

The New York Times

Conspiracy or Coincidence? A Timeline Open to Interpretation

By PETER BAKER JULY 12, 2017

Donald Trump Jr. speaking to reporters at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland last year.

Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — At 6:14 p.m. on June 7, 2016, Donald Trump Jr. clicked the send button on an email to confirm a meeting with a woman described as a “Russian government attorney” who would give him “information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia.”

Three hours later, his father, Donald J. Trump, claimed victory in the final primary races propelling him to the Republican presidential nomination and a general election contest against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In his victory speech, Mr. Trump promised to deliver a major address detailing Mrs. Clinton’s “corrupt dealings” to give “favorable treatment” to foreign governments, including “the Russians.”

The White House said the timing was a coincidence. The younger Mr. Trump said this week that he never told his father about the meeting with the Russian lawyer, and the president said on Wednesday that he did not know about it until a few days ago. But the time frame raised questions that investigators will presumably examine as they try to piece together who knew what, and when, last year during what American intelligence agencies have called (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/politics/russia-hack-election-dnc.html>) a Russian effort to influence the presidential election.



Trump advisers have often insisted that the campaign had no contact with various Russian insiders — claims that were later proved false. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

The meeting with the Russian lawyer came at a crucial stage in the elder Mr. Trump's against-the-odds campaign as he pivoted toward taking on Mrs. Clinton, who was widely seen as the front-runner for the presidency. With Mr. Trump's party still divided, his team was eager for information that could be used against his Democratic opponent, just as any nominee would be at that stage. The difference was that the Kremlin, according to intelligence reports, was eager to play a role in the campaign, and was in the midst of unleashing an operation to damage Mrs. Clinton.

The younger Mr. Trump said the meeting with the Russian lawyer yielded no useful information about Mrs. Clinton, and instead turned into a discussion about a Russian-American diplomatic dispute. By happenstance or not, in the days and weeks after the meeting with the Russian lawyer, emails purloined from Democratic computers were made public, which investigators tied to Russian hacking.

As a candidate, the elder Mr. Trump, who had expressed admiration of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, took positions that summer that caused head scratching. He expressed openness to lifting sanctions on Russia that were imposed after its annexation of Crimea, and suggested he might not defend NATO allies that did not spend enough money on their own security. The Republican platform at the party convention in July 2016 was crafted to keep out a call to provide arms to Ukraine to fight pro-Russian separatists.

The president's legal team declined to comment about the close timing of some of these events. A White House official said the president's threat to air allegations about Mrs. Clinton on June 7 was part of a long-planned speech and was not related to his son's decision to meet with the Russian lawyer. At a briefing on Wednesday, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a White House spokeswoman, dismissed the latest articles about the emails and meeting as "much ado about nothing."

Mr. Trump said on Wednesday that he was not aware of the June 2016 meeting with the Russian lawyer at the time. "No, that I didn't know until a couple of days ago when I heard about this," he told Reuters (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-interview-highlights-idUSKBN19X34X>). He did not fault his son for sitting down with the lawyer. "I think many people would have held that meeting," Mr. Trump said.



President Trump, with his wife, Melania, said Wednesday that he was not aware that his oldest son had met with a Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, in June 2016. Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times

Democrats said the timing of Donald Trump Jr.'s emails and his meeting with the lawyer showed an intent to collude.

"Going back now, a lot of things seem to be falling into place," said Jennifer Palmieri, who was Mrs. Clinton's campaign communications director. She dismissed the president's assertion that he had known nothing about the meeting. "It's not plausible to me, understanding how much control Donald Trump exerts over whatever organization he's in charge of. How many times did he tell us, 'I'm in charge, I'm the only one who matters, I'm my own strategist'?"

Lawyers with experience in political inquiries said the timetable would certainly interest investigators, but did not necessarily mean they would find a connection. "You have two pieces of the puzzle, and they're important," said Cliff Sloan, who was an associate independent counsel during the Iran-contra investigation. "But you have to see how all the pieces fit together before you can draw final conclusions."

Here is a look at how the emails and meeting fit into the timeline of other events last summer:

June 2, 2016

In a speech in San Diego, **Mrs. Clinton castigated Mr. Trump for his affinity for Mr. Putin**, saying the Republican candidate had an "affection for tyrants" that would make him a poor commander in chief. "If you don't know exactly who you're dealing with, men like Putin will eat your lunch," she said.



President Vladimir V. Putin in Moscow last year. As a candidate, Mr. Trump expressed admiration for the Russian president. Pool photo by Maxim Shipenkov

June 3

Donald Trump Jr. received an email from Rob Goldstone, a former British tabloid reporter who knew the Trumps and spent a lot of time in Russia in recent years. Citing a Russian contact, **Mr. Goldstone offered to help provide “very high level and sensitive information” that would “incriminate Hillary”** as “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.”

Mr. Trump replied with interest 17 minutes later (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/07/11/us/politics/donald-trump-jr-email-text.html>). “If it’s what you say I love it especially later in the summer,” he wrote.

June 7

After several more emails, **Mr. Trump and Mr. Goldstone agreed to a meeting at Trump Tower on the afternoon of June 9** with what Mr. Goldstone described as a “Russian government attorney who is flying over from Moscow.” Mr. Trump said he would probably be joined by Paul J. Manafort, the campaign chairman, and Jared Kushner, his brother-in-law, who would later become a White House senior adviser.



Rob Goldstone, a publicist and former British tabloid reporter, worked at the 2013 Miss Universe pageant, which Mr. Trump put on in Moscow. Irina Buzhor/Kommersant Photo, via Reuters

That evening, the Republican primary season wrapped up with contests in five states. Mr. Trump, the presidential candidate, took the stage in New York and focused on Mrs. Clinton.

“I am going to give a major speech on probably Monday of next week, and we’re going to be discussing all of the things that have taken place with the Clintons,” he said.

“Hillary Clinton turned the State Department into her private hedge fund — the Russians, the Saudis, the Chinese — all gave money to Bill and Hillary, and got favorable treatment in return.”

June 9

Donald Trump Jr., Mr. Manafort and Mr. Kushner met with Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Russian lawyer who, contrary to Mr. Goldstone’s email, did not openly work for the state but was a former prosecutor with deep connections to the Russian government and a history of arguing for Russian interests. In an initial statement to The New York Times, the younger Mr. Trump said Ms. Veselnitskaya primarily discussed a ban on American families seeking to adopt Russian children imposed by Mr. Putin as retaliation for American sanctions on Russians suspected of human rights abuses.

Donald Trump Jr. later acknowledged that he had agreed to the meeting because he believed Ms. Veselnitskaya would provide the campaign with incriminating information about Mrs. Clinton. Only after an inquiry by The Times prompted him to release his emails did it become clear that he had been told that the information was coming from the Russian government.

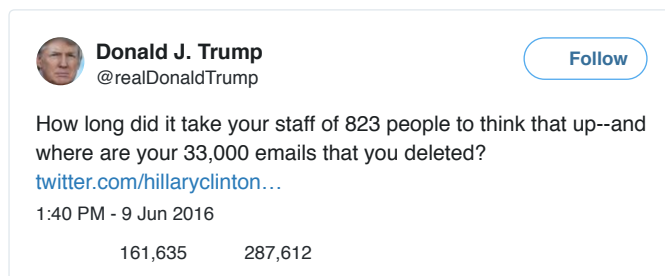
Ms. Veselnitskaya, for her part, has maintained that nothing about the campaign was discussed, and she said she provided no incriminating information about Mrs. Clinton.



Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Russian lawyer, met with Donald Trump Jr., Paul J. Manafort and Jared Kushner at Trump Tower in Manhattan in June 2016. Yury Martynov/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

In an interview on Fox News on Tuesday night, the younger Mr. Trump said that Ms. Veselnitskaya’s discussion was “sort of nonsensical, inane and garbled,” and that he had concluded the original email “was probably some bait and switch” to get him to take the meeting. He said Mr. Kushner left the meeting within 10 minutes, while Mr. Manafort spent most of the time looking at his phone. Mr. Trump said he did not mention the meeting to his father. “There was nothing to tell,” he said. “It was literally just a wasted 20 minutes, which was a shame.”

At 4:40 p.m. that day, or roughly right after the meeting, if it began at 4 p.m. as scheduled, the elder Mr. Trump posted a message on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/741007091947556864?lang=en>) jabbing Mrs. Clinton about email messages that had been deleted from her private server on the grounds that they were personal and not about government business.



June 13

Mr. Trump, the candidate, **ended up not giving the “major speech” about Mrs. Clinton’s dealings with Russia** and other countries, despite his promise. Mrs. Clinton’s campaign spent the day waiting for the attack.

“We were very concerned about it,” Ms. Palmieri said. “We put a team together.” The campaign figured the attack would be a reprise of some of the allegations raised a year earlier in a book called “Clinton Cash” by Peter Schweizer, so Mrs. Clinton’s advisers drafted responses and recruited surrogates to go on television to defend her.

“Then the day came, and I was in the room with Hillary, and we’re monitoring what he said, and he didn’t do anything,” Ms. Palmieri said.

On Wednesday, the White House said Mr. Trump had switched speeches because of the mass shooting at an Orlando, Fla., nightclub the day before.



Mrs. Clinton in Cleveland in June 2016. Her campaign attacked Mr. Trump after he failed to deliver a promised “major speech” about her dealings with Russia. Eric Thayer for The New York Times

June 15

A hacker calling himself **Guccifer 2.0 posted opposition research and donor documents stolen from the Democratic National Committee**. A cybersecurity firm that investigated the breach concluded that Russia was behind it. “Too bad the D.N.C. doesn’t hack Crooked Hillary’s 33,000 missing emails,” Mr. Trump, the candidate, said in a statement.

July 22

The activist group **WikiLeaks** posted nearly 20,000 emails from senior **Democratic National Committee** officials. Intelligence officials have said that the emails were taken from the party's computer system by Russian hackers.

The same day, Mr. Trump delivered the speech denouncing Mrs. Clinton's ethics that he had promised earlier, relying mainly on "Clinton Cash" and other known controversies linked to her.

July 24

Donald Trump Jr. Interview on State of the Union



In an interview on CNN, **Donald Trump Jr. dismissed Democratic suggestions that the Russians were trying to hurt Mrs. Clinton** and help his father. "It's disgusting," he said. "It's so phony." He added: "I can't think of bigger lies. But that exactly goes to show you what the D.N.C. and what the Clinton camp will do. They will lie and do anything to win."

July 27

The elder **Mr. Trump publicly dared Russia to hack Mrs. Clinton's emails**. "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing," he said. "I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press." Advisers later said he was only joking.

▶ **PLAY VIDEO** 1:06

Donald J. Trump encouraged Russia at a news conference to find Hillary Clinton's missing correspondence. Todd Heisler/The New York Times

Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election (<https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/russian-election-hacking?action=click&module=Associated&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election>)

Complete coverage of Russia's campaign to disrupt the 2016 presidential election.



Adriel Reboh/Patrick McMullan, via Getty Images

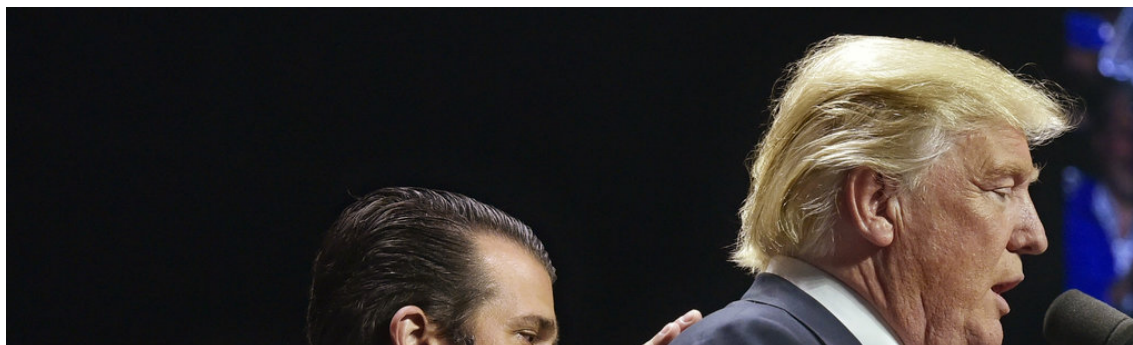
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/style/rob-goldstone-russia-trump.html?action=click&module=Associated&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election>)

Who is Rob Goldstone, the British publicist who facilitated the meeting?

The British publicist has a moment in the media glare as the broker of the 2016 meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a Moscow insider.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/style/rob-goldstone-russia-trump.html?action=click&module=Associated&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election>)

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https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/us/politics/trump-russia-election-meeting.html?_r=0



Mandel Ngan/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/us/politics/trump-says-son-is-innocent-amid-reports-of-russia-meeting.html?action=click&module=Associated&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election>)

A spotlight on President Trump's children has left him angry and protective.

Questions about Russia have long shadowed President Trump, but a spotlight on his children has left him angry and protective.

Mr. Trump has publicly defended his son over his advisers' protests, painting Donald Trump Jr. as "the victim."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/us/politics/trump-says-son-is-innocent-amid-reports-of-russia-meeting.html?action=click&module=Associated&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election>)

July 12

More in Politics (<https://www.nytimes.com/section/politics?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Politics>)



Eduardo Munoz/Reuters

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/13/arts/music/kid-rock-for-senate-hints-but-dont-assume-anything.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Politics>)

Kid Rock for Senate? Hints, but Don't Assume Anything

It is highly unlikely that Robert Ritchie, better known by his rap-rock moniker, Kid Rock, is running for Senate, given his website's current contents.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/13/arts/music/kid-rock-for-senate-hints-but-dont-assume-anything.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Politics>)

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Al Drago/The New York Times

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/13/us/politics/cbo-trump-budget.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Politics>)

Congressional Budget Office Casts Doubt on Trump Spending Plan

The independent government office said the president's inaugural budget was overly optimistic about tacking the deficit.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/13/us/politics/cbo-trump-budget.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=undefined®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Politics>)

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