

# AS RUSSIA OVERTLY HELPS TRUMP GET ELECTED, TRUMP CONTINUES TO CHECK IN WITH VLADIMIR PUTIN

According to CNN, Bob Woodward's latest book reveals that Trump has spoken to Vladimir Putin as many as seven times since leaving the Presidency.

In one scene, Woodward recounts a moment at Mar-a-Lago where Trump tells a senior aide to leave the room so "he could have what he said was a private phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin."

"According to Trump's aide, there have been multiple phone calls between Trump and Putin, maybe as many as seven in the period since Trump left the White House in 2021," Woodward writes.

Woodward asked Trump aide Jason Miller whether Trump and Putin had spoken since he left the White House. "Um, ah, not that, ah, not that I'm aware of," Miller told Woodward.

"I have not heard that they're talking, so I'd push back on that," Miller added.

Woodward writes that Biden's Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines "carefully hedged" when asked about whether there were any post-presidency Trump-Putin calls.

"I would not purport to be aware of all contacts with Putin. I wouldn't purport to speak to what President Trump may or may not have done," Haines said, according to Woodward.

According to WaPo's version of the Woodward story the incident where Trump asked an aide to leave the room happened in early 2024.

This is unsurprising. After all, Trump has repeatedly described speaking to Putin in advance of the Ukraine invasion, including fairly explicitly during the debate with Joe Biden.

When Putin saw that, he said, you know what? I think we're going to go in and maybe take my – this was his dream. I talked to him about it, his dream. The difference is he never would have invaded Ukraine. Never.

But the confirmation that Trump keeps speaking to Putin is important for several other reasons.

## **We still don't know where all the stolen documents are**

If Trump was speaking to Putin before the Ukraine investigation and at least as recently as earlier this year, he was speaking to him *during* the investigation into his stolen documents, *during* the period when Trump was hiding boxes from his attorney to make sure he could steal documents.

Trump was going back and referring to some of these documents during the period he worked with Putin.

And perhaps most importantly, there were presumably classified documents loaded onto his plane on June 3, 2022 that got flown back to Bedminster, and probably some remained hidden at Mar-a-Lago (the FBI failed to search a room off Trump's suite).

The FBI has never found the missing classified documents.

Trump was charged with hoarding some of America's most secret documents in his basement. And during that entire period, he was checking in regularly with the leader of a hostile foreign country, the one who keeps helping him get elected.

## Russian staged another operation to help defeat Joe Biden

Last month, Guardian revealed details of an information operation involving George Papadopoulos and Simona Mangiante, one for which she published an interview she did with sanctioned Russian agent Andrii Derkach. Relatedly, they rolled out yet more propaganda about Hunter Biden.

Working alongside contributors for Kremlin state media, the former Donald Trump policy aide George Papadopoulos, his wife, Simona Mangiante, and others have become editorial board members of the website Intelligencer, which is increasingly becoming a source of news for those in the rightwing ecosystem.

The growth of the website, which has not been reported on before, comes at a time when the US is seeking to crack down on Russian influence ahead of the 2024 election. Recently, the justice department charged two members of RT (formerly known as Russia Today) with violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act and money laundering for payments they allegedly made to "recruit unwitting American influencers". It also placed sanctions on RT's editor-in-chief, Margarita Simonyan, and nine other employees.

[snip]

Mangiante, his wife, has written several

posts for the site about debunked conspiracy theories involving the Bidens and Ukraine. In January, she posted an interview with a former Ukrainian lawmaker, Andrii Derkach, who repeated false claims of bribery about the Biden family in Ukraine. In 2020, the US placed sanctions on Derkach, calling him an active Russian agent; Derkach, who now is running for political office in Russia, previously met with Rudy Giuliani and purported to offer evidence of corruption against the Bidens.

“Intelligencer appears to be one of several [Russia-friendly] operations targeting the upcoming US elections, leveraging a network of far-right figures and disinformation tactics,” Olga Lautman, a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, said.

Mangiante, along with fellow board member Igor Lopatonok, appears to have parlayed this work into a new documentary about the Hunter Biden laptop saga called Hunter’s Laptop: Requiem for Ukraine. According to social media posts, the documentary premiered on 5 September at the Trump International hotel in Chicago. Eliason wrote the script, which was filmed by Lopatonok, who has frequently collaborated with Oliver Stone on prior anti-Ukrainian documentaries and fawning films of dictators.

Since Biden dropped out, I haven’t really dug into this as much as I might. It can wait. But suffice it to say these links are interesting beyond the most obvious ones. I believe that this ongoing effort targeting Hunter Biden is among the reasons Trump was so sad that Joe Biden dropped out: because Russia had already reloaded the ongoing information operation to work against Joe Biden.

But that's not the only ongoing Russian operation. As part of the RT operation, for example, Russia was allegedly paying money to Lauren Chen, who also had a role at Turning Point America, the group that was supposed to lead Trump's turnout operation.

In a warning about Russia's plan to interfere issued in July, ODNI described that Russia was using "influential US voices" to push Russian support for Trump (and according to a new warning today, also for members of Congress who'll abandon Ukraine).

"We are beginning to see Russia target specific voter demographics, promote divisive narratives and denigrate specific politicians. Moscow seeks to shape electoral outcomes, undermine electoral integrity and amplify domestic divisions," the ODNI official said.

"To accomplish this, Moscow is using a variety of approaches to bolster its messaging and lend an air of authenticity to its efforts. This includes outsourcing its efforts to commercial firms to hide its hand and laundering narratives through influential U.S. voices," the official said.

An influential US voice also mentioned in the RT indictment is Tucker Carlson, fresh off his visit to Vladimir Putin.

## **American media critics have made themselves tools of Russian disinformation**

As it happens, just yesterday, the publisher of the Steele dossier that gave Republicans a way to claim the Russian story was something other than it was, Ben Smith, claimed that the Trump-

Russia story is nothing more than “an embarrassment.”

The Trump-Russia story is at this point an embarrassment to everyone. Democrats couldn't prove the most extensive allegations of plotting or that Russian Facebook ads swung the election. Republicans couldn't deny that Russia was trying to help Trump, or prove their own more conspiratorial claims that the whole thing was a Hillary Clinton-made “Russia hoax.” At some point, American politics mostly moved on.

What the Russian investigation found is that Trump's coffee boy, his campaign manager, his National Security Adviser, his personal lawyer, and his rat-fucker *all* lied to cover up the truth of what happened with Russia in 2016.

And yet because Trump successfully pardoned himself out of legal trouble, people like Ben yawn and say it's over. And Trump's successful pushback on the Russian story – assisted by the self-imagined savvy of people like Ben – means that no one has investigated the follow-on in 2020 and this year.

## Vladimir Putin's puppet makes house calls

And that has led the mainstream press to give just passing coverage of critical stories about Trump's negotiations with Russia and its proxies.

Days before Biden dropped out of the race, I included Viktor Orbán's trip to Mar-a-Lago among the stories getting ignored as everyone chased Joe Biden old stories.

Now, however, Trump no longer hides that he's willing to let Putin dismember Ukraine. He welcomed Viktor Orbán's pitch of a plan to do just that – but

there has been no readout from Trump's side of what happened. Orbán, however, has told other EU nations that Trump will move for "peace" immediately after being elected – a replay of what Flynn lied to cover up in 2017 – largely by withdrawing US support for Ukraine.

In the past, Trump has gone even further than this, suggesting he'll do nothing as Putin invades NATO states.

Meanwhile, JD Vance is, if anything, even more pro-Russian than Trump, as are some of the Silicon Valley oligarchs who now back Trump's campaign since the Vance pick.

Trump's plan of capitulation to Russia will go a long way to ending the Western rules-based order, the greatest wish of Putin and Xi Jinping.

And thus far we know just one of the things that Russia seems to be doing to help Trump's campaign: detaining WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich until Trump gets elected, just as Iran held onto hostages to help Reagan get elected. Avril Haines recently made clear Russia is planning on helping in other ways as well.

That's how "Russia Russia Russia" has worked. It's a shameless lie that Mueller found nothing, a lie built off years of propaganda. Indeed, Trump's willing acceptance – or, in Rudy's case, outright solicitation – of Russia's help to get elected has only gotten more brazen. Yet rather than call Don Jr on his "Russia Russia Russia" lie, reporters simply let the pressing question of whether Trump will end the alliance of democracies in a second term go unasked.

Viktor Orbán is an absolutely central player in

Republican plans, especially those – like Project 2025 – boosted by the Heritage Foundation. But there has been almost no curiosity about what's behind that.

Another thing that got largely buried was Paul Manafort's return to Trump's campaign, even though since he last worked for Trump, it has been confirmed that his efforts resulted in Russian spies obtaining polling and the campaign's strategy.

Because Trump has so successfully led journalists to be cowed by his "Russia Russia" bullying, none of this has been a central story.

It needs to become one.