

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM B. SCHIFF
HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
OPEN HEARING - SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2016 ELECTION
NOVEMBER 1, 2017
Opening Statement

In March of this year, our committee had its first open hearing and then FBI Director Comey revealed that he had opened a counterintelligence investigation involving Trump associates and the Russians. Then, we knew next to nothing about the Russians use of social media to attack Hillary Clinton — indeed the technology companies themselves only recently have identified the reach of that facet of the Kremlin’s active measures campaign.

Today, you will see a representative sample of those ads, and we will ask the social media companies what they know about the full extent of Russian use of social media, why it took them so long to discover this abuse of their platforms, and what they intend to do about it to protect our country from this malign influence in the future.

But first, it is worth taking stock of where we are in the investigation. During our March hearing, I posed the question of whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russia in any aspect of its influence operations. In essence, did the Russians offer to help the campaign, and did the campaign accept? And if the Trump campaign did accept, explicitly or implicitly, what did the Russians do to make good on that understanding?

We now know, as a result of the guilty plea by Trump Campaign foreign policy advisor George Papadopolous, that the Russians approached the Trump campaign as early as April of 2016, to inform them that they were in possession of dirt on Hillary Clinton, in the form of thousands of stolen emails. This timing is significant, because it means that the Trump campaign was informed of Russia’s involvement with stolen emails, and their intent to release them, before anyone else.

But Mr. Papadopolous was not the only Trump campaign figure the Russians approached, nor would his lies to federal agents be the last example of Trump associates making false statements about their interactions with the Russians.

We now know that the uppermost levels of the Trump campaign were also informed that the Russians had dirt on Clinton, and that it was offered to the campaign in what was described as part of the Putin government's effort to help Trump. That offer appears to have been accepted when the President's son said that he would love the assistance and suggested that the best timing would be late summer. And in late summer, the Russians would begin dumping the dirt on Hillary Clinton. The President and his son would later deceptively claim the meeting with the Russians in Trump Tower was about adoptions.

It is not clear from Mr. Papadopoulos' plea or the emails which established the meeting at Trump Tower, whether the Russians communicated that the mechanism they would use to help the campaign may not involve the direct provision of the stolen emails to the campaign, but their publication through Wikileaks and Moscow's own cutouts, like Guccifer 2. What is clear is this: The Kremlin repeatedly told the campaign it had dirt on Clinton and offered to help it, and at least one top Trump campaign official, the President's own son, accepted.

Apart from publishing stolen emails, the Russians also used social media to assist the Trump Campaign. Whether the Russians and Trump coordinated these efforts, we do not yet know, but it is true that the Russians mounted what could be described as an independent expenditure campaign on Trump's behalf. Russian ads on Twitter, for example, promoted stories about Hillary Clinton's allegedly poor health or legal problems.

But the social media campaign was also designed to further a broader Kremlin objective: sowing discord in the U.S. by inflaming passions on a range of divisive issues. The Russians did so by weaving together fake accounts, pages, and communities to push politicized content and videos, and to mobilize real Americans to sign online petitions and join rallies and protests. They also bought ads, like these:

- **[Show Ad 1] Black Matters** was brought to us from St. Petersburg and amassed over **224,000** "likes."
- **[Show Ad 2]** This page garnered over **135,000** Facebook followers. The Russians bought sufficient ad space for it to appear almost **145,000 times** across Facebook accounts that had expressed an interest in Donald

Trump, stopping illegal immigration, conservatism, Confederate States of America, Dixie, or the Republican party.

Russia exploited real vulnerabilities that exist across online platforms and we must identify, expose, and defend ourselves against similar covert influence operations in the future. The companies here today must play a central role as we seek to better protect legitimate political expression, while preventing cyberspace from being misused by our adversaries.