



October 11, 2017

The Honorable Richard Burr
Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner
Vice Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Committee Lead in Election Interference Investigation
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Schiff
Ranking Member
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Request for Inclusion of Russian Attacks on American Muslim Community and Organizations in Congressional Investigations of Russia's Interference in 2016 U.S. Election

Dear Honorable Members of Congress:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), our nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I write to request that your respective congressional committees charged with investigating the Russian Federation's interference in the 2016 election include in their inquiry Russian operatives' attacks against the American Muslim community. Congress should investigate Russia's use of social media and other online platforms, search engines and internet advertising to coordinate hate rallies targeting American Muslims, smear immigrant communities, and fraudulently impersonate at least one U.S. Muslim organization, all for the purpose of spreading disinformation, increasing Islamophobia, and disrupting our nation's social cohesion.

As you are aware, Facebook recently shut down almost 500 fraudulent accounts linked to Russian operatives for promoting approximately \$100,000 in false advertisement. According to Facebook, these ad buys were designed to amplify "divisive social and political messages across the ideological spectrum — touching on topics from LGBT matters to race issues to immigration to gun rights" to sway public opinion in the 2016 presidential campaign.^[1] These Russian propaganda posts and ads were viewed by 23 to 70 million Facebook users.^[2] Twitter shut down 201 accounts that were tied to these

^[1] Alex Stamos, Chief Security Officer at Facebook. 2017. *Facebook*. "An Update On Information Operations On Facebook," . <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/09/information-operations-update/>

^[2] Ben Collins, Kevin Poulsen, Spencer Ackerman. 2017. "70 million people or 28 percent of U.S. adults." *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russias-facebook-fake-news-could-have-reached-70-million-americans>

same Russian operatives.^[3] These accounts were also replicated on Instagram. An internal Google probe reports Russian operatives purchasing \$4,700 in search ads and \$53,000 worth of political ads, spread across its search engine, YouTube (a property of Google), Gmail, and its DoubleClick ad network.^[4]

Using false accounts, Russian operatives executed a hostile disinformation campaign directed at American Muslims,^[5] whereby they impersonated an existing U.S. Muslim organization based in California – United Muslims of America (UMA) – spreading such disingenuous claims that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain help “created, funded and armed” al-Qaeda and ISIS (Daesh). Other false claims included that Osama bin Laden was a “CIA agent.”

This Russian-controlled Facebook account also bought advertisements on that platform to reach its target audience and announce rallies aimed at Muslim audiences. According to *The Daily Beast*, Russia used the “Twitter account “muslims_in_usa” and the Instagram account “muslim_voice” to pass along inflammatory memes under cover of the UMA.”^[6]

By impersonating UMA, Russia operatives sought to: 1) create the false perception that American Muslim organizations promote anti-American conspiracy theories; 2) undermine American Muslim trust in the United States; while, 3) legitimizing Russia’s own disinformation campaign that the U.S. secretly founded and funds international terrorist organizations.

At the same time, Russian operatives incited alt-right white supremacist audiences on Facebook by hosting anti-immigrant hate rallies that in part fostered hostility towards American Muslims. *The Daily Beast* reports that the Russian front organization “SecuredBorders,” which had 133,000 followers, planned to host an August 2016 rally called “Citizens before refugees” in Twin Falls, Idaho.

The rally’s tagline on Facebook included: “We must stop taking in Muslim refugees! We demand open and thorough investigation of all the cases regarding Muslim refugees! All government officials, who are covering up for these criminals, should be fired!”

CNN also reports that on May 2016, the Russian-controlled front “Heart of Texas” Facebook group hosted a “Stop Islamization of Texas” protest that was attended by a handful of people at the commemoration of a library at an Islamic Center in Houston.^[7]

CAIR Houston, a local chapter of CAIR, contacted the FBI concerning comments posted on the “Heart of Texas” Facebook page prior to the protest to raise safety concerns about the event. One such comment included the declaration: “Need to blow this place up. We don’t need this shit in Texas.”

^[3] Elizabeth Dwoskin, Adam Entous and Karoun Demirjian. 2017. “Twitter finds hundreds of accounts tied to Russian operatives.” *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/twitter-finds-hundreds-of-accounts-tied-to-russian-operatives/2017/09/28/6cf26f7e-a484-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa_story.html?utm_term=.01cc5635d98f

^[4] Daisuke Wakabayashi. 2017. “Google Finds Accounts Connected to Russia Bought Election Ads.” *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/technology/google-russian-ads.html>

^[5] Ben Collins, Kevin Poulsen, Spencer Ackerman. 2017. “Exclusive: Russians Impersonated Real American Muslims to Stir Chaos on Facebook and Instagram.” *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/exclusive-russians-impersonated-real-american-muslims-to-stir-chaos-on-facebook-and-instagram>

^[6] Idib.

^[7] Tim Lister and Clare Sebastian. 2017. “Stoking Islamophobia and secession in Texas -- from an office in Russia.” *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/05/politics/heart-of-texas-russia-event/index.html>

By hosting these anti-Muslim, anti-refugee and anti-immigrant rallies Russian operatives sought to increase Islamophobic sentiment and social division within the U.S. to the point that it endangered the safety and property of American Muslims.

When a foreign nation like Russia feels emboldened to take on the identity of an American organization or business it threatens U.S. sovereignty and national security. It is unacceptable for the Russian government to interfere in our election by pushing American citizens to participate in hate-driven-events that advance the Kremlin's agenda to create social division and Islamophobia within our great nation.

CAIR shares your view that Russia's interference in our election and media is also an attempt to compromise the integrity of the American democratic process. It is a violation of our nation's election law that prohibit other nations or foreign nationals to contribute or donate anything of value to an election. The American people are entitled to knowing when a publicly trusted institution like the electoral process has been compromised and misused.

We request your respective committees hold Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google and other online platforms and companies to account demanding the public release of all information pertaining to Russia's interference in the 2016 election. Moreover, we ask that you pursue in your investigations of Russia's election interference its fraudulent impersonation of at least one U.S. Muslim group and organizing of anti-immigrant hate rallies targeting American Muslims and other communities.

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

Sincerely,



Robert S. McCaw
CAIR Director of Government Affairs Department