

The Donald Trump Jr. emails change everything

It is no longer possible to dismiss the Russia scandal as fake news.

The June 2016 email thread in which Donald Trump Jr. was offered Russian government help for the Trump campaign has now been released, and it is utterly damning.

In the thread, publicist Rob Goldstone writes clear as day that a prosecutor in Russia met a client of his, and offered to give the Trump campaign incriminating information on Hillary Clinton “as part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.”

“If it’s what you say I love it especially later in the summer,” Trump Jr. responded.

The full thread — posted by Trump Jr. himself in [two tweets](#) in an effort to preempt a story by the [New York Times’ Jo Becker, Adam Goldman, and Matt Apuzzo](#) — makes indisputably clear that Trump Jr. was trying to collude with the Russian government.

In the thread, Goldstone goes on to schedule a meeting between Trump Jr. and a “Russian government attorney” who he said would convey the information. Trump Jr. also forwards on the thread to Jared Kushner and then-Trump campaign chair Paul Manafort, confirming the time of the meeting.

To be blunt: This changes everything.

What exactly is so damaging about the new email thread

The email thread makes clear that Donald Trump Jr. was aware of and willing to support a Russian government effort to help his father’s campaign.

It suggests that Kushner and Manafort were also in the loop.

And it raises serious questions of how Donald Trump himself could have kept professing to disbelieve claims that Russia was helping him.

What actually happened when Trump Jr., Kushner, and Manafort met Russian government attorney Natalia Veselnitskaya on June 9, 2016, in Trump Tower remains unclear.

Trump Jr. has claimed in a statement that he was given no useful information at the meeting and that the matter went no further. Yet previous accounts he’s given of the meeting keep leaving out relevant details that emerge later on.

There remains a great deal we still don’t know about the Russia scandal. For instance, what, if anything, Trump’s team actually ended up *doing* with the Russians is still unclear. Did any collaborative effort or private understanding materialize in the end? Was the Trump campaign tipped off about the Russian hacking and planned leaks of prominent Democrats’ emails? What, exactly, did Donald Trump know?

But it’s no longer possible to dismiss the Russia scandal as fake news. The future of Trump’s presidency hinges on what Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation finds.

The emails are very specific about who was behind the information

On June 3, 2016, publicist Rob Goldstone sent his acquaintance Donald Trump Jr. a tantalizing email headlined “Russia - Clinton - private and confidential”:

>>>> On Jun 3, 2016, at 10:36 AM, Rob Goldstone wrote:
 >>>>
 >>>> Good morning
 >>>> Emin just called and asked me to contact you with something very interesting.
 >>>> The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with his father Aras this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father.
 >>>> This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump - helped along by Aras and Emin.
 >>>> What do you think is the best way to handle this information and would you be able to speak to Emin about it directly?
 >>>> I can also send this info to your father via Rhona, but it is ultra sensitive so wanted to send to you first.
 >>>> Best
 >>>> Rob Goldstone

Goldstone said he was writing at the behest of Aras and Emin Agalarov, a father-son pair of real estate developers who do business with Russia and worked with the Trumps on the 2013 Miss Universe pageant. (Emin is also [a Russian pop star](#).)

He said that “the Crown prosecutor of Russia” met with Aras and “offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful” to Trump. (“Crown prosecutor” is a British term and that exact position doesn’t exist in Russia, but the Times [suggests](#) Goldstone may have been referring to the Russian prosecutor general.)

And crucially, Goldstone made clear that the information would be “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump — helped along by Aras and Emin.”

Trump Jr. responded enthusiastically — “if it’s what you say I love it especially later in the summer.”

>>>> On Jun 3, 2016, at 10:53, Donald Trump Jr. wrote:
 >>>>
 >>>> Thanks Rob I appreciate that. I am on the road at the moment but perhaps I just speak to Emin first. Seems we have some time and if it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer. Could we do a call first thing next week when I am back?
 >>>> Best,
 >>>> Don

Goldstone then helps set up a phone call between Trump Jr. and Emin Agalarov, and later arranges a meeting between Trump Jr. and someone he calls “The Russian government attorney who is flying over from Moscow.”

>>> On Jun 7, 2016, at 4:20 PM, Rob Goldstone wrote:
 >>>
 >>> Don
 >>> Hope all is well
 >>> Emin asked that I schedule a meeting with you and The Russian government attorney who is flying over from Moscow for this Thursday.
 >>> I believe you are aware of the meeting - and so wondered if 3pm or later on Thursday works for you?
 >>> I assume it would be at your office.
 >>> Best
 >>> Rob Goldstone

Trump Jr. confirms the meeting and says then-campaign manager Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner will also attend:

On Jun 7, 2016, at 18:14, Donald Trump Jr.

wrote:

Great. It will likely be Paul Manafort (campaign boss) my brother in law and me. 725 Fifth Ave 25th floor.

Later, the meeting was rescheduled, and Trump Jr. forwarded the new time and apparently the entire thread to Kushner and Manafort:

From: Donald Trump Jr.
Sent: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 12:03 PM
To: Jared Kushner; Paul Manafort
Subject: FW: Russia - Clinton - private and confidential

Meeting got moved to 4 tomorrow at my offices.
 Best,
 Don

The meeting with Natalia Veselnitskaya then took place the following day, on June 9.

The email thread makes clear that the people closest to Trump understood that Russia was trying to help his campaign

Throughout the past year, Trump and his team have denied and disparaged reports that the Russian government tried to help his candidacy, and that there was any collusion between his team and Russia.

Trump himself for months publicly professed not even to believe that the Russian government was behind the hackings and leaks of prominent Democrats' emails, something that is the consensus judgment of US intelligence agencies.

In the opening months of this year, report after report of strange or suspicious behavior from Trump and his team members around Russia kept emerging. But we still lacked outright proof that there was any private understanding or behind-the-scenes collaboration between the two camps. It remained theoretically possible that what US intelligence agencies said was a multifaceted Russian effort to help Trump win was done without anyone from the Trump team knowing about it.

That is no longer possible. We have indisputable proof that people very close to the president indeed — his son, his son-in-law/top adviser, and his then-campaign chair — were not only aware of but encouraging of a Russian government effort to help Trump win the White House.

Think about it: Goldstone casually sent Trump Jr. an email saying his information would be “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump” — casually stating Russia’s support for Trump as if it were an unremarkable fact.

Trump Jr.’s response is similarly blasé. Rather than being confused or questioning what Goldstone means when he’s referring to the Russian government’s support for Trump, the president’s son cheerily responds “If it’s what you say I love it” and proceeds to try to get the details. And he forwards the thread on to Kushner and Manafort.

It’s hard to read these emails and not conclude that the top echelons of the Trump campaign were well aware of the Russian government’s support for Trump and willing to collaborate in the effort — which you’d have to think implies that Trump himself has been well aware of this knowledge all along.

There may still be much more we don’t know

Now, the White House has said that the president only learned about this Trump Jr. meeting in recent days. Still, one has to wonder whether the president's repeated complaints about the Russia investigation and his firing of FBI director James Comey were in part motivated by trying to stop information like this — information that could even expose his son to criminal charges, according to experts [interviewed by my colleague Zack Beauchamp](#) — from turning up.

What the Trump camp and Russian government-linked actors actually talked about or did together remains unknown. Perhaps this particular meeting did indeed lead nowhere, as Trump Jr. claims (though his story [has already changed so much](#) that it's difficult to take the new version at face value).

But even if that's true, it raises yet more questions about just what else Trump campaign advisers like Manafort and Kushner (who attended this meeting) and Michael Flynn (whose [name has surfaced](#) in recent reports about GOP operatives' efforts to contact Russian hackers) may have said to or done with the Russians.

The bigger picture is that it's now impossible to dispute that the investigations into the Trump campaign, and Russian collusion is an extremely serious matter. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's inquiry needs to proceed unimpeded, and congressional investigators need to do their own work as well. The country needs to get to the bottom of what happened here.

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