

## POLITICS

## The New York Times

# *Trump Says 'I'd Take It' if Russia Again Offered Dirt on Opponent*

By **Peter Baker**

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WASHINGTON — President Trump said on Wednesday that there would be nothing wrong with accepting incriminating information about an election opponent from Russia or other foreign governments and that he saw no reason to call the F.B.I. if it were to happen again.

“It’s not an interference,” he said in an interview with ABC News, describing it as “opposition research.” “They have information — I think I’d take it.” He would call the F.B.I. only “if I thought there was something wrong.”

His comments put him at odds not only with Democratic candidates who have made a point of forswearing help from foreign governments as they seek their party’s nomination to challenge him but also with his own F.B.I. director, Christopher S. Wray, who has said politicians in such circumstances should call his agency.

“I don’t think in my whole life I’ve ever called the F.B.I. In my whole life,” Mr. Trump said dismissively. “You don’t call the F.B.I. You throw somebody out of your office, you do whatever you do.” He added, “Give me a break — life doesn’t work that way.”

When the interviewer, George Stephanopoulos, noted that the F.B.I. director has said a candidate should call, Mr. Trump snapped, “The F.B.I. director is wrong.”

The president's remarks came on the same day that his son Donald Trump Jr. appeared on Capitol Hill to answer questions from lawmakers. During the 2016 campaign, the younger Mr. Trump — along with Jared Kushner, the future president's son-in-law, and Paul Manafort, then his campaign chairman — met with a Kremlin-connected lawyer after being told she would have “dirt” on Hillary Clinton as “part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump.”

The president has previously defended the decision to take the meeting on the grounds that any campaign would listen to opposition research, even from a foreign adversary. Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel, concluded in his recent report that Russia made a concerted effort to help Mr. Trump get elected and that Mr. Trump's campaign benefited from it, but he established no illegal conspiracy between the two.

Mr. Trump has sought to characterize Mr. Mueller's report as complete exoneration. He took it a step further on Wednesday during an earlier meeting with reporters when he claimed that Mr. Mueller's report actually said that “we rebuffed them” when the Russians tried to help.

Mr. Trump's lawyer did not respond to a request asking what the president was referring to. In actuality, Mr. Mueller's report documented numerous contacts between Mr. Trump's campaign and Russian figures throughout the 2016 campaign.

In testimony to Congress last month, Mr. Wray, who was appointed by Mr. Trump, said campaigns should report it if they hear from foreign governments. “I think my view is that if any public official or member of any campaign is contacted by any nation state or anybody acting on behalf of a nation state about influencing or interfering with our election, then that's something that the F.B.I. would want to know about,” Mr. Wray said.

When pressed during the interview, Mr. Trump allowed that maybe he would call the F.B.I. but only after listening to the incriminating information first. “I think maybe you do both,” he said, adding: “There’s nothing wrong with listening. If somebody called from a country, Norway, ‘we have information on your opponent’ — oh, I think I’d want to hear it.”

His answer mirrored one given recently by Mr. Kushner, who said he was not sure he would call the F.B.I. if a foreign government again offered damaging information about an opponent. “I don’t know,” he said in an interview with Axios, an online news organization. “It’s hard to do hypotheticals, but the reality is that we were not given anything that was salacious.”

It was the second time in recent weeks that Mr. Trump has publicly chided Mr. Wray. After the F.B.I. director rejected the word “spying” to describe the bureau’s investigation of contacts between Russia and the Trump campaign, Mr. Trump lashed out. “I thought it was a ridiculous answer,” Mr. Trump said last month.

Mr. Trump on Wednesday also disputed an article in The New York Times reporting that his internal polling showed him trailing Democrats in key states. “We are winning in every single state that we polled,” he told reporters in the Oval Office. “We’re winning in Texas very big, we’re winning in Ohio very big. We’re winning in Florida very big. They were fake polls that were either put out by the corrupt media.”

Mr. Trump’s claim to Mr. Stephanopoulos that he never in his life called the F.B.I. conflicts with past reports. In 2017, BuzzFeed reported on a 1981 F.B.I. memo that described how Mr. Trump, as a real estate developer, contacted the bureau about a casino he was considering opening in Atlantic City. He offered to “fully cooperate” with the bureau and suggested that F.B.I. agents work undercover in the casino to root out any mafia elements.

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