

# DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE WITH IRAN THAT DENIALISTS MADE WITH RUSSIA

I read the book by Aaron Zebley, James Quarles, and Andrew Goldstein on the Mueller investigation. Regarding the investigation itself, there were no new details. Where the book does break new ground is in describing the discussions with Trump's attorneys and DOJ officials, especially with regards to the debate about whether to subpoena Trump. I'll return to those details in a follow-up.

But I want to point to something they said in their afterward. They describe that Barr's treatment of the report helped sow doubt about the import of the Russian attack on US democracy in 2016.

Perhaps the most significant casualty of Barr's handling of the report was the truth about Russia's attack on the United States during the 2016 election. The Russian government interfered in our democracy in sweeping and systematic fashion. Those are the first substantive words of our report. This statement is beyond dispute, and yet many in America do not know that, and still others deny it.

As detailed in volume I of our report, Russian operatives working for the Internet Research Agency visited the United States in 2014 to gather intelligence for what they called "information warfare" against the United States. They returned to Russia and—sitting at their desks in Saint Petersburg—planned and advertised rallies to support Trump at specific US locations, invited Americans to attend,

provided banners for Americans to wave, and then handed off logistical responsibilities for the events to real Americans. The goal of these activities, along with their yearslong campaign of false-name social media accounts, was to further divide Americans and cause them to think and behave in particular ways—including at the voting booth in 2016.

Meanwhile, Russian military intelligence hacked into email accounts belonging to the Democratic team supporting Hillary Clinton in 2016, and then dumped emails and other documents they had stolen at specific times during the campaign to harm Clinton and bolster Trump. The Russians also leveraged WikiLeaks to release the stolen information, and, like the Russians, WikiLeaks timed its releases to favor Trump's candidacy.

While these operations were underway, Russian government officials and their proxies reached out to multiple Trump campaign officials. George Papadopoulos was one example. A month after Trump appointed him as a foreign policy adviser in March 2016, Papadopoulos received word about a Russian government offer to assist the Trump campaign through the anonymous release of information information damaging to Clinton—"dirt" in the form of "thousands of emails." This offer coincided with the Russian military's then secret hack-and-dump operation.

It is beyond dispute that the Russians interfered in the 2016 election to support Trump—that was no hoax. They worked to secure his win. Our investigation of this work was no witch hunt.

[snip]

It has not seemed to matter, for instance, that our hack-and-dump indictment, which was backed by financial, email, and other records, demonstrated irrefutably that the Russian military executed this operation. Three days after the indictment came out, Trump dismissed it all in a press conference in Helsinki, Finland, after Putin—standing a few feet to Trump’s left—told him, “It’s not Russia.” Trump and his advocates declared it all a hoax, taking Putin’s word over the plain facts. And millions of Americans have taken this as truth, siding with Kremlin propaganda over the US Department of Justice.

We are now heading into another election. Russia interfered before, Russia is emboldened, and Russia is interfering again. Bob described Russia’s actions as one of the most serious attacks on democracy he has seen in his career—chilling words from the person who helped lead America’s fight against terrorism following the 9/11 attacks. As he put it in his 2019 testimony, the Russians are interfering in our democracy “as we sit here, and they expect to do it during the next campaign.”

I’ve obviously written a lot about this. It’s the central focus of the Ball of Threads podcast that LOLGOP and I are doing.

I fear that, because of the polarization Trump has deliberately stoked, many lefties are doing the same thing that Trump’s MAGAts did with Russia: treat credible allegations that Iran is targeting him, both for hacking and assassination, as a hoax.

Regarding the hacking, as happened in 2016, it is not just the Intelligence Community (one, two) attributing the hack in real time. Both

Microsoft and Google have described the operation. As I explained repeatedly regarding the 2016 Russian attack, big American tech companies have a similar kind of global reach as the NSA, and when someone uses their infrastructure to target someone, they have both the tools and an independent incentive to get the attribution right. There's really no reason to doubt the attribution, from three of the entities with the best global reach in the world, that Iran targeted Trump's campaign.

Regarding Iran's attempt to assassinate Trump, there's also no reason to doubt that. While the case against Asif Merchant, whom DOJ accused of trying to solicit a variety of operations targeting Trump, does rely on undercover FBI employees posing as wannabe hitmen, the underlying tip – from the guy Merchant allegedly asked for help recruiting a hit team – appears to be organic, just someone calling the cops. Plus, the effort bears certain resemblance to the effort to solicit assassins for John Bolton, arising from the same motive of revenge for the Qassem Soleimani killing.

According to court documents, on Oct. 22, 2021, Poursafi asked Individual A, a U.S. resident whom Poursafi previously met online, to take photographs of the former National Security Advisor, claiming the photographs were for a book Poursafi was writing. Individual A told Poursafi that he/she could introduce Poursafi to another person who would take the pictures for \$5,000-\$10,000. Individual A later introduced Poursafi to an associate (referred to in court documents as the confidential human source or CHS).

On Nov. 9, 2021, Poursafi contacted the CHS on an encrypted messaging application, and then directed the CHS to a second encrypted messaging application for further communications. Poursafi offered the CHS \$250,000 to

hire someone to “eliminate” the former National Security Advisor. This amount would later be negotiated up to \$300,000. Poursafi added that he had an additional “job,” for which he would pay \$1 million.

As I noted in my first post on the Merchant arrest, the Pakistani man took 20 minutes before he let the FBI in to arrest him, meaning he may have had time to destroy evidence. There’s no reason to assume Merchant’s efforts to hire assassins was limited to the NYC source who called the FBI, nor is there reason to assume that Merchant was the only one recruiting assassins.

Indeed, as I keep noting, *we can’t rule out* that Ryan Routh (who was indicted yesterday and will face trial before Aileen Cannon, and whose son was arrested Monday after the FBI found CSAM at his house while conducting a search presumably related to his father) was recruited by Iran. His sympathy for Iran and his antipathy for Trump were both public, he imagined himself a fighter, and he had international ties from his efforts to recruit fighters for Ukraine. Both the Bolton efforts and the Merchant plot relied on secure digital operational security, and the six phones Routh had in his truck indicate he was communicating in unusual ways, even for – especially for – a person with possible mental illness. And the timing of Routh’s movements – he left North Carolina August 14 and traveled to Florida, scoped out Trump events in August, September, and October, and conducted reconnaissance for much of the month leading up to his arrest – match the planned timing of the Merchant plot. For a variety of reasons (not least that Routh has due process rights and an incentive to flip, if he did have co-conspirators), if the FBI did suspect an Iranian tie, they wouldn’t say more than they already have done, including references to Iran in his detention memo.

In the wake of Routh’s indictment yesterday, the

IC briefed Trump on ongoing assassination threats from Iran. And while his comments to Fox – suggesting that Kamala Harris was weak on Iran – were typical Trump garbage, Trump’s Xitter account posted something that – for him – is downright gracious, recognizing the bipartisan support to expand Secret Service funding.



**Donald J. Trump** ✓  
@realDonaldTrump

...

Big threats on my life by Iran. The entire U.S. Military is watching and waiting. Moves were already made by Iran that didn’t work out, but they will try again. Not a good situation for anyone. I am surrounded by more men, guns, and weapons than I have ever seen before. Thank you to Congress for unanimously approving far more money to Secret Service – Zero “NO” Votes, strictly bipartisan. Nice to see Republicans and Democrats get together on something. An attack on a former President is a Death Wish for the attacker!

5:47 AM · Sep 25, 2024 · 11.9M Views

It is perfectly reasonable to call out the double standards of Trump himself, in responding stupidly to the hacking attempt, in ignoring his own role in the stalking of Barack Obama and pretending he has faced unique threats, in media outlets refusing to publish stolen emails.

Trump’s narcissistic behavior is one reason it’s so easy for hostile countries like Russia and Iran to stoke division.

But that doesn’t mean you should make it easier for them, by doubting the word of neutral parties who attest the threat to Trump is real. The Russian attack continues to do real damage, to this day, because the investigation into it led to such polarization. If I’m right about the Steele dossier (Ball of Thread version), some of that was by design, while some of it was the auspicious upside (from the perspective of Russia) of targeting a narcissist. But the result is the same: By targeting Trump, you can elicit the tribalism that damages the US, regardless of Iran’s (or Russia’s) other efforts. A great deal of the polarization in the US, a great deal of the conspiracism on the part of Trump supporters, and therefore a great deal of the extremism, stems from the response to the Russian attack and investigation.

Whether a country backs Trump or wants revenge against him, the goal is the same: to end US hegemony and extend authoritarianism. There are public, rational reasons to believe that Iran really is targeting Trump. There are no good reasons to instead irrationally doubt those public attributions.

Update: In an appearance in North Carolina, Trump said there could be a tie to Iran, and complained that DOJ had not yet broken into the six phones found in Routh's truck.