

Is Donald Trump a Manchurian Candidate?

A series of explosive reports provide new details about the Republican nominee's relationship with Russia.



By

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Senate minority leader **Harry Reid** sparked a political firestorm Sunday when he published a [blistering letter](#) to F.B.I. director **James Comey**, accusing the Republican of tipping his hand by informing Congress—in a frustratingly [vague letter](#) made public just 11 days before the election—that his agency had discovered a trove of communications that may pertain to **Hillary Clinton's** use of a private e-mail while serving as secretary of state. Comey, Reid charged, had exhibited a “disturbing double standard” by making the inflammatory disclosure while withholding “explosive information” linking **Donald Trump** and his top aides to the Russian government. “The public has a right to know this information,” Reid added.

Within 24 hours of Reid's letter being published, several news outlets broke stories about Trump's long-rumored ties to Russia. First, CNBC [confirmed](#) that Comey did, in fact, believe a “foreign power was trying to undermine the election,” but didn't want to make the bureau's investigation public until after the election. Later Monday evening, Slate [published](#) a separate story investigating the suspicious communications

between a Trump-controlled server and Alfa Bank, one of the largest financial institutions in Russia. (**Franklin Foer**, who wrote the article, ultimately concluded that “we don’t yet know what this server was for, but it deserves further explanation.”) The Trump campaign dismissed Slate’s reporting, claiming in a statement that “the Trump Organization has no communication or relationship with this entity or any Russian entity.” But hours later, a more damning story dropped. According to *[Mother Jones](#)*, a former Western intelligence officer brought the F.B.I. evidence months ago revealing “an established exchange of information between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin of mutual benefit.” The former spy, who reporter **David Corn** characterizes as a veteran operative with nearly two decades of experience investigating Russian intelligence, allegedly brought his findings to the agency after deeming them “sufficiently serious.” The F.B.I. reportedly took the allegations seriously, requesting additional information. (While Corn’s source did not share his agency contact with the magazine, a senior U.S. official familiar with the former spy told *Mother Jones* that he was a credible source.) According to Corn, the report sent to the F.B.I. concluded that the “Russian regime has been cultivating, supporting and assisting Trump for at least [five] years” and that the G.O.P. nominee “and his inner circle have accepted a regular flow of intelligence from the Kremlin, including on his Democratic and other political rivals.” (The Trump campaign did not respond to a request by *Mother Jones* for comment.)

There are plenty of reasons to doubt or withhold judgment on a report credited to a single, anonymous source. For one, its findings conflict with a separate *[New York Times](#) article*, published the same day, which reports that the F.B.I. found no “conclusive or direct link” between Trump and the Kremlin in its investigation. According to the *Times*, the agency does not dispute that Russian hackers were behind the

cyberattacks on the Democratic National Convention and the Clinton campaign, which have yielded a steady drip of damaging headlines via Wikileaks. But “even the hacking into Democratic e-mails, F.B.I. and intelligence officials now believe, was aimed at disrupting the presidential election rather than electing Mr. Trump,” the paper reports, and that “no evidence has emerged that would link [Trump] or anyone else in his business or political circle directly to Russia’s election operations.” (How the Russian government is not taking sides by allegedly targeting only the Democratic candidate is not explained.) The *Times* article also contradicts the Slate report, noting that F.B.I. officials spent “weeks” examining the electronic channel between the Trump Organization and Alfa Bank, but concluded that there was likely an innocuous explanation for the connection.

Still, the latest allegations facing Donald Trump and his presidential campaign fit a longstanding pattern that has rightfully raised serious questions. Trump’s foreign policy agenda is a near mirror-image of Russia’s, right down to the rhetoric he has used about Ukraine and Syria. At the end of July, Trump threatened the 67-year-old NATO alliance when he suggested that, if elected president, he might not come to the aid of the Baltic States in the event of a Russian invasion, and later seemed to support Russian president **Vladimir Putin**’s invasion of Crimea. “You know, the people of Crimea, from what I’ve heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were,” he remarked over the summer. He has repeatedly defended thawing relations with Putin and even called on Russia to hack Clinton’s e-mails. (Trump later characterized the statement as a joke.) More recently, he has adopted Russian propaganda on the campaign trail, describing Putin’s military intervention in Syria as a war against ISIS, rather than an effort to prop up the **Bashar al-Assad** regime. And while Trump has vehemently denied any link to Russian interests, he has never kept his admiration of

Putin a secret. The former reality-TV star has routinely praised the Russian president for his leadership. (Putin, for his part, has denied that Russia was behind the cyberattack on the D.N.C., but did characterize it as a public service to American voters. “Listen, does it even matter who hacked this data?” he said during [an interview](#) with Bloomberg in September. “The important thing is that the content was given to the public.”)

Throughout his campaign, Trump has also surrounded himself with advisers friendly with the Russian regime. Former Trump campaign chairman **Paul Manafort** resigned after *The New York Times* reported that he was allegedly designated to receive \$12.7 million in off-the-books cash payments from former Ukrainian president and Russian ally **Viktor Yanukovych** for work he did in that country. (Manafort, who has denied any wrongdoing, was recently [reported](#) to be the subject of a “preliminary inquiry” by the F.B.I.) Another Trump adviser, **Carter Page**, has also [been linked to Russian interests](#), a charge he has denied. U.S. intelligence officials have [reportedly](#) investigated whether Page held talks with senior Russian officials about potentially lifting economic sanctions on the country if Trump is elected president. Longtime Trump confidant **Roger Stone** has also been a source of troubling optics for the Republican nominee. Last month, Clinton campaign chairman **John Podesta** [accused](#) Stone of having “advance knowledge” of document dumps by Wikileaks, including e-mails stolen

from Podesta by alleged Russian hackers. (Stone has dismissed the allegations against him as “the new McCarthyism.”)

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