

ALEX CANNON AND THE MISSING RUSSIAN BINDER

CNN reports that the classified version of the Russian binder Trump tried, but failed, to release before leaving office has not been found.

A binder containing highly classified information related to Russian election interference went missing at the end of Donald Trump's presidency, raising alarms among intelligence officials that some of the most closely guarded national security secrets from the US and its allies could be exposed, sources familiar with the matter told CNN.

Its disappearance, which has not been previously reported, was so concerning that intelligence officials briefed Senate Intelligence Committee leaders last year about the missing materials and the government's efforts to retrieve them, the sources said.

In the two-plus years since Trump left office, the missing intelligence does not appear to have been found. [my emphasis]

I would contest that the disappearance of the binder is entirely new. It is consistent with Cassidy Hutchinson's testimony, on which this story explicitly relies.

What is new in this story is that "last year" (so, 2022) Intelligence Community leaders briefed SSCI; the story is silent about whether the spooks briefed HPSCI, whence much of the materials came.

What is also new is that, according to a single US official, which is a moniker often used to describe members of Congress or their staffers,

the binder was not among the things found at Mar-a-Lago last year.

The binder was not among the classified items found in last year's search of Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort, according to a US official familiar with the matter, who said the FBI was not looking specifically for intelligence related to Russia when it obtained a search warrant for the former president's residence last year.

The Intelligence Committees got briefed on what was seized from MAL. It's not entirely clear that they got briefed on what was returned in the first and second tranches.

That's important because Alex Cannon – who was the key lawyer involved in the first set of boxes returned to NARA in 2022 – asked NARA for a copy of the declassified materials in 2021. In a response sent on September 27, 2021 (and later resent to John Solomon), NARA explained that NARA didn't have the binder because when Meadows sent it to DOJ for the privacy review, it became a federal record, and what remained at the White House was *not* a binder but 2,700 disorganized pages the intended classification markings of which conflicted.

That's because NARA General Counsel Gary Stern provided Kash and Solomon with the explanation of what happened with the attempted declassification over and over and over. First, Trump *didn't* declassify the documents. He *ordered* the binder of Crossfire Hurricane documents be sent to the Attorney General, who would implement the final declassifications, then send the document back to the White House.

I have directed the Attorney General to implement the redactions proposed in the FBI's January 17 submission and return

to the White House an appropriately redacted copy.

Then the next day, January 20, 2021, Mark Meadows sent all that to the Attorney General to conduct a Privacy Act review before releasing anything.

As Stern explained to Kash and Solomon, what remained at the White House at that point was a collection of 2,700 “undifferentiated pages,” a cursory review of which revealed conflicting redactions and some documents lacking the requisite declassification stamp. The stuff that got sent to DOJ was a Federal Record, not a Presidential Record, and by the time Kash and Solomon started this process, it was already being processed as part of a Judicial Watch FOIA lawsuit (the first two releases in which – one, two – recently came out).

In other words, Trump and Mark Meadows fucked this up. NARA didn't. Trump did.

Shortly after getting this response, Cannon oversaw the attempt to return Trump's documents, with the now-indicted Walt Nauta and the now-cooperating Molly Michael juggling boxes back and forth from the storage room so Trump could hand-curate what would be returned.

After it became public that a bunch of those documents were classified, Kash invented the story that Trump had declassified everything, focusing on the Russian documents, though not exclusively.

Then, in the weeks after Trump returned a folder of documents on June 3, 2022, Kash Patel and John Solomon made a panicked effort to find out what was at NARA. Evan Corcoran, only recently brought in to serve as fall guy for the document handover, was closely involved in that process.

During that same period, Trump made several unexpected trips back to Mar-a-Lago.

And the government and Stan Woodward apparently agree that the government still doesn't know where all the boxes hidden from Evan Corcoran's search on June 2 ended up.

All of Trump's stolen classified documents aren't accounted for. And the Russian binder may be only part of what's missing.

Update: I did a post on what was known to be in Trump's "dumbass Russian binder." It's quite the cherry pick.