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What's next in this reality-show spectacle?

by [Joe Scarborough](#)

I don't get it, and I never have. Why has President Trump kowtowed to Russian President Vladimir Putin since the beginning of his presidential campaign? I've asked this question on the air, and off, to those close to the president and to the president himself. No one has a good answer. The man has insulted everyone from [war heroes](#) to [the pope](#), and yet his admiration of the Russian dictator remains intact.

During [my Dec. 18, 2015, "Morning Joe" interview with Trump](#), I tried throwing some cold water on the then-candidate's adoration of the Russian leader.

"He kills journalists, political opponents and . . ."

"Invades countries," co-anchor Willie Geist helpfully added.

". . . and invades countries. Obviously that would be a concern, would it not?" I asked.

Any other candidate would have hit this softball out of the park. But not Trump.

"He's running his country, and at least he's a leader, unlike what we have in this country."

I tried slowing down for emphasis.

"But, again: He kills journalists that don't agree with him."

"Well," Trump weakly argued, "I think that our country does plenty of killing, too, Joe."

To this day, Trump has been steadfast in his defense of an autocrat who views the Soviet Union's collapse as a tragedy and the United States as an enemy. Why? Soon I may not have to speculate. This week's news out of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's office suggests that what has long been opaque will soon become clear.

Here's some of what we know so far. It seems to be enough to make any self-aware president panic.

- [June 16, 2015](#): Trump announces he's running for president.

- [October 2015 to January 2016](#): Trump lawyer Michael Cohen tries to make a deal with Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov to build a Trump Tower in Moscow.
- [Dec. 10, 2015](#): Top Trump ally Michael Flynn is seated beside Putin to celebrate the Kremlin propaganda outlet Russia Today.
- [March 21, 2016](#): Trump tells The Post that Carter Page and George Papadopoulos are key members of his foreign policy team.
- [April 26, 2016](#): Kremlin-connected professor Joseph Mifsud tells Papadopoulos that Moscow has “dirt” on Hillary Clinton, including “[thousands of emails](#).”
- [April 27, 2016](#): Despite insisting throughout the campaign that they had never met with Russian officials, [Trump](#) and [Jeff Sessions](#) greet Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak at an event at the Mayflower Hotel.
- [June 9, 2016](#): Donald Trump Jr., campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner meet with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya and Kremlin insider Rinat Akhmetshin to gain information that would allegedly incriminate Clinton and her dealings with Russia. In an email setting up the meeting, [Trump Jr. expresses excitement](#) about receiving Russian intelligence about the Democratic nominee.
- [July 7, 2016](#): Manafort offers to provide briefings to a Kremlin-linked Russian billionaire.
- [July 18, 2016](#): Trump campaign members succeed in pressuring Republicans to remove a platform plank in support of providing arms to help Ukraine resist Russian aggression.
- [July 27, 2016](#): Trump makes a direct appeal to the Kremlin during a news conference. “Russia, if you’re listening, I hope you’re able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press.”
- [Sept. 16, 2016](#): After admitting that he [had been in contact](#) with WikiLeaks — and later revealing that he had contact with a hacker connected to Russia — Trump associate Roger Stone tells Boston Herald Radio that WikiLeaks will soon “drop a payload of new documents on Hillary on a weekly basis” that will damage the Clinton campaign.
- [Oct. 7, 2016](#): The “Access Hollywood” tape is released. About a half-hour later, WikiLeaks begins to publish Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta’s emails.
- [Dec. 1](#): Kushner meets with Kislyak in an attempt to create a “channel” for sensitive communications between the transition team and the Russian government, according to U.S. officials briefed on intelligence reports.
- [Dec. 29, 2016](#): Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn calls Kislyak to discuss sanctions placed on Russia by President Barack Obama.

- **Jan. 11:** At his first news conference as president-elect, Trump said, “If Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks? That’s called an asset, not a liability. Now, I don’t know that I’m gonna get along with Vladimir Putin. I hope I do.” [He also tweets](#), “I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA – NO DEALS, NO LOANS, NO NOTHING!”
- **Feb. 13:** Flynn resigns after he reportedly lied to Vice President Pence about his contacts with Kislyak.
- **May 9:** Trump fires FBI Director James B. Comey.
- **May 10:** Trump meets in the Oval Office with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Kislyak, bragging that the firing of “nut job” Comey will ease pressure from the investigation. Trump barred U.S. reporters from the meeting and revealed classified information to the Russian officials.
- **May 11:** In an interview with NBC’s Lester Holt, Trump reveals that he had asked Comey whether he was under investigation for alleged ties to Russia.
- **June 7:** Comey releases a memo recalling his interactions with Trump, who he said asked for an oath of loyalty from him.
- **July 7:** Trump meets with Putin at the Group of 20 summit in Germany. A [second dinner meeting](#) was undisclosed.
- **Oct. 5:** Papadopoulos pleads guilty to lying to the FBI as part of a cooperation agreement with Mueller.
- **Oct. 30:** Mueller’s office indicts Manafort and associate Rick Gates on charges of conspiracy against the United States, being an unregistered foreign agent, money laundering, and seven counts of failing to file reports of foreign bank and financial accounts.

I’m starting to think that the answers to our burning questions about Trump’s strange obsession with Russia are revealing themselves in a slow and painful way for the president and all of his men and women. Will the next big reveal in this reality show spectacle come when one of his closest confidants surprises him in the final episode, not with a rose, but with a wire? The ratings would be yuge. Believe me. Yuge.