

Matt Taibbi

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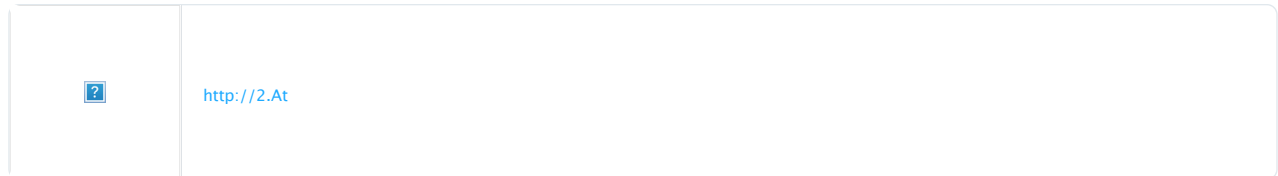
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1.THREAD: Twitter Files #14

THE RUSSIAGATE LIES

One: The Fake Tale of Russian Bots and the [#ReleaseTheMemo](#) Hashtag

[2.At](#) a crucial moment in a years-long furor, Democrats denounced a report about flaws in the Trump-Russia investigation, saying it was boosted by Russian “bots” and “trolls.”

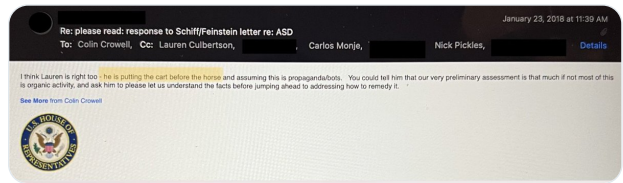
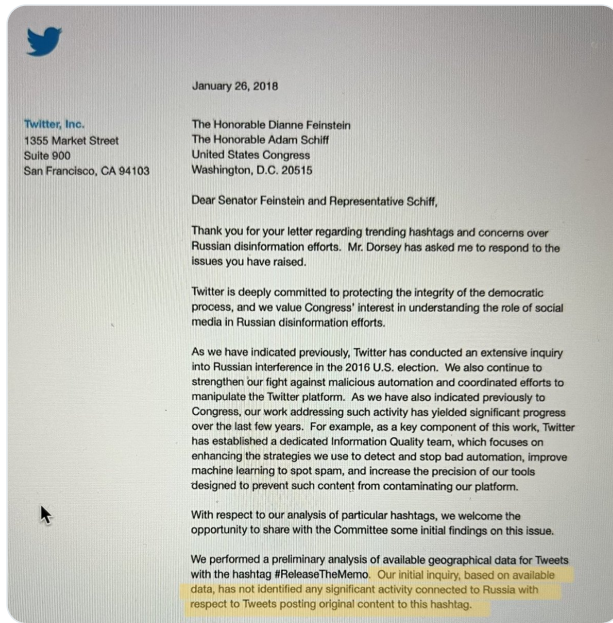


3.Twitter officials were aghast, finding no evidence of Russian influence:

“We are feeding congressional trolls.”

“Not any...significant activity connected to Russia.”

“Putting the cart before the horse assuming this is propaganda/bots.”



We are feeding congressional trolls.

Ad



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4. Twitter warned politicians and media the not only lacked evidence, but had evidence the accounts weren't Russian – and were roundly ignored.

5. On January 18th, 2018, Republican Devin Nunes submitted a classified memo to the House Intel Committee detailing abuses by the FBI in obtaining FISA surveillance authority against Trump-connected figures, including the crucial role played by the infamous “Steele Dossier”:

UNCLASSIFIED ~~TOP SECRET//NOFORN~~

January 18, 2018

Declassified by order of the President
February 2, 2018

To: HPSCI Majority Members
From: HPSCI Majority Staff
Subject: Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Abuses at the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Purpose

This memorandum provides Members an update on significant facts relating to the Committee's ongoing investigation into the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and their use of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) during the 2016 presidential election cycle. Our findings, which are detailed below, 1) raise concerns with the legitimacy and legality of certain DOJ and FBI interactions with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), and 2) represent a troubling breakdown of legal processes established to protect the American people from abuses related to the FISA process.

Investigation Update

On October 21, 2016, DOJ and FBI sought and received a FISA probable cause order (not under Title VII) authorizing electronic surveillance on Carter Page from the FISC. Page is a U.S. citizen who served as a volunteer advisor to the Trump presidential campaign. Consistent with requirements under FISA, the application had to be first certified by the Director or Deputy Director of the FBI. It then required the approval of the Attorney General, Deputy Attorney General (DAG), or the Senate-confirmed Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division.

The FBI and DOJ obtained one initial FISA warrant targeting Carter Page and three FISA renewals from the FISC. As required by statute (50 U.S.C. §1805(d)(1)), a FISA order on an American citizen must be renewed by the FISC every 90 days and each renewal requires a separate finding of probable cause. Then-Director James Comey signed three FISA applications in question on behalf of the FBI, and Deputy Director Andrew McCabe signed one. Then-DAG Sally Yates, then-Acting DAG Dana Boente, and DAG Rod Rosenstein each signed one or more FISA applications on behalf of DOJ.

Due to the sensitive nature of foreign intelligence activity, FISA submissions (including renewals) before the FISC are classified. As such, the public's confidence in the integrity of the FISA process depends on the court's ability to hold the government to the highest standard—particularly as it relates to surveillance of American citizens. However, the FISC's rigor in protecting the rights of Americans, which is reinforced by 90-day renewals of surveillance orders, is necessarily dependent on the government's production to the court of all material and relevant facts. This should include information potentially favorable to the target of the FISA

~~TOP SECRET//NOFORN~~

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6.The Nunes assertions would virtually all be verified in a report by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz in December 2019.

Executive Summary
Review of Four FISA Applications and Other Aspects of the FBI's Crossfire Hurricane Investigation

and therefore members of the Crossfire Hurricane team and FBI executives were unaware of it.

We also found that the FBI's interviews of Steele, his Primary Sub-source, a second sub-source, and other investigative activity, revealed potentially serious problems with Steele's descriptions of information in his reports. For example, as detailed in Chapters Six and Eight, the Primary Sub-source made statements during his/her January 2017 FBI interview that were inconsistent with multiple sections of the Steele reports, including some that were relied upon in the FISA applications. Among other things, regarding the allegations attributed to Person 1, the Primary Sub-source's account of these communications, if true, was not consistent with and, in fact, contradicted the allegations of a "well-developed conspiracy" in Reports 95 and 102 attributed to Person 1.

We further determined that the Crossfire Hurricane team was unable to corroborate any of the specific substantive allegations regarding Carter Page contained in Steele's election reporting which the FBI relied on in the FISA applications. We were told by the Supervisory Intel Analyst that, as of September 2017, the FBI had corroborated limited information in the Steele election reporting, and much of that was publicly available information. Most relevant to the Carter Page FISA applications, the allegations contained in Reports 80, 94, 95, and 102, which were relied upon in all four applications, remained uncorroborated and, in several instances, were inconsistent with information gathered by the Crossfire Hurricane team.

The Three Renewal Applications for Continued FISA Authority on Carter Page

As noted above, the FBI filed three renewal applications with the FISC, on January 12, April 7, and June 29, 2017. In addition to repeating the seven significant errors contained in the first FISA application and outlined above, we identified 10 additional

significant errors in the three renewal applications, based upon information known to the FBI after the first application and before one or more of the renewals. We describe the circumstances surrounding these 10 errors in Chapter Eight, and provide a chart listing additional errors in Appendix One. As more fully described in Chapter Eight, the renewal applications:

- Omitted the fact that Steele's Primary Sub-source, who the FBI found credible, had made statements in January 2017 raising significant questions about the reliability of allegations included in the FISA applications, including, for example, that he/she did not recall any discussion with Person 1 concerning WikiLeaks and there was "nothing bad" about the communications between the Kremlin and the Trump team, and that he/she did not report to Steele in July 2016 that Page had met with Sechin;
- Omitted Page's prior relationship with another U.S. government agency, despite being reminded by the other agency in June 2017, prior to the filing of the final renewal application, about Page's past status with that other agency; instead of including this information in the final renewal application, the OGC Attorney altered an email from the other agency so that the email stated that Page was "not a source" for the other agency, which the FBI affiant relied upon in signing the final renewal application;
- Omitted information from persons who previously had professional contacts with Steele or had direct knowledge of his work-related performance, including statements that Steele had no history of reporting in bad faith but "[d]emonstrates lack of self-awareness, poor judgment," "pursued people with political risk but no intelligence value," "didn't always exercise great judgment," and it "not clear what he would have done to validate" his reporting;
- Omitted information obtained from Ohr about Steele and his election reporting, including that (1) Steele's reporting was going to Clinton's presidential campaign and others, (2) Simpson was paying Steele to discuss his reporting with the media, and (3) Steele was "desperate that Donald Trump not get elected and was passionate about him not being the U.S. President";

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Crossfire Hurricane team. We further determined that FBI officials at every level concurred with this judgment, from the OGC attorneys assigned to the investigation to senior OD officials, then General Counsel James Baker, then Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, and then Director James Comey. FBI leadership supported relying on Steele's reporting to seek a FISA order on Page after being advised of, and giving consideration to, concerns expressed by Stuart Evans, then NSD's Deputy Assistant Attorney General with oversight responsibility over OI, that Steele may have been hired by someone associated with presidential candidate Clinton or the DNC, and that the foreign intelligence to be collected through the FISA order would probably not be worth the "risk" of being criticized later for collecting communications of someone (Carter Page) who was "politically sensitive."

According to McCabe, the FBI "felt strongly" that the FISA application should move forward because the team believed they had to get to the bottom of what they considered to be a potentially serious threat to national security, even if the FBI would later be criticized for taking such action. McCabe and others discussed the FBI's position with NSD and ODAG officials, and these officials accepted the FBI's decision to move forward with the application, based substantially on the Steele information.

We found that the FBI did not have information corroborating the specific allegations against Carter Page in Steele's reporting when it relied upon his reports in the first FISA application to articulate the renewal applications. OGC and NSD attorneys told us that, while the FBI's "Woods Procedures" (described in Chapter Two) require that every factual assertion in a FISA application be "verified," when information is attributed to a FBI CHS, the Woods Procedures require only that the agent verify, with supporting documentation, that the application accurately reflects what the CHS told the FBI. The procedures do not require that the agent corroborate, through a second, independent source, that what the CHS told the FBI is true. We did not identify anything in the Woods Procedures that is inconsistent with these officials' description of the procedures.

However, absent corroboration for the factual assertions in the election reporting, it was particularly important for the FISA applications to articulate the FBI's knowledge of Steele's background and its assessment of his reliability. On these points, the applications advised the court that Steele was believed to be a reliable source for three reasons: his professional background; his history of work as an FBI CHS since 2013; and his prior non-election reporting,

which the FBI described as "corroborated and used in criminal proceedings." As discussed below, the representations about Steele's prior reporting were overstated and had not been approved by Steele's handling agent, as required by the Woods Procedures.

Due to Evans's persistent inquiries, the FISA application also included a footnote, developed by OI based on information provided by the Crossfire Hurricane team, to address Evans's concern about the potential political bias of Steele's research. The footnote stated that Steele was hired by an identified U.S. person (Glenn Simpson) to conduct research regarding "Candidate #1's" (Donald Trump) ties to Russia and that the FBI "speculates" that this U.S. person was likely looking for information that could be used to discredit the Trump campaign.

Relevant Information Inaccurately Stated, Omitted, or Undocumented in the First Application

Our review found that FBI personnel fell far short of the requirement in FBI policy that they ensure that all factual statements in a FISA application are "scrupulously accurate." We identified multiple instances in which factual assertions relied upon in the first FISA application were inaccurate, incomplete, or unsupported by appropriate documentation, based upon information the FBI had in its possession at the time the application was filed. We found that the problems we identified were primarily caused by the Crossfire Hurricane team failing to share all relevant information with OI and, consequently, the information was not considered by the Department decision makers who ultimately decided to support the applications.

As more fully described in Chapter Five, based upon the information known to the FBI in October 2016, the first application contained the following seven significant inaccuracies and omissions:

- Omitted information the FBI had obtained from another U.S. government agency detailing its prior relationship with Page, including that Page had been approved as an "operational contact" for the other agency from 2008 to 2013, and that Page had provided information to the other agency concerning his prior contacts with certain Russian intelligence officers, one of which overlapped with facts asserted in the FISA application;
- Included a source characterization statement asserting that Steele's prior reporting had been "corroborated and used in criminal proceedings,"

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Review of Four FISA Applications and Other Aspects of the FBI's Crossfire Hurricane Investigation

explained that he also was aware of the potential for political influences on the Steele reporting.

The fact that the FBI believed Steele had been retained to conduct political opposition research did not require the FBI, under either DOJ or FBI policy, to ignore his reporting. The FBI regularly receives information from individuals with potentially significant biases and motivations, including drug traffickers, convicted felons, and even terrorists. The FBI is not required to set aside such information; rather, FBI policy requires that it critically assess the information. We found that after receiving Steele's reporting, the Crossfire Hurricane team began those efforts in earnest.

We determined that the FBI's decision to receive Steele's information for Crossfire Hurricane was based on multiple factors, including: (1) Steele's prior work as an intelligence professional for [redacted]; (2) his expertise on Russia; (3) his record as an FBI CHS; (4) the assessment of Steele's handling agent that Steele was reliable and had provided helpful information to the FBI in the past; and (5) the themes of Steele's reporting were consistent with the FBI's knowledge at the time of Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. elections.

However, as we describe later, as the FBI obtained additional information raising significant questions about the reliability of the Steele election reporting, the FBI failed to reassess the Steele reporting relied upon in the FISA applications, and did not fully advise NSD or OI officials. We also found that the FBI did not aggressively seek to obtain certain potentially important information from Steele. For example, the FBI did not press Steele for information about the actual funding source for his election reporting work. Agents also did not question Steele about his role in a September 23, 2016 Yahoo News article entitled, "U.S. intel officials probe ties between Trump advisor and Kremlin," that described efforts by U.S. intelligence to determine whether Carter Page had opened communication channels with Kremlin officials. As we discuss in Chapters Five and Eight, the FBI assessed in the Carter Page FISA applications, without any support, that Steele had not "directly provided" the information to Yahoo News.

The First Application for FISA Authority on Carter Page

At the request of the FBI, the Department filed four applications with the FISC seeking FISA authority

targeting Carter Page: the first application on October 21, 2016, and three renewal applications on January 12, April 7, and June 29, 2017. A different FISC judge considered each application and issued the requested orders, collectively resulting in approximately 11 months of FISA coverage targeting Carter Page from October 21, 2016, to September 22, 2017. We discuss the first FISA application in this section and in Chapter Five.

Decision to Seek FISA Authority

We determined that the Crossfire Hurricane team's receipt of Steele's election reporting on September 19, 2016 played a central and essential role in the FBI's and Department's decision to seek the FISA order. As noted above, when the team first sought to pursue a FISA order for Page in August 2016, a decision was made by OGC, OI, or both that more information was needed to support a probable cause finding that Page was an agent of a foreign power. As a result, FBI OGC ceased discussions with OI about a Page FISA order at that time.

On September 19, 2016, the same day that the Crossfire Hurricane team first received Steele's election reporting, the team contacted FBI OGC again about seeking a FISA order for Page and specifically focused on Steele's reporting in drafting the FISA request. Two days later, on September 21, the FBI OGC Unit Chief contacted the NSD OI Unit Chief to advise him that the FBI believed it was ready to submit a formal FISA request to OI relating to Page. Almost immediately thereafter, OI assigned an attorney (OI Attorney) to begin preparation of the application.

Although the team also was interested in seeking FISA surveillance targeting Papadopoulos, the FBI OGC attorneys were not supportive. FBI and NSD officials told us that the Crossfire Hurricane team ultimately did not seek FISA surveillance of Papadopoulos, and we are aware of no information indicating that the team requested or seriously considered FISA surveillance of Manafort or Flynn.

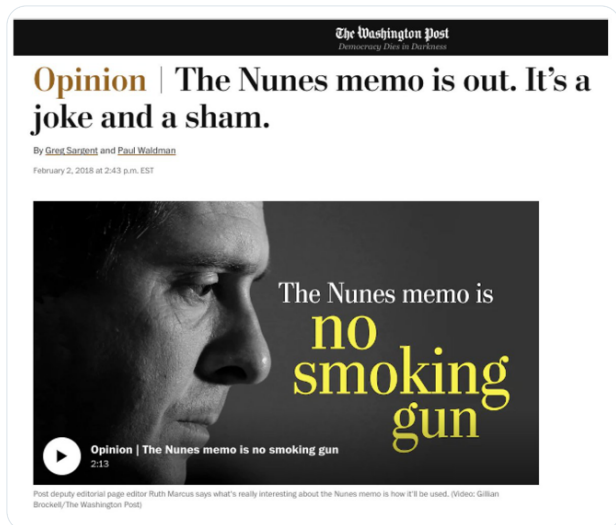
We did not find documentary or testimonial evidence that political bias or improper motivation influenced the FBI's decision to seek FISA authority on Carter Page.

Preparation and Review Process

As we detail in Chapter Two, the FISC Rules of Procedure and FBI policy required that the Carter Page FISA applications contain all material facts. Although

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7. Nonetheless, national media in January and early February of 2018 denounced the Nunes report in oddly identical language, calling it a "joke":



9. On January 23rd, 2018, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA) published an open letter saying the hashtag “gained the immediate attention and assistance of social media accounts linked to Russian influence operations.”

9b. Feinstein/Schiff said the Nunes memo "distorts" classified information, but note they didn't call it incorrect.

10. Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal followed suit, publishing a letter saying, “We find it reprehensible that Russian agents have so eagerly manipulated innocent Americans.”

11. Feinstein, Schiff, Blumenthal, and media members all pointed to the same source: the Hamilton 68 dashboard created by former FBI counterintelligence official Clint Watts, under the auspices of the Alliance for Securing Democracy (ASD).

12.The dashboard, which featured a crude picture of Vladimir Putin deviously blowing evil red Twitter birds into the atmosphere, was vague in how it reached its conclusions.

13.Inside Twitter, executives panned Watts, Hamilton 68, and the Alliance for Securing Democracy. Two key complaints: Hamilton 68 seemed to be everyone’s only source, and no one was checking with Twitter.

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14.“I encourage you to be skeptical of Hamilton 68’s take on this, which as far as I can tell is the only source for these stories,” said Global Policy Communications Chief (and future WH and NSC spokesperson) Emily Horne.

She added: “It’s a comms play for ASD.”

15.“All the swirl is based on Hamilton,” said Trust and Safety chief Yoel Roth.

16.“If ASD isn’t going to fact-check with us, we should feel free to correct the record on their work,” said Policy VP Carlos Monje.

17.Roth couldn’t find any Russian connection to [#ReleaseTheMemo](#) – at all. “I just reviewed the accounts that posted the first 50 tweets with [#releasethememo](#) and... none of them show any signs of affiliation to Russia.”

18.“We investigated, found that engagement as overwhelmingly organic, and driven by VITs” – Very Important Tweeters, including Wikileaks and congressman Steve King.

19.A staffer for “DiFi” – Feinstein – agreed it would be “helpful to know” how Hamilton 68 goes by “the process by which they decide an account is Russian.”

But, only AFTER Feinstein published her letter about Russian influence.

20.When Twitter spoke to a Blumenthal staffer, they tried to “wave him off” because “we don’t believe these are bots.”

21.Added another: “It might be worth nudging Blumenthal’s staffer that it could be in his boss’ best interest not to go out there because it could come back to make him look silly.”

[22.One](#) Twitter exec even tried to negotiate, implying an undisclosed future PR concession if Blumenthal would lay

off on this:

“It seems like there are other wins we could offer him.”

23. Blumenthal published his letter anyway.

24. Execs eventually grew frustrated over what they saw as a circular process – presented with claims of Russian activity, even when denied, led to more claims.

25. They expressed this explicitly to Blumenthal’s camp, saying “Twitter spent a lot of resources” on this request and the reward from Blumenthal shouldn’t be round after round of requests.”

“We can’t do a user notice each time this happens.”

26. Eventually Twitter staff realize “Blumenthal isn’t looking for real and nuanced solutions” but “just wants to get credit for pushing us further.”

27. Ultimately senior executives talked about “feeding congressional trolls” and compared their situation to the children’s book, “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.”

[28. In](#) the story, if you give a mouse a cookie, he’ll want a glass of milk, which will lead to a wave of other exhausting requests, at the end of which he’ll want a glass of milk. And one more cookie.

29. The metaphor for the endless Russia requests was so perfect, one exec wrote, “I’m legit embarrassed I didn’t think of that first.”

30. Despite universal internal conviction that there were no Russians in the story, Twitter went on to follow a slavish pattern of not challenging Russia claims on the record.

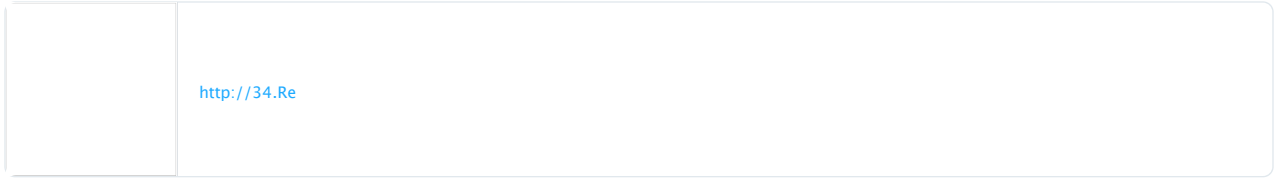
31. Outside counsel from DC-connected firms like Debevoise and Plimpton advised Twitter to use language like, “With respect to particular hashtags, we take seriously any activity that may represent an abuse of our platform.”

[32. As](#) a result, reporters from the AP to Politico to NBC to Rolling Stone continued to hammer the “Russian bots” theme, despite a total lack of evidence.

33. Russians weren’t just blamed for [#ReleaseTheMemo](#) but [#SchumerShutdown](#), [#ParklandShooting](#), even [#GunControlNow](#) – to “widen the divide,” according to the New York Times.

[34. Re #SchumerShutdown](#) and [#ReleaseTheMemo](#), the internal guidance was, “Both hashtags appear to be

organically trending.”



35.NBC, Politico, AP, Times, Business Insider, and other media outlets who played up the “Russian bots” story – even Rolling Stone – all declined to comment for this story.

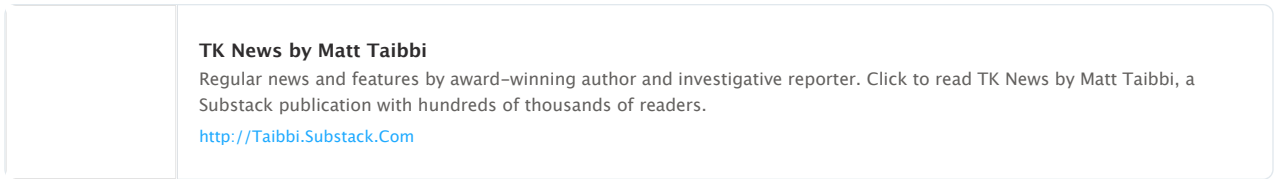
36.The staffs of Feinstein, Schiff, and Blumenthal also declined comment.

37 Who did comment? Devin Nunes. "Schiff and the Democrats falsely claimed Russians were behind the Release the Memo hashtag, all my investigative work... By spreading the Russia collusion hoax, they instigated one of the greatest outbreaks of mass delusion in U.S. history.”

38.This [#ReleaseTheMemo](#) episode is just one of many in the [#TwitterFiles](#). The Russiagate scandal was built on the craven dishonesty of politicians and reporters, who for years ignored the absence of data to fictional scare headlines.

39.For more, watch [@ShellenbergerMD](#), [@bariweiss](#), [@lhfang](#), [@davidzweig](#), [@AlexBerenson](#), and more.

Read [Taibbi.Substack.Com](#) for more on why “America Needs Truth and Reconciliation on Russiagate.”




40.Twitter had no editorial input on this story. Searches were carried out by third parties, so the documents could be limited.



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More from @mtaibbi

 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Jan 3

1.THREAD: The Twitter Files Twitter and the FBI “Belly Button”

2.By 2020, Twitter was struggling with the problem of public and private agencies bypassing them and going straight to the media with lists of suspect accounts.

3 In February, 2020, as COVID broke

[Read 40 tweets](#)

 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Jan 3

1.THREAD: The Twitter Files How Twitter Let the Intelligence Community In

2.In August 2017, when Facebook decided to suspend 300 accounts with “suspected Russian origin,” Twitter wasn’t worried. Its leaders were sure they didn’t have a Russia problem.

3 “We did not see a big correlation”

[Read 34 tweets](#)

 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Dec 24, 2022

Note on Left and Right in the Twitter Files...

Mainstream outlets try to grind every news story into grade D partisan hamburger and Twitter Files coverage is no exception. The Washington Post even called me a “conservative journalist” for a few minutes.

[Read 19 tweets](#)

 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Dec 24, 2022

1.THREAD: The Twitter Files TWITTER AND "OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES"

After weeks of “Twitter Files” reports detailing close coordination between the FBI and Twitter in moderating social media content, the Bureau issued a statement Wednesday.

2 It didn't refute allegations. Instead

[Read 58 tweets](#)


 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Dec 24, 2022

Good morning, and happy holidays to all!

As I wrote last night on Substack, I'm in San Francisco, working on the Twitter story. In an effort to be a fully-present Dad on the holiday tomorrow, I'm going to empty some #TwitterFiles notes throughout the morning.

[Read 5 tweets](#)

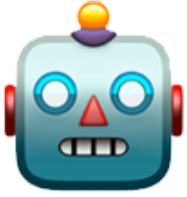
 **Matt Taibbi**
@mtaibbi

Dec 18, 2022

1.THREAD: Twitter Files Supplemental

2.In July of 2020, San Francisco FBI agent Elvis Chan tells Twitter executive Yoel Roth to expect written questions from the Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF), the inter-agency group that deals with cyber threats.

[Read 14 tweets](#)



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