



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

I write to seek clarification regarding inconsistent reports, including statements you made via Twitter, in recent days regarding the potential formation of an “impenetrable Cyber Security Unit” with Russia.¹

Late Friday afternoon, shortly after your meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded, media reports indicated and the White House confirmed that the United States and Russia would establish a cyber working group.² Although accounts of the cybersecurity discussion that transpired between you and President Putin differ, you and officials from your Administration confirmed plans for a U.S.-Russia cybersecurity partnership repeatedly over the weekend. For example, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters that you and President Putin planned to establish “a working-level group” to address cybersecurity challenges that would establish a “framework” regarding “how these tools are used to interfere with the internal affairs of countries, but also how the tools are used to threaten infrastructure, how these tools are used from a terrorism standpoint as well.”³ On Sunday morning, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin appeared on ABC’s *This Week* and said that the U.S.-Russia cybersecurity partnership agreement was a “positive step forward,” and that “this is like any other strategic alliance, whether we’re doing military exercises with our allies or anything else. This is about having capabilities to make sure that we both fight

¹ I understand that your Administration considers your tweets to be “official statements by the President of the United States.” Statement of Sean Spicer, White House Press Briefing, (June 6, 2017), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/featured-videos/video/2017/06/06/6617-white-house-press-briefing>.

² Eric Geller, “U.S., Russia to Establish New Dialogue on Cyber Issues,” *PoliticoPro* (July 7, 2017), <https://www.politicopro.com/cybersecurity/whiteboard/2017/07/us-russia-to-establish-new-dialogue-on-cyber-issues-090169> (last accessed July 10, 2017).

³ Joe Uchill, “Trump, Putin Discuss Working Together on Cyber Issues,” *The Hill* (July 7, 2017), <http://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/341062-russian-official-trump-and-putin-agreed-to-team-up-on-cybersecurity> (last visited July 10, 2017).

cyber together, which I think is a very significant accomplishment for President Trump.”⁴ Other Administration officials echoed the importance of establishing the cybersecurity partnership with Russia.⁵

Amid the criticism from Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle,⁶ you weighed in on Sunday morning via Twitter: “Putin & I discussed forming an impenetrable Cyber Security unit so that election hacking, & many other negative things, will be guarded..[sic].”⁷ Late Sunday night, however, you posted the following tweet: “The fact that President Putin and I discussed a Cyber Security unit doesn’t mean I think it can happen. It can’t...”⁸

Although I understand that you have yet to be persuaded that the Russian government was responsible for breaching State and local election board networks during the months leading up to the 2016 Presidential election,⁹ the general consensus among Federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies continues to be that Russia did, in fact, compromise election infrastructure.¹⁰ Moreover, I am not convinced by President Putin’s vehement denials of election interference in the United States. Denials from President Putin – a former member of the KGB – are simply unbelievable, especially when they contradict the findings of our own intelligence community. Accordingly, I was disturbed to learn of the proposed U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit. Your more recent tweet indicating that you may not believe that such an arrangement is possible is encouraging, but it was not accompanied by any explanation, nor have any of the Administration officials who defended the U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit over the weekend made similar retractions. Whether your Administration plans to engage with Russia on cybersecurity matters remains unclear.

⁴ Rebecca Savransky, “Mnuchin: Russian Cybersecurity Partnership Talks a ‘Significant Accomplishment’ for Trump,” *The Hill* (July 9, 2017), <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/341169-mnuchin-discussion-with-russia-about-cybersecurity-partnership> (last accessed July 10, 2017).

⁵ Rebecca Savransky, “Trump’s Talk of Cybersecurity Unit With Russia Takes the Spotlight,” *The Hill* (July 9, 2017), <http://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/341192-trump-talk-of-cyber-security-unit-with-russia-earns-mixed-reviews> (last accessed July 10, 2017) (U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said “[f]rom a cyber standpoint, we need to get together with Russia, we need to tell them, you know, what we think should happen, shouldn’t happen, and if we talk to them about it, hopefully we can cut this out and get them to stop.”).

⁶ Senator Marco Rubio tweeted: “Partnering with Putin on a ‘Cyber Security Unit’ is akin to partnering with Assad on a ‘Chemical Weapons Unit.’” Senator John McCain sarcastically suggested that the partnership with President Putin could be valuable because “he’s doing the hacking.” Senator Lindsey Graham described the proposed partnership as “not the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard, but it’s pretty close.” Cleve R. Wootson, Jr., “Trump Suggest a Cybersecurity Pact with Russia. Lawmakers Say They Were ‘Dumbfounded.’” *The Washington Post* (July 9, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/07/09/trump-suggested-a-cybersecurity-pact-with-russia-lawmakers-say-they-were-dumbfounded/?utm_term=.870982ab88e4 (last accessed July 10, 2017).

⁷ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter (July 9, 2017, 8:50 AM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/884016887692234753>.

⁸ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter (July 9, 2017, 9:45 PM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/884211874518192128>.

⁹ The Associated Press, “Trump on Russian Meddling: ‘Nobody Really Knows for Sure,’” *The New York Times* (July 6, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/07/06/us/politics/ap-eu-trump.html>.

¹⁰ See “Full Transcript: FBI Director James Comey Testifies on Russian Interference in 2016 Election,” *The Washington Post* (Mar. 20, 2017), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/03/20/full-transcript-fbi-director-james-comey-testifies-on-russian-interference-in-2016-election/?utm_term=.a3209228adef; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Background to “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution, (Jan. 6, 2017), available at https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.

It is important that you clarify, in writing, the inconsistent statements made by the Administration related to the U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit that have circulated since Friday. Pursuant to Rule(3)(g) and Rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, we respectfully request you provide a written response to the following information, and whatever supplementary information your deem responsive, by July 24, 2017:

1. Does your Administration plan to pursue the establishment of a U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit or similar cybersecurity partnership? If so, please detail the scope of the entity's authority and mission and its proposed membership.
2. At any point before or after the meeting with President Putin in which you discussed establishing a U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit, did you engage with the U.S. Intelligence Community to learn about the intelligence consequences that could result from such an arrangement?
3. At any point before or after the meeting with President Putin in which you discussed establishing a U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit, did you engage with officials within your Administration to understand benefits and vulnerabilities that could result from such an arrangement?
4. Please detail what, if any, stakeholder engagement occurred prior to your meeting with President Putin during which you discussed establishing a U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit.
5. Administration officials have defended the proposed U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit since news of the partnership broke on Friday. On Sunday, you appeared to suggest that the proposed U.S.-Cybersecurity Unit would not be possible. If you have, in fact, decided that the U.S.-Russia Cybersecurity Unit is not possible, to what degree did discussions with Administration officials inform that decision?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Alison Northrop, Chief Director for Oversight, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member