump aides charged in Mueller's investigation on Russian interference in the 2016 election



Paul Manafort – 12 charges, including:

- Conspiracy against the US
- Conspiracy to launder money
- Failure to file reports of foreign bank and financial accounts (calendar years 2011-14)
- Unregistered agent of a foreign principal
- False and misleading FARA statements
- False statements



Rick Gates – 12 charges, including:

- Conspiracy against the US
- Conspiracy to launder money
- Failure to file reports of foreign bank and financial accounts (calendar years 2011-13)
- Unregistered agent of a foreign principal
- False and misleading FARA statements
- False statements



George Papadopoulos

- False statements

The arrests marked the first in the investigation, according to unsealed court documents. Manafort and Gates were charged with:

- Conspiracy against the US by “impeding, impairing, obstructing, and defeating the...functions of” the DOJ, treasury
- Conspiracy to launder money

Papadopoulos pleaded guilty to lying to FBI about a conversation tied to the Russian gov’t. The conversation – which took place while Papadopoulos was an adviser to Trump’s presidential campaign – involved “dirt” Moscow had on Hillary Clinton. Unsealed documents reveal that several senior campaign officials knew of Papadopoulos’ interactions with Russians

Russia relations: Russian fake accounts ran thousands of political ads on Facebook

Facebook's findings on fake advertising



June 2015-May 2017

- Facebook found that a Russian organization **linked to the Kremlin**, known as the **Internet Research Agency**, ran 3,000 political ads (at a cost of \$100,000) using fake accounts
- Facebook has disclosed its findings to Special Counsel Robert Mueller and the House and Senate intelligence committees
- Most of the ads focused on **divisive social and political issues**

Why it matters: It is illegal for foreign governments and companies to spend money to influence American politics



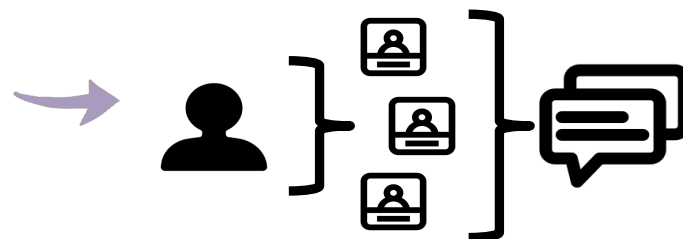
The Internet Research Agency

- In a Jan. report, the FBI, CIA and NSA concluded that the Internet Research Agency was likely financed by a close Putin ally
- The organization employs a staff of “trolls” to establish fake accounts and post propaganda

Internet Research
Agency worker

Fake accounts

Propaganda,
political ads



Online ad purchases: key October events

Oct. 19, 2017: Sens. Klobuchar (D), Warner (D) and McCain (R) introduced legislation to require social media to disclose political ad purchases

Oct. 30, 2017: Google acknowledged that it had found 1,108 videos and 43 hours of content related to Russian efforts; \$4,700

Oct. 31, 2017: Facebook revealed that 126 million of its users may have seen content produced and circulated by Russian operatives

Nov. 1, 2017: The House Intelligence Committee released dozens of social media ads created by Russian operatives

Sources: Scott Shane and Vincu Goel, "Fake Russian Facebook accounts brought in \$100,000 in political ads," The New York Times, September 6, 2017; Adrian Chen, "The agency," The New York Times, June 2, 2015; Craig Timberg & Elizabeth Dwoskin, Russian content on Facebook, Google and Twitter reached far more users than companies first disclosed, congressional testimony says," Washington Post, Oct. 30, 2017; Nicholas Fandos et al., "House Intelligence Committee Releases Incendiary Russian Social Media Ads," New York Times,