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Russia Inquiry By U.S. Centers On Americans

Examining Their Work
for Pro-Putin Outlets

By STEVEN LEE MYERS
and JULIAN E. BARNES

The Department of Justice has begun a broad criminal investigation into Americans who have worked with Russia's state television networks, signaling an aggressive effort to combat the Kremlin's influence operations leading up to the presidential election in November, according to American officials briefed on the inquiry.

This month, F.B.I. agents searched the homes of two prominent figures with connections to Russian state media: Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector and critic of American foreign policy, and Dimitri K. Simes, an adviser to former President Donald J. Trump's first presidential campaign in 2016. Prosecutors have not announced charges against either of the men.

More searches are expected soon, some of the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss investigations. Criminal charges are also possible, they said.

The investigation comes in the wake of the Biden administration's official intelligence findings that Russia's state news organizations, including the global news channel RT, are working with its intelligence agencies to sway elections around the world.

Those efforts include November's contest between Mr. Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. For a third time, according to the officials and public statements, the Kremlin's propaganda apparatus has thrown itself behind Mr. Trump's candidacy, creating online news outlets and fake videos to denigrate President Biden and, more recently, Ms. Harris.

The investigation so far has focused on potential violations of the economic sanctions imposed on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine and a law that requires the disclosure of lobbying efforts on behalf of foreign governments.

The government's investigation is politically fraught, reprising the furiously partisan debate over Russia's influence in the 2016 presidential campaign. By targeting Americans working with news organizations, even if they are state-run, the inquiry could also bump up against the First Amendment's protection of rights to free speech.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence warned on July 29 that Russia was exploiting "witting and unwitting Americans" to create and spread narratives that were favorable to the government of President Vladimir V. Putin.

"These personalities," the office said in a statement, "post content on social media, write for various websites with overt and covert ties to the Russian government,"

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Walz Carries Small Towns Within Him

An Identity Forged on
the Nebraska Prairie

By MATT FLEGENHEIMER

VALENTINE, Neb. — Tim Walz was 14 or so, trouble-seeking with his cousins across a shaggy patch of family land where they liked to shoot air guns at birds.

They had come upon his uncle's "junk pile" one day in the late 1970s, a little scrap heap with a broken-down car and one unam-

THE LONG RUN
Rural Life to Political Life

biguous rule.

"Dad specifically — specifically — said, 'Now don't shoot them windows,'" one cousin, Matt Reiman, said of the car recently.

What happened next was probably inevitable: Pop. Shatter. Gleeful profanity from Mr. Walz — and a knee-jerk confession with no adults around.

"My gun went off!" he shouted, as if it might have been an accident, formulating his pre-emptive defense in real time. "My gun went off!"

Relatives said Mr. Walz would later deny culpability of any sort.

"He could make something unbelievable believable," Casey Reiman, another cousin who was there, said fondly, if still a bit grudgingly, some 45 years later.

"Had a lot of giggle in him," Matt Reiman said. "Never had a serious day in his life."

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top left, Tim Walz in high school. From top: Valentine, Neb., where Mr. Walz spent much of his youth; Casey Reiman, right, a cousin, and his son Dylan in their corn field around Butte, Neb.; Jerome Reiman, an uncle, said, "I never figured he'd be in the position he's in now."

In the Democrats' Newest Attack Strategy, the Joke's on Trump

By MAGGIE HABERMAN
and JONATHAN SWAN

CHICAGO — How to attack former President Donald Trump?

It's a question that has tormented Democratic Party strategists for nearly a decade. Hillary Clinton called him "Dangerous Donald" and a racist. President Biden uses grave and lofty terms to describe him imperiling Amer-

ican democracy.

Vice President Kamala Harris is trying something different: deflating him.

The first two nights of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago have brought into sharper focus the lens through which Ms. Harris and her allies intend to frame Mr. Trump from now until Election Day.

In slickly produced videos shown to delegates and in speech

POLITICAL MEMO

after speech, a host of attacks emerged. Ms. Harris is the future-oriented change agent, and Mr. Trump is the stale past. He's been playing a long con on the American people that has outlived its expiration date.

The goal of Ms. Harris's anti-Trump messaging is trying to shrink her opponent in order to

rise above him, minimizing him and disengaging from him to avoid getting drawn into reacting to his every provocation. There is less engagement on highlighting Mr. Trump's racist statements or casting him as a threat to democracy, than focusing on a portrait Democrats believe will resonate with voters: that of Mr. Trump as a meanspirited fraud who only cares about himself and his bil-

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THE WEATHER
Today, sunny to partly cloudy, a good day to be outside, high 75. Tonight, cool, clear, low 62. Tomorrow, sunny to partly cloudy, low humidity, high 80. Weather map is on Page B10.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Harris's Ban On Gouging Omits 'How'

Price Policy May Not
Match Hopes or Fears

By JIM TANKERSLEY

WASHINGTON — Vice President Kamala Harris threw her support behind a federal ban on price-gouging in the food and grocery industries last week. It was the first official economic policy proposal of her presidential campaign, and it was pitched as a direct response to the high price of putting food on the table in America today.

"To combat high grocery costs, VP Harris to call for first-ever federal ban on corporate price-gouging," the Harris campaign proclaimed in the subject line of a news release last week, ahead of a speech laying out the first planks of her economic agenda.

It is still impossible to say, from publicly available details, what exactly the ban would do. Republicans have denounced the proposal as "communist," warning that it would lead to the federal government setting prices in the marketplace. Former President Donald J. Trump has mocked the plan on social media as "SOVIET Style Price Controls."

Progressives have cheered the announcement as a crucial check on corporate greed, saying it could immediately benefit shoppers who have been stunned by a 20 percent rise in food costs since President Biden took office.

But people familiar with Ms. Harris's thinking on the ban now say it might not resemble either of those characterizations. The ban, they also suggest, might actually not do anything to bring down grocery prices right now. Those who spoke about the strategy behind the emerging policy did so on the condition of anonymity.

Ms. Harris's campaign has created the space for multiple interpretations, by declining to specify how that ban would work, when it would apply or what behaviors it would prohibit.

In the process, the vice president and her team are discovering the double-edged reality of releasing a policy proposal that is thin on detail: Anyone is free to imagine what those details might be.

Ms. Harris's strategic vagueness on certain policy details has allowed her to emphasize broad themes that resonate with voters. Polling this summer by the Democratic firm Blueprint, for example, found four out of five voters supported prosecuting companies for price-gouging and

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ONLINE Follow news from the Democratic National Convention at nytimes.com, where reporters will be providing live updates.

For China's Road Trip Heroine, A Bold Step on a New Journey

By VIVIAN WANG and JOY DONG

BEIJING — In the four years since she began driving solo across China, leaving behind an abusive marriage and longstanding expectations about women's duties at home, Su Min, 60, has become an internet sensation known as the "road trip auntie."

She has driven to the foot of Mount Everest and camped on the beach in the tropical province of Hainan. She has been featured in an ad campaign about female empowerment and inspired a forthcoming movie starring a famous Chinese actress.

But one key step in Ms. Su's emancipation eluded her: She wavered on whether to file for divorce, worried about how it would affect her family.

Until now. Last month, Ms. Su officially began divorce proceedings.

Her decision, she said, is a testament to how much she has learned to commit to her own happiness, and to the self-confidence she has gained on the road.

But her experience in trying to end the marriage also shows the

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SU MIN

Su Min left an abusive marriage to travel alone across China, and became an internet star. Divorce is her latest milestone.

'Keyboard Warriors' Stoke Hate, And British Free Speech Debate

By MARK LANDLER

LONDON — A 53-year-old woman from northwest England was jailed for 15 months after posting on Facebook that a mosque should be blown up "with the adults inside." A 45-year-old man was sentenced to 20 months for goading his online followers to torch a hotel that houses refugees. A 55-year-old woman was questioned by the police for a viral post that wrongly identified the suspect in a deadly knife attack at a children's dance class.

These and other people are accused of being "keyboard war-

riors," in the words of one British judge, exploiting social media to stir up the anti-immigrant riots that exploded after the suspect was arrested in the fatal stabbings of three young girls at the dance class, in the town of Southport. Their cases have now become examples in a politically charged debate over the limits of free speech in Britain.

With the courts handing down harsh sentences to hundreds who took part in the violent unrest, and calls for the government to

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INTERNATIONAL A4-11

Drone Attack on Moscow

Russia said it repelled a wave of drones. Ukraine also claimed to have shot down some over its territory. PAGE A6

Antarctic Disaster Less Likely

A "worst-case" scenario for the continent's ice shelf might be a less pressing concern, a new study found. PAGE A10



NATIONAL A12-20

Fear of Bird Flu Spread

The virus is poised to become a permanent presence in cattle on American farms, raising the odds of an eventual outbreak among people. PAGE A19

A Face-Off in Missouri

A county prosecutor says a death row inmate should be exonerated. The state attorney general disagrees. PAGE A20

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Suspended Game Time Warp

Danny Jansen could make history by playing for both the Red Sox and the Blue Jays in the same game. PAGE B6

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Revision in U.S. Jobs Report

The Labor Department updated figures for the 12 months through March that indicated 818,000 fewer jobs were added than had been reported. PAGE B1

A Reluctant Solar Conversion

One of the nation's largest coal-fueled power plants is being replaced with thousands of acres of solar panels and a Minnesota town isn't happy. PAGE B1

Flipping Big Tech's Shield

A Massachusetts professor has filed a lawsuit against Meta using Section 230, a law known primarily for protecting social media companies. PAGE B1

THURSDAY STYLES D1-6

Making Stars Shine Brighter

The stylist Holly White has worked with breakout actors on "Bridgerton," "The Crown" and more. PAGE D1

Sports Agent in the Limelight

Sean Stellato rose to fame with a mix of outlandish clothes, a big personality and an embrace of underdogs. PAGE D5



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A Push for Diversity Sputters

The departures of some top editors raise questions about the publishing industry's efforts to diversify. PAGE C1

How 'Matrix' Fits Into 2024

One scene reflects the themes — A.I., fake news, transgender lives and Gen X — that make the film a classic. PAGE C7

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Charles M. Blow

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