



Read the full transcript of the Helsinki press conference

Standing next to Putin, Trump slammed US intelligence agencies, Democrats, and the Mueller investigation.

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President Trump met with Russian President Putin at the Helsinki summit on July 16, 2018. | CNN

President Donald Trump met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday to discuss relations between the two countries. The press conference that followed was striking. Asked to denounce Russian interference in the 2016 election, Trump changed the subject to Hillary Clinton's emails. Trump refused, despite being asked multiple times, to criticize Putin, blamed the US for tensions with Russia, and repeatedly criticized the investigation into whether his campaign colluded with

Russia in 2016.

A rush transcript of the press conference follows.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: Thank you so much. Shall we start working, I guess?

Distinguished Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, negotiations with the President of the United States, Donald Trump, took place in a frank and business-like atmosphere. I think we can call it a success and a very fruitful round of negotiations. We carefully analyzed the current status, the present and the future of the Russia-United States relationship — key issues of the global agenda.

It's quite clear to everyone that the bilateral relationship are going through a complicated stage. Yet those impediments, the current tension, the tense atmosphere essentially have no solid reason behind it. The Cold War is a thing of past. The era of acute ideological confrontation of the two countries is a thing of the remote past — it's a vestige of the past. The situation of the world changed dramatically. Today both Russia and the United States face a whole new set of challenges. Those include a dangerous maladjustment of mechanisms for maintaining international security and stability, regional crises, the creeping threat of terrorism and transnational crime. It's the snowballing problems in the economy, environmental risks and other sets of challenges. We can only cope with these challenges if we join the ranks and work together. Hopefully, we will reach this understanding with our American partners.

Today's negotiations reflected our joint wish, our joint wish with President Trump, to redress this negative situation in the bilateral relationship, outline first steps for improving this relationship to restore the acceptable level of trust, and going back to the previous level of interaction on all mutual interests and issues.

As major nuclear powers, we bear special responsibility for maintaining international security. It's vital — and we mentioned this during the negotiations — it's crucial that we fine-tune the dialogue on strategic stability and global security and

nonproliferation on weapons of mass destruction. We submitted to our American colleagues a note with a number of specific suggestions. We believe it necessary to work together further to interact on the disarmament agenda, military and technical cooperation. This includes the extension of the Strategic Offensive Arms Limitation Treaty. It's a dangerous situation with the global American anti-missile defense system. It's the implementation issue with the INF Treaty. And of course the agenda of non-placement of weapons in space.

We favor the continued cooperation in counterterrorism and maintaining cybersecurity. I'd like to point out specifically that our special services are cooperating quite successfully together. The most recent example is their operational cooperation within the recently concluded World football Cup. In general, the contacts among our special services should be put to system-wide basis, should be brought to a systemic framework. I reminded President Trump about the suggestion to re-establish the working group on anti-terrorism. We mentioned a plethora of regional crises, not always that our postures dovetail exactly, and yet the overlapping and mutual interests abound. We have to look for points of contact and interact closer in a variety of international forums.

Clearly, we mentioned the regional crisis, for instance, Syria. As far as Syria is concerned, the task of establishing peace and reconciliation in this country could be the first showcase example of the successful joint work. Russia and the United States apparently can proactively take leadership on this issue and organize the interaction to overcome humanitarian crisis and help Syrian refugees go back to their homes. In order to accomplish this level of successful cooperation in Syria, we have all the required components. Let me remind you that both Russian and American military have acquired a useful experience of coordination of their action, established the operational channels of communication, which permitted [us] to avoid dangerous incidents and unintentional collisions in the air and on the ground. Also, crushing terrorists in the southwest of Syria: The south of Syria should be brought to the full compliance with the treaty of 1974 about the separation of forces, about separation of forces of Israel and Syria. This will bring peace to Golan Heights. And bring more peaceful relationship between Syria and Israel and also to provide security of the state of Israel. Mr. President paid special attention to the issue during today's

negotiations. I would like to confirm that Russia is interested in this development and this will act accordingly. Thus far, we will make a step toward creating a lasting peace in compliance with the respective resolutions of security council, for instance the resolution 338.

We're glad that the Korean peninsula issue is starting to resolve. To a great extent, it was possible thanks to the personal engagement of President Trump who opted for dialogue instead of confrontation.

We also mentioned our concern about the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. Well, the US — our US counterparts are aware of our posture. Let me remind you that thanks to the Iranian nuclear deal, Iran became most controlled country in the world. It submitted to the control of IAEA. It effectively ensures the exclusively peaceful nature of Iranian nuclear program and strengthens the non-proliferation regime.

While we discussed the internal Ukrainian crisis, we paid special attention to the bonafide implementation of Minsk agreements by Kiev. At the same time, the United States could be more decisive in nudging the Ukrainian leadership and encourage it to work actively on this.

We paid more attention to economic ties and economic cooperation. It's clear that both countries, the businesses of both countries are interested in this. The American delegation was one of the largest delegations in the St. Petersburg economic forum. It featured over 500 representatives from American businesses. We agreed, me and President Trump, we agreed to create a high-level working group that would bring together captains of Russian and American business. After all, entrepreneurs and businessmen know better how to articulate this successful business cooperation. We'll let them think and make their proposals and suggestions in this regard.

Once again, President Trump mentioned the issue of the so-called interference of Russia in the American elections. I had to reiterate things I said several times, including during our personal contacts, that the Russian state has never interfered and is not going to interfere into internal American affairs, including the election

process. Any specific material, if such things arise, we are ready to analyze together. For instance, we can analyze them through the joint working group on cyber security, the establishment of which we discussed during our previous contacts.

Clearly, it's past time we restore our cooperation in the cultural area in the humanitarian area. As far as that, I think you know that recently we hosted the American congressmen delegation. Now it's portrayed almost as a historic event, although it should have been just a current affair, just business as usual. In this regard, we mentioned this proposal to the president. We have to think about practicalities of our cooperation, but also about the rationality, the logic of it. We have to engage experts on bilateral relationship who know history and the background of our relationship. The idea is to create an expert council that would include political scientists, prominent diplomats and former military experts in both countries who would look for points of contact between the two countries. That would look for ways of putting the relationship on the trajectory of growth.

In general, we are glad with the outcome of our first full-scale meeting because previously we only had a chance to talk briefly on international forums. We had good conversation with President Trump. I hope that we start to understand each other better. I'm grateful to Donald for it. Clearly, there are some challenges left — we were not able to clear all the backlog. But I think that we made the first important step in this direction. In conclusion, I want to point out that this atmosphere of cooperation is something that we are especially grateful for to our Finnish hosts. We're grateful for Finnish people and Finnish leadership for what they have done. I know that we have caused some inconvenience to Finland and we apologize for it. Thank you for your attention.

DONALD TRUMP: Thank you very much. Thank you. I have just concluded a meeting with President Putin on a wide range of critical issues for both of our countries. We had direct, open, deeply productive dialogue. It went very well. Before I begin, I want to thank President Niinistö of Finland for graciously hosting today's summit. President Putin and I were saying how lovely it was and what a great job they did. I also want to congratulate Russia and President Putin for having done such an excellent job in hosting the World Cup. It was really one of the best ever. Your team

also did very well. It was a great job.

I'm here today to continue the proud tradition of bold American diplomacy. From the earliest days of our republic, American leaders have to understand that diplomacy and engagement is preferable to conflict and hostility. A productive dialogue is not only good for the United States and good for Russia, but it is good for the world.

The disagreements between our two countries are well-known. President Putin and I discussed them at length today. But if we're going to solve many of the problems facing our world, then we're going to have to find ways to cooperate in pursuit of shared interests. Too often, in both recent past and long ago, we have seen the consequences when diplomacy is left on the table. We have also seen the benefits of cooperation. In the last century, our nations fought alongside one another in the second World War. Even during the tensions of the Cold War, when the world looked much different than it does today, the United States and Russia were able to maintain a strong dialogue. Our relationship has never been worse than it is now. However, that changed as of about four hours ago. I really believe that. Nothing would be easier politically than to refuse to meet, to refuse to engage. But that would not accomplish anything.

As president, I cannot make decisions on foreign policy in a futile effort to appease partisan critics or the media or Democrats who want to do nothing but resist and obstruct. Constructive dialogue between the United States and Russia forwards the opportunity to open new pathways toward peace and stability in our world. I would rather take a political risk in pursuit of peace than to risk peace in pursuit of politics. As president, I will always put what is best for America and what is best for the American people.

During today's meeting, I addressed directly with President Putin the issue of Russian interference in our elections. I felt this was a message best delivered in person. Spent a great deal of time talking about it. President Putin may very well want to address it and very strongly, because he feels very strongly about it. And he has an interesting idea.

We also discussed one of the most critical challenges facing humanity, nuclear proliferation. I provided an update on my meeting last month with Chairman Kim on the denuclearization of North Korea. After today, I am very sure that President Putin and Russia want very much to end that problem. Going to work with us. I appreciate that commitment.

The president and I also discussed the scourge of radical Islamic terrorism. Both Russia and the United States have suffered horrific terrorist attacks. We have agreed to maintain open communication between our security agencies to protect our citizens from this global menace. Last year, we told Russia about a planned attack in St. Petersburg and they were able to stop it cold. They found them. They stopped them. There was no doubt about it. I appreciated President Putin's phone call afterwards to thank me.

I also emphasized the importance of placing pressure on Iran to halt its nuclear ambitions and to stop its campaign of violence throughout the area, throughout the Middle East. As we discussed at length, the crisis in Syria is a complex one. Cooperation between our two countries has the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives. I also made clear that the United States will not allow Iran to benefit from our successful campaign against ISIS. We have just about eradicated ISIS in the area. We also agreed that representatives from our national security councils will meet to follow-up on all of the issues we addressed today and to continue the progress we have started right here in Helsinki.

Today's meeting is only the beginning of a longer process. But we have taken the first steps toward a brighter future and one with a strong dialogue and a lot of thought. Our expectations are grounded in realism, but our hopes are grounded in Americans' desire for friendship, cooperation, and peace. I think I can speak on behalf of Russia when I say that also. President Putin, I want to thank you again for joining me for these important discussions and for advancing open dialogue between Russia and the United States. Our meeting carries on a long tradition of diplomacy between Russia, the United States for the greater good of all. This was a very constructive day. This was a very constructive few hours that we spent together. It's in the interest of both of our countries to continue our conversation. And we have agreed to do so. I'm

sure we will be meeting again in the future often, and hopefully, we will solve every one of the problems that we discussed today. Again, President Putin, thank you very much.

REPORTER: (Alexei Meshkov from Interfax Information Agency): Good afternoon. I have a question to President trump. During your recent European tour, you mentioned that the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline makes Europe [a] hostage of Russia. You suggested that you could free Europe from this by supplying American LNG (liquefied natural gas). This cold winter showed the current model, current mechanism of supply of fuel to Europe is quite viable. At the same time, as far as I know, the US had to buy Russian gas for Boston.

I have a question. The implementation of your idea has political tinge to it or is this practical one? Because there will be a gap formed in the supply and demand mechanism and first it's the consuming countries who will fall into this gap.

The second question, before the meeting with President Putin, you called him an adversary, a rival. And yet you expressed hope [that] you will be able to bring this relationship to a new level. Did you manage to do this?

TRUMP: I called him a competitor and a good competitor he is. I think the word competitor is a compliment. I think that we will be competing when you talk about the pipeline. I'm not sure necessarily that it's in the best interests of Germany or not. That was a decision that they made. We will be competing. As you know, the United States is now, or soon will be, but I think it is right now the largest in the oil and gas world. So we're going to be selling LNG. We'll have to be competing with the pipeline. I think we will compete successfully. Although there is a little advantage locationally. I wish them luck. I discussed with Angela Merkel in pretty strong tones. But, I also know where they're coming from. They have a very close source. We will see how that all works out. But we have lots of sources now. The United States is much different than it was a number of years ago when we weren't able to extract what we can extract today. So, today, we're number one in the world at that. I think we will be out there competing very strongly. Thank you very much.

PUTIN: If I may, I throw in some two cents. We talked to Mr. President, including this subject as well. We are aware of the stance of President Trump. I think that we as major oil and gas power and I think the United States is a major gas and oil power as well. We can work together on regulation of international markets because neither of us is actually interested in the plummeting of the prices. And the consumers will suffer as well. And the consumers in the United States will suffer as well. And the shale gas production will suffer. Because beyond a certain price bracket, it's no longer profitable to produce gas. Nor we are interested in driving prices up, because it will drain live juices from all other sectors of the economy. We do have space for cooperation here, as the first thing.

Then about the North Stream, Mr. President voiced his concerns about the possibility of disappearance of transit through Ukraine. I reassured Mr. President that Russia stands ready to maintain this transit. Moreover, we stand ready to extend this transit contract that's about to expire next year in case. If the dispute between the economic entities — dispute will be settled in Stockholm arbitration court.

REPORTER (Jeff Mason from Reuters): Thank you. Mr. President, you tweeted this morning that it's US Foolishness, stupidity and the Mueller probe that is responsible for the decline in US Relations with Russia. Do you hold Russia at all accountable for anything in particular? If so, what would you consider them that they are responsible for?

TRUMP: Yes, I do. I hold both countries responsibility. I think the United States has been foolish. I think we have all been foolish. We should have had this dialogue a long time ago, a long time frankly before I got to office. I think we're all to blame. I think that the United States now has stepped forward along with Russia. We're getting together and we have a chance to do some great things, whether it's nuclear proliferation in terms of stopping, we have to do it — ultimately, that's probably the most important thing that we can be working on.

I do feel that we have both made some mistakes. I think that the probe is a disaster for our country. I think it's kept us apart. It's kept us separated. There was no collusion at all. Everybody knows it. People are being brought out to the fore. So far

that I know, virtually, none of it related to the campaign. They will have to try really hard to find something that did relate to the campaign. That was a clean campaign. I beat Hillary Clinton easily and, frankly, we beat her. And I'm not even saying from the standpoint — we won that race. It's a shame there could be a cloud over it. People know that. People understand it. The main thing — and we discussed this also — is zero collusion. It has had a negative impact upon the relationship of the two largest nuclear powers in the world. We have 90 percent of nuclear power between the two countries. It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous what's going on with the probe.

REPORTER (Jeff Mason from Reuters): For President Putin if I could follow up as well. Why should Americans and why should President Trump believe your statement that Russia did not intervene in the 2016 election given the evidence that US Intelligence agencies have provided? Will you consider extraditing the 12 Russian officials that were indicted last week by a US Grand jury.

TRUMP: Well I'm going to let the president answer the second part of that question.

As you know, the concept of that came up perhaps a little before, but it came out as a reason why the Democrats lost an election, which frankly, they should have been able to win, because the electoral college is much more advantageous for Democrats, as you know, than it is to Republicans. We won the electoral college by a lot. 306 to 223, I believe. That was a well-fought battle. We did a great job.

Frankly, I'm going to let the president speak to the second part of your question. But, just to say it one time again and I say it all the time, there was no collusion. I didn't know the president. There was nobody to colluded with. There was no collusion with the campaign. Every time you hear all of these 12 and 14 — it's stuff that has nothing to do — and frankly, they admit, these are not people involved in the campaign. But to the average reader out there, they are saying, well maybe that does. It doesn't. Even the people involved, some perhaps told mis-stories. In one case the FBI said there was no lie. There was no lie. Somebody else said there was. We ran a brilliant campaign. And that's why I'm president. Thank you.

PUTIN: As to who is to be believed, who is not to be believed: you can trust no one.

Where did you get this idea that President Trump trusts me or I trust him? He defends the interests of the United States of America and I do defend the interests of the Russian Federation. We do have interests that are common. We are looking for points of contact.

There are issues where our postures diverge and we are looking for ways to reconcile our differences, how to make our effort more meaningful. We should not proceed from the immediate political interests that guide certain political powers in our countries. We should be guided by facts. Could you name a single fact that would definitively prove the collusion? This is utter nonsense — just like the president recently mentioned. Yes, the public at large in the United States had a certain perceived opinion of the candidates during the campaign. But there's nothing particularly extraordinary about it. That's usual thing.

President Trump, when he was a candidate, he mentioned the need to restore the Russia/US relationship and it's clear that certain parts of American society felt sympathetic about it and different people could express their sympathy in different ways. Isn't that natural? Isn't it natural to be sympathetic towards a person who is willing to restore the relationship with our country, who wants to work with us?

We heard the accusations about it. As far as I know, this company hired American lawyers and the accusations doesn't have a fighting chance in the American courts. There's no evidence when it comes to the actual facts. So we have to be guided by facts, not by rumors.

Now, let's get back to the issue of this 12 alleged intelligence officers of Russia. I don't know the full extent of the situation. But President Trump mentioned this issue. I will look into it.

So far, I can say the following. Things that are off the top of my head. We have an existing agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, an existing treaty that dates back to 1999. The mutual assistance on criminal cases. This treaty is in full effect. It works quite efficiently. On average, we initiate about 100, 150 criminal cases upon request from foreign states.

For instance, the last year, there was one extradition case upon the request sent by the United States. This treaty has specific legal procedures we can offer. The appropriate commission headed by Special Attorney Mueller, he can use this treaty as a solid foundation and send a formal, official request to us so that we could interrogate, hold questioning of these individuals who he believes are privy to some crimes. Our enforcement are perfectly able to do this questioning and send the appropriate materials to the United States. Moreover, we can meet you halfway. We can make another step. We can actually permit representatives of the United States, including the members of this very commission headed by Mr. Mueller, we can let them into the country. They can be present at questioning.

In this case, there's another condition. This kind of effort should be mutual one. Then we would expect that the Americans would reciprocate. They would question officials, including the officers of law enforcement and intelligence services of the United States whom we believe have something to do with illegal actions on the territory of Russia. And we have to request the presence of our law enforcement.

For instance, we can bring up Mr. Browder in this particular case. Business associates of Mr. Browder have earned over \$1.5 billion in Russia. They never paid any taxes. Neither in Russia nor in the United States. Yet, the money escapes the country. They were transferred to the United States. They sent huge amount of money, \$400 million as a contribution to the campaign of Hillary Clinton. Well, that's their personal case. It might have been legal, the contribution itself. But the way the money was earned was illegal. We have solid reason to believe that some intelligence officers, guided these transactions. So we have an interest of questioning them. That could be a first step. We can extend also it. Options abound. They all can be found in an appropriate legal framework.

REPORTER (Jeff Mason from Reuters): President Putin, did you want President Trump to win the election and did you direct any of your officials to help him do that?

PUTIN: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. Because he talked about bringing the US/Russia relationship back to normal.

REPORTER (Ilya Petrenko from RT International): Mr. President, would you please go into the details of possibly any specific arrangements for the US to work together with Russia in Syria — if any of these arrangements were made today or discussed?

My question to President Putin in Russian. Since we brought up the issue of football, several times, I use the football language. Mr. Pompeo mentioned that when we talk about Syrian cooperation, the ball is in the Syrian court. Mr. Putin, in Russian court, is it true? How would you use this fact of having the ball?

TRUMP: Well, I guess I will answer the first part of the question. We have worked with Israel long and hard for many years, many decades. I think we have never, never has any country been closer than we are.

President Putin also is helping Israel. We both spoke with Bibi Netanyahu. They would like to do certain things with respect to Syria, having to do with the safety of Israel. In that respect, we absolutely would like to work in order to help Israel. Israel will be working with us. So both countries would work jointly. I think that when you look at all of the progress that's been made in certain sections with the eradication of ISIS, about 98 percent, 99 percent there, and other things that have taken place that we have done and that, frankly, Russia has helped us with in certain respects. But I think that working with Israel is a great thing. And creating safety for Israel is something that both President Putin and I would like to see very much.

One little thing I might add to that is the helping of people. Helping of people. Because you have such horrible. I've seen reports and I've seen pictures. I've seen just about everything. If we can do something to help the people of Syria get back into some form of shelter and on a humanitarian basis. That's what the word was, a humanitarian basis. I think both of us would be very interested in doing that. And we are. And we will do that. Thank you very much.

REPORTER (Ilya Petrenko from RT International): For now, no specific agreements, for instance, between the militaries?

TRUMP: Well, our militaries do get along. Our militaries have gotten along probably better than our political leaders for years. Our militaries do get along very well. They

do coordinate in Syria and other places. Okay? Thank you.

PUTIN: Yes, we did mention this. We mentioned the humanitarian trek of this issue. Yesterday, I discussed this with French president, Mr. Macron. And we reached an agreement that together with European countries, including France, we will step up this effort. On our behalf, we will provide military cargo aircraft to deliver humanitarian cargo. Today, I brought up this issue with President Trump. I think there's plenty of things to look into.

The crucial thing is that huge amount of refugees are in Turkey, in Lebanon, in Jordan, in the states that border or adjacent to Syria. If we help them, the migratory pressure upon the European states will be decreased many fold. I believe it's crucial from any point of view from humanitarian point of view, from the point of view of helping people, helping the refugees. And in general, I agree, I concur with President Trump, our military cooperate quite successfully together. They do get along and I hope they will be able to do so in [the] future. We will keep working in Russia, Turkey and Iran, which I informed President Trump.

But we do stand ready to link this effort to the so-called small group of states so that the process would be a broader one, it would be a multidimensional one. We will be able to maximize our fighting chance to gather ultimate success on the issue of Syria.

Speaking about having the ball in our court in Syria. President Trump has just mentioned that we have successfully concluded the world football cup. Speaking of the football, actually, Mr. President, I will give this ball to you and now the ball is in your court. [Applause] All the more that the United States will host the world cup in 2026.

TRUMP: That's right. Thank you very much. We do host it. We hope we do as good a job. That's very nice. That will go to my son, Barron. We have no question. Melania, here you go.

REPORTER (Jonathan Lemire from AP): Thank you. A question for each president. President Trump, you first. Just now President Putin denied having anything to do with the election interference in 2016. Every US intelligence agency has concluded

that Russia did.

My first question for you, sir, is who do you believe? My second question is would you now with the whole world watching tell President Putin — would you denounce what happened in 2016 and would you warn him to never do it again?

TRUMP: So let me just say that we have two thoughts. You have groups that are wondering why the FBI never took the server. Why haven't they taken the server? Why was the FBI told to leave the office of the democratic national committee? I've been wondering that. I've been asking that for months and months and I've been tweeting it out and calling it out on social media. Where is the server? I want to know, where is the server and what is the server saying? With that being said, all I can do is ask the question. My people came to me, Dan Coats came to me and some others and 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, but I really do want to see the server. But I have confidence in both parties. I really believe that this will probably go on for a while, but I don't think it can go on without finding out what happened to the server. What happened to the servers of the Pakistani gentleman that worked on the DNC? Where are those servers? They're missing. Where are they? What happened to Hillary Clinton's emails? 33,000 emails gone — just gone. I think in Russia they wouldn't be gone so easily. I think it's a disgrace that we can't get Hillary Clinton's 33,000 emails. So I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that president Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today. And what he did is an incredible offer. He offered to have the people working on the case come and work with their investigators, with respect to the 12 people. I think that's an incredible offer. Okay thank you.

PUTIN: I'd like to add something to this. After all, I was an intelligence officer myself. And I do know how dossiers are made up. Just a second. That's the first thing. Not the second thing. I believe that Russia is a democratic state and I hope you're not denying this right to your own country, you're not denying that United States is democracy. Do you believe the United States is a democracy? And if so, if it is a democratic state,

then the final conclusion in this kind of dispute can only be delivered by a trial, by the court. Not by the executive, by the law enforcement.

For instance, the concord company that is brought up is being accused, it's being accused of interference, but this company does not constitute the Russian state. It does not represent the Russian state. And I brought several examples before.

Well, you have a lot of individuals in the United States — take George Soros, for instance, with multibillion capitals, but it doesn't make him — his position, his posture the posture of the United States. No, it does not. It's the same case. There is the issue of trying a case in the court and the final say is for the court to deliver.

We are now talking about the individuals and not about particular states. And as far as the most recent allegations is concerned about the Russian intelligence officers, we do have an intergovernmental treaty. Please do send us the request. We will analyze it properly and we'll send a formal response. As I said, we can extend this cooperation, but we should do it on a reciprocal basis. Because we would await our Russian counterparts to provide us access to the persons of interests for us who we believe can have something to do with intelligence service.

Let's discuss the specific issues and not use the Russia and US Relationship as a loose change for this internal political struggle.

REPORTER (Jonathan Lemire from AP): A question for President Putin, thank you. Two questions for you, sir. Can you tell me what President Trump may have indicated to you about officially recognizing Crimea as part of Russia? And secondly, sir, do you -- does the Russian government have any compromising material on President Trump or his family?

PUTIN: President Trump — well, the posture of President Trump on Crimea is well known and he stands firmly by it. He continues to maintain that it was illegal to annex it. Our viewpoint is different. We held a referendum in strict compliance with the UN Charter and international legislation. For us this issue --we put [unintelligible] to this issue.

And now to the compromising material. Yeah, I did heard these rumors that we allegedly collected compromising material on Mr. Trump when he was visiting Moscow. Well, distinguished colleague, let me tell you this, when President Trump was in Moscow back then, I didn't even know that he was in Moscow. I treat President Trump with utmost respect, but back then when he was a private individual, a businessman, nobody informed me that he was in Moscow.

Let's take St. Petersburg economic forum, for instance. There were over 500 American businessmen — high-ranking, high-level ones. I don't even remember the last names of each and every one. Do you think that we try to collect compromising material on each and every single one of them?

Well, it's difficult to imagine utter nonsense on a bigger scale than this. Please disregard these issues and don't think about this anymore again.

TRUMP: And I have to say if they had it, it would have been out long ago. And if anybody watched Peter Strzok testify over the last couple of days, and I was in Brussels watching it, it was a disgrace to the FBI. It was a disgrace to our country. And you would say, 'That was a total witch hunt.' Thank you very much, everybody.