

TRUMP: 'Our relationship with Russia has NEVER been worse'

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an American president in memory." House Speaker Paul Ryan, who rarely criticizes Trump, stressed there was "no question" that Russia had interfered.

Even staunch Trump backer Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, called Trump's comments "the most serious mistake of his presidency" and said they "must be corrected — immediately."

Former CIA Director John Brennan, who served under President Barack Obama, called Trump's words "nothing short of treasonous." Brennan tweeted: "Not only were Trump's comments imbecilic, he is wholly in the pocket of Putin. Republican Patriots: Where are you???"

In a Fox News Channel interview after the summit, Putin pronounced the meetings "the beginning of the path" back from the West's past efforts to isolate Russia. "I think you see for yourself that these efforts failed, and they were never bound to succeed," he said.

As he flew home to Washington aboard Air Force One, Trump tried to clarify his position via tweet, saying: "As I said today and many times before, 'I have GREAT confidence in MY intelligence people.' However, I also recognize that in order to build a brighter future, we cannot exclusively focus on the past — as the world's two largest nuclear powers, we must get



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

U.S. President Donald Trump speaks with Russian President Vladimir Putin during a press conference after their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki, Finland, Monday.

along!"

In an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity that aired later Monday, Trump said "it's a shame" that he and Putin were being asked questions about the Russia probe while they were trying to discuss issues like Syria and nuclear proliferation. "We've had a phony witch hunt deal drive us apart," he said.

In their totality, Trump's remarks amounted to an unprecedented embrace of a man who for years has been isolated by the U.S. and Western allies for actions in Ukraine, Syria and beyond. And it came at the end of an extraordinary trip to Europe in which Trump had

already berated allies, questioned the value of the NATO alliance and demeaned leaders including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May.

The two leaders' long-awaited summit began with a private face-to-face sitdown — just the leaders and their interpreters — that lasted more than two hours, before additional meetings joined by senior aides.

The pair had held lengthy talks before — on the sidelines of world leader meetings in Germany and Vietnam last year — but this was their first official summit and was being watched closely, especially following the announcement Fri-

day of new indictments against 12 Russian intelligence officers accused of hacking Democratic emails to help Trump's campaign.

Asked about the indictments, Putin suggested that Moscow and Washington could jointly conduct the investigation, inviting special counsel Robert Mueller's investigators to come to Russia to interview the 12 people — an idea Trump hailed as an "incredible offer."

Putin said he'd expect the U.S. to return the favor and cooperate in the Russian probe against William Browder, a British investor charged with financial crimes in Russia. Browder, an outspoken Putin critic, was a driving force behind a U.S. law targeting Russian officials over human rights abuses.

The summit began just hours after Trump blamed the United States — and not Russian election meddling or its annexation of Crimea — for a low-point in U.S.-Russia relations.

"Our relationship with Russia has NEVER been worse," Trump tweeted Monday morning, blaming "many years of U.S. foolishness and stupidity and now, the Rigged Witch Hunt!"

The Russian foreign ministry responded by liking Trump's tweet and then replying, "We agree."

Asked whether Russia was responsible at all, Trump said "we're all to blame" for the soured relations.

However, "that changed," he said, "as of about four hours ago."

Putin ridiculed as "sheer nonsense" allegations that Russian intelligence agencies had collected compromising information on Trump during his visit to Moscow years before the election, saying that he had no idea Trump was even visiting.

Trump also dismissed the idea in his interview with Hannity, adding, "If they had it, it would have been out."

Still, Putin said he had indeed wanted Trump to win the election — a revelation that might have made more headlines if not for Trump's performance — but had taken no action to make it happen.

"Yes, I wanted him to win because he spoke of normalization of Russian-U.S. ties," Putin said. "Isn't it natural to feel sympathy to a person who wanted to develop relations with our country? It's normal."

At the closing press conference, Putin, riding high after hosting a successful World Cup, unveiled a gift he'd brought for Trump: a red and white soccer ball, which he tossed to Trump at the neighboring lectern. Trump passed it over to his wife, and said they'd give it to their soccer-loving 12-year-old son, Barron.

Out on the streets, the summit attracted a grab-bag of protesters, including anti-fascist protesters, free traders, anti-war Ukrainians and gay rights supporters.



AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin

A man walks past the building of the Russian military intelligence service in Moscow, Russia, Saturday.

Russian hackers used U.S. online infrastructure against itself

WASHINGTON (AP) — Exactly seven months before the 2016 presidential election, Russian government hackers made it onto a Democratic committee's network.

One of their carefully crafted fraudulent emails had hit pay dirt, enticing an employee to click a link and enter her password.

That breach of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee was the first significant step in gaining access to the Democratic National Committee network.

To steal politically sensitive information, prosecutors say, the hackers exploited some of the United States' own computer infrastructure against it, using servers they leased in Arizona and Illinois.

The details were included in an indictment released Friday by special counsel Robert Mueller, who accused the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, of taking part in a wide-ranging conspiracy to interfere in the 2016 presidential election. The companies operating the servers were not identified in the court papers.

The Russians are accused of exploiting their access to inexpensive, powerful servers worldwide — conveniently available for rental — that can be used to commit crimes with impunity. Reaching across oceans and into networks without borders can obfuscate their origins.

The indictment painstakingly reconstructs the hackers' movements using web servers and a complex bitcoin financing operation.

Two Russian hacking units were charged with tasks, including the creation and management of a hacking tool called "X-agent" that was implanted onto computers. The software allowed them to monitor activity on computers by individuals, steal passwords and maintain access to hacked networks. It captured each keystroke on infected computers and took screenshots of activity displayed on computer screens, including an employee viewing the DCCC's online banking information.

From April to June 2016, the hackers installed updated versions of their software on at least 10 Democratic computers.

The software transmitted information from the infected computers to a GRU-leased server in Arizona, the indictment said. The hackers also created an overseas computer to act as a "middle server" to obscure the connection between the DCCC and the hackers' Arizona-based server.

Once hackers gained access to the DCCC network, it searched one computer for terms that included "hillary," "cruz," and "trump" and copied select folders, including "Benghazi Investigations."

In emails, the hackers embedded a link that purported to be a spreadsheet of Clinton's favorability ratings, but instead it directed the computers to send its data to a GRU-created website.

Meanwhile, around the same time, the hackers broke into 33 DNC computers and installed their software on their net-

work. Captured keystrokes and screenshots from the DCCC and DNC computers, including an employee viewing the DCCC's banking information, were sent back to the Arizona server.

The Russian hackers used other software they developed called X-Tunnel to move stolen documents through encrypted channels to another computer the GRU leased in Illinois.

Despite the use of U.S.-based servers, such vendors typically aren't legally liable for criminal activities unless it can be proved in federal court that the operator was party to the criminal activity.

A 1996 federal statute protects internet vendors from being held liable for how customers use their service, and except for a few exceptions, provides immunity to the providers. The law is considered a key part of the legal infrastructure of the internet, preventing providers from being saddled with the behemoth task of monitoring activity on their servers.

"The fact that someone provided equipment and or connectivity that was used to engage in data theft is not going to be attributed to the vendor in that circumstance," Eric Goldman, a professor of law and co-director of the High Tech Law Institute at Santa Clara University School of Law, said. A notable exception, however, is if federal prosecutors are bringing a criminal charge for violations of a federal criminal law.

In that case, "we're going to require a high level of knowledge of their activity or intent," Goldman said.

BRIEFLY

U.S. arrests, accuses woman of acting as Russian hacker

WASHINGTON (AP) — A 29-year-old gun-rights activist served as a covert Russian agent while living in Washington, gathering intelligence on American officials and political organizations and working to establish back-channel lines of communications for the Kremlin, federal prosecutors charged Monday.

The announcement of

the arrest of Maria Butina came just hours after President Donald Trump met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and just days after special counsel Robert Mueller charged 12 Russian intelligence officials with directing a sprawling hacking effort aimed at swaying the 2016 election.

Mueller didn't file the charge against Butina, but court papers show her activities revolved around American politics during the 2016 campaign and included efforts to use contacts with the National Rifle

Association to develop relationships with U.S. politicians and gather intelligence for Russia.

Court papers also reveal that an unnamed American who worked with Butina claimed to have been involved in setting up a "private line of communication" ahead of the 2016 election between the Kremlin and "key" officials in an American political party through the NRA.

The court papers do not name the political party mentioned in the October 2016 message.

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