

Putin calls U.S. election-meddling charge a ‘load of nonsense’ in Megyn Kelly interview

By **David A. Fahrenthold** June 4 at 8:43 PM

Russian President Vladimir Putin testily rejected the idea that his government had interfered in the 2016 U.S. election — or that he is holding compromising evidence against President Trump — in an interview broadcast Sunday night with NBC’s Megyn Kelly.

“They have been misled,” Putin responded when Kelly said that American intelligence agencies had concluded that Russia interfered in the campaign with the goal of electing Trump. “They aren’t analyzing the information in its entirety. I haven’t seen, even once, any direct proof of Russian interference in the presidential election.”

The interview with Putin — conducted last week during an economic forum in St. Petersburg — was the opening segment in the debut episode of [“Sunday Night With Megyn Kelly.”](#) Kelly, who was a prime-time star on Fox News Channel, moved to NBC at the start of this year.

The interview was tense at times, with Putin calling Kelly’s questions a “load of nonsense.” “Your lives must be so boring,” if Americans are reduced to making up stories about Russia, he said.

Kelly continued to push Putin. But the interview produced little that was new.

The Russian leader, a former KGB intelligence officer, is not given to unguarded moments or admissions of guilt. When Kelly asked him about allegations of Russian involvement in the campaign, he replied with a conspiracy theory about the death of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

“There’s a theory that Kennedy’s assassination was arranged by the United States intelligence services. So, if this theory is correct — and that can’t be ruled out — ” then the same agencies could fabricate evidence of Russian hacking, Putin said.

In several cases, Putin said he was not even aware of contacts reported in American media. For instance, Kelly asked about an episode first reported in [The Washington Post](#), in which Jared Kushner — the president’s son-in-law and senior adviser — suggested setting up a secret back-channel communication with the Kremlin before Trump took office.

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“I don’t know about this proposal. No proposal like that came to me,” Putin said, speaking via a Russian interpreter. Putin said such a request would have been reported to him. “For me, this is just amazing. You created a sensation out of nothing, and . . . you turned it into a weapon of war against the current president.”

Putin also rejected the idea that he had any relationship with Michael Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser. In 2015, [Flynn visited Moscow](#) for a banquet honoring Russian TV outlet RT, and photos show him seated next to Putin.

Putin said that he had not sat in the seat for much of the dinner, and that he barely spoke to Flynn. “I didn’t even really talk to him. That’s the extent of my acquaintance with Mr. Flynn,” he said.

Kelly asked Putin if he was holding any kind of damaging information about Trump, either involving Trump’s finances or a visit Trump made to Russia as a businessman. Putin, slouched over in his seat, scoffed at the idea.

“We have a lot of Americans who visit us,” Putin said. “Do you think we’re gathering compromising information on all of them right now or something? Are you all — have you all lost your senses over there?”

Intelligence experts have said Russian intelligence officials have a habit of trying to gather compromising information on influential foreigners when they visit.

Among the denials, however, were signs of Putin's resentment toward the United States and its conduct as the world's lone post-cold war superpower.

Putin, for instance, dismissed Kelly's questions about repression and the killing of journalists in Russia by saying it was another example of American moralizing. "Why do you feel you have the right to ask us these kinds of questions?" he said.

At another point, Putin answered Kelly's questions about Russia's role in the election by saying that the United States had sought to influence other nations' elections in the past. "Put your finger anywhere on a map of the world," he said, "and everywhere you will hear complaints that American officials are interfering in internal election processes."

Among Putin's denials that the Russians had interfered in the U.S. election, he had just offered up a moral logic for Russia — interfering in U.S. elections.

"That sounds like a justification," Kelly said.

"It doesn't sound like a justification," Putin said. "It sounds like a statement of fact. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction."

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