

Vladimir Putin: No Evidence of Russian Interference in US Elections

On the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, Vladimir Putin answered questions from NBC anchor Megyn Kelly

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Megyn Kelly: *President Putin, you have repeatedly and passionately denied that Russia was behind the interference with our American presidential election, including on stage at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum.*

But as you know, the consensus view in the United States is that you did. That's what the 17 intelligence agencies concluded and that's what the Republicans and the Democrats on the Congressional oversight committees who have seen the classified report have said. Are they all lying?

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: They have been misled and they are not analysing the information in its entirety. I have not once seen any direct proof of Russia's interference in the presidential election in the USA.

We have talked about it with former president [Obama](#) and with several other officials. No one ever showed me any direct evidence.

When we spoke with President Obama about that, you know, you should probably better ask him about it – I think he will tell you that he, too, is confident of it. But when he and I talked I saw that he, too, started having doubts. At any rate, that's how I saw it.

I have already told you, and I can say it again, that today's technology is such that the final address can be masked and camouflaged to an extent that no one will be able to understand the origin of that address. And, vice versa, it is possible to set up any entity or any individual that everyone will think that they are the exact source of that attack.

Modern technology is very sophisticated and subtle and allows this to be done. And when we realize that we will get rid of all the illusions. That's one thing. The other thing is that I am deeply convinced that no interference from the outside, in any country, even a small one, let alone in such a vast and great power as the United States, can influence the final outcome of the elections. It is not possible. Ever.

Megyn Kelly: But the other side says it was only 70,000 votes that won [Trump](#) the election, and therefore influencing 70,000 people might not have been that hard.

Vladimir Putin: The Constitution of the United States and the electoral legislation are

structured in such a way that more electors can vote for a candidate who is backed by fewer voters. And such situations do occur in the history of the United States. True, isn't it?

Therefore, if we were to discuss some kind of political and social justice, then probably that electoral legislation needs to be changed and bring a situation where the head of state would be elected by direct secret ballot and so there will be direct tabulation of votes that can be easily monitored. That's all there is to it. And there will be no need for those who have lost the elections to point fingers and blame their troubles on anybody.

Now, if we turn this page over, I will tell you something that you most likely know about. I don't want to offend anyone, but the United States, everywhere, all over the world, is actively interfering in electoral campaigns in other countries. Is this really news to you?

Just talk to people but in such a way (to the extent it is possible for you) so as to convince them that you're not going to make it public. Point your finger to any spot on the world's map, everywhere you'll hear complaints that American officials interfere in their political domestic processes.

Therefore, if someone, and I am not saying that it's us (we did not interfere), if anybody does influence in some way or attempts to influence or somehow participates in these processes, then the United States has nothing to be offended by. Who is talking? Who is taking offense that we are interfering? You yourselves interfere all the time.

Megyn Kelly: That sounds like a justification.



Vladimir Putin: It does not sound like justification. It sounds like a statement of fact. Each action invites appropriate counteraction, but, again, we don't need to do that because I did not tell you this without a reason, both you personally and other members of the media, recently I was in France and I said the same things.

Presidents come and go, and even parties come to and away from power. But the main policy tack does not change. So by and large we don't care who will be at the helm in the United States. We have a rough idea of what is going to happen. And in this regard, even if we wanted to it wouldn't make any sense for us to interfere.

Megyn Kelly: You had said for months that Russia had nothing to do with the interference of the American election, and then this week you floated the idea of patriotic hackers doing it. Why the change and why now?

Vladimir Putin: It's just that the French journalists asked me about those hackers, and just

like I told them, I can tell you, that hackers may be anywhere. They may be in Russia, in Asia, in America, in Latin America. There may be hackers, by the way, in the United States who very craftily and professionally passed the buck to Russia. Can't you imagine such a scenario? In the middle of an internal political fight, it was convenient for them, whatever the reason, to put out that information. And put it out they did. And, doing it, they made a reference to Russia. Can't you imagine it happening? I can. Let us recall the assassination of President Kennedy.

There is a theory that Kennedy's assassination was arranged by the United States special services. If this theory is correct, and one cannot rule it out, so what can be easier in today's context, being able to rely on the entire technical capabilities available to special services than to organise some kind of attacks in the appropriate manner while making a reference to Russia in the process. Now, the candidate for the Democratic Party, is this candidate universally beloved in the United States? Was it such a popular person? That candidate, too, had political opponents and rivals.

Megyn Kelly: Let's move on. A special counsel has been appointed to investigate contacts between your government and the Trump campaign. You have said that your ambassador Kislyak was just doing his job. Right? So, what exactly was discussed in those meetings?

Vladimir Putin: There were no sessions. You see, there were no sessions. When I saw that my jaw dropped.

Megyn Kelly: No meetings between Ambassador Kislyak and anybody from the Trump campaign?

Vladimir Putin: No clue. I am telling you honestly. I don't know. That's an ambassador's every day, routine work. Do you think, an ambassador from any place in the world or from the US reports to me daily as to whom he meets with and what they discuss? It's just absurd. Do you even understand what you are asking me?

Megyn Kelly: Well, you're his boss.

Vladimir Putin: Listen, his boss is the foreign minister. Do you think I have the time to talk to our ambassadors all over the world every day? This is nonsense. Don't you understand that this is just some kind of nonsense. I don't even know with whom he met there. Had there been something out of the ordinary, something remarkable he of course would have advised the minister and the minister would have informed me. Nothing of that happened.

Megyn Kelly: Since it happened have you gone back to speak with the ambassador about what was in those discussions he had with Jared Kushner, with General Michael Flynn, with anybody else from the Trump campaign?

Vladimir Putin: No, I haven't.



Megyn Kelly: Aren't you interested?

Vladimir Putin: No. Because if there had been something meaningful he would have made a report to the minister, and the minister would have made a report to me. There weren't even any reports. Just every day, routine work that doesn't mean anything that may not even have any prospects.

It's just that someone decided to find fault with it and, you know, select it as a line of attack against the current President. This isn't for us to get into, these are your domestic political squabbles. So you deal with them. Nothing to talk about.

There was not even a specific discussion of sanctions or something else. I just find it amazing how you created a sensation where there wasn't anything at all. And proceeded to turn that sensation into a tool for fighting the sitting president. You know, you're just very resourceful people there, well done, probably your lives there are boring.

Megyn Kelly: I am sure you have heard by now that one of the things they are looking into is the fact that Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, reportedly discussed with Ambassador Kislyak in December establishing a back channel for communications between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. And the suggestion was, by Mr Kushner, that they could do this at a Russian embassy or a Russian consulate. That they could use Russia's communications gear to make those communications happen so that the United States intelligence service could not hear. Does that strike you as a good idea?

Vladimir Putin: Russia had no channels of communication with neither campaign, the campaigns of the US Presidential candidates. None whatsoever. Russia did not set up and did not have any channels with anyone. There may have been official contacts with the campaigns of all the candidates, which is a standard diplomatic practice.

Megyn Kelly: This is a proposal, a proposal by Mr Kushner.

Vladimir Putin: I am not aware of such a proposal. No such proposal ever reached me.

Megyn Kelly: Did you know General Michael Flynn? He came over here for a dinner a photo of which has been widely circulated in the American media. What was the nature of your relationship with him?

Vladimir Putin: You and I, we have a much closer relationship than with Mr Flynn. You and I met up yesterday evening. You and I have worked all day together. We are meeting yet again at this moment. When I came to the event at our company, *Russia Today*, and sat

down at the table, next to me there was a gentleman, and someone else was sitting down on my other side.

I made a speech, then we talked about something else, then I got up and left. Afterwards, I was told, "You know, that American gentleman, he used to do this before, used to work in the special services. And now he does this." "Great," I said, "Are you working with him somehow?" "No, we just invited him as a guest, one of the guests." And I replied: "Well, good for you!" And that's it.

I almost did not talk to him. I said hello, we sat next to each other, then I said goodbye and left. This sums up my entire acquaintanceship with Mr Flynn. If Mr Flynn and I had this kind of interaction, while you and I, we have spent an entire day together, and Mr Flynn was fired from his job, you then should be arrested and put in jail.

Megyn Kelly: Many Americans hear the name, Vladimir Putin. And they think, "He runs a country full of corruption, a country in which journalists, who are too critical, could wind up murdered, a country in which dissidents could wind up in jail or worse." To people who believe that, what is your message?

Vladimir Putin: I want to say that Russia is developing along a democratic path, this is without question so. No one should have any doubts about that. The fact that, amidst political rivalry and some other domestic developments, we see things happen here that are typical of other countries, I do not see anything unusual in it.

We have rallies, opposition rallies. And people here have the right to express their point of view. However, if people, while expressing their views, break the current legislation, the effective law in place, then of course, the law enforcement agencies try to restore order.

I am calling your attention to something that I discussed recently when on a trip to France and in my discussions with other European colleagues. Our police force, fortunately, so far, do not use batons, tear gas or any other extreme measures of instilling order, something that we often see in other countries, including in the United States.

Speaking of opposition, let us recall the movement Occupy Wall Street. Where is it now? The law enforcement agencies and special services in the US have taken it apart, into little pieces, and have dissolved it. I'm not asking you about how things stand in terms of democracy in the United States. Especially so that the electoral legislation is far from being perfect in the US. Why do you believe you are entitled to put such questions to us and, mind you, do it all the time, to moralize and to teach us how we should live?

We are ready to listen to our partners, ready to listen to appraisals and assessments when it is done in a friendly manner, in order to establish contacts and create a common atmosphere and dedicate ourselves to shared values. But we absolutely will not accept when such things are used as a tool of political struggle. I want everybody to know that. This is our message.

Megyn Kelly: There have been questions in America about Donald Trump's finances. He hasn't released his tax returns. There have been questions about this secret Russian dossier, which he says is fake, but which purports to have blackmail information in it generated by the Russians. There have been questions about the communications between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign, all of which has Americans asking, "Do you have

something damage on our president?"

Vladimir Putin: Well, this is just another piece of nonsense. Where would we get any information about him? Did we have some kind of special relationship with him. There was no relationship whatsoever. Yes, he visited Moscow in his day. But, you know, I never met him.

Many Americans come here. There are representatives of 100 companies from the US, who have come to Russia. Do you think I have met each and every representative of those American companies? You probably saw me walk into the conference hall, where our colleagues were sitting. I consider them all to be our friends. They are all working in Russia and many of them have been doing it for many years. They are investors. They are the CEOs of major US companies. They are interested in joint work. And that's great! And we will welcome each and every one of them. And we will consider each of them our friend.

And we will help them implement their plans in Russia and will try to steer things in a direction so that they can work here successfully and make a profit.

And should they all be arrested for it afterwards? Have you lost your minds there or something? What about the freedom of economy? What about human rights? Do you think we are gathering dirt on all of them now? Are you all right in the head, all of you there?

Megyn Kelly: Last question. We have been here in St Petersburg for about a week now. And virtually every person we have met on the street says what they respect about you is they feel that you have returned dignity to Russia, that you've returned Russia to a place of respect. You've been in the leadership of this country for 17 years now. Has it taken any sort of personal toll on you?

Vladimir Putin: I hope not. Do you know what I feel? I feel this live, direct connection to this land, to its history, to this country. You have said that you have been in St Petersburg for several days. Yesterday, I had a conversation with Indian Prime Minister. He had visited the Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery, where almost 400,000 residents of Leningrad were buried, most of them civilians. They died during the siege of Leningrad. They starved to death. And buried in one of those graves is my older brother whom I have never seen. And I will never forget that, just like I will never forget the state in which this country was in the early 1990s.

You and I have had a debate today in the course of our conversation. However, in this country, since 2000 – and we have many problems, and recently even the poverty threshold has become a little worse than we planned – the situation will recover, I am confident of that, and yet our population's real wages have grown manifold. And so have pensions.

Our economy has become completely different, on the whole. The size has changed. The economy has almost doubled in size. And the quality is changing, not as fast as we would like it to, but the structure is changing.

Our Armed Forces are completely different today from what they were, say 15 years ago or so.

All of this, including our great history, great culture, all of this, not just what we see today, is what makes the vast majority of Russia's citizens feel proud for their country.

Megyn Kelly: Mr President, thank you very much.

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