



Episode 12 – Cover Up

Producer:

Previously on The Asset.

Max Bergmann:

There have been a lot of shockingly visceral moments in Trump's presidency, but his meeting with Vladimir Putin on Monday, July 16, 2018, in Helsinki, Finland, may take the cake.

[Donald Trump:](#)

People came to me, Dan Coats came to me and some others, they said they think it's Russia. I have President Putin, he just said it's not Russia. I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be.

[Sen. Bob Menendez:](#)

The American people deserve to know who they elected to be their president. They deserve to know if he's in fact putting America's interests first, and they deserve to know if Donald Trump is, wittingly or unwittingly, an agent for the Russian Federation.

[Rod Rosenstein:](#)

Today, a grand jury in the District of Columbia returned an indictment presented by the Special Counsel's office. The indictment charges 12 Russian military officers by name for conspiring to interfere with the 2016 presidential election.

Max Bergmann:

It has been treated as so inexplicable why Trump acts in this way. It's a big mystery. Except it's really not. You just have to accept the fact that our president is a Russian asset.

-Break-

Max Bergmann:

Before we get started on this week's final episode, I want to tell you about an exciting new addition to The Asset podcast. We are making the full audio recordings of our exclusive interviews with our all-star roster of commentators and analysts available on a new Patreon page. If you go to www.patreon.com/assetpodcast, you'll be able to subscribe and hear never-before-released, behind-the-scenes stories of the Trump-Russia scandal. And we will be posting a bonus episode later this month that explores those mysterious deaths of those Kremlin-linked



figures in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia that all happened around the time of Donald Trump's election. The bizarre circumstances and coincidences of timing make these stories a must-listen experience for anybody who's been following Russian interference in the 2016 election. Go to patreon.com/assetpodcast. That's Patreon, patreon.com/assetpodcast and sign up today.

Max Bergmann:

Episode 12: Cover Up. Felix Bloch was compromised, and he knew it.

[Newscast:](#)

Announcer: From ABC, this is World News Tonight with Peter Jennings.

Peter Jennings: Good evening, we begin tonight with a harsh reminder that a secret sells. ABC News has learned that a veteran State Department official, a man with access to some of the government's most sensitive political secrets, is suspected of working for the Soviets.

Max Bergmann:

He was a veteran foreign-service officer in the State Department. He became director of European and Canadian affairs and had served as deputy chief of mission, the number-two job at the embassy in Vienna, a critical outpost during the Cold War. As *The New York Times* put it, Felix Bloch had a reputation as “a reserved, seemingly austere workaholic.” Yet Felix Bloch had a secret: He was into S&M.

[Newscast:](#)

The suspect is a senior American diplomat named Felix Bloch, a man who has served in embassies across Europe, including six years in Vienna, where he became the number-two man, or deputy chief of mission. Vienna is regarded as the most active crossroads between spies of the East and West, and American authorities say it was there that Bloch allegedly made his first contact with the Soviets more than three years ago.

Max Bergmann:

In the late 1980s, the CIA was monitoring a house in Vienna, Austria, and they had noticed that a suspected deep cover KGB illegal agent kept entering the house. They monitored the phone line, and one day, this man named Reino Gikman called the United States, a 202 area code—Washington, DC. He called the phone number of Felix Bloch, and FBI counterintelligence was on it. Bloch became one of the highest-ranking State Department officers investigated for espionage. The FBI, working with French intelligence, tracked him to a meeting with Gikman on



May 14, 1989, in Paris. French counterintelligence officers monitored Bloch as he entered a cafe and Bloch met with Glickman and left him a bag. What the bag contained they didn't know for sure. But for all their surveillance, French counterintelligence couldn't determine what was in the suitcase, and French intelligence hesitated. They decided not to blow their cover and arrest the two and seize the bag, which almost certainly would have been incriminating. They decided they could wait. But as Milton Bearden, former CIA chief for the Soviet East European division at the end of the Cold War, wrote in his book with James Risen, *The Main Enemy*, that Bloch “seemed to have been working for the Soviets since 1974,” yet there was still little hard evidence to pass to court. The FBI did not have absolute proof that Bloch had passed classified materials to Glickman and the Soviets. John Martin, the Justice Department's unsparing chief attorney on espionage cases, would demand a better case. But there was no reason for U.S. intelligence authorities to rush forward. They had time. They could wait, they could monitor, they could catch him in the act. But it turns out that was wrong; there wasn't time. Bloch got a phone call in the middle of the night from someone named Ferdinand Paul. This person said he was calling for Pierre, that stamp collector, who could not see Bloch because he got sick with a contagious disease, and that he is worried Bloch caught the same sickness. Bloch, without saying much, laid down the receiver knowing his cover was blown. The call was from the KGB. The FBI, who was listening in, knew it was the KGB warning Bloch, and the FBI was irate. While this was further confirmation that Bloch was a KGB asset, they didn't have it. The FBI didn't have a court case, they didn't have Bloch saying that he was a KGB asset or exchanging classified information. But how did Glickman know the US was onto him? What happened was what the Justice Department called possibly the worst intelligence disaster in US history: Robert Hanssen. Hanssen was an FBI agent who had been selling secrets to the Soviet government since 1979, and at some point in 1989, Hanssen tipped the KGB off about the investigation, and they tipped off Bloch. That, we now know, was what they meant when they discussed an infectious disease: It was a warning from the KGB that Bloch was compromised. Of course, the FBI didn't know at the time that they had been compromised. They assumed it was the French who had the mole. They didn't know Hanssen was selling secrets until 2001, when a mole hunt into decades worth of leaks and breaches led them to a Palm Pilot full of incriminating data. But back in 1989, knowing their investigation was blown, the FBI decided just to confront Bloch. But Bloch stonewalled, he held firm, no collusion. But the press eventually found out about the Bloch case, and it became a media circus. The press joined the FBI in trailing Bloch wherever he went around Washington, DC.

[Newscast:](#)

Officials say they don't yet know how much damage may have been done, but they assume this has been a very serious breach of security. Bloch's most recent assignment was at the State



Department, where he worked in the bureau that deals with the Soviet Union and Europe.

Max Bergmann:

But Bloch was still inside the US government. The threat remained, and maybe there was no legal case, but he simply couldn't be trusted in the US government. And so the State Department found a reason to revoke his security clearance, to neutralize the threat and get him out of Foggy Bottom. Bloch eventually moved down to North Carolina, where he led a quiet life as a grocery-store cashier and a bus driver. Even though justice wasn't done in this case, the threat to national security, to the United States, was neutralized.

[Newscast:](#)

He is currently on administrative leave from the State Department, has had all his security clearances revoked, and is under 24-hour surveillance by the FBI at his Washington apartment.

Max Bergmann:

Bloch was never charged with espionage, but a few years later Vasili Mitrokhin, a KGB archivist, defected to the United Kingdom and provided British intelligence with information that included details of the KGB's handling of the Felix Bloch case. The Bloch affair also shows the challenge with counterintelligence investigations. It's extremely difficult to actually catch somebody in the act of espionage, as spies are trained to avoid detection; they use tradecraft, spy craft. But in espionage cases there is one clear line: If someone passes along secret classified national-security information, documents, then you have them dead to rights. And the FBI eventually caught Robert Hanssen at a dead drop in a park in northern Virginia doing just that—leaving classified information for Russian intelligence—in 2001. When Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and his deputy Rick Gates confessed to passing confidential polling data, some of the most closely-held information the campaign possessed, it was akin to catching Robert Hanssen at the dead drop—except what Hanssen did, passing classified national security information on to the Russians, was illegal. What Manafort and Gates did was technically not, because sending along private polling data is, in and of itself, not illegal. It has to be embedded in a broader conspiracy. This, in effect, is where we are today. There's overwhelming evidence that Trump and his team, like Felix Bloch, sold out the country. And unlike Bloch, the Mueller investigation actually has Rick Gates, the deputy campaign chairman, confessing to passing along confidential internal polling data to an alleged Russian agent. They didn't have Bloch confessing, but they have the Trump team confessing. But Muller said he also needed proof that there was a meeting of the minds, that there was an agreement, that this information that the Trump campaign was passing on would be used by the Russians in their interference campaign in the 2016 election. While it may seem obvious why the Trump



campaign was passing on the polling data and what the Russians were going to do with the polling data, Mueller exists in a legal framework. He needed actual tangible proof to make a charge of conspiracy that the Russians were using the polling data to influence the US elections, and Mueller didn't have that proof. But we know what happened. I'm Max Bergmann and this is The Asset.

-Break-

Max Bergmann:

By the time Robert Mueller became Special Counsel, the FBI investigation had been going on for almost a year. So the Mueller investigation began well after the fact, and there are real questions about how the FBI handled the investigation before Mueller took it over. If you watched the Mueller hearing, you may have seen Republican after Republican rail against the FBI, against the investigation, some claiming that the FBI was spying on the Trump campaign by having an informant meet with Carter Page and Papadopoulos. To Republicans, the FBI was on some progressive resistance drug, out to get Donald Trump.

[Ron Johnson:](#)

This is bias, potentially corruption at the highest levels of the FBI, that is now investigating, and now this, and by the way, Robert Mueller used to run the FBI. He is in no position to do an investigation over this kind of misconduct. So I think at this point in time, we probably should be looking at a special counsel to undertake this investigation.

Max Bergmann:

This is all ludicrous. One of the most conservative agencies in the US government did not suddenly become filled with progressive resistance heroes. The FBI deserves scrutiny, but not because it aggressively went after the Trump campaign, but because it didn't. In fact, the FBI did the opposite. Trump represented the most serious counterintelligence threat to the United States in the FBI's history and the FBI just looked like they were going through the motions. It's not just the failure to notify the public about Trump's ties to Russia during the campaign. Remember in that October 31, 2016, story the FBI told *The New York Times* that they saw no clear links between Trump and Russia.

[Newscast:](#)

Here's a little context for you in terms of James Comey's thinking here as he went through this process on Friday. A former FBI official tells CNBC that FBI Director James Comey argued privately that it was too close to Election Day for the United States government to name Russia



as meddling in the US election, and ultimately Comey ensured that the FBI's name was not on the document that the US government put out. Now, the official said that some government insiders are perplexed as to why Comey would have election timing concerns with the Russian disclosure, but not apparently with the Hillary Clinton email disclosure that he made on Friday.

Max Bergmann:

It's that the FBI did not appear to have wrapped their heads around the threat and full scope of what was happening until James Comey was fired, until well after the election. Far from being driven by blind rage to get Donald Trump, the FBI did not appear to treat this investigation with any sense of urgency. They seemed to think they had time. They could operate slowly and methodically, like a normal counterintelligence investigation. This was going to be a marathon, not a sprint. After all, no government secrets were at stake, and she would win, he would lose. And they also seem to fail to grasp that this involved Trump. It wasn't just a few bad apples trying to infiltrate the campaign. In mid-August, just a few weeks after opening the formal investigation, codenamed Crossfire Hurricane, there was a meeting within the FBI about how to proceed with the investigation, about how to approach it. The election was a few months away, and so, should the FBI aggressively investigate now to see if there was something to inform the public about? Or should they take this slow and steady, because she was going to win and if they moved too fast, they could endanger a source and perhaps alert the perpetrators, making it harder to catch them in the act? And so, there was now that infamous text exchange between two FBI agents that were having an affair, Peter Strzok and Lisa Page, and they were using their government phones to communicate. Strzok was arguing to be aggressive, to go fast. Page was arguing to be cautious, to go slow. Strzok, texted, "I want to believe the path you threw out for consideration, that there's no way he gets elected, but I'm afraid we can't take that risk. It's like an insurance policy in the unlikely event you die before you're 40." This has been seized on by Trump to say the FBI was out to get him and that the investigation was an insurance policy to take him down. But all Strzok was saying, as he explained it in countless hours before congressional hearings, was that, regardless of the polls, you still have to investigate because what if she loses? We still have to investigate because he's a threat to national security.

[Peter Strzok:](#)

It was in no way, unequivocally, any suggestion that me, the FBI, would take any action whatsoever to improperly impact the electoral process for any candidate.

Max Bergmann:



But that tension of how aggressively to investigate a presidential candidate seemed to lead to a lot of caution. One reason to spike that *New York Times* story and kill the notion you're investigating is you didn't want the target to know. But counterintelligence cases are hard. They require a ton of effort, and it simply doesn't seem the FBI put much effort into the investigation during the election, and I say that because of one of the most perplexing sections of the Mueller Report: pages 149 to 151. Immediately after the election, two senior Kremlin figures, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's close aide, and Kirill Dmitriev, who we mentioned in the last episode for his involvement in that Seychelles meeting, were actually here in the United States, in New York, blocks from Trump Tower. But it doesn't seem like we know what they did while they were here. After the election, it was likely Peskov who texted Dmitriev, "Putin has won," and Dmitriev immediately contacted that guy George Nader, the convicted pedophile and close advisor to the UAE and connected to the Trump team, about meeting with the Trump inner circle. Dmitriev told Nader he would ask Putin for permission to travel to the United States, and later that day, the day after the election, Dmitriev jumped on a plane and came to New York City. Dmitriev requested that Trump transition officials come to the opening gala of the World Chess Federation tournament that was taking place at South Street Seaport in Manhattan.

[Newscast:](#)

This is New York City, where the first official World Chess Championship match took place in 1886. Now, 130 years later, we are back. Reigning champion Magnus Carlsen will take on Sergey Karjakin. It is the match we have been waiting for for 13 years, since these two prodigies became grand masters. It will be an intense and spectacular drama. Welcome to the World Chess Championship 2016.

Max Bergmann:

Dmitry Peskov was also going to the chess championship, and it's worth noting that Peskov was also mentioned heavily in an August 2016 memo in the Steele Dossier, in which Steele wrote that Peskov is the "main protagonist in the Kremlin campaign to aid Trump."

[Newscast:](#)

Newscaster: Joining us now from Moscow Dmitry Peskov, Vladimir Putin's right-hand man. Mr. Peskov, thank you for joining us.

Dimitry Peskov: Oh, lots of Americans, they do think that, "Yes, Russian hackers are everywhere. Russian hackers are in every, in every fridge. Russian hackers are in every iron," and so on and so forth. But this is not true. Those are fake news and this is slander.



Max Bergmann:

Remember, the FBI had the Steele Dossier at this point. The FBI knew that Steele was saying that Peskov was crucial to the Russian interference campaign. And here he is in New York City. Now if you're thinking, maybe these Russians are just really into chess because, you know, Russians are really into chess, it's also worth noting that the World Chess Federation was led at the time by a sanctioned Kremlin oligarch: Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. Not only that, according to a FiveThirtyEight-ABC investigation, the Chess Federation president "has repeatedly been alleged to act as an informal envoy for the Russian government." There is a ton of suspicion that the World Chess Federation and its president serve as a covert diplomatic vehicle for the Kremlin. For example, two days before the Iraq War in 2003, Ilyumzhinov met with the Hussein family. He later met with Muammar Gaddafi during the NATO bombing campaign of Libya. And in 2012, just as the Syrian civil war broke out, he was in Syria meeting with Assad. I guess all these guys are just really into chess. Mueller even asked Trump about his contacts with Ilyumzhinov because Ilyumzhinov had asked Trump to even host the World Chess Federation tournament in Trump Tower, which Trump declined. So, we have two of Putin's closest aides, one allegedly deeply involved in the interference campaign, the other seeking to create a diplomatic back channel to the Trump transition team, come to New York right after the election. Dmitriev even invites Trump transition officials to the tournament and this leads to what may be the most confounding line in the entire Mueller Report: "One World Chess Federation official recalled hearing from an attendee that president-elect Trump had stopped by the tournament." Mueller concluded the sentence by saying he couldn't establish that that had happened and Trump denied that he attended the tournament when questioned. Okay, so here's why this is so weird: It would seem pretty easy to determine that the president-elect did not attend. He has secret service detail. He's the president-freaking-elect and you can't account for his whereabouts? This also isn't a footnote in the report. This is a line in the actual text of the report. The only reasonable explanation for Mueller to have included a secondhand rumor is that Mueller actually thinks that Trump may have gone to meet with these Russians. But did Mueller not talk to Trump's secret-service detail? Was he prevented from doing so? But it also raises another question: what in the hell was the FBI doing? Was the FBI not monitoring these two very senior and important Kremlin officials when they were here in New York right after the election, at an event organized by an organization used as a covert diplomatic tool by the Kremlin, and right after, oh, what was that other thing? Oh yeah, they interfered in the election on Trump's behalf. Remember it was the FBI's New York field office that was leaking to Rudy Giuliani, and lo and behold, it looks like in New York, the FBI wasn't on top of two senior Kremlin officials.

[Newscast:](#)

Male newscaster: Did Donald Trump plan anything except for a series of inspiring rounds?



Rudy Giuliani: Yes.

Female newscaster: What?

Rudy Giuliani: Ah, ah, ah you'll see.

Female newscaster: When will this happen?

Rudy Giuliani: We've got a couple of surprises left.

Male newscaster: October surprises?

Rudy Giuliani: Ah, well, I'd call it "surprises" in the way that we're going to campaign to get our message out there, maybe in a little bit of a different way.

Max Bergmann:

This raises significant questions about the FBI's investigation. But in their defense, this was uncharted territory. Foreign interference at this level was simply unprecedented. I talked with Asha Rangappa, a former FBI agent and a Yale University lecturer.

Asha Rangappa:

I'm sympathetic to the position that the FBI was in. In 2015, 2016, they see this counterintelligence threat merging with this ongoing and, you know, increasingly successful presidential campaign. And this presents a huge and unprecedented dilemma for the FBI, because here you have the pinnacle of First Amendment activity, this is somebody running for office, the highest office in the land, and they are entitled to every cushion of protection from government intrusion. On the other hand, you also have what is arguably, you know, the nightmare counterintelligence scenario, which is possible foreign infiltration of this political campaign. They also know, by the way, when you're in the FBI, it's kind of both said implicitly and explicitly everything that you write down and put in a case file will ultimately end up on the lap of somebody in member of Congress and on the front page of The New York Times or Dateline or whatever it is. So, understand that, though it's secret now, this is publicly accountable, and so, I think that, you know, the FBI was very conscious of that. Ironically, they did not want to be interfering, and I think President Obama did not want to appear to be interfering, in a presidential campaign, which is exactly what they're being accused of now. And as a result, I think they held back and tried to avoid doing the things that in any other situation



they would have done, and that is to take more aggressive steps, open cases, move aggressively to neutralize this kind of threat. I also think that they made a big mistake because I believe that they thought Hillary Clinton was going to win and that was a fait accompli and that they could, they could afford to be cautious, because once the election was over, then they could kind of do this investigation and not have to worry about, you know, interfering in anything. And unfortunately, it's kind of like Schrodinger's cat: Taking that into account, they ended up altering that outcome itself, and that, that is where we are right now.

Max Bergmann:

But after the election, it didn't appear that the FBI operated with any greater degree of urgency. In addition to Peskov and Dmitriev's trip to New York, there were also a host of key Russian figures that came to the US for the Trump inauguration. Konstantin Kilimnik came to the inauguration and the FBI even knew it at the time, but didn't interview him. Natalia Veselnitskaya, Emin Agalarov were all here. Even Joseph Mifsud, the Maltese professor, was in Washington, but the FBI missed him. It wasn't until James Comey was fired in May 2017 that the FBI and the Justice Department finally seemed to realize that Trump might actually be a Russian asset. Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, even reportedly suggested wearing a wire, and then made the call to appoint Robert Mueller as special counsel, and this is when the FBI decided to open a formal counterintelligence investigation into the president, into Donald Trump. But it was already May. But despite the seemingly slow start to the investigation and the difficulty of trying to uncover a conspiracy after the fact, the Mueller report is still the most damning document ever written about a president of the United States. What's remarkable is that given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of actually catching Trump in the act, Mueller still found a number of smoking guns: the exchange of polling data; the June 9 meeting, which was about getting the dirt from the Russians; the channel to WikiLeaks; the shady back channels to Russia after the election; and whatever was going on with Michael Flynn. And Mueller accomplished this without there being a ton of obstruction. A ton of information was deleted: Bannon's text messages with Eric Prince, Rick Gates' WhatsApp messages to Konstantin Kilimnik were all deleted, that whole server was taken down, Cambridge Analytica's records disappeared. And it's important to remember that conspiring to win an election is a lot different than robbing a bank, where you can trace the money and track exactly where the money is going. Colluding and conspiring to win a campaign is ephemeral. You can't really pinpoint why people voted the way they did. Therefore, you need the emails, the messages, the data. Mueller didn't catch Trump pulling the trigger or giving the order.

[Newscastr:](#)



What did the president know and when did he know it? On July 16, Alexander Butterfield, a former White House official, shocked the Senate Watergate Committee by saying the President's conversations were on tape.

Max Bergmann:

Yet, despite this, Mueller found all this evidence pointing to a clear conspiracy between Trump and the Russians. What Mueller did with his report is a classic counterintelligence tactic. He used the 198 pages of Volume One to show all the collusion, all the sketchiness, all the contacts, and then he used Volume Two to show the crimes, to show the slam dunks that he could prove in court. Mueller's report is therefore an impeachable referral. Volume Two very much resembles Special Counsel Leon Jaworski's report from 1974, which was described at the time as an impeachment referral and in that report, Jaworski never said that Nixon obstructed justice or committed crimes. Jaworski simply laid out all the underlying facts that were garnered from the grand-jury testimony, and which all definitely amounted to obstruction of justice. But Jaworski never actually said that Nixon broke the law, because according to Department of Justice rules, it cannot indict the president. That's Congress' job: to remove the president, to impeach the president. Another way to think about Volume Two is that, when Elliot Ness went after Al Capone, he did so because everyone knew Capone was a huge mobster. But Elliot Ness couldn't get Al Capone on the mobbing, on all the criminal activity he was doing, so they got him on tax evasion. But one is inextricably linked to the other. He had all this illicit money from his mob activities. The Mueller report is exactly that. Volume One, the 198 pages, is the conspiracy, the conspiring with Russia, the collusion. Volume Two is the crime you can nail him on, the obstruction. Volume One identifies the threat to the country; Volume Two is the way Mueller sought to neutralize it. Here's Asha Rangappa.

Asha Rangappa:

And so, as you mentioned, your goal there is to collect evidence to determine whether or not that's true, and if it is true, whether you have enough evidence to charge that person and prove it in court beyond a reasonable doubt. Okay? That's the end goal, is that, ultimately you are going to charge or not charge this person, and if you do, you're going to lay all of your evidence out on the table and let a jury make the decision. That is not the goal on the counterintelligence side. The counterintelligence side, as you noted, is to neutralize the foreign intelligence threat, and how you neutralize a threat really depends on what is happening. So, for example, if you have a country who is here conducting economic espionage and you know that a company has somebody working for a foreign intelligence service that's feeding them trade secrets. As you mentioned, it might be letting that company know so they can get that person out of the position. It might be flipping that person, and then you start getting information about what the



foreign intelligence service is up to. Other countries are looking for defense secrets. Other countries are doing what we call perception management, this is disinformation, propaganda, all these kinds of information operations, and that requires a different kind of neutralization. In my experience, it requires essentially exposing it and letting people know that this is what's happening. So, you're not really looking to take these people into a court, and in fact, as I mentioned, the primary movers behind this, the intelligence officers, are often here under diplomatic cover, so you wouldn't be able to charge them anyway. They have diplomatic immunity. And so, you know, very few cases on the counterintelligence side actually see the inside of a courtroom, partly because that may not be necessary to neutralize, partly because they may not be able to charge them, but also because you're using these very sensitive sources and methods and you don't want to reveal them, because ultimately our advantage as a country in counterintelligence is not letting other countries know what we know and how we know it. And so, it's kind of antithetical to the criminal process. And that's the tension on, on the counterintelligence side.

Max Bergmann:

A skeptic might say, “This guy Max is delusional. Isn't the most obvious explanation for why Mueller didn't charge a conspiracy was because there was no conspiracy? They didn't collude. Yeah, they had a ton of sketchy meetings and the Trump folks are definitely shady and yeah, maybe he has all this sketchy Russian money and has done all this money laundering, but the Trump team were full of jokers. They weren't criminal masterminds, and as for all those meetings and contacts, that was just the Russians trying to connect to the campaign, but the Trump folks wouldn't have known how to collude. So, in trying to connect all these dots, what you're really actually doing is connecting dots that seem to connect when it's actually just a lot of dots.” Look, I could go back over the last 14 hours of this podcast to show you why all of this amounts to something more. I could say, taken together, all of Trump's conduct, all those 270-plus contacts, all those 38 meetings, add up to a clear conspiracy. But I don't have to. The biggest tell is that, in the aftermath, the Trump team was acting guilty. You don't just randomly engage in a massive and incredibly risky coverup if you don't think you have something really, really bad to hide. When Trump figures were asked about their meetings and contacts with the Russians, they lied again and again and again and again. Michael Flynn, Michael Cohen, Paul Manafort, Rick Gates, Jared Kushner, Donald Trump—they all lied to the FBI. Why? Because they had something to hide

[Testimony:](#)

Rep. Val Demings: Director Mueller isn't it fair to say that the President's written answers were



not only inadequate and incomplete because he didn't answer many of your questions, but where he did his answers show that he wasn't always being truthful?

Robert Mueller: There... uh, I would say, uh, generally.

Rep. Val Demings: Generally.

Max Bergmann:

Some of the biggest skeptics of the Russia scandal were actually reporters closest to the president, working in the White House, who questioned whether the Trump team could maintain a coverup, because to them, the White House leaked like no other; stories in *The Post* and *The New York Times* routinely had more than 10 sources. For these reporters, if there was a conspiracy, it would have leaked. We would have known about it. Well, two things. First, they did leak, all the time. Much of the Mueller report was old news by the time it came out because of all the leaking, not from Mueller, but from the Trump people that Mueller was talking to. Donald Trump Jr. posted the June 9 meeting on his Twitter feed after learning *The New York Times* had the email exchange. But the second reason is that, if you engage in a criminal conspiracy, you keep it very close hold. You don't hold all hands White House staff meetings about it; you limit the exposure. In Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's book, *The Final Days*, which captured the final days of Nixon and Watergate, they describe how totally stunned White House senior staff were when they heard the tape that Nixon was clearly guilty. These White House staff didn't know. They believed the man they were working for. They didn't think Nixon would lie to their face. And what this means is that traditional White House access journalism actually means very little when covering a criminal conspiracy because the few people that are in the know, that are actually in on the conspiracy, don't leak that information. There are certain things you actually keep a secret, and Trump has actually shown he can keep a secret. If you're not buying that Trump could maintain the lie remember back to Episode Two when it was revealed that Trump was actually a total fraud of a businessman. He was on the *Forbes* Billionaire List when he was actually bankrupt. He was hundreds of millions of dollars in debt. Yet Trump the showman, the reality TV star, the actor, perpetuated the myth about himself that he was always a successful businessman when it just wasn't true. He lived a lie. He's good at living a lie.

[Newscast:](#)

*A new report claims President Trump's businesses were bleeding red ink while he bragged about art of the, *The Art of the Deal*.*



-Break-

Max Bergmann:

When folks say the coverup is usually worse than the crime, what they actually mean is the coverup is usually where people get caught. Innocent people don't launch a massive coverup. By the time Donald Trump came to office, he was panicking about the Russia investigation and worked hard to obstruct it at every single turn. The most obvious and most public example of obstruction of justice was Trump's decision to fire director James Comey. He fired the guy that was investigating him, investigating Russia. Why? Because he was investigating Russia. Trump even said this in public. In the interview with Lester Holt, Trump even admitted that he fired Comey because of the Russia investigation.

[Donald Trump:](#)

When I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said, "You know this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made up story. It's an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should have won."

Max Bergmann:

And after Trump had fired Comey, he thought he had killed off the investigation, which is why when Mueller was appointed, Trump said, "This is the end of my presidency. I'm [explicitly deleted]." Those aren't the words of an innocent man. Mueller's report also lists ten different ways that Trump tried to obstruct the Russia investigation.

[Andrew Napolitano:](#)

The crime is not a difficult one to understand. Obstruction of justice, the statute making obstruction criminal, prohibits interfering or attempting to interfere with a criminal prosecution or an investigation that the government's conducting. So, if I'm about to go into a courthouse and testify against my neighbor and the neighbor's kid comes and tackles me to prevent me from getting in the courthouse and I eventually pick myself up and get in and give the testimony, the neighbor's kid can be charged with obstruction because he attempted to interfere with the work of a jury that was waiting to hear my testimony. So when Bob Mueller said the president of the United States did about a dozen things to slow down, impede, negate, or interfere with the investigation of his campaign or of his former national security advisor, General Michael Flynn, that's a serious allegation of criminal activity. So, when the president asked his former advisor and my former colleague at Fox K.T. McFarland to write an untruthful letter to the file, knowing the government would subpoena it, that's obstruction of justice. When the president asked Corey Lewandowski, his former campaign manager, to get Mueller fired,



that's obstruction of justice. When the president asked his then-White House counsel to get Mueller fired and then lie about it, that's obstruction of justice. When he asked Don McGahn to go back to the Special Counsel and change his testimony, that's obstruction of justice. When he dangled a pardon in front of Michael Cohen in order to keep Cohen from testifying against him, that's obstruction of justice.

Max Bergmann:

In June 2017, just after Mueller took over the Russia investigation, Trump tried to fire him. After *The Washington Post* reported that Trump himself was actually now under investigation for obstruction of justice, Trump called his White House counsel Don McGahn and told him to “Call Rod. Tell Rod that Mueller has conflicts and can’t be the special counsel.” Why would Trump do this? Because Mueller had once been a member of one of Trump's golf clubs. It was such a ridiculous argument that even Trump's own people pushed back on it. McGahn even called his personal lawyer and threatened to resign. Trump also ordered McGann to cover up the attempts to fire Mueller. When *The New York Times* first revealed that Trump tried to get Mueller fired, Trump had his staff secretary call up McGann to get him to not only deny the story, but also create a false record to “prove it had never happened.” Trump raged at McGann, berating him for taking notes on the meeting. McGann responded, he takes notes because he's a “real lawyer.” Trump responded, “I've had a lot of real lawyers like Roy Cohn and they didn't take notes.” These two efforts have a couple of things in common. In both of them Trump acted through a middleman. If you've listened to our episodes on Trump's businesses, this should all sound very familiar. Trump may be a terrible businessman, but he's great at one thing: plausible deniability. He built an international real-estate empire by putting just enough distance between himself and his shady partners that when things went south, he could walk away with clean hands and a relatively full bank account. It's what he did during the election too. He didn't reach out to WikiLeaks and Guccifer 2.0; he had Roger Stone do it, who was technically not on the campaign. The whole thing should be familiar to anybody who's seen a mob movie, including how he talks. And here was Michael Cohen testifying before Congress on that very point

[Testimony:](#)

Justin Amash: Uh, you've suggested that the President sometimes communicates his wishes indirectly. For example, you said, “Mr. Trump did not directly tell me to lie to Congress. That's not how he operates.” Can you explain how he does this?

Michael Cohen: Sure. It would be no different if I said, “That's the nicest looking tie I've ever seen, isn't it?” What are you going to do, are you going to fight with him? The answer is no. So,



you say, "Yes, it's the nicest looking tie I've ever seen." That's how he speaks. He doesn't give you questions, he doesn't give you orders. He speaks in a code, and I understand the code because I've been around him for a decade.

Justin Amash: And it's your impression that others who work for him understand the code as well?

Michael Cohen: Most people, yes.

Max Bergmann:

And this takes us to another example: Trump repeatedly tried to stop witnesses from cooperating with the Special Counsel investigation. He tried to encourage them not to cooperate. Because of the lack of hustle from the FBI in the beginning of the investigation, Mueller needed witnesses. He needed people to confirm events after the fact because information was deleted and destroyed. He needed people to turn on Trump. And Trump's efforts to encourage people not to cooperate with the investigation happened right out in the open. He attacked witnesses who cooperated and praised the ones who didn't. He talked over and over again about how he was considering pardoning them.

[Newscast:](#)

Interviewer: Are you considering pardoning Paul Manafort?

Donald Trump: I have great respect for what he's done in terms of what he's gone through. You know, he worked for Ronald Reagan for years. He worked for Bob Dole. He worked, I guess his firm worked, for McCain. He worked for many, many people, many, many years. And I would say what he did, some of the charges they threw against him, every consultant, every lobbyist in Washington probably does.

[Newscast:](#)

Reporter: Can I ask you more about Michael, about Michael Flynn? Would you consider a pardon from Michael Flynn?

Donald Trump: I don't want to talk about pardons with Michael Flynn yet. We'll see what happens. Let's see. I can say this: When you look at what's gone on with the FBI and with the Justice Department, people are very, very angry. Thank you very much everybody. Thank you.

Max Bergmann:



And this is just what was going on in public. And behind the scenes, Trump's lawyer, John Dowd, called Michael Flynn's attorney to make the President's meaning even more explicit. Dowd even left a voicemail with Michael Flynn's attorney.

[Voicemail:](#)

John Dowd: We need some kind of a heads up just for the sake of protecting all our interest if we can without you having to give up any confidential information. So, um, and if it's the former then well, remember what we've always said about the President and his feelings toward Flynn. I know that still [inaudible] but. In any event, um, let me know and, uh, I appreciate your listening and taking the time. Thanks, pal.

Max Bergmann:

But there's more. Trump tried to again and again to get his attorney general Jeff Sessions to limit the Russia investigation, and if Jeff Sessions wouldn't, he would force him out and find someone who would. When it came to actual policy, Sessions delivered on Trump's harsh immigration policies and on other areas that were of interest to the Trump administration. But Trump could never forgive Sessions for one thing: recusing himself from the investigation. And he berated him constantly, and publicly, and privately. Trump didn't care that DOJ guidelines held that Sessions had to recuse. In his mind, his attorney general's job was to protect him. He said this publicly and privately, that he regretted picking Sessions and would never have done so if he'd known Sessions would have to recuse.

[Donald Trump:](#)

The Attorney General made a terrible mistake when he did this and when he recused himself or he should have certainly let us know if he was going to recuse himself and we would have used a, put a different attorney general in. So he made what I consider to be a very terrible mistake for the country.

Max Bergmann:

He berated Sessions on Twitter and in cabinet meetings, mocking him for his height and how he talked, doing everything he could to get Sessions to resign or unrecuse. He even tried praise at one point, telling Sessions he would be a "hero" if he unrecused. Trump also instructed his former campaign chairman, Corey Lewandowski, who never actually worked for the Trump administration to help him out by trying to convince Sessions to unrecuse and to have Sessions limit the investigation to look into future foreign interference, not what happened in 2016. But what's really odd is that after spending pages and pages in the report on Trump's corrupt motive to obstruct the investigation by firing Jeff Sessions, it doesn't say anything when Trump



actually fires him. Trump finally pulled the trigger to fire Sessions on November 7, 2018, the day after the GOP lost the house in the midterm.

[Newscast:](#)

This is an NBC news special report. Here's Lester Holt.

Lester Holt: Good day. we're coming on the air with news that Jeff Sessions, the US Attorney General is stepping down, apparently at the request of President Trump, issuing a letter of resignation.

[Newscast:](#)

They're saying that the White House received the resignation letter from Sessions earlier today, and the president has accepted it.

Max Bergmann:

When Trump named who would be taking over the Justice Department, it became obvious that Trump had fired Sessions to mess with the Russia investigation. Instead of going through the normal chain of command and just making the number two, the deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein, the acting attorney general, Trump ignored the chain of command. Instead, he installed Sessions' chief of staff, a guy named Matt Whitaker, to be the acting attorney general. He'd been a US attorney for a few years in the early 2000s, but his most recent job had been for a company that literally sold toilets and hot tubs.

[Matt Whitaker:](#)

It's a unique design that's going to help lots of people that have mobility issues, get in and use their hot tub in a safe manner.

Max Bergmann:

The company had eventually shut down for defrauding consumers. It was a bizarre pick—until you looked at what Whitaker had to say about the Russia investigation.

[Matt Whitaker:](#)

So, I can see a scenario where Jeff Sessions is replaced with a recess appointment, and that attorney general doesn't fire Bob Mueller, but he just reduces the budget so low that his investigation grinds to absolute, almost a halt.

Max Bergmann:



Eventually, Trump named a permanent replacement: William Barr, who had much more of a pedigree than Whitaker. He had been an attorney general back in the Bush administration, and since then, he had become a well-known DC establishment lawyer. But there were also clear alarm bells about Barr. While he was serving under Bush, Barr had been a key player in the Iran Contra coverup, personally signing off on pardons that ended the investigation. Conservative *New York Times* columnist Williams Safire, even called Barr “the coverup general.” But there's more. When reporters dug into Barr's record, it started to look like he'd been applying for the job to be Trump's attorney general for more than a year. He told *The New York Times* that there was more basis for an investigation into this bizarre Uranium One conspiracy than the Russia investigation. He said he had no problem with Trump directing the DOJ to investigate his political opponents and said that not investigating the Clinton Foundation was “abdicating its responsibility.” Most damningly, he wrote an unsolicited 19-page memo to the Justice Department attacking the Mueller investigation and outlining the exact argument he would eventually use to say that Trump could not be charged with obstructing justice. As it turned out, all of that was enough to get Barr on the Trump administration's radar. Long before Trump fired Sessions, he even considered hiring Barr as his defense lawyer. But that's exactly what Barr ended up becoming when he became Trump's attorney general. After Mueller finally submitted his report in March, Barr released a four-page letter “summarizing” the report. It included just four partial sentences from the entire 448-page report. Barr's conclusion: no conspiracy, no collusion. And even though Mueller specifically said his report “does not exonerate Trump,” Barr said no obstruction. But Barr's letter worked. Rod Rosenstein played along, and as Comey attested way back in 2017, “Rod's a survivor.” In other words, he's going to go along to get along.

[Newscast:](#)

Now, a summary released by attorney general William Barr says Mueller found no collusion between President Trump or his campaign and Russia.

[Newscast:](#)

Lawyers are still waiting to see the report, but the President believes that he was completely cleared and he is saying so. Major, I hear they are celebrating at the White House today. Good morning.

Major Garrett: Good morning. In numerous conversations yesterday with lawyers and advisors, President Trump was by turns elated at the no collusion conclusion, but still seething that this investigation was launched in the first place, the President and many close to him still regard the Special Counsel probe as a nasty political power.



[Newscast:](#)

As for Mueller's central assignment, the letter says the Special Counsel did not find that the Trump campaign or anyone associated with it conspired or coordinated with the Russians to interfere in the election. "No involvement," Mueller concluded, with the Russian-led hacking into Democratic computers or the phony social-media accounts set up by Russian intelligence to spread disinformation. That's despite, the report says, multiple offers from Russia-affiliated individuals to assist the Trump campaign.

[Newscast:](#)

Jeffrey Toobin: Well certainly the most important thing is the total vindication of the President and his staff on the issue of collusion. I mean, there's just no other way around that. Um, that was the heart of this investigation, and Director Mueller and his team did not conclude directly or indirectly that the Trump campaign helped Russia.

Max Bergmann:

For three weeks until the report actually came out, Barr's letter dominated the headlines. It was exactly what Trump wanted: an attorney general willing to sacrifice his own reputation, to go all in protecting his client, to protecting Trump. Barr even gave a press conference just minutes before the Mueller Report came out where he repeatedly lied about its conclusion.

[Attorney General William Barr:](#)

So that's the bottom line. After nearly two years of investigation, thousands of subpoenas, hundreds of warrants and witness interviews, the Special Counsel confirmed that the Russian government sponsored efforts to illegally interfere with the 2016 presidential election, but did not find that the Trump campaign or other Americans colluded in those efforts. The Russian government sought to interfere in our election process, but thanks to the special counsel's thorough investigation, we now know that the Russian operatives who perpetrated these schemes did not have the cooperation of President Trump or the Trump campaign, or the knowing assistance of any other American, for that matter.

Max Bergmann:

Barr made sure that Trump controlled the narrative so the public wouldn't quite understand just how damning the Mueller Report actually was. Because of Barr and Rosenstein, there are real questions of how the Mueller investigation was managed and how it ended. Trump's team members deleted hundreds or even thousands of texts and emails, and used encrypted apps to keep their messages secret from Mueller's team. They coordinated their stories. They lied to



Congress. Potential witnesses like Sergei Millian, Konstantin Kilimnik, and Joseph Mifsud fled the country to avoid having to tell investigators what they knew. Trump spent months stonewalling and ultimately managed to avoid sitting down with Mueller, as did his children—even Don Jr., who never had to answer Mueller's questions about that June 9 meeting. Molly Claflin, who we interviewed from the Senate Judiciary, did, but Mueller did not. There are questions as to why no additional charges were brought against people like Erik Prince, who clearly seem to have lied to Congress. Outside of Trump Tower Moscow, Mueller says nothing about Trump's finances. This has meant they are important gaps in Mueller's report. It looks like his investigation was constrained. And we still don't know who that mysterious foreign company was that Mueller sought records from, and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court. We don't know what that was about. And what are the 14 other criminal investigations that Mueller referred? The end of the Mueller investigation and the release of his report provided a ton of answers, but it also raised a whole lot of additional questions.

-Break-

Max Bergmann:

We started this series talking about the first six months of 2017, and how the Russia scandal became real in American minds. But now, two and half years later, we can do an after-action. We can do an assessment. Where are we? Trump's still in office, yet the Russia scandal was real. He did it. And as we ended Episode 10 and closed out our assessment of the election, we concluded that basically everybody failed. The FBI failed, the media, the Obama administration, and the Clinton campaign failed. Similarly, at the end of the Mueller investigation, after he has testified, we see a lot of failure. First: Robert Mueller and his team. It is harsh to say that Mueller failed. The report he delivered is the most damning report ever written about a president. It shows a ton of collusion, all pointing to a vast conspiracy and it delivers the crimes, the obstruction. The report is clearly an impeachment referral meant to be used by Congress to impeach him. But that said, the report is without a doubt maddening. It uses double negatives that hide the meaning. It says the report could not exonerate him. Why didn't you just say he did it? It has tons of convoluted sentences. Instead of providing a clear narrative in Volume One, as it does in Volume Two, the Mueller report dissembles all the hundreds of contacts with Russia and breaks them down individually, giving them no context. Mueller could have written Volume One in a way that was way more damning by including what people knew and when they knew it. There are also legal questions. Mueller is extremely cautious and small-c conservative with how he applies the law in Volume One, and some legal scholars have noted that there are clear crimes in Volume One that aren't charged. Fordham law professor Jed Shugerman noted that Mueller's definition of conspiracy is way too narrow and that Mueller



should have used the definition of coordination under election law, which governs campaign coordination with super PACs and outside group. And there, the Trump campaign would have been in clear violation of election law. Shugerman writes, “It seems Mueller did not hire any legal experts with experience in campaign finance regulation. Given that this investigation was about campaign crimes, this is a revealing oversight with serious consequences.” The June 9 meeting is another area where the Trump campaign obtain something of value—dirt on a Clinton donor—yet Mueller said Donald Trump Jr. didn't know he was breaking the law. But since when is being a total idiot a defense to breaking the law? Mueller also didn't press to interview Donald Trump or even Donald Trump Jr. Far from being out to get Trump, this looks like an investigation that was constrained by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. They didn't look at the money after all. And Mueller's team didn't howl in protest; they abided. They seemed to operate like career climbing bureaucrats: working hard, doing their best, but not going to cause trouble with their superiors. When they were boxed in, they operated in the box, despite having the power, if not the obligation to the country, to break out of that box. And then there was Mueller's abysmal performance at the hearing. Mueller looked past his prime, with his thin grasp of the report and inability to articulate what was in it, ultimately resulted in a terrible spectacle. But Muller's feeble performance also raises a lot of questions about how strong a figure he would be in standing up to Bill Barr as he wrapped up the investigation. Ultimately, Mueller delivered an incredibly damning product, but he also failed to be the figure the country needed. But a huge part of the reason he failed is not because of him, but because he was built up to be an infallible, all-knowing, God-like figure that would solve all the country's problems, answer every question. And this part wasn't his fault. The press and all its former Justice Department lawyers that spammed America's airways for the past two years regaled us with stories about how great Bob Mueller was and assured us and again and again that Bob would solve all. The coverage of the investigation often became less about what happened, about Russia's attack, but about the horse race of the proceedings, about the legal effort, about who would go down when, about what all the legal developments meant. But I have to say, we always love to blame the press. But in this case, the media were stellar. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* broke story after story. But it wasn't just the big papers. Reporters like Natasha Bertrand, Betsy Woodruff, Tim Mak. *Buzzfeed* had the temerity to rightly publish that dossier and their reporters broke story after story on the Trump Tower Moscow. *Politico* staked out a DC courtroom on that mysterious Supreme Court case. *The Daily Beast* broke interesting story after interesting story. British reporting at *The Guardian* and UK Channel 4 brought down Cambridge Analytica and exposed Wikileaks. And Rachel Maddow night after night explained the most complex scandal in American history with precision and clarity. Her reporting, her show, were vital in translating the drip, drip, drip of media reporting into a clear narrative about what happened.



[Rachel Maddow:](#)

If Russia decided to interfere with our presidential election because they wanted something, uh, because they wanted to change the world so it's more like what they want, what are the things they want that they might try to get from the United States? What could they conceivably get from the United States if they could wave a magic wand?

Max Bergmann:

This was actually a shining moment for American journalism. They got the story. They informed the public. But informing the people is half the battle. The political side also matters. Ultimately, a critical failure was on the part of Trump's political opponents, on Democrats. It became a cliché to imagine this being the other way around. Imagine a Democrat had done what Trump did. Imagine what the Republicans would have done. Instead of manning the barricades, Democrats actually spent the past two and a half years avoiding making the Russia scandal a political issue. While there was a clear, crisp narrative coming from Trump—"no collusion, no obstruction"—Democrats never said he did it. They never said he colluded. Democrats talked about process, about Mueller, and about the need for an investigation. They mobilized to stop Trump from ending the investigation, but they rarely talked about what Trump did to merit said investigation. They never had a clear narrative of what happened. Now, you could defend Democrats and say, "well, this was all very unclear of how this would unfold." But it wasn't. It wasn't some huge mystery of where this was all headed. Here was Adam Schiff in March 2017 at a congressional hearing.

[Adam Schiff:](#)

Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence? Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible maybe more than possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnected, and not unrelated, and that the Russians used the same techniques to corrupt US persons that they employed in Europe and elsewhere. We simply don't know, not yet, and we owe it to the country to find out.

Max Bergmann:

It wasn't hard to figure out that there was a there there. You just had to look and not try to explain away all the information we were seeing. Now, we at The Moscow Project weren't geniuses. We got a lot wrong. We got too excited about some threads, really thought that Cohen went to Prague. It was clear that Trump did it. It was clear he conspired or colluded with Russia. It was clear from the outset. But the "it" in this case—being a Russian asset—was so hard for the country to get their heads around that they need their political leaders to guide



them, to tell them that's what was happening. The press pointed out what was occurring, what was happening with investigation, but it was ultimately up to political leaders to call a spade a spade, to make this clear to the American public. The key political moment came after the revelation of the June 9 meeting, which happened in July 2017. At this point, Democrats could have dropped the gloves and let the rhetoric fly. The Trump campaign had had a meeting in Trump Tower about collusion. They also had clear evidence of obstruction with the Comey firing. We at The Moscow Project even wrote a report in August 2017 called *Russiagate: The Depths of Collusion*, outlining much of what we have talked about in this podcast. This wasn't some mystery what had happened. We didn't need to wait for Mueller to call a spade a spade; it was all right there. It was all right there in July of 2017. But this was the response from Democrats:

[Interview:](#)

David Greene: So, have you now seen evidence of collusion?

Sen. Ben Cardin: Well, I think that is what the Special Counsel is investigating. I don't want to draw conclusions.

Max Bergmann:

Could you imagine during the Hillary Clinton email investigation, an endless stream of shocking stories and Republicans going to the microphone and saying, "I'm not going to make a judgment whether Hillary did anything wrong. I'm going to wait for the conclusion of the investigation." That may be responsible, but that's politically nuts. The Republicans used the very existence of an email investigation to say Clinton was corrupt, to tar her. They drove a message and it worked. A major problem in this whole affair politically for Democrats were Democratic political consultants who, not knowing how to talk about issues outside of the same ones that they polled over and over and over again, told politicians to stay away from the Russia scandal. It was too confusing, this Russia thing, too strange. Voters are confused. Pivot to healthcare. Talk about kitchen-table issues. Don't talk about the fact that the president of United States is compromised by Russia. The biggest political scandal in American history and Democratic political consultants say don't talk about it?

[Newscast:](#)

Mara Liasson: Instead of presenting the left-wing mirror image of Donald Trump, these candidates promise to get things done and dial down the partisanship. Former Tennessee governor Phil Bredesen is sending the same message as he tries to flip a Senate seat in Tennessee.



Phil Bredesen Ad: I'm running for the Senate because I have the right kind of experience and the actual track record that it will take to start working across party lines to fix the mess in Washington and bring common sense.

Mara Liasson: Joe Trippi, who ran Doug Jones' winning and soft-spoken campaign in Alabama says if he could make a generic ad for Democrats to use this year, that's pretty much what it would sound like.

Joe Trippi: I think it's just, it's the candidate talking directly to people and saying that there's too much chaos and division in Washington.

Mara Liasson: Trippi would skip the collage of porn-star headlines, and he would never even mention Donald Trump.

Joe Trippi: The mistake is, as soon as I add the word "Trump" at the top of that, the second you do it that way, it's a political attack on Trump and even these Republicans who have their doubts and are tired and exhausted by it, see it as exactly that: a personal partisan attack and you're just a Democrat. It's a mistake in my view to join in the polarization.

Mara Liasson: So, in a year when Donald Trump is dominating the conversation 24/7, and has become so identified with chaos and division, the best message for Democrats in competitive seats may be to not talk about him at all.

[Ted Deutch:](#)

I think we have to wait until we get the Mueller Report to provide some guidance.

[Jamie Raskin:](#)

We need to read the Muller report. It needs to be turned over in its entirety.

[Hakeem Jeffries:](#)

We have an ongoing investigation that we called for that is now being led by Special Counsel Bob Mueller. He's doing a tremendous job and running a fair and comprehensive investigation and in my view, and I think this is the view of the vast majority of members of the House Democratic Caucus, we should let Mueller be Mueller, complete his investigation, and then we can determine once he's issued his report what is appropriate to do thereafter.

Max Bergmann:

Republicans in Congress tarred Clinton for more than a year and made the public think she was



corrupt because she used a personal email account, something that Mike Pence, Jared, and Ivanka all did as well. But when voters went to the polls, they thought she was corrupt. I'm no political guru, but for those claiming to be ones, if you can't make political hay out of this, out of the president of the United States being a Russian asset, out of all this corruption, out of all these contacts with Russia, out of the biggest scandal in American history, than maybe you need to find a new line of work. And if you think I'm just Monday-morning quarterbacking the Democratic response and lack of message, here's me on Chris Hayes more than a year ago,

[Newscast:](#)

Chris Hayes: Max Bergmann, from the Center for American Progress, had a tweet storm last night that really caught my eye. Started like this: "Democrats are unbelievably losing the political fight over the Russia scandal. This is of their own doing. They've ceded the field and aren't fighting the fight. They want this to be bipartisan, but the GOP has decided to go on offense, witch hunt, deep state, liberal FBI." And of course, I think he's right. Despite all the coverage here and elsewhere of the Russia investigation, Americans are amazingly uninformed about the most basic facts. A new poll found that just 41% of registered voters know that Mueller has uncovered crimes. The rest, 59%, wrongly believed that Mueller has found nothing. Max Bergmann, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Give me your argument, Max.

Max Bergmann: So, my basic argument is I think Democrats have been in a tough spot, right? Democrats want to get to the bottom of this. They want to have a thorough investigation and they want the investigation to play out before they come to judgment. That is a responsible way of proceeding. The problem is the White House, President Trump, and his accomplices in Congress are going on offense. They're attacking the investigation. They're saying it's a witch hunt. They're attacking the credibility, and what we're seeing is that it's having an impact, that they're basically running a disinformation campaign that is throwing sand in the eyes of the American public, that's confusing the American public. And so, what's happened is that Democrats, by defending the investigation and really focusing on just defending Mueller, the public has lost sight of what this investigation is about.

Max Bergmann:

The lack of Democratic message meant the public lost the plot on the investigation. Polls continuously show the public doesn't know about the 37 indictments, and that he's indicted Trump's campaign chairman, his deputy campaign chairman, his national security advisor, his personal lawyer, and a foreign policy advisor. The problem with waiting for Mueller is that it allowed all of this to seem normal. And yet, despite this, when Mueller released his report, the



reaction was—well, it was explosive. It was an impeachment referral.

[Newscast:](#)

He was not approaching this, as he said, to come to a traditional prosecutorial decision and instead was gathering facts. And that I, I think it's impossible to read his report, especially when you read the executive summary that he wrote at the top of Volume Two, as anything other than an impeachment referral.

[Newscast:](#)

Chris Matthews: What did you make of Mueller today, Congresswoman?

Rep. Rashida Tlaib: Well, I think from the beginning the Mueller Report is an impeachment referral to the United States Congress.

[Newscast:](#)

Let's be clear, the Mueller Report is an impeachment referral.

Max Bergmann:

However, when you spend two years not talking about something, when you have no message, it's kind of hard to pivot on a dime. And right out of the gate, Democrats refused to make it clear that this report was as damning as it was. Steny Hoyer, the House Majority Leader, said impeachment wasn't worthwhile. Now there were exceptions; presidential candidates and members of Congress broke and came out for impeachment. But by not moving immediately to impeach the president after the Mueller Report came out, by calling for still more investigation, more process and not just saying, "He did it, oh my God, he did it," a signal was never sent to the American people that this was a big deal, that the report was damning, that Trump had to be removed immediately for the sake of national security, for the sake of the country. Instead, it was more, "We need to see more of the report. We need to get this witness and this document, do more investigation, process, process, process." Polling shows that when you ask Democratic voters, "What do you think of the report," you get a ton of different responses. But for Republicans, you get the president's clear message: no collusion, no obstruction, exonerated, witch hunt. Trump also seized on the hesitation to impeach. He realized he could just keep obstructing. Democrats thought they would be able to start calling witnesses and create a Watergate-like hearing process for the American people. But Trump and Barr stopped and stonewalled, exerted executive privilege, enforced long drawn out court fights. Trump's obstruction, his coverup, has never stopped.

So, a chicken-and-egg problem was created. Voters heard the deluge of news, but didn't have a Democratic party politically translating what all the news meant. And what it all meant was very



simple: He did it. He colluded. He betrayed the country. He's a crook. But with no message from Democrats and a clear message from the president of no collusion, no obstruction, witch hunt, the public didn't know what to think. It was confused. So the public didn't press their members of Congress and didn't tell pollsters how concerned they were about the Russia investigation. And part of the reason Democrats never wanted to go there and say that he did it is they were worried that saying collusion occurred would then force them to say they were for impeachment. In retrospect, Democrats actually lost the impeachment fight in the summer of 2017. After Comey was fired, after the June 9 meeting was revealed, that was the moment when Republicans were wobbling, when McConnell nervously pushed through a Russia sanctions bill, when Senate Intel actually held public hearings on Russian hacking. Republicans were nervous. But Democrats didn't seize the moment. They talked about process. And in the intervening two years, Trump has run a campaign, a deliberate messaging strategy, to avoid getting impeached. Trump not only sought to obstruct the investigation behind closed doors, he also went on a massive PR campaign. This was a counter-impeachment effort. Trump, knowing where the investigation was headed, because he did it, right away recognized that he was in an impeachment fight. He didn't start this campaign in 2019, he started it back in the beginning of his administration. According to Mueller, Trump engaged in a "second phase of conduct involving public attacks on the investigation, nonpublic efforts to control it, and efforts in both public and private to encourage witnesses not to cooperate with the investigation." In March 2017, the White House was enlisting members of Congress to dismiss the Russian allegations and to defend Trump. Remember back in Episode One when Devin Nunes, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, jumped out of the Uber saying he had a whistleblower and the whistleblower was the White House? That was part of a campaign to protect the President and every few months there were some big new conspiracy theory that House Republicans were throwing out there. There was Uranium One, illegal spying on the campaign, and that infamous Nunes memo. Trump attacked the investigation endlessly on Twitter and in statements.

[Donald Trump:](#)

I have this witch hunt constantly going on for over 12 months now.

[Newscast:](#)

The attacks come from all sides, Twitter and television, with the help of trusty surrogates.

[Rudy Giuliani:](#)

This is a completely tainted investigation.



[Newscast:](#)

The president sometimes starts the attacks on Twitter early in the morning to his 52 million followers, tweeting about something he saw on the Fox News morning program, Fox and Friends.

Max Bergmann:

He ran a disinformation campaign with his far-right allies in Congress, attacking Mueller, attacking the FBI, attacking the deep state. He succeeded in getting his base fully behind him. Fox News took their cue and got to work. This solidified and calcified Republican views, and the Republican attacks and conspiracy theories gave them something to go on. Trump was also unrelenting in attacking Republicans that crossed him. So Trump kept his base intact. He kept the Republican Party on side. While critiquing Democrats for not hitting Republicans and making them pay, the moral collapse of the Republican party is just astonishing. Critics of Trump—Lindsey Graham, Marco Rubio, Bob Corker, Mitt Romney—reversed themselves and backed Donald Trump. They backed a Russian asset. Democrats failed on the politics of this scandal, but Republicans failed morally. They failed the country again and again and again. And the thing is, they knew. Remember that leaked audio back in June 2016 with Kevin McCarthy, the current Minority Leader of the Republicans in the House of Representatives, when he said, “Trump is paid by Putin?” It became cliché on Capitol Hill for Republican politicians to say off the record that they thought Trump was awful. Conservative writer Eric Erickson talked to an anonymous Republican elected official in a DC supermarket.

[Newscast:](#)

Quotes like one that came out today from an unnamed Republican Congressman to conservative writer Eric Erickson quoted as saying, “I say a lot of bleep on TV defending him, but honestly, I wish the mother-effer would just go away. We’re going to lose the House, lose the Senate, and lose a bunch of states because of him. All his supporters will blame us for what we have or have not done, but he hasn’t led. He wakes up in the morning, bleeps all over Twitter, bleeps all over us, bleeps all over his staff, then hits golf balls. Bleep him. Of course, I can’t say that in public or I’d get run out of town.”

Max Bergmann:

But standing up to Trump, against the MAGA base, was too hard. And plus, he’s advancing a conservative agenda, giving us judges, passing a tax cut. Here’s the problem: America is a two-party system, and for the democracy to work, both parties have to be committed to the founding democratic principles. Political parties are the guardrails of our democracy. Power is going to change hands, and the parties are supposed to vet the candidates. Trump’s election



was an example of the guardrails failing. He took over the Republican Party. A Russian asset took over the Republican Party. So, what type of asset is Donald Trump? We use the term “asset” deliberately. It speaks volumes and yet it is vague. It is malleable. In the beginning of the show, in the teaser, we pose this as a dichotomy: He's either unwitting or winning. So, which is it? The unwitting asset, or “useful idiot” theory, is the most appealing or palatable conclusion, that Trump acts as Russia's asset but isn't aware he's doing it. He's not knowingly acting as an asset of Russia. But the problem I have with saying that Trump is unwitting is that he clearly isn't oblivious to what is going on. And when you're not oblivious, you kind of become witting. Here's Asha Rangappa.

Asha Rangappa:

I think most Americans would, if they were told by the FBI, “You’re being targeted for development recruitment by Russian intelligence”—you know, you might say, “Okay, I guess I'm not gonna talk to those people anymore,” and that effectively burns the Russians’ operation. Or, if they believe that he was amenable to it gives them a chance to overtly make clear in the investigative record that they let him know, and then, if he continued to work with them and stay in contact with them and continue that relationship, he is then doing it knowingly, knowing that he, he, you know, you can no longer say that he is unwitting at that point. He is volunteering to go down this path.

Max Bergmann:

Throughout this podcast we have noted again and again that the Trump campaign knew about Russia's efforts. They sought out Russian money. They wanted Russia's help in the campaign. Trump directed the creation of the back channel. Trump ran the Trump campaign, after all. He knew about the attack. He knew about the Russian conspiracy against the United States, and he encouraged the crime, and he did that wittingly. And once in office, despite all the political reasons in the world to distance himself from Russia, he refused. Trump's actions while he was in office—the meetings with Putin, the praise of Russia—weren't unwitting. Despite the Russia investigation, he took all those actions. He said all those things. So no, he's not unwitting. The polar opposite of being unwitting would be a controlled agent of Russia—not an asset, but an agent, working on the behalf of Russia at its direction. I don't think that this is the case either, and this is a point where I'm not trying to be cute. I don't think Trump is paid formally as a Russian agent. I think it's unlikely that Trump ever had or had to have a formal relationship with Russian intelligence. I don't think anything ever had to be that formal for Donald Trump. I don't think Trump thinks of himself as betraying the country. But even if Trump is not a controlled Russian agent, that doesn't mean he's not a witting asset. The maximalist theory of this whole



conspiracy is that Trump was compromised all the way back in 1987, when he went to the Soviet Union, or perhaps through his business ties to Russia, or perhaps on one of his other trips to Russia. And maybe the Russians went to him and said, “We got you. But don't worry Donald, we just want to work together like businessmen.” And so, they did. As relations broke down with the West, the Russians may have said, “Hey Donald, we need your help. You know, your president wasn't born in the United States. Here's the proof. You should tell the country.” And as money flowed into Donald Trump's golf courses, the Russians in 2015 may have said, “Hey Donald, you might want to think about running for president. And if you do, we got your back and you might get a really sweet Trump Tower out of it, especially if you say nice things about Russia.” And then Donald Trump runs, and he starts winning during the primary, and the Russians say, “Oh my God, our guy is winning. We can help him.” So they hacked the Democratic party and they go to Donald and they say, “Hey, we can help you,” and Trump says, “I love it.” And then the Russians help. Trump's inner circle exchange information through a secret server and through direct meetings. Trump passes polling data and Trump's sketchy data company, Cambridge Analytica, helps guide Russian messaging. And the Russians send back the data they didn't release, which help Trump's efforts. On Election Day, the Russians help the Trump campaign's voter suppression efforts by providing just a tad bit of chaos at some of the polling areas with heavy minority populations. Trump wins and Russians are like, “Hey, just hammer your free-riding allies and be your typically divisive racist self. Stop anti-Russian foreign policy measures and try to get rid of sanctions.” That's the maximalist theory, a theory about a conspiracy. But at a certain point, it stops being a theory because we start having the receipts to back it up, and I think a lot of it is pretty damn plausible, some bits more than others. Even the most innocent rationale for all of this, which I don't think is plausible, is still quite damning. That maybe that server didn't amount to anything, maybe the back channel led to nothing, and maybe all those meetings were just the Russians trying to co-opt the Trump campaign, and then the Trump campaign and the Trump transition team lied about all those meetings because they knew it looked bad. This is the minimalist view. But even if this is the truth, it's still extremely bad, because what it means is the Trump team was compromised. It means that the Russians had leverage over them. It means all these meetings and all those contacts could be held over the head of all these Trump officials. It gave the Russians incredible leverage, and the Russians know how to use their leverage. I also think it's quite plausible that nothing ever had to be said to Donald Trump. Trump just knew where his interest lied. Russia bailed him out. Russian money kept him afloat, effectively replaced his father's money. So ties built up, they developed, interests converged. What was good for Russia was good for Donald Trump, and Trump's ties to Russian money, to its oligarchs, meant that he is tied to the Kremlin. So he became a public figure, pushes birtherism, ran for president, and they wanted to support him. And the Russians are all in supporting him and Trump said, “I'd love it.” And so they collude and conspire, and in



doing that, the Russians have him compromised even more. But perhaps it never even has to be stated. They don't even have to wield what they have on Trump, because Trump knows, because they're in this together, he wants to help Russia. There's a saying in government: Where you stand depends on where you sit. And what this means is that the office that people work in, they tend to come and represent those views. Trump stands with Russia because that's where his interests lie. And in some ways that makes Trump even scarier than someone who goes down a path of betrayal, someone who becomes an actual agent of a foreign country. Because people who go down a path of betrayal, who go down that treasonous path, often face a terrible choice. They are broke or they are blackmailed and they don't want to lose their family or their job, and so they decide to betray the country. But I don't think Trump ever had to make a decision to go down the treasonous path to betray the country. He just did it naturally, it was in his interest to do it, because at his core he is corrupt. He does what's in his interests in no one else's. Here's Asha Rangappa.

Asha Rangappa:

I recruited people who, essentially they were committing treason against their country. And, you know, it's a careful process because you really need to help them rationalize the path, that choice as they're making it, and let them believe that they are the one making it. Of course it's, it's actually harder when people see it as a choice as you mentioned. When they really see that they are kind of crossing over, you know that path is going to be longer, whereas, if that's not even a consideration, if that's not even a part of their moral compass at all, then really all you have to do is just entice them or pull the puppet strings, because they are really just looking out for their own gain or whatever it is that motivates them. And that's why I said that the latter is actually scarier, because you're not, you're not dealing with someone who has buried guilt, or regret, or shame or any, any of those kinds of emotions in some recesses of their mind. They actually just don't have those kinds of emotions.

Max Bergmann:

Here's John Sipher, former Deputy Bureau Chief for the CIA in Moscow.

John Sipher:

If I was assessing him as an intelligence target like we mentioned before, I mean you're looking at someone as you, as you start to understand who has very little value system, right? He appears to be comfortable in this sort of gangster-y system where anything that benefits me is automatically okay. Some people have looked at him and said, there's this, that he might even have sort of that sickness. He's narcissistic and, and narcissistic people, same thing, anything that benefits me is automatically okay. If you put that into the political space, you know, for



him, you know, he's not a career politician, he doesn't understand government, he doesn't understand what governing involves, but he does understand winning and losing, and if to him, the real enemy is the Democrats, the real enemy, or Hillary Clinton, the real enemy, then it is, and you don't have a value system, you don't understand that frankly our real enemies are foreign adversaries, not, you know, we're all on the same side even though our parties are against each other. If you have internalized that your real enemy are the Democrats, then working with the Russians is okay. I'm doing this to, to serve a bigger, better truth. And therefore, in his mind, I'm sure people offered him things, gave him things, and to him it was, "Why not? Of course. Like anything, anything to make me win, anything to hurt Hillary Clinton is therefore okay." If you take that, the next step is, is Trump, uh, a Russian asset is he someone the Russians would cultivate for that purpose? I think they can almost manipulate him without him being sort of a, you know, a controlled source. Cause we talked earlier about what you look for in someone who might spy for you, a controlled source. He's got every vulnerability, he's, he's got everything that you would try to manipulate.

Max Bergmann:

At the core of this, at its base, is simply a corrupt man is offered a corrupt deal—Russian money and Russian interference in a campaign—and he takes it. In fact, he loves it. Trump is so corrupt, so without any moral compass, that he was willing to do anything to advance his interests, to win by any means whether that meant setting up a secret back channel to Russian hackers, encouraging an attack on America, or deflecting attention from the Russians that were committing this crime against the United States. And he had no qualms about lying about it again and again and again. Trump's corruption makes him a witting asset. So, while I don't think Trump is an agent of Russia, I don't think he is unwitting. I think he is a witting asset, and that he conspired with Russia, and that he is extremely compromised. Think about it this way. The Kremlin right now, today, knows more about Trump's ties to Russia than Robert Mueller does.

-Break-

Max Bergmann:

Donald Trump's ties to Russia, the Russia scandal, Russian interference, all now seem somewhat normal. We've been living with the scandal for three years now. Donald Trump's connections to Russia are now tired. We know already. We get it. But this is what is so dangerous. A Russian asset became president of the United States and the country has seemingly accepted it and now we are starting to move on, to turn the page to the next scandal and to focus on the next election. Russian-American writer Masha Gessen immediately after the 2016 election wrote an article in the *New York Review of Books*. It was titled "Autocracy:



Rules for Survival,” and in it she said, “In the face of the impulse to normalize, it is essential to maintain one's capacity for shock.” But the problem is, it's actually really hard to maintain a capacity for outrage, to not adapt to a new environment. You get used to things. We live our lives and get used to a series of shocking events. Every time something shocking happens, we express concern and outrage and then we get on with living our lives. That's healthy. But this is also how democracies die today—not by a military coup or by communist takeover, but by the slow erosion of democratic norms and institutions by elected leaders who make the unthinkable thinkable and gradually sap our outrage, our capacity for shock. The damage from having a Russian asset in the White House has been mitigated by career government employees, by Trump's own incompetence, by the existence of the Russia investigation, but these constraints are loosening. Trump has found his loyalists, and he and his people have started to figure out how government works. They're learning. Attorney General William Barr is now at the Justice Department, and he's seemingly making the investigations into Trump go away and he's starting to investigate the investigators. I talked with Jonathan Winer, former State Department Envoy to Libya, and we talked about his experience investigating Iran-Contra in the Senate in the 1980s, and there's real lessons for today.

Jonathan Winer:

In 1984, we stumbled into what became known as Iran-Contra. And we had these various sources from outside Washington telling us that Oliver North was running a secret Contra program in violation of US law, which forbid it, that had been penetrated by drug traffickers and gun runners, that some of the drug money was going into the Contra movement, that US assets were being used in part to move the drugs and move the guns. That was the gist of it. That investigation was systematically attacked by people trying to protect President Reagan and Vice President Bush. It was systematically discredited. We were viewed to be conspiracy theorists for suggesting these things. Congressman Dick Cheney, who was then the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, said, “All of this stuff has been investigated and disproven, all a bunch of crap.” We wound up under investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee for bribing witnesses to make up the allegations of the activity of the NSC in support of the Contras. Needless to say, we had not bribed any witnesses, and the investigation never went anywhere, there was no place for it to go. And then finally, when a plane was shot down over Managua, the true story came out and what became known as the Iran Contra Affair began to be exposed and became a big scandal. What I saw in that period of time is reality getting flipped on its head again and again and again by people who were the actual conspirators to challenge and attack anyone who would expose them, to use their power to deny the truth and to hide from the truth.



Max Bergmann:

Trump has been a master of the politics of scandal. In 2020, my bet is Trump will use the Russian investigation to his benefit. It'll be about how the Deep State tried to stop Trump from changing Washington. And how does an incumbent run as a change agent? Well, "look at how they, the elites, the liberals, the Deep State bureaucrats tried to stop me, and they failed, and now I've beaten them, reelect me and I will change Washington. I will change America."

Political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt explain in their book *How Democracies Die* that "The tragic paradox of the electoral route to authoritarianism is that democracy's assassins use the very institutions of democracy gradually, subtly, even legally, to kill it." They conclude that "Our constitutional system, while older and more robust than any in history, is vulnerable to the same pathologies that have killed democracy elsewhere. Democracy is a shared enterprise, its fate depends on all of us." We think today that democracy is normal, but it's not, it's a historical aberration. Democratic self-government remains a grand experiment, and the current democratic age is a unique blip in the long historical timeline. When Ben Franklin quipped, "A republic, if you can keep it," it was a real question. In 1992, after the Cold War ended, American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama wrote his famous book *The End of History*. After hundreds of years of searching for the best form of government, the best system, we found it, and it was liberal democracy. History is over; we found what we are looking for. But Fukuyama concluded his book by saying, "Experience suggests that if men cannot struggle on behalf of a just cause because that just cause was victorious in an earlier generation, then they will struggle against the just cause. They will struggle for the sake of struggle. If the greater part of the world in which they live in is characterized by peaceful and prosperous liberal democracy, then they will struggle against that peace and prosperity, and against democracy." We are facing the greatest, most serious threat to our democracy since World War Two.

[Donald Trump:](#)

Then I have in Article Two, where I have the right to do whatever I want as president, but I don't even talk about that.

Max Bergmann:

Russia wants to undermine our democracy, and their asset is in the White House. As we approach 2020, we should feel dread. Putin has the green light to interfere again. His candidate is on the ballot, after all, and unlike in 2016, his candidate controls the reigns of the United States government. Putin, or Saudi Arabia, or any other Middle Eastern state desperate to have Trump win, won't be deterred. Trump has not only invited future interference, he has actively sought it out, even going as far as to push Ukraine to dig dirt up on a presidential candidate. Trump and his Republican allies in Congress like Mitch McConnell have also blocked every effort



to protect our election system, and Trump has neutered the government's ability to respond to foreign interference. And Trump has even signaled that he's all about future collusion. With no Justice Department to worry about, with a campaign willing to do anything, and with Trump desperate to stay in office—because if he leaves office, he might even go to jail—we are staring at the abyss. In his testimony before Congress, Robert Mueller was asked if Russia would try to interfere again. He said:

[Robert Mueller:](#)

They're doing it as we sit here and they expect to do it during the next campaign.

Max Bergmann:

But despite all of this, what gives me hope is that we know. We know what's coming. We know what's at stake. In 2016, we didn't think Trump could win, now we know. In 2016, America was subjected to a surprise attack on our democracy by a hostile foreign power, by Russia. It was the most successful espionage operation in history. The attack was decisive in electing a man who received almost 2.9 million fewer votes and is the most unpopular president in history. It was successful because we didn't know what a bot or troll was, or about election interference, or about foreign interference. We didn't know that this was possible. But in 2020, we know what to expect. We know what's at stake, and we know this is coming. We are aware and now we must be vigilant. Complacency kills democracy and in 2020 we cannot be complacent. Our democratic future is at stake. I'm Max Bergmann, and this has been The Asset.

Producer:

The Asset is a production of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, Protect the Investigation, and District Productive, Paul “Woody” Woodhall, Max Bergmann, and Andrea Purse Executive Producers, and Peter Ogburn Senior Producer. The Asset is written by Max Bergmann and the good people at The Moscow Project, Jeremy Venook, Talia Dessel, and Siena Cicarelli, and the team at Protect the Investigation and Paul “Woody” Woodhall and his cohort at District Productive. To learn more about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, go to themoscowproject.org and protecttheinvestigation.org. Please subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts or your favorite podcast app and please leave a rating and a review. Thank you.

[Clint Watts:](#)

Follow the trail of dead Russians. There's been more dead Russians in the past three months that are tied to this investigation who have assets in banks all over the world.