

# **Durbin: we need the truth about President Trump and Russia now**

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*Discusses Russian Attacks against the U.S. and the Need to Investigate Alleged 2016 Links between Trump Officials and Russian Government*

**WASHINGTON** – In a speech at the Center for American Progress, U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today discussed the need for an immediate, independent investigation of U.S. intelligence reports of Russian cyberattacks on the 2016 presidential election, as well as allegations of Russian attempts to compromise President Trump and contact between Trump officials and the Russian government.

**“Last Friday, America achieved what so many nations have failed to do – peacefully transition to new leadership. It’s tradition that is more than 200 years old. That’s worth celebrating. That’s democracy. Without this foundational principle, you cannot have a true democracy. But what if a campaign is about something other than two opposing American political parties? What happens when we’re presented with proof that the leader of a hostile foreign government – a former KGB official in fact -- personally directed cyberattacks against our democracy and tried to influence the election to further his country’s interests? The answer is clear. We need a bipartisan, independent body to investigate this Russian cyber invasion of our body politic,”** said Durbin in his remarks at Center for American Progress. **“I am calling for a bipartisan, independent commission to look into this attack with the shared end-goal of preventing future attacks on our election and our democracy. The American people deserve the truth, and they need more than a secret hearing whose work – if it ever sees the light of day – will be so heavily redacted that it could be worthless. The American people deserve to know the extent of Russian influence into the American election.”**

Durbin’s remarks as delivered are available below:

## **Remarks by U.S. Senator Dick Durbin**

### **Center for American Progress**

**January 24, 2017**

### ***“Foreign Threat to the U.S. Presidency & Attack on our Democracy”***

Thank you Neera and thanks to the Center for the American Progress. It is an honor to be back. This is an important forum in Washington and in our nation and I’m happy I can share a few thoughts with you this afternoon.

Last Friday, America achieved what so many nations have failed to do – peacefully transition to new leadership. It’s tradition in America that is more than 200 years old. That’s worth celebrating. That’s democracy. Without this foundational principle, you can’t have a true democracy.

The first peaceful transfer of power came after the election of 1800. Thomas Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican defeated incumbent John Adams of the Federalist Party.

Bitterly contested election. Both parties believed that the fundamental principles of America were at stake – and a victory by the other would ruin this new nation.

When Thomas Jefferson won, he understood the far-reaching significance of what took place, and said – quote: “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.”

But what if a campaign is about something other than two opposing American political parties?

What happens when we’re presented with proof that the leader of a hostile foreign government – a former KGB secret police official in fact -- personally directed cyberattacks against our democracy and tried to influence the election to further his country’s interests?

Follow that with reports...that while unverified, underline the word unverified, were evidently credible enough for our own intelligence community to brief then-President Obama and now-President Trump...that the Russian government possesses personally and financially compromising information about President Trump...and that there was continued contact between the Trump campaign and the Russian government.

What happens when most of the Republicans in Congress dismiss even proven Russian interference with a “boys will be boys” shrug of the shoulders?

What happens when we have a President who defies decades of bipartisan consensus and condones policies clearly sympathetic to Russian President Vladimir Putin?

The answer is clear.

We need a bipartisan, independent body to investigate this Russian cyber invasion of our body politic.

I am calling for a bipartisan independent commission to look into this attack with the shared end-goal of preventing future attacks on our election and our democracy.

The American people deserve the truth, and they need more than a secret hearing whose work – if it ever sees the light of day – will be so heavily redacted it could be worthless.

The American people deserve to know the extent of Russian influence into the American election...what actions, if any, were taken by the Trump campaign... which members of this administration have been or could be compromised by a foreign adversary.

Our intelligence community recently issued a damning and detailed assessment concluding that Russian strongman Vladimir Putin ordered an attack on our nation’s electoral system to sow mistrust and favor one candidate over another.

I have read the public and classified versions as well as attended classified briefings on the issue. I can tell you that the evidence is sweeping...overwhelming...and deeply troubling.

Here are some of the key public findings:

“Russian efforts to influence the 2016 US presidential election represent the most recent expression of Moscow’s longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order...

“...Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia’s goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. ... Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump.”

“...Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.”

These conclusions are damning.

Election Day 2016 is a day that will live in cyber infamy. A foreign adversary intentionally manipulated America’s presidential election. It is an act of cyber war and it cannot go unanswered.

Amid warnings of Russian manipulation going back to early October, Donald Trump has not only resisted these findings, he praises Putin and dismisses the true nature of Putin and his threat.

As early as July of last year, Trump urged a foreign adversary of the United States to conduct espionage against Hillary Clinton.

He said, “I will tell you this, Russia: If you’re listening, I hope you’re able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing...I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press.”

And it gets worse.

President Trump, who has impulsively attacked just about anyone who criticizes him, has not criticized the one person who is guilty of sponsoring this cyber-attack.

The President tweets at all hours about Representative John Lewis...Meryl Streep...Alec Baldwin...the American press...the American intelligence community...the cast of Hamilton...NATO....and anyone who would dare to slight him...

But Vladimir Putin has been spared.

Everyone except the one former KGB leader who ordered an attack on our nation...on our democracy. He hasn't been subjected any Tweet storm.

Instead, President Trump is enthralled by Vladimir Putin. On December 30, he tweeted about Putin, and he gushed "I always knew he was very smart!" At his January 11, press conference President Trump said, "If Putin likes Donald Trump, I consider that an asset, not a liability."

Most troubling is that instead of criticizing Putin after being presented evidence that he interfered in our election, President Trump attacked the integrity of the men and women of our intelligence community, comparing them to Nazi Germany.

Then, he attacked the press.

Once again, he is attacking everyone except the perpetrator – a threat to the United States whose friendship seems oddly and dangerously important to the new President ...especially in light of Putin's actions around the world.

This is bigger than one election or one person. This is about our national security and we should take it seriously.

For those who have been following Putin's over the last several years, this attack should come as no surprise.

Russia has conducted cyber warfare against Ukraine...the Netherlands...Georgia...Lithuania...Estonia...and a host of other nations.

Russia now appears focused on disrupting the upcoming German elections over Putin's dislike of Chancellor Merkel.

Russia's militarily seized sovereign territory in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, territory it continues to illegally occupy.

Russia-backed separatists shot down a civilian airliner in 2014 from Donetsk area, murdering 283, including 80 children – an act of barbarism for which Russia still has not been held to account.

Instead of building a modern global economy based on the talents of the Russian people – Putin has created a false narrative that domestic Russian problems are the result of America and the West.

He's tried to discredit democratic free market institutions and manufactured enemies of Russia to rally domestic support.

It's a contrived story, when combined with domestic political repression and manipulation, it helps to keep Putin in power.

And overarching in this scheme to maintain power is his determination to undermine Western democratic order that the United States and the allies have worked to build since World War II.

Sadly, President Trump has been proposing policies that would help Putin: questioning the United States role in NATO and NATO's relevance...undermining the European Union...lifting sanctions on Russia...and belittling key European leaders.

And don't forget President Trump's deeply troubling senior White House advisor Steve Bannon of so called Breitbart News, which openly supports anti-immigrant and racist populist politicians in upcoming European elections – further playing into Putin's goal of destabilizing the West.

Why would we lift sanctions on Russia after an attack on the United States?

Instead, Congress should consider the bipartisan Russian sanctions bill that I co-sponsored in the Senate. That, should be the priority.

And don't be fooled into fanciful folly that if we just ease off Russia they will team up with us to defeat ISIS.

Russia has been a shameful bystander in the fight against ISIS. When Russia was asked to help fight ISIS, it sat on the sidelines. It did not join the 68-nation coalition effort led by the Obama Administration to fight and destroy ISIS.

President Trump must not naively trade away Western security alliances and allies for the catnip-like lure of helping fight ISIS. And he must not naïvely trade away sanctions on Russia.

To protect against this, I am supporting legislation introduced by Senators Schumer and Cardin this week to ensure it doesn't happen.

Now, I have to give credit to those Senators who have spoken out vociferously in defense of honest elections and made clear that no one should be allowed to interfere in American democracy.

As Matt Irwin noted in a recent Louisville Courier Journal article, when evidence emerged that some were trying to steal sensitive political information, Senator Mitch McConnell during his re-election campaign several years ago, called the perpetrators' effort "Nixonian" – and assured Americans that an investigation was underway.

His top aide warned, "This is Gestapo style scare tactics and we're not going to stand for it!"

Conservative leaders praised McConnell for standing up to the enemies of democracy at that time and standing "for the integrity of our electoral process."

It wasn't about politics. It was about right and wrong.

These statements weren't made in 2016 or 2017 amid the damning evidence of Russian interference.

This happened in 2013, when three activists visited an open house at Senator McConnell's election headquarters and discovered they could hear a private conversation among staff. They recorded it and shared it with the media.

Let me be clear. What happened in Kentucky was just wrong. Senator McConnell's outrage was justified and he was right to demand justice. But where is his outrage now? Where is his demand for justice?

Since October – when the first official reports came out on the Russian attacks on our election – how many of my Republican colleagues came to the Senate floor to talk about this Russian attack on our nation and our democratic process?

Other than a few fleeting and generic remarks about Russian cyber capabilities, buried in their statements, exactly none. That's right. Zero.

Compare that with the number of times they've come to the Senate floor to talk about repealing health care from millions of Americans: Thirty-four. Ponder that for a moment.

Since formal evidence was presented in early October of a foreign adversary attacking our democratic system, members of the party of President Reagan have not spoken about this once on the Senate Floor.

Now imagine if the situation had been reversed? I can hear the howls of treason and impeachment.

Twenty years ago, brand new to the United States Senate, I was a member of the Government Affairs Committee. The first hearing we had was lengthy and very interesting.

We had just concluded a Presidential campaign, and allegations were made that the Chinese government this was 20 years ago, 20 years ago, the Chinese government was accused of trying to insert itself into the Presidential campaign of the United States, specifically in support of the Clinton-Gore ticket.

Fred Thompson – we all remember him well – was chairman of that committee. John Glenn, the Ranking Democrat. He was a well-known man who has since passed, but he was an outstanding lawyer and a famous actor. He was my chairman.

We spent months in public hearings – months – investigating whether the Chinese tried to insert themselves in any way, shape, or form in the election of Clinton-Gore. Public hearings, week after week. They found virtually no evidence, other than a handful of – can you believe this – Buddhist nuns writing checks to the Clinton-Gore campaign, which nobody ever really explained.

But there was no evidence that the Chinese government was involved in this in any specific way. We spent months on that theory in open hearings, and months later publishing formal majority and minority reports. We took it very seriously 20 years ago. But what about now?

Here we are with virtual silence on the Republican side of the aisle when it comes to Russia's attack on the United States and a President who seems to be parroting some of the attacker's key lines.

It is time for my Republican colleagues to put country before party and our national security interests ahead of any one person or one President.



I call on Congress to undertake an investigation. I think that an independent Commission is in order. We should pick some person or persons to chair or co-chair who are above reproach in integrity. General Colin Powell comes to mind, Sandra Day O'Connor, perfect co-chairs for this serious investigation.

There is reason the majority party wants to keep any investigation in that committee -- it will control it, and it will be conducted largely in secret.

Early refusals by Chairman Burr over whether the Committee on Intelligence would look into the reports about connections between the Trump campaign and Russia only supports this point.

An independent commission – my preference – which is led by people of unquestionable integrity can get to the bottom of it.

If we are going to have a comprehensive, credible investigation it must also have resources ... time....and staff to make it happen.

And let me also note, it's clear that we need to know that the next U.S. Attorney General will take this matter seriously as well and will be independent of the White House. This means allowing career Justice Department prosecutors and the FBI to follow the facts and the law.

I am concerned about Attorney General nominee, Senator Jeff Sessions, when it comes to this assignment.

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I asked Senator Sessions questions for the record. Two days ago I received his written responses and Senator Sessions admitted that he has not even read – not even read – the January 6 Intelligence Community Assessment on Russian involvement in the U.S. election – neither the classified nor the unclassified version.

The unclassified version incidentally is just a few pages if you don't count the annexes. I read it in less than 15 minutes. You would think that Senator Sessions, seeking to be the top law enforcement official in the land, should have found time to read it.

This does not give me confidence that Senator Sessions is giving this matter the attention it deserves.

I asked Senator Sessions if he would recuse himself from any FBI or DOJ investigation into Russian efforts to influence the election. I also asked if he would commit not to shut down or impede such an investigation.

He responded that he would not make any commitment about allowing investigations to continue if confirmed, and he said he was not aware of a basis to recuse himself.

Department of Justice regulations call for recusals from investigations due to personal or political relationships.

Senator Sessions was a prominent supporter of the President's campaign....He defended the President's position on Russia in numerous interviews...On August 15, USA Today published an article entitled "Sen. Jeff Sessions backs Donald Trump on Russia Policy" detailing how Sessions changed his hawkish position on Russia to align with then-Mr. Trump's statements.

Clearly, an investigation into the reported Russia-Trump allegations has the potential to significantly impact the interests of Senator Sessions' soon to be boss, if he's confirmed, and Senator Sessions' close political ally.

Again, these answers by Senator Sessions do not give me confidence.

In the end, the American people deserve the truth.

The stakes too high to ignore.

Let me close. On New Year's Eve, Nixon biographer – John Farrell – wrote an op-ed in the New York Times.

While researching his upcoming biography he found notes left by Nixon's closest aide – H.R. Haldeman. The notes confirmed what many had suspected for half a century.

In the fall of 1968, while Nixon was running for President against Vice President Hubert Humphrey – he deliberately worked toward undermining President Johnson's efforts to stop the bombing in North Vietnam and begin peace talks to end that war.

The notes left behind by Haldeman show "that Nixon directed his campaign's efforts to scuttle the peace talks ... On October 22, 1968, ordered Haldeman to 'monkey wrench' the initiative." In his words.

Throughout his life, Nixon continued to deny he had interfered. And with good reason. His actions may have violated federal law, which prohibits private citizens from trying to “defeat the measures of the United States.”

Johnson had always suspected Nixon had a hand in this, couldn’t prove it. Now, history has proven it.

Today, we face another electoral crisis.

Former diplomat James Bruno summed it up: “The United States has just endured a carefully planned, well-orchestrated assault against its democratic form of government in the form of a grand cyber-theft of information and targeted release of that information.”

As Bill Moyers recently wrote, “we can’t afford to wait fifty years for history to judge. We need the truth about Trump and Russia now.”