



**THE HUNTER BIDEN STATEMENT: HOW SENIOR INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY  
OFFICIALS AND THE BIDEN CAMPAIGN WORKED TO MISLEAD AMERICAN  
VOTERS**

Interim Joint Staff Report of the

Committee on the Judiciary,  
Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization  
of the Federal Government, and  
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

U.S. House of Representatives



May 10, 2023

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## Executive Summary

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“Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday to getting back at you.”

– Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY), January 3, 2017.<sup>1</sup>

In the heated days shortly before the 2020 presidential election, a news story appeared in the *New York Post* detailing how Hunter Biden used the position and influence of his father, now-President Joe Biden, for personal gain with President Biden’s awareness.<sup>2</sup> This article, based on materials obtained from an abandoned laptop once owned by Hunter Biden, called into question statements made by President Biden denying awareness of the international business dealings of his son, Hunter.<sup>3</sup> Five days after the *Post* story, 51 former intelligence community officials, using their official titles and citing their national security credentials, released a public statement suggesting the story “ha[d] all the classic earmarks” of Russian disinformation.<sup>4</sup> Three days after that, Vice President Biden used this public statement in a nationally televised presidential debate to rebut President Trump’s criticisms, asserting “there are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what this, he’s accusing me of is a Russian plan.”<sup>5</sup>

Much has been written about how social media companies and news outlets improperly censored or ignored allegations on the flimsy basis that it was “hacked” materials;<sup>6</sup> and “can’t be verified”;<sup>7</sup> or, in the inspired words of National Public Radio, a “waste of time” and a “pure distraction.”<sup>8</sup> These censorship decisions were wrong then, but they look even more egregious

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Maddow, *Schumer: Trump ‘being really dumb’ on intel*, MSNBC (Jan. 3, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Emma-Jo Morris & Gabrielle Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 14, 2020); *see also* Emma-Jo Morris & Gabrielle Fonrouge, *Hunter Biden emails show leveraging connections with his father to boost Burisma pay*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 14, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The Hill (@thehill), Twitter (Sept. 21, 2019, 3:04 PM) (Joe Biden claiming, “I’ve never spoken to my son about his overseas business dealings.”), <https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1175486006348460032>; Press Briefing, Jen Psaki, White House Press Secretary, in Washington, D.C. (Apr. 5, 2022) (explaining how President Biden stands by his statement that he never spoke to Hunter Biden about his overseas business dealings). *See also* Miranda Devine, *Hunter Biden’s biz partner called Joe Biden ‘the Big Guy’ in panicked message after Post’s laptop story*, N.Y. POST (July 27, 2022) (“In an email to Hunter, Jim and other partners on May 13, 2017, Gilliar outlined an equity breakdown in which 10% of the lucrative CEFC joint venture would be held by Hunter ‘for the big guy.’ That email, which was previously revealed by The Post, was found on the laptop Hunter abandoned at a Delaware repair shop in April 2019. Another former associate of the first son, US Navy veteran Tony Bobulinski, publicly declared in October 2020 that ‘big guy’ was a reference to President Biden — and alleged that Biden was aware of, and involved in, the planned CEFC deal.”).

<sup>4</sup> Jim Clapper et al., *Public Statement on the Hunter Biden Emails* (Oct. 19, 2020). *See also* Natasha Bertrand, *Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former intel officials say*, POLITICO (Oct. 19, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> COMM. ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES, Presidential Debate at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, October 22, 2020, Participants: Former Vice President Joe Biden (D) and President Donald Trump (R), <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-22-2020-debate-transcript/>.

<sup>6</sup> *See, e.g.*, Katie Paul, *Twitter, Facebook restrict users’ dissemination of New York Post story on Biden*, REUTERS (Oct. 15, 2020); Kari Paul, *Facebook and Twitter restrict controversial New York Post story on Joe Biden*, THE GUARDIAN (Oct. 14, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Zachary Evans, *60 Minutes Anchor Insists Hunter Biden Emails ‘Can’t Be Verified’ When Pressed by Trump*, NAT’L REV. (Oct. 22, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> *See, e.g.*, Brian Flood, *NPR issues major correction after falsely claiming Hunter Biden laptop story was ‘discredited’ by intelligence*, FOX NEWS (Apr. 2, 2021); Joe Concha, *Media’s pre-election burial of Hunter Biden story proves dereliction of duty*, THE HILL (Dec. 11, 2020).

with the passage of time. The contents of Hunter Biden’s laptop have since been authenticated and the *Post*’s reporting has been verified by several other news outlets.<sup>9</sup>

What has not been examined, until now, is how 51 former federal employees with intelligence and national security credentials came together to insert themselves into the thick of the presidential campaign. Beginning in April 2022—and renewed earlier this year when Republicans resumed control of the House of Representatives—the Committee on the Judiciary and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence have been conducting oversight into the origins of this statement.<sup>10</sup> The Committees wrote to all 51 former officials requesting relevant documents and testimony. Consistent with the obligation to keep the House apprised of investigative activities,<sup>11</sup> this interim report summarizes the key information learned to date.

- **The public statement by 51 former intelligence officials was a political operation to help elect Vice President Biden in the 2020 presidential election.** Contemporaneous emails show the organizers’ intent in drafting and releasing the statement: “[W]e think Trump will attack Biden on the issue at this week’s debate and we want to offer perspectives on this from Russia watchers and other seasoned experts,”<sup>12</sup> and “we want to give the [Vice President] a talking point to use in response.”<sup>13</sup>
- **The Biden campaign took active measures to discredit the allegations about Hunter Biden by exploiting the national security credentials of former intelligence officials.** On October 17, 2020, Biden campaign advisor—now Secretary of State—Antony Blinken contacted former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Acting Director Michael Morell to discuss the *Post*’s reporting. Morell told Blinken that he was not familiar with the reporting and Blinken later emailed Morell a *USA Today* article alleging the FBI was investigating whether it was Russian disinformation.<sup>14</sup> At the bottom of the email was the signature block of Andrew Bates, then-director of rapid response for the Biden campaign.<sup>15</sup> Following this outreach from the Biden campaign, Morell began the process of drafting the statement—something Morell testified would not have happened but for Blinken’s communication. In addition, following the October 22 presidential debate—during which Vice President Biden used the public statement to rebut President Trump’s criticisms—Biden campaign chairman Steve Ricchetti called Morell to thank him for the statement.

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Katie Benner et al., *Hunter Biden Paid Tax Bill, but Broad Federal Investigation Continues*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 16, 2022); Craig Timberg et al., *Here’s how The Post analyzed Hunter Biden’s laptop*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 30, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> See Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Ranking Member et al., H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Ms. Nada Bakos, c/o Central Intelligence Agency (Apr. 6, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., H. Res. 12, 118th Cong. (2023).

<sup>12</sup> Email from Kristin Wood to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 19, 2020, 7:27 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>13</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 18, 2020, 4:48 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>14</sup> Email from Tony Blinken to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 10:53 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

- **Blinken’s outreach to Morell was the impetus for the public statement.** Morell testified that he had no intention of drafting the statement until Blinken reached out to him. Morell, who at the time was reportedly under consideration to be appointed CIA Director in the Biden Administration if Biden won the election,<sup>16</sup> conceived the statement and concluded it would have greater credibility if it was supported by a significant number of signatories.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, Morell contacted several former intelligence officials to help write the statement, solicit cosigners, and help with media outreach.
- **The Biden campaign coordinated dissemination of the statement to members of the media.** Morell tasked Nick Shapiro, his former Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor at the CIA, with placing the statement in major publications. Specifically, Morell apprised Shapiro that, “[b]etween us, the campaign would like” a specific reporter with the *Washington Post* to run the statement first.<sup>18</sup> Shapiro crafted an email for three separate media outlets and sent the content of the email to the Biden campaign’s Director of Rapid Response, Andrew Bates, stating “This is what I gave them.”<sup>19</sup> After peddling the statement to the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press* with apparently no result, Shapiro found a willing partner in *Politico*. *Politico* published a story about the statement under the headline: “Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former intel officials say.”<sup>20</sup>
- **The Committees have evidence that an employee affiliated with the CIA may have assisted in obtaining signatories for the statement.** One signer of the statement, former CIA analyst David Cariens, disclosed to the Committees that a CIA employee affiliated with the agency’s Prepublication Classification Review Board (“PCRB”) informed him of the existence of the statement and asked if he would sign it.<sup>21</sup> The Committees have requested additional material from the CIA, which has ignored the request to date.

The Committees’ oversight continues. Notably, the Biden Administration has declined to cooperate with this oversight to date. On March 21, 2023, the Committees wrote to the CIA, requesting documents in the CIA’s possession relating to the statement and interactions between the CIA and the signatories of the statement.<sup>22</sup> The Committees requested that the CIA furnish these documents by April 4, 2023.<sup>23</sup> The CIA has so far failed to comply to this oversight request. On April 20, 2023, the Committees wrote to Secretary of State Antony Blinken requesting information in his possession about his role in the origins of the statement.<sup>24</sup> On May

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<sup>16</sup> Erin Banco, *Biden Weighs Mike Morell as His CIA Chief. A Key Dem Senator Says Don’t Bother*, THE DAILY BEAST (Dec. 2, 2020). See also Transcribed Interview of Mr. Michael Morell at 91 [hereinafter “Morell Interview”].

<sup>17</sup> See Email from Michael Morell to Kristin Wood (Oct. 18, 2020, 8:01 PM) (on file with the Committees). Morell Interview at 44.

<sup>18</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro (Oct. 19, 2020, 8:21 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>19</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to Andrew Bates (Oct. 19, 2020, 11:22 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>20</sup> Bertrand, *supra* note 4.

<sup>21</sup> Email from David Cariens to Committee staff (March 5, 2023, 3:02 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Chairman Jim Jordan, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, and Chairman Michael R. Turner, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, to Hon. William J. Burns, Dir., Cent. Intel. Agency (Mar. 21, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Chairman Jim Jordan, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, and Chairman Michael R. Turner, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, to Hon. Antony Blinken, Sec., Dep’t of State (Apr. 20, 2023).

4, 2023, via counsel, Secretary Blinken responded.<sup>25</sup> Although he denied asking Morell to write the statement, Secretary Blinken did not dispute that his communication was the impetus for the statement.<sup>26</sup> Secretary Blinken provided none of the documents that Committee requested. The Committees will continue to pursue additional information about the actions and events described in this report.

Americans deserve to have confidence that their government, particularly its premier intelligence agency, is free from politicization. The infusion of bare-knuckle partisan politics into America’s intelligence agencies is cause for grave concern. Former federal employees have a right to engage in the political process—a fundamental right that the Committees do not dispute. Here, however, the signers of the Hunter Biden laptop statement relied on their national security credentials and used their official titles to lend heft to their statement and to insinuate access to secretive information unavailable to other Americans. And these signers did so in coordination with a political campaign for the explicit purpose of giving a candidate for office a “talking point” to dismiss legitimate criticism of his family’s business practices.

Consistent with the Committees’ obligations to keep the House of Representatives informed of its oversight, this interim report presents what the Committees have learned to date about the origins of the public statement signed by 51 former intelligence officials that falsely discredited public allegations about the Biden family. Although more work remains, this report presents the Committees’ findings to date.

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Jonathan C. Su, counsel for Secretary Antony Blinken, to Chairman Jim Jordan, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, and Chairman Michael R. Turner, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (May 4, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

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**I. The Biden campaign used the national security credentials of 51 former intelligence community employees to falsely discredit allegations of Biden family influence-peddling.**

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On October 14, 2020, the *New York Post* published a report detailing how Hunter Biden used the position and influence of his father for personal gain with the apparent awareness of President Biden.<sup>27</sup> This article raised doubts about President Biden’s earlier denial of ever speaking to his son about his international business dealings.<sup>28</sup> The *Post* reported on an email in which a Ukrainian businessman urged Hunter Biden to “use [his] influence to convey a message / signal, etc. to stop what we consider to be politically motivated actions.”<sup>29</sup> In another email, the same businessman thanked Hunter Biden for arranging a meeting with his father, calling it “an honor and pleasure.”<sup>30</sup> The *Post* reported that these emails came from a laptop belonging to Hunter Biden that he had abandoned in a Delaware computer shop.<sup>31</sup>

The Biden campaign knew it had a serious political liability with these allegations. This is because then-Vice President Biden’s son had monetized his relationship with his father to secure lucrative, shady opportunities overseas.<sup>32</sup> In the days leading up to the 2020 election, Hunter Biden’s laptop and the email trove it contained provided evidence of this arrangement.<sup>33</sup> To prevent President Trump from effectively raising these allegations in the final presidential debate, the Biden campaign sought to discredit the allegations by employing the national security credentials of compliant former intelligence community members.

**A. Biden campaign advisor Antony Blinken’s outreach to former CIA Acting Director Michael Morell was the impetus for the public statement, which was intended to give the Biden campaign a “talking point” with which to respond to the Hunter Biden allegations.**

On October 17, 2020, senior Biden campaign advisor and now Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Michael Morell, the former CIA Acting Director, and asked him if he had seen the *New York Post* story on the Hunter Biden laptop and emails and whether Morell believed the Russians were involved in disseminating those emails.<sup>34</sup> Morell claimed that he had not read the story, but at that point he began researching it.<sup>35</sup> Morell testified:

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<sup>27</sup> Morris & Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, *supra* note 2.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Nick Givas, *Joe Biden again denies speaking to son about Ukrainian business dealings*, Fox News, Oct. 10, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Morris & Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, *supra* note 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Matt Viser et al., *Inside Hunter Biden’s multimillion-dollar deals with a Chinese energy company*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 30, 2022) (“But the new documents . . . illustrate the ways in which his family profited from relationships built over Joe Biden’s decades in public service.”).

<sup>33</sup> Morris & Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, *supra* note 2.

<sup>34</sup> Morell Interview at 18.

<sup>35</sup> Statement of Michael Morell, dated March 28, 2023, at 2 [hereinafter “Morell Statement”]; Morell Interview at 18–20.

Q. In an email to Nick Shapiro, you said that you would, quote, explain tomorrow on the phone how this came to be, meaning this public statement. . . . Can you tell us what you said to Mr. Shapiro during that call? . . .

A. Sure. I told him that I had received a call from Tony Blinken, then a senior official on the Biden campaign, asking me if I had seen *The New York Post* story. . . . I believe he summarized it for me, and he asked me if I thought the Russians may have been involved in any way in the emergence of these emails.

Q. So that was—now—

A. I should also say I don't know whether he called me or whether he sent me an email.

Q. Okay.

A. Just to be clear.

Q. In the production the committee received, we did not get an email from him—

A. Correct.

Q. —initiating that call except—but for a *USA Today* article that he forwarded—

A. Yes.<sup>36</sup>

At 10:53 p.m., after his initial call with Morell, Blinken forwarded to Morell a *USA Today* article, titled “A tabloid got a trove of data on Hunter Biden from Rudy Giuliani. Now, the FBI is probing a possible disinformation campaign.”<sup>37</sup> Notably, at the bottom of Blinken’s email was the signature block of Andrew Bates, then-Director of Rapid Response for the Biden campaign.<sup>38</sup> As the Biden campaign’s Director of Rapid Response, Bates “was charged with

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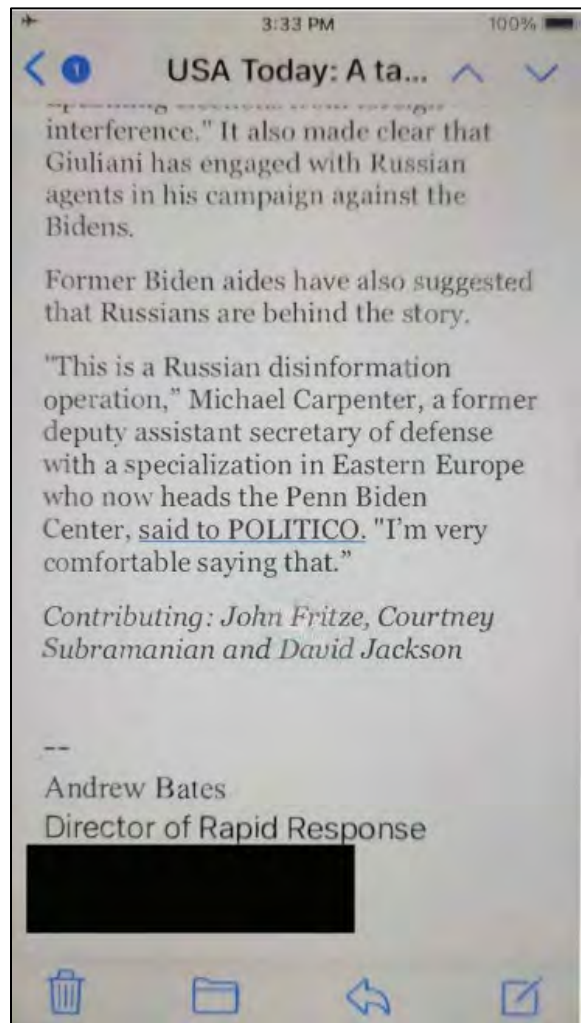
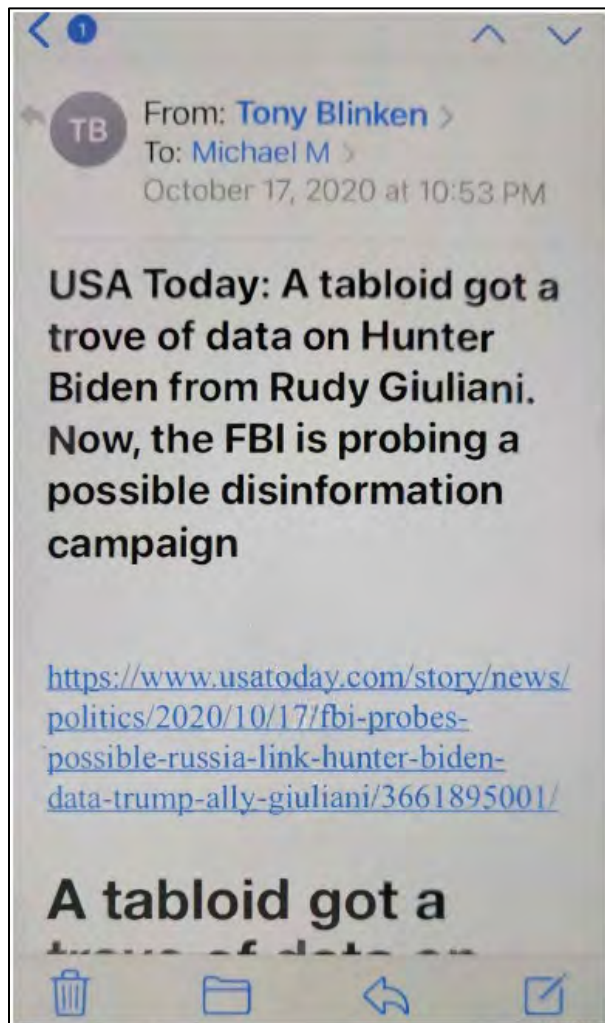
<sup>36</sup> Morell Interview at 20.

<sup>37</sup> Email from Tony Blinken to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 10:53 PM) (on file with the Committees); Morell Statement at 2; Morell Interview at 18–20; *see also* Caren Bohan et al., *A tabloid got a trove of data on Hunter Biden from Rudy Giuliani. Now, the FBI is probing a possible disinformation campaign.*, USA TODAY (Oct. 17, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Morell Statement at 2; *see* Email from Tony Blinken to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 10:53 PM) (on file with the Committees).



defending” then-Vice President Biden “and his team against attacks on the campaign trail, while also employing an aggressive offensive strategy against President Trump and his team.”<sup>39</sup>



Morell confirmed during this transcribed interview that he received two communications from Blinken on October 17, 2020. Morell speculated that the first communication occurred before 2:16 p.m. that day, based on the timestamp in a text message that Morell sent to Marc Polymeropoulos, a former CIA Acting Chief of Operations for Europe and Eurasia. The second communication was via email at 10:53 p.m. Morell testified:

- Q. There were two separate communications. There was the first call or email, and then there was the subsequent email with the *USA Today* article?
- A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

<sup>39</sup> Brooke Singman, *Meet the Rapid Response director: Top Biden aide on how the 2020 campaign was unlike any other*, FOX NEWS (Nov. 23, 2020).

- Q. What was the time of the email?
- A. So I don't know for sure, Congressman, but I believe he called to ask the question first and then followed up with the email.
- Q. Close together?
- A. I think—you know, given the timestamps [in the text message] on here, I feel that, you know, when I say—Congressman, I say: Just wondering if you guys, if you think the Russians played in the Hunter Biden thing. That was at 2:16 p.m. on the 17th. He sends me the *USA Today* article later that night.
- Q. Right.
- A. Right. I think he called me or sent me an email prior 2:16 p.m. So there's some gap there I think between the first contact and the second.
- Q. Okay. That's what I assumed. When you got the *USA Today* article—and I believe it was at 10:53 that evening—[that] was that the first time you had seen [the] *USA [Today]* article.
- A. So I referenced the FBI investigation in the early afternoon of the 17th in my conversation with Marc Polymeropoulos. I don't remember whether I saw it. The first thing I did when Mr. Blinken called me is I did some research. I had not read *The New York Post* article. I went and read it. I did some internet searches. I did a little bit of research here before I reached out to Marc. It's possible I found it then. It's also possible that, when Mr. Blinken called me, he mentioned it to me. I just don't remember.
- Q. In that timeframe, then, you would have got the call from Mr. Blinken prior to 2:16.
- A. I believe so, sir.
- Q. Excuse me, Mr. Morell, as part of the research that you did in between the contact with Mr. Blinken and the contact with Marc [Polymeropoulos], did you contact any individuals as a part of that research?

A. I did not.

Q. So the full sum of that research involved your internet searches?

A. Yes.<sup>40</sup>

Morell testified that the statement was a direct result of his interactions with the Biden campaign, explaining that the call from Blinken triggered his interest in preparing the statement. He explained:

Q. But, prior to his call, you—you did not have any intent to write this statement?

A. I did not.

Q. Okay. So his call triggered—

A. It did, yes.

Q. —that intent in you?

A. Yes. Absolutely.<sup>41</sup>

Although Morell denied in his transcribed interview that the Biden campaign specifically asked that he prepare a statement,<sup>42</sup> Polymeropoulos, who helped to prepare the initial draft of the statement, told the Committees that Morell “did mention to me that someone in the kind of Biden world had asked about doing this.”<sup>43</sup> When asked to elaborate, Polymeropoulos testified: “Morell said that to me, that someone from kind of the Biden world had asked for this. And he did not tell me who it was or any of the other kind of details of it.”<sup>44</sup>

Morell testified repeatedly that his purpose for organizing, drafting, and disseminating the statement was to help Vice President Biden become president. He testified:

Q. What was the intent of the statement?

A. There were two intents. One intent was to share our concern with the American people that the Russians were playing on this issue; and, two, it was [to] help Vice President Biden.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Morell Interview at 19-20.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> Transcribed Interview of Mr. Marc Polymeropoulos at 17 [hereinafter “Polymeropoulos Interview”].

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>45</sup> Morell Interview at 11.

Q. So is it fair to say that the text of the letter makes it clear that the focus is actually on Russian interference, not on the political candidates?

A. It's correct. I would just repeat what I said earlier just to be, you know, totally clear, that there were two intentions here, right? One was to make clear to the American people that the Russians were interfering in the election, and the other was to help Vice President Biden in the debate.<sup>46</sup>

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Q. You wanted to help the Vice President why?

A. Because I wanted him to win the election.

Q. You wanted him to win; that's why?

A. Yes, sir.<sup>47</sup>

An October 19, 2020, email exchange between Morell and former CIA Director John Brennan made abundantly clear that Morell's intentions were to "give the [Biden] campaign, particularly during the debate on Thursday, a talking point to push back on [President] Trump on this issue."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 78.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 102.

<sup>48</sup> Email from Michael Morell to John Brennan (Oct. 19, 2020, 9:29 AM) (on file with the Committees). *See also* Jim Clapper et al., *supra* note 4.

From: JohnB <John Brennan >  
Date: Mon, Oct 19, 2020 at 9:47 AM  
Subject: Re: Letter to Sign  
To: Michael M <Michael Morell >

Ok, Michael, add my name to the list. Good initiative. Thanks for asking me to sign on.

On Mon, Oct 19, 2020 at 9:29 AM Michael M <Michael Morell > wrote:

John,

Can I add your name to this list? Will be adding Leon, Sue Gordon, Jeh Johnson, George, Lisa Monaco, and Mike Rogers (DIRNSA) today.

And working on adding Dan Coats, Mike Rogers (HPSCI), and Tom Bossert.

And lots of other IC career folk.

Trying to give the campaign, particularly during the debate on Thursday, a talking point to push back on Trump on this issue.

Thanks.

Michael

Lastly, an October 18 email from Morell to former CIA senior intelligence officer Kristin Wood shows that the statement was meant to help the Biden campaign. Morell wrote that he had “control of the document. The more former intelligence officers the better. Campaign will be thrilled.”<sup>49</sup>

Michael < >  
To: Kristin W < >

Sun, Oct 18, 2020 at 8:01 PM

No, have folks send to me. I have control of the document.

The more former intelligence officers the better.

Campaign will be thrilled.

## **B. Morell recruited Polymeropoulos to draft the public statement.**

Upon concluding his communication with Blinken and performing internet searches, Morell then enlisted Polymeropoulos to begin preparing the statement. Morell recruited Polymeropoulos because, in Morell’s wording, he was a former “acting chief of operations for the part of the world that covers Russia,” “had a very good understanding of what the Russians did in [the] 2016 [election],” and is an expert “in Russian disinformation.”<sup>50</sup>

In a text message exchange, Morell asked Polymeropoulos if he thought “the Russians

<sup>49</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Kristin Wood (Oct. 18, 2020, 8:01 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>50</sup> Morell Interview at 56-57.

played in the Hunter Biden email thing,” opining that it “[k]inda feels that way to me.”<sup>51</sup> Polymeropoulos responded, “It does to me too.”<sup>52</sup> Morell then expressed some doubt about the “strange” way in which the emails were placed “into the public domain,” with Polymeropoulos responding: “They,” presumably referring to the Russians, “will always look for a dissem[ination] mechanism third party. Yes this is odd . . . a blind computer guy.”<sup>53</sup> After Polymeropoulos agreed to work with Morell on the draft, Morell asked Polymeropoulos to “send me a list of what you see as the hallmarks” of Russian involvement in the story.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Text message exchange between Michael Morell to Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 17, 2020, 2:16 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* See also Email from Marc Polymeropoulos to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 8:01 PM) (on file with the Committees).



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 17, 2020)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Text message graphics in this report were generated by the Committee from screen shots produced by Marc Polymeropoulos. The graphics were created to assist in reading the messages.

Morell explained that Polymeropoulos wrote the first draft of the statement. Morell testified:

- Q. Okay. What was your role in the creation of the statement?
- A. I organized it.
- Q. So you drafted that?
- A. I did not do the first draft.
- Q. Okay.
- A. Marc Polymeropoulos did the first draft. Then I redrafted it. Yeah, I'm the organizer, and I played a major role in drafting it.<sup>56</sup>

Polymeropoulos similarly testified:

- Q. And what role did Mike Morell play in the creation of the statement?
- A. . . . I think Mike Morell on the—I think it was on the 17th—had wrote me a text asking me if I thought there was any—kind of any Russian involvement in this. I said that I thought that there was, based on my professional background. He asked if I would be willing to write something with him on this. And that's how this began.<sup>57</sup>

Polymeropoulos explained that he and Morell initially discussed preparing an op-ed, which eventually morphed into a statement. He testified:

- Q. Did you say you had a conversation with Mr. Morell?
- A. About?
- Q. About this letter. Or was it only over text message?
- A. So I think from what I recall, two—a couple things happened. First, he wrote me the text. I then—I believe he asked, and I looked at my records and I just don't have the exact date, but shortly after that he asked me to come over to his house.

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<sup>56</sup> Morell Interview at 11.

<sup>57</sup> Polymeropoulos Interview at 10.



Q. Okay.

A. And we discussed this there.

I don't recall how it morphed from what I thought was an op-ed into a letter. He did mention to me that someone in the kind of Biden world had asked about doing this.

Q. But he didn't--

A. He did not tell me who it was, and I did not ask.

Q. So you prepared the backgrounder that's exhibit 4.<sup>58</sup>

A. Right.

Q. Was that before or after you went to Morell's house?

A. I believe it was after, but I actually don't recall. I see that text was on the 17th, and I think I sent the backgrounder on the 17th as well. But I actually don't recall if this was before or after.

Q. And as you understand it, Mr. Morell took your backgrounder and turned it into the letter?

A. That's right.

Q. And do you know if any other person helped him do that?

A. I don't know.

Q. Or whether he did it himself?

A. I don't know.<sup>59</sup>

Morell kept Polymeropoulos in the dark about his interactions with Blinken and the Biden campaign. Polymeropoulos was not aware of these facts until the Committees informed him during his transcribed interview. He testified:

Q. Are you aware that now Secretary of State Antony Blinken

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<sup>58</sup> The "backgrounder" refers to a document Polymeropoulos created that contains the purported reasons why he believed the Hunter Biden laptop and emails were part of a Russian information operation to interfere in the 2020 presidential election. See Email from Marc Polymeropoulos to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 8:01 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 17-18.

called Mr. Morell some time on or about October 17th, 2020, to inquire as to whether Mr. Morell believed Russia might have been involved in the Hunter Biden email story in some way?

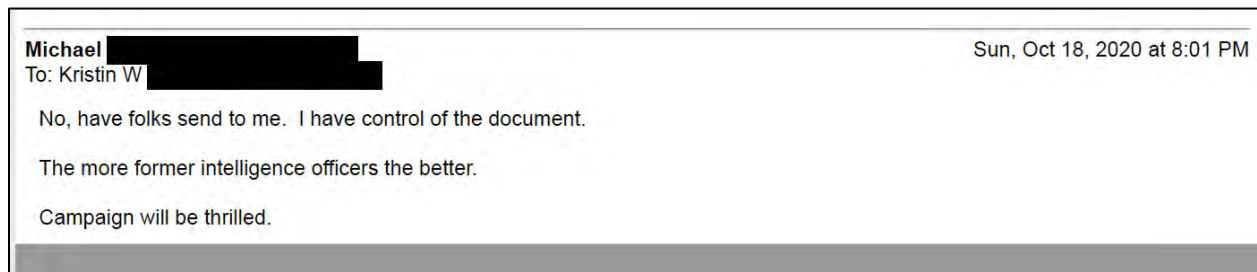
A. That's the first I heard of that. I was not aware of that at all.

Q. Were you aware that Secretary Blinken also sent an article to Mr. Morell from *USA Today* titled "A tabloid got a trove of data on Hunter Biden from Rudy Giuliani. Now, the FBI is probing a possible disinformation campaign"?

A. No.<sup>60</sup>

**C. Morell, Polymeropoulos, and former CIA officer Kristin Wood solicited other former intelligence officials and employees to sign the public statement.**

As Morell testified, a goal of writing a statement was to "help Vice President Biden" win the election.<sup>61</sup> To achieve this goal, Morell wanted to affix as many signatures from former intelligence officials and employees as he could. For Morell, "The more former intelligence officers the better."<sup>62</sup>



Morell seemed to believe that the statement would have a great effect with more signatories. Morell admitted this fact to Nick Shapiro, his former Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor at the CIA, who was tasked with pushing the public statement to the media, writing: "The real power is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>61</sup> See Morell Interview at 11, 78, 102.

<sup>62</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Kirstin Wood (Oct. 18, 2020, 8:01 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>63</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro (Oct. 19, 2020, 8:21 PM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Michael M [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 8:21:10 PM  
**To:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** The Letter

Will send to you shortly.

Some thoughts when dealing with reporters:

1. Between us, the campaign would like Shane Harris to go first. Please share with the campaign when you share with Shane. But, by all means, get it to other reporters as well.
2. On the record from you: What is this? A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former IC leaders, all saying that the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed here are diverse in that they worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know.
3. OTR: Make sure reporters know that we are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that Moscow played a role in getting the information out. I'm afraid people might miss this point and say that we are saying that this is all disinformation.
4. If asked: On background from you: Why Michael? In talking to people, outside of government, who he worked with and who know Russia, he was struck by the fact that all of them thought Russia is involved here. Michael thought people should know that.
5. Also on background from you: We did not speculate on how the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

Morell testified:

So, breaking into two pieces here, the first piece is that three of us took responsibility for sending it out to officials to try to get signatories. Myself, Marc Polymeropoulos, and a woman named Kristin Wood. Kristin worked for me at the [Central Intelligence] Agency. She worked directly for me at the Agency as my aide. We were very close friends. I asked her to do that. She agreed. And then, in terms of getting it to the media, that was entirely Nick Shapiro's responsibility here. So he took that responsibility on.<sup>64</sup>

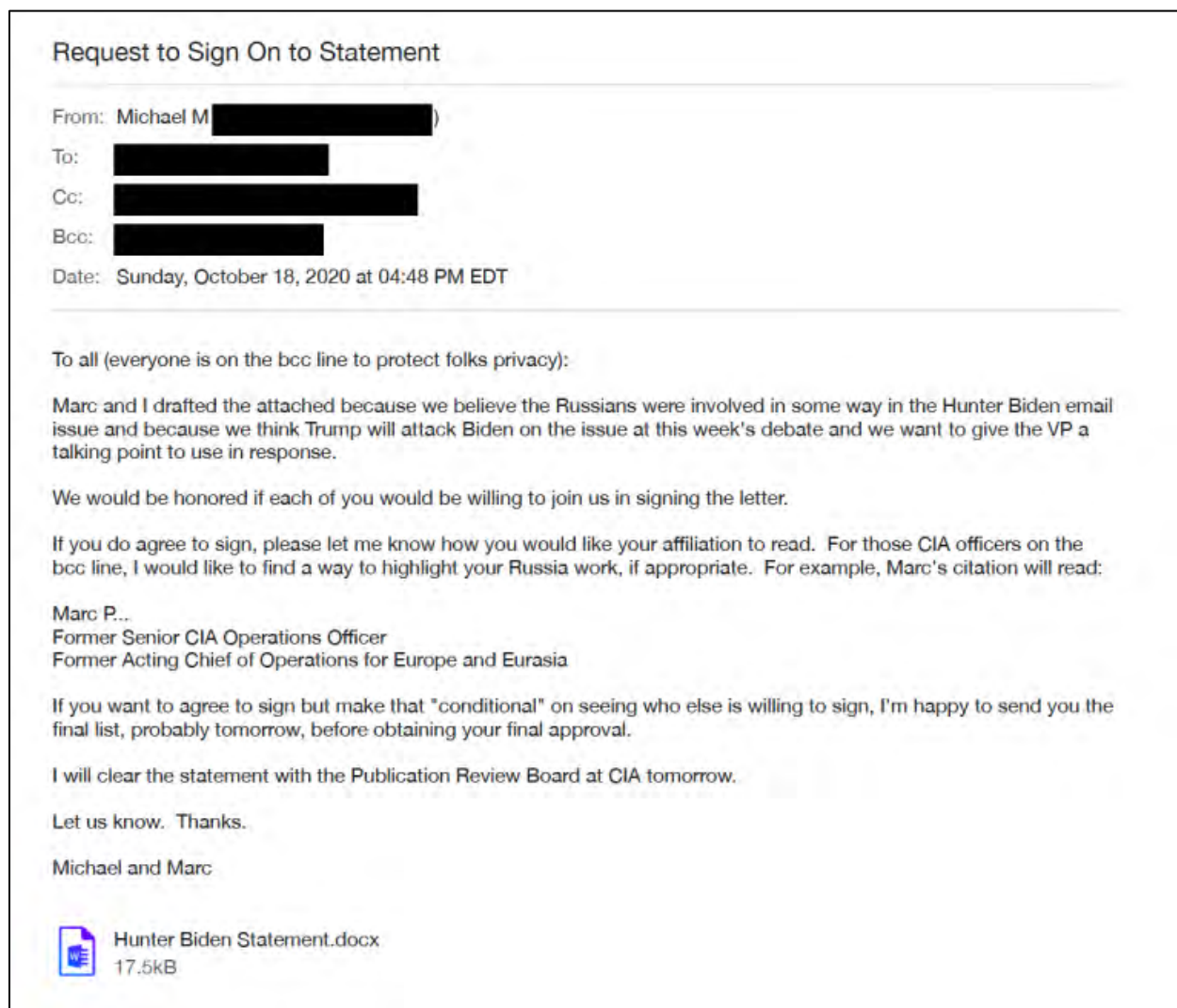
On October 18, Morell sent an email to several former intelligence personnel, writing about helping to give Vice President Biden "a talking point to use in" the final presidential debate.<sup>65</sup> Specifically, Morell wrote, "because we think Trump will attack Biden on the issue at this week's debate and we want to give the VP a talking point to use in response," Morell pleaded, "[w]e would be honored if each of you would be willing to join us in signing the

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<sup>64</sup> Morell Interview at 15-16.

<sup>65</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 18, 2020, 4:48 PM) (on file with the Committees).

letter.”<sup>66</sup>



The next day, Wood sent an email to several former intelligence personnel within her network, using language from Morell's email the previous day.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> Email from Kristin Wood to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 19, 2020, 10:27 AM) (on file with the Committees).

## Quick turnaround: Intelligence officers signing statement on Russian election interference

From: Kristin W [REDACTED])  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Date: Monday, October 19, 2020 at 10:27 AM EDT

To all (everyone bcc'ed to protect privacy),

>> Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos drafted the attached because we believe the Russians were involved in some way in the Hunter Biden email issue and because we think Trump will attack Biden on the issue at this week's debate and we want to offer perspectives on this from Russia watchers and other seasoned experts. (Apologies if you've already received this...we are trying to cast a wide net).

>> We would be honored if each of you would be willing to join us in signing the letter.

>> If you do agree to sign, please let me and Michael know by 2pm ET today and include how you would like your affiliation to read. For CIA officers, we would like to find a way to highlight your Russia work, if appropriate. For example, Marc's citation will read:

>> Marc P..  
>> Former Senior CIA Operations Officer  
>> Former Acting Chief of Operations for Europe and Eurasia

There also is a new category -- the number of people who support the letter but cannot sign publicly.

>> The statement will be sent to the Publication Review Board at CIA later today.

Again, just let us know by 2pm today if you would like to be included.

Thanks!

Kristin



Hunter Biden Statement.docx  
19.2kB

Like Morell, Wood wrote that the group intended for the public statement to help then-Vice President Biden's candidacy, specifically in regards to the upcoming debate: "[W]e think Trump will attack Biden on the issue at this week's debate and we want to offer perspectives on this from Russia watchers and other seasoned experts."<sup>68</sup>

### **D. Some former intelligence officials objected to the first draft of the public statement for being too political, one sought to "strengthen the verbiage," and others refused to sign it altogether.**

The initial statement was so nakedly partisan that some of the former intelligence officials refused to sign it until portions of it were removed. In the initial draft, Morell and Polymeropoulos included two paragraphs about Vice President Biden's relationship with

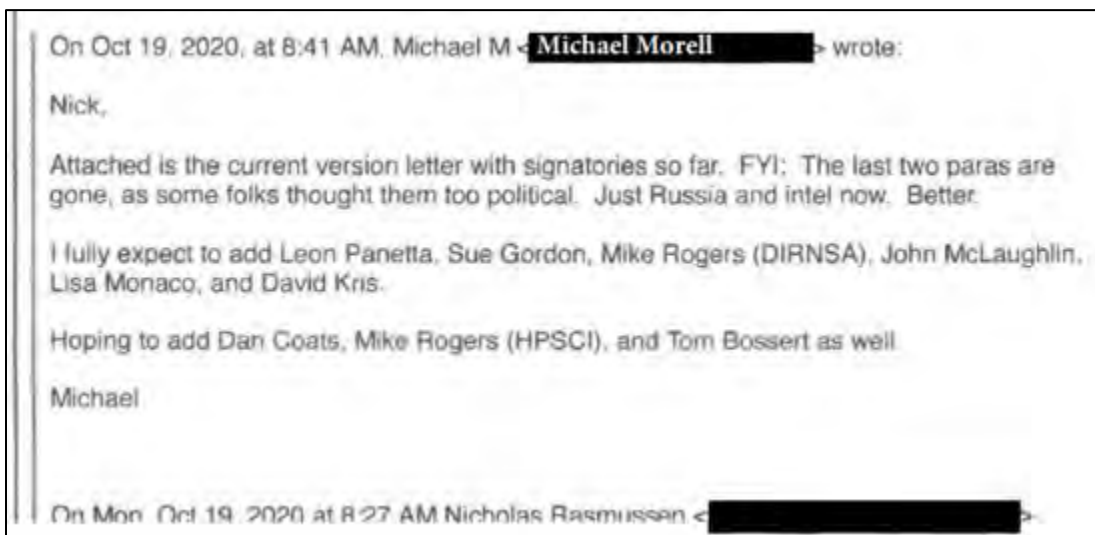
<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

Ukraine, which were later omitted from the final version of the public statement:

For those who argue that it is important for the truth to come out – even if it comes at the cost of foreign interference – let us share our understanding of the what [*sic*] transpired between Vice President Biden and the Ukrainians. It is not what Biden’s opponents want Americans to think.

When the Vice President took a private and public stand against the then Prosecutor General of Ukraine Victor Shokin, he did so as a matter of Obama Administration policy, because Shokin was corrupt, because he was not investigating corruption in Ukraine, and because the Obama Administration wanted a prosecutor who would. This included any corruption at Burisma. Shokin was not investigating Burisma. Biden was not protecting Burisma. Indeed, by arguing that Ukraine needed an aggressive prosecutor, Biden was arguing for just the opposite. The Russians want you to think otherwise.<sup>69</sup>

Some of the signatories objected to these paragraphs as “too political,” as shown in an email exchange between Morell and Nick Rasmussen, former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. Morell explained to Rasmussen that “some folks thought [the two paragraphs] too political. Just Russia and intel now. Better.”<sup>70</sup>



In addition to the edits removing reference to Ukraine, other emails show that former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper offered editorial advice to “strengthen the verbiage.”<sup>71</sup> On October 18, after reviewing the draft statement, Clapper emailed Morell that he

<sup>69</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 19, 2020, 1:38:31 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>70</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Rasmussen (Oct. 19, 2020, 8:41 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>71</sup> Email from James Clapper to Michael Morell (Oct. 18, 2020, 6:10 PM) (on file with the Committees).

would “gladly sign on,” having “said as much [about the Hunter Biden laptop and emails] on CNN Friday evening.”<sup>72</sup> He also offered an editorial suggestion to a key phrase in the statement:

I have one editorial suggestion for the letter: I think it would strengthen the verbiage if you say this has all the classic earmarks of a Soviet/Russian information operation rather than the “feel” of a Russian operation.<sup>73</sup>

On Sun, Oct 18, 2020 at 6:10 PM James Clapper <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Michael:

I'll gladly sign on; I said as much on CNN Friday evening.

I have one editorial suggestion for the letter: I think it would strengthen the verbiage if you say this has all the classic earmarks of a Soviet/Russian information operation rather than the “feel” of a Russian operation.

Jim

Morell responded that Clapper’s “editorial suggestion has been made. It was a good one.”<sup>74</sup>

From: Michael M <Michael Morell [REDACTED]>  
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2020 7:47 PM  
To: James Clapper <[REDACTED]>  
Subject: Re: Request to Sign On to Statement

Jim,

Thanks.

And, your editorial suggestion has been made. It was a good one.

Michael

Other former national security officials were approached and declined to sign the statement.<sup>75</sup> By his own account, Morell solicited the signatures of 36 former intelligence officials,<sup>76</sup> 26 of whom did not sign. Ultimately, the following individuals agreed to add their name to the statement:

Jim Clapper;  
Mike Hayden;  
Leon Panetta;

John Brennan;  
Thomas Finger;  
Rick Ledgett;

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> Email from Michael Morell to James Clapper (Oct. 18, 2020, 7:47 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>75</sup> Morell Interview at 14.

<sup>76</sup> *See* Morell Statement at 3 n.9.

John McLaughlin;  
Michael Morell;  
Mike Vickers;  
Doug Wise;  
Nick Rasmussen;  
Russ Travers;  
Andy Liepman;  
John Moseman;  
Larry Pfeiffer;  
Jeremy Bash;  
Rodney Snyder;  
Glenn Gerstell;  
David B. Buckley;  
Nada Bakos;  
Patty Brandmaier;  
James B. Bruce;  
David Cariens;  
Janice Cariens;  
Paul Kolbe;  
Peter Corsell;  
Brett Davis;  
Roger Zane George;  
Steven L. Hall;

Kent Harrington;  
Don Hepburn;  
Timothy D. Kilbourn;  
Ron Marks;  
Jonna Hiestand Mendez;  
Emile Nakhleh;  
Gerald A. O'Shea;  
David Priess;  
Pam Purcilly;  
Marc Polymeropoulos;  
Chris Savos;  
Nick Shapiro;  
John Sipher;  
Stephen Slick;  
Cynthia Strand;  
Greg Tarbell;  
David Terry;  
Greg Treverton;  
John Tullius;  
David A. Vanell;  
Winston Wiley; and  
Kristin Wood.<sup>77</sup>

**E. On October 19, 2020, Morell sent the CIA the finalized public statement for review, calling it a “rush job,” and quickly secured its approval.**

On October 19, 2020, at 6:34 a.m., Morell sent the final version of the statement to the CIA’s Prepublication Classification Review Board (PCRB) for review.<sup>78</sup> According to Morell, the PCRB consists of CIA officers—“not contractors”—and their sole function is to determine whether former and current CIA personnel are disclosing classified information in any materials they may release publicly.<sup>79</sup> This is because “[a]ll CIA officers, as a condition of employment, sign the standard CIA secrecy agreement when entering on duty . . . [and this] **lifelong** obligation which exists to help avoid the damage to national security” requires they submit any materials they intend to publicize to the PCRB for approval.<sup>80</sup>

Morell directed the PCRB that “[t]his is a rush job, as it need to get out as soon as possible.”<sup>81</sup> Morell wanted the public statement released before the October 22, 2020, presidential debate. Specifically, he testified:

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<sup>77</sup> Jim Clapper et al., *supra* note 4; Bertrand, *supra* note 4.

<sup>78</sup> Email from Michael Morell to PCRB staff (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:34 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>79</sup> Morell Interview at 29.

<sup>80</sup> CIA, PREPUBLICATION CLASSIFICATION REVIEW BOARD, <https://www.cia.gov/about/organization/prepublication-classification-review-board/> (emphasis in original).

<sup>81</sup> Email from Michael Morell to PCRB Staff (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:34 AM).



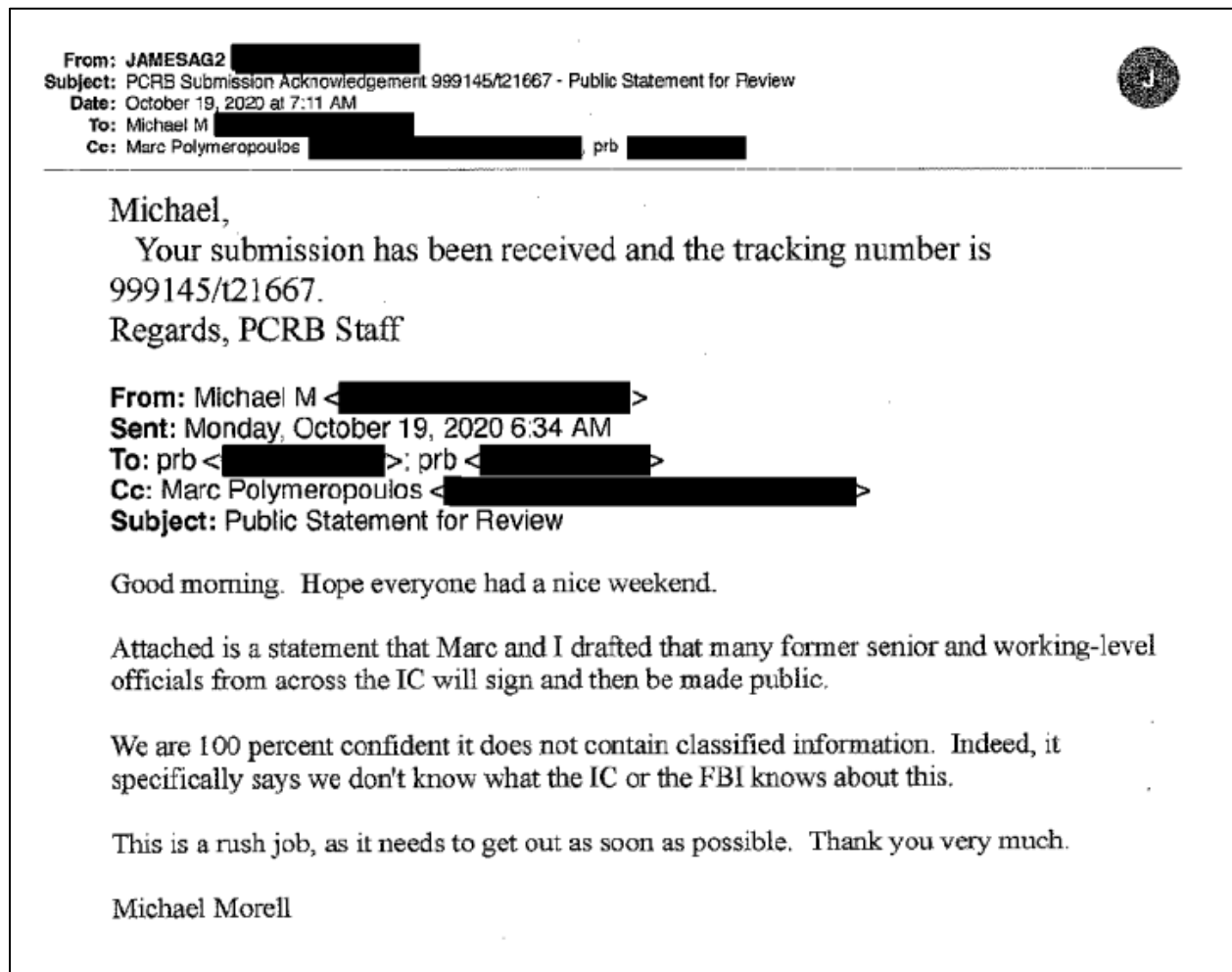
Q. And, in this, you described . . . it as a rush job to the officials at the CIA. Why? Were you trying to get it out?

A. We were trying to get it out before the debate, yes.

Q. Before the debate?

A. Yes, ma'am.<sup>82</sup>

The PCRB responded on October 19, 2020, at 7:11 a.m., that it received the submission.<sup>83</sup>



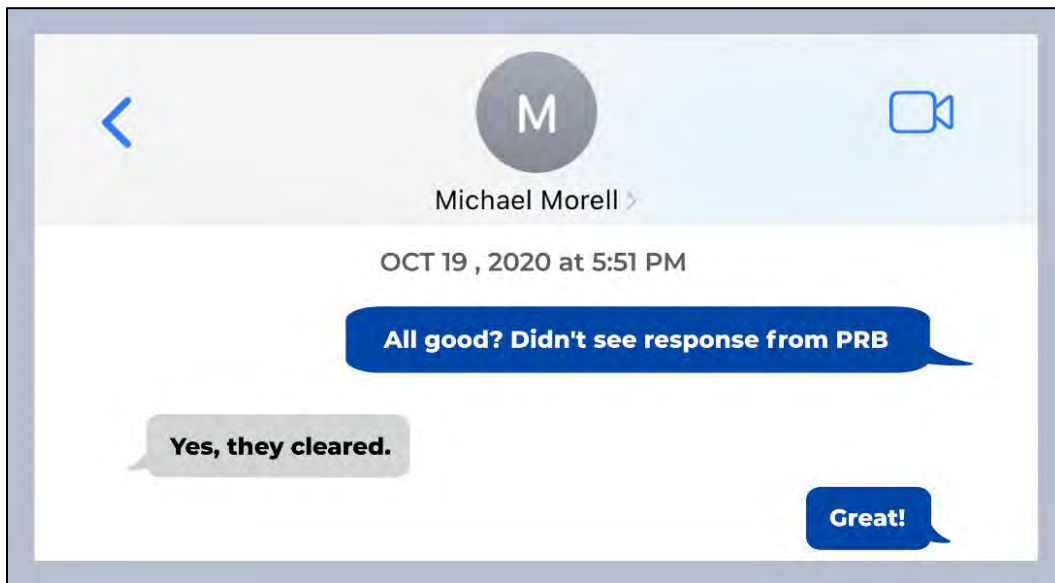
Morell testified the statement was “approved . . . as written.”<sup>84</sup> Although the timing of the PCRB’s approval is uncertain, it appears to have come before 5:51 p.m. In response to a text message at that time from Polymeropoulos, who “[d]idn’t see” a response from PCRB, Morell

<sup>82</sup> Morell Interview at 28. COMM. ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES, *supra* note 5.

<sup>83</sup> Email from JAMESAG2 to Michael Morell (Oct. 19, 2020, 07:11 AM) (on file with the Committees) (“Michael, [y]our submission has been received and the tracking number is 999145/t21667. Regards, PCRB Staff.”);

<sup>84</sup> Morell Interview at 28.

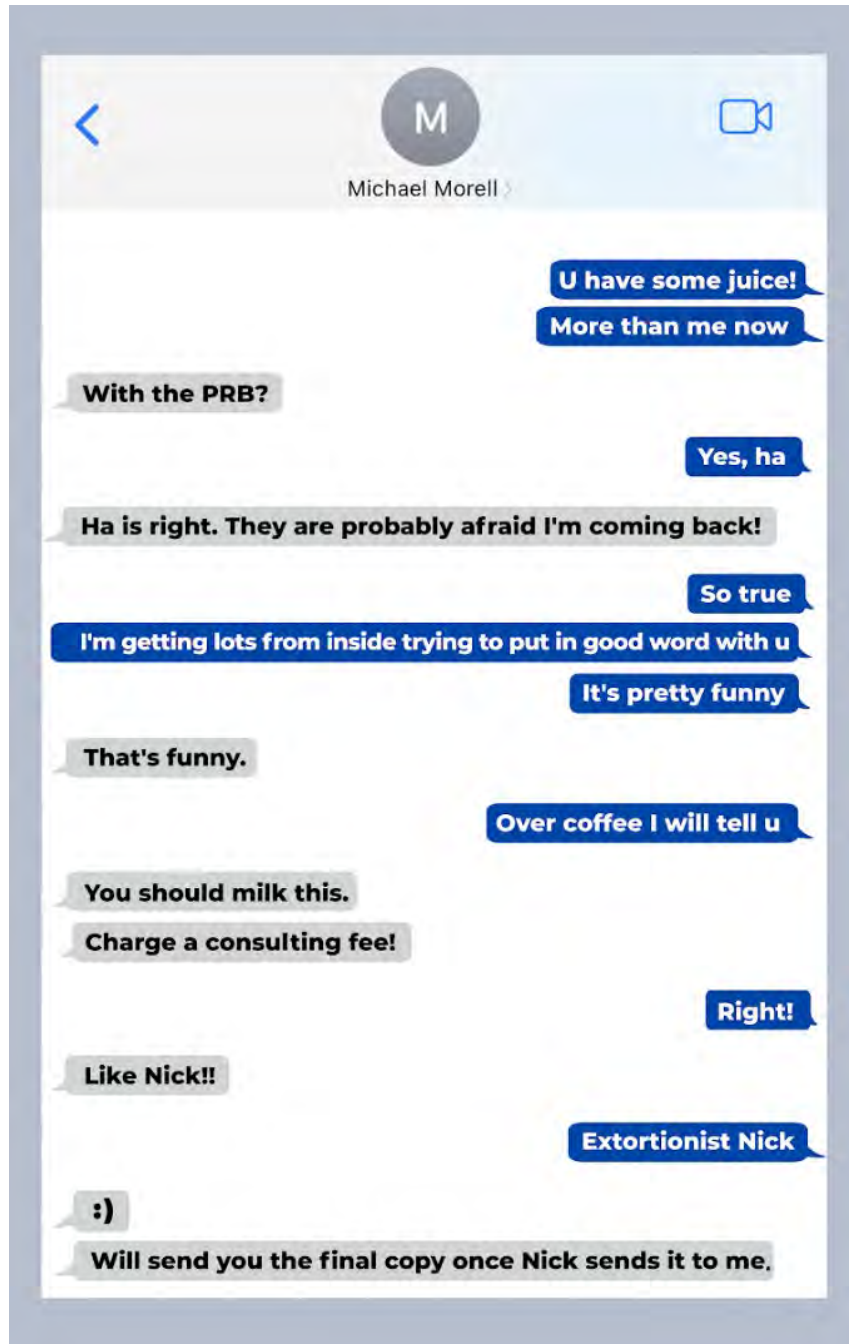
texted that the PCRB “cleared” the statement.<sup>85</sup> Notably, none of the former intelligence officials who signed the letter and produced documents to the Committees, including Morell, have produced the PCRB’s email approving the statement.



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 19, 2020)

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<sup>85</sup> Text message from Marc Polymeropoulos to Michael Morell (Oct. 19, 2020, 5:51 PM) (on file with the Committees).



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 19, 2020)

Morell testified:

- Q. And was the email the only communication you had with the CIA?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You did not speak to any of the officials on the phone?

A. I did not. I did not.<sup>86</sup>

**F. Contrary to the signers' assessment, the intelligence community publicly stated that the Hunter Biden laptop was not part of a Russian disinformation campaign.**

On October 19, while Morell and others worked procuring more signatories for the statement, Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe—who, unlike the statement's signatories, was in government as the top intelligence official in the United States and privy to all classified information—stated publicly that “Hunter Biden’s laptop is not part of some Russian disinformation campaign.”<sup>87</sup> He further stated: “Let me be clear: The intelligence community doesn’t believe that because there is no intelligence that supports that.”<sup>88</sup> Director Ratcliffe issued this statement in response to Congressman Adam Schiff’s claim that Hunter Biden’s laptop and emails came “from the Kremlin. That’s been clear for well over a year now that they’ve been pushing this false narrative about the vice president and his son.”<sup>89</sup>



<sup>86</sup> Morell Interview at 28. Morell has not produced the email from the PRCB approving the public statement. In his statement to the Committees, Morell stated that his document production is incomplete because, since 2015, he began “to regularly delete all communications in his personal email account.” Morell Statement at 1.

<sup>87</sup> Mark Moore, *DNI John Ratcliffe says info on Hunter Biden laptop isn’t Russian disinformation*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 19, 2020).

<sup>88</sup> *Id.*

<sup>89</sup> Olivia Beavers & Joe Concha, *Ratcliffe, Schiff battle over Biden emails, politicized intelligence*, THE HILL (Oct. 19, 2020).

Rather than give the then-Director of National Intelligence's statement credence or at least a modicum of deference, Morell rejected it wholesale. He testified:

Q. So did the statement put out by the Director of National Intelligence that day or earlier that morning, did that have any influence on your decision with the letter, specifically, what Mr. Ratcliffe said?

A. No.

Q. Even though he said . . . the emails were not part of some Russian disinformation operation.

A. It did not because, as a former intelligence officer with much more experience than Mr. Ratcliffe, I don't know how he could have come to that conclusion. How could he know . . . it wasn't part of Russian disinformation?

\*\*\*

Q. So you were obviously aware of Mr. Ratcliffe's statement that morning before you sent the letter out?

A. Yes.

Q. And, as you sit here today, do you believe the Russians were involved in the Hunter Biden laptop matter?

A. I don't know. I mean, I still have suspicions, Congressman.

Q. Would you organize such a letter today knowing what you know now?

A. I would have to write it differently because we now know the emails are authentic, right? So you couldn't say anymore we don't know whether it's information or disinformation. But I still have suspicions about a Russian role in these emails getting to *The New York Post*.<sup>90</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) ratified Director Ratcliffe's statement. In a letter to Senator Ron Johnson, then-Chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, the FBI stated, "we have nothing to add at this time to the October 19th public statement by the Director of National Intelligence about the available actionable intelligence" on Hunter Biden's laptop and emails.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Morell Interview at 37, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Even Perez, *FBI says it has 'nothing to add' to Ratcliffe's claim on Russian disinformation*, CNN (Oct. 21, 2020).



U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Washington, D.C. 20535-0001

October 20, 2020

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson:

This responds to your letter, dated October 17, 2020, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) regarding the authenticity of certain information provided to your Committee, including whether such information is linked to a foreign adversary's influence operation or is otherwise fraudulent. You also ask several questions about a laptop computer reportedly produced pursuant to a grand jury subpoena.

As you may know, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has advised the American public that, in advance of the 2020 election, a number of nation-states plan to use covert and overt influence measures in an attempt to sway voter preferences and perspectives, sow discord in the United States, and undermine the confidence of Americans in our democratic process. The FBI is the primary investigative agency responsible for the integrity and security of the 2020 election, and as such, we are focused on an array of threats, including the threat of malign foreign influence operations. Regarding the subject of your letter, we have nothing to add at this time to the October 19<sup>th</sup> public statement by the Director of National Intelligence about the available actionable intelligence. If actionable intelligence is developed, the FBI in consultation with the Intelligence Community will evaluate the need to provide defensive briefings to you and the Committee pursuant to the established notification framework.

Finally, as the FBI advised the Committee in its letter, dated October 5, 2020, consistent with longstanding Department of Justice (Department) policy and practice, the FBI can neither confirm nor deny the existence of any ongoing investigation or persons or entities under investigation, including to Members of Congress. As the Inspector General firmly reminded the Department and the FBI in recent years, this policy is designed to preserve the integrity of all Justice Department investigations and the Department's ability to effectively administer justice without political or other undue outside influences. Therefore, the FBI cannot provide any additional information in response to the enumerated questions in your letter.

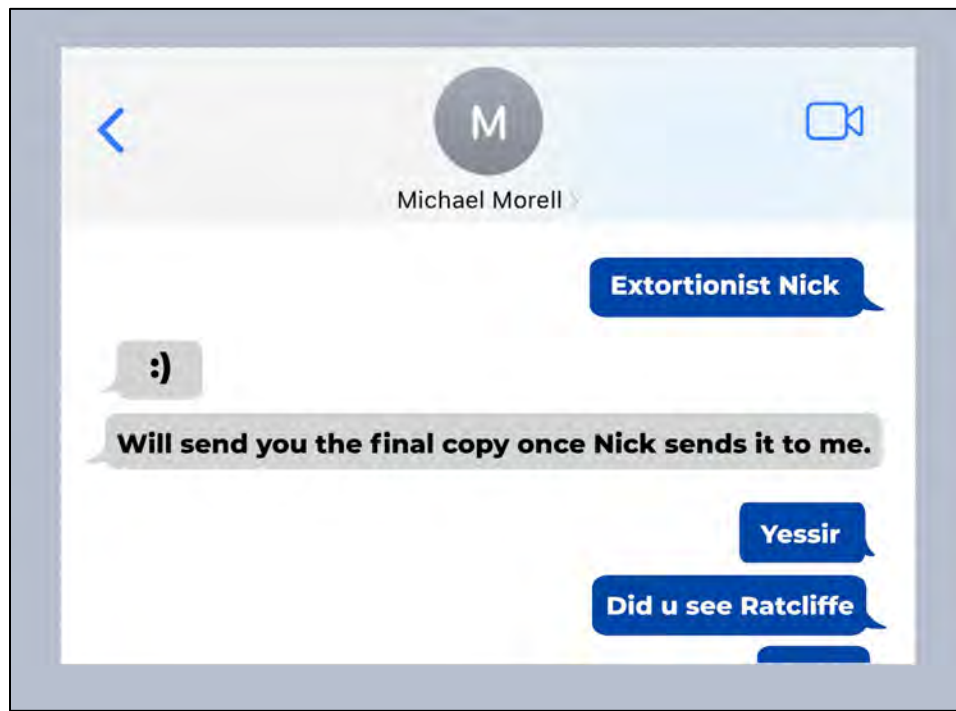
Thank you for your support of the FBI, its mission, and its people.

Sincerely,

Jill C. Tyson  
Assistant Director  
Office of Congressional Affairs

Letter from FBI to Senator Ron Johnson (Oct. 20, 2020)

Even after learning of Ratcliffe’s statement that the laptop and emails were not Russian disinformation, Morell and Polymeropoulos were not dissuaded. In one text exchange on October 19, Polymeropoulos remarked to Morell: “Did u see Ratcliffe[?] Omg[.]”<sup>92</sup>



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 19, 2020)

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<sup>92</sup> Text message from Marc Polymeropoulos to Michael Morell (Oct. 19, 2020, 5:51 PM) (on file with the Committees). Polymeropoulos produced these text messages to the Committees with redactions, including what follows “OMG.”



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 19, 2020)



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## II. The Committees have evidence that the CIA may have promoted the statement to other intelligence community officials.

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According to a written statement provided to the Committees by former CIA official David Cariens, the CIA—or at least an employee of the CIA—may have helped in the effort to solicit signatures for the statement. Cariens explained that he spoke with the PCRB in October 2020 regarding the review of his memoir and during that call the CIA employee “asked” him if he would sign the statement.<sup>93</sup> As Cariens explained:

When the person in charge of reviewing the book called to say it was approved with no changes, I was told about the draft letter. The person asked me if I would be willing to sign. . . . After hearing the letter’s contents, and the qualifiers in it such as, “We want to emphasize that we do not know if the emails provided to the *New York Post* by President Trump’s personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, are genuine or not and that we do not have evidence of Russian involvement . . .” I agreed to sign.<sup>94</sup>

From: David Cariens [REDACTED]  
Sent: Sunday, March 5, 2023 3:02 PM  
To: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Re: FW: Letter for Mr. David Cariens

[REDACTED]—Thank you for acknowledging my response. My wife and I are happy to help in any way possible.

To put our position in proper perspective, my wife retired from the CIA in 1995 and has not had security clearances after that time. I retired in 1997 and continued to do contract work for the CIA and other members of the Intelligence Community. I teach intelligence and crime analysis. My contract work for the CIA ended in 2017 and I no longer had security clearances after that.

The answer to the two questions posed in the April 6, 2022 letter are:

1. I am the author of nine books, including two text books on intelligence and crime analysis. All my work is passed through the CIA’s Publications Review Board (PRE) for approval. My last book, a memoir, entitled *Escaping Madness*, was before the PRB in October, 2020. When the person in charge of reviewing the book called to say it was approved with no changes, I was told about the draft letter. The person asked me if I would be willing to sign. (I do not recall the person’s name or the exact date of the phone call.) After hearing the letter’s contents, and the qualifiers in it such as, “We want to emphasize that we do not know if the emails provided to the *New York Post* by President Trump’s personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, are genuine or not and that we do not have evidence of Russian involvement . . .” I agreed to sign. I had been following the Hunter Biden laptop issue, and as a former director of CIA University’s course in deception analysis (with a heavy emphasis on all forms of Soviet/KGB deception), I felt there was enough circumstantial evidence to raise the suspicion that Russian intelligence was involved. I shared these views with my wife, also a former CIA officer, and she agreed to sign as well.
2. We have no documents because all of the above was done in a phone call. Neither my wife nor I have discussed the letter with any of the other signatories or any member of the U.S. policy or intelligence communities.

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. Regards, David and Janice Cariens

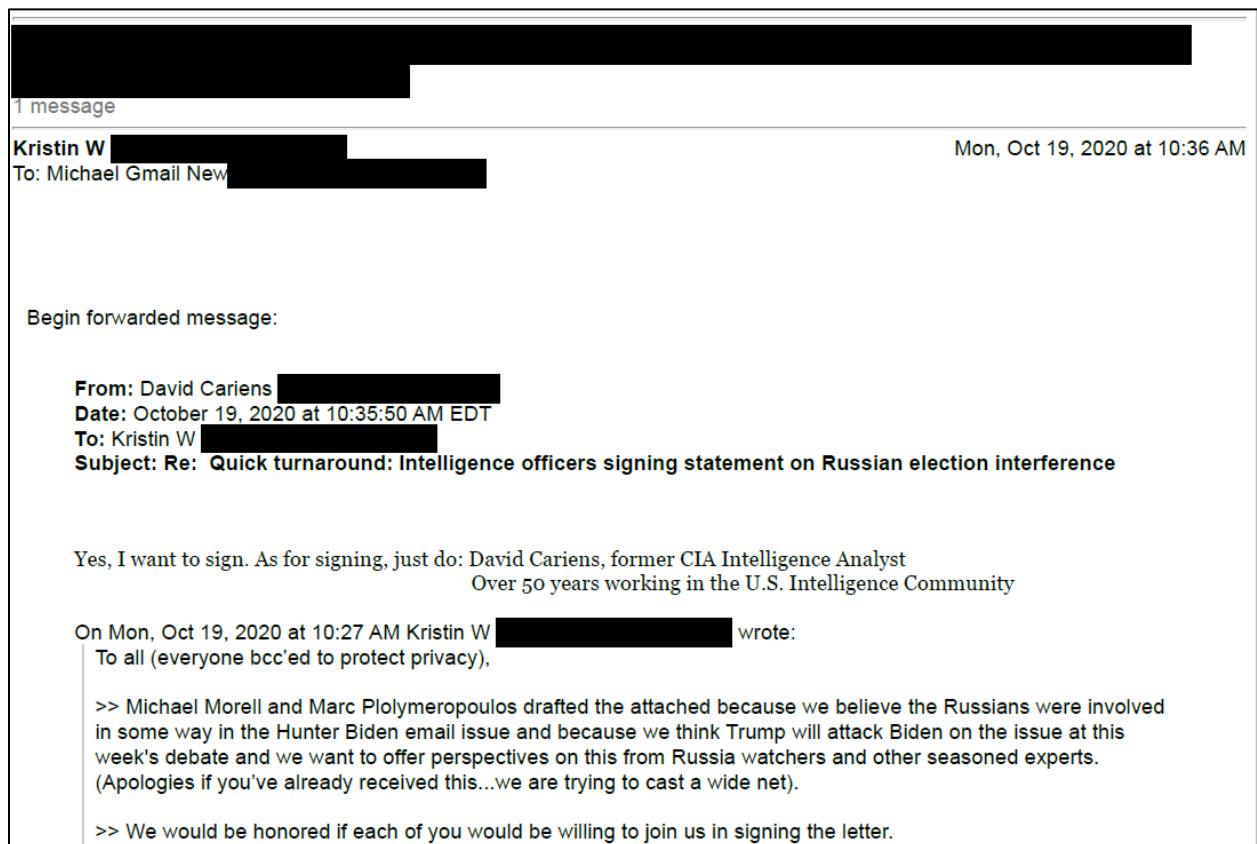
[www.davecariens.com](http://www.davecariens.com)

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<sup>93</sup> Email from David Cariens to Committee staff (March 5, 2023, 3:02 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

Cariens’s statement did not provide the precise timing of his communication with the PCRB. However, the Committees received an email exchange, produced by Kristin Wood, in which Cariens wrote, “Yes, I want to sign,” on October 19, at 10:35 a.m.—eight minutes after Wood sent the mass distribution email soliciting signatures.<sup>95</sup> PCRB was in possession of the statement since 6:34 a.m. on October 19, when Morell emailed it to the unit for approval.<sup>96</sup> PCRB acknowledged receipt of the statement, at 7:11 a.m. that same day.<sup>97</sup>



Cariens’s revelation is potentially shocking. As he recounted, a CIA employee informed him about the statement, the CIA employee read the text of the statement to him, and the CIA employee asked Cariens if he would like to join.

Indeed, even Morell testified that such an action by a CIA employee would be “inappropriate.” Morell explained:

- A. I did not coordinate with the CIA. I would have—had I known [Cariens’s allegation], I would have reacted very negatively to this. This might—you know, had I known at the time this might have been in the letter, then I certainly would have reported this to then

<sup>95</sup> Email from David Cariens to Kristin Wood (Oct. 19, 2020, 10:35:50 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>96</sup> Email from Michael Morell to PCRB staff (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:34 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>97</sup> Email from JAMESAG2 to Michael Morell (Oct. 19, 2020, 07:11 AM) (on file with the Committees).

the Director of the Agency.

Q. And why would you have done this?

A. Because this is inappropriate.

Q. And why is it inappropriate?

A. It's inappropriate for a currently serving staff officer or contractor to be involved in the political process.

Q. Do you know the people who were engaged in this review for the CIA?

A. I do not.

Q. You don't know any of the people who work in that process.

A. I do not, sir.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Polymeropoulos testified that such an action from the CIA would be "incredibly unprofessional":

Q. Does what Mr. Cariens described there, that interaction with the PCRB, sound like a quid pro quo to you?<sup>99</sup>

A. I can't comment on this. This is—to me, this is something that the PCRB in my experience would never engage in something like that. They are just straightforward back and forth in terms of approval. The idea they would have a comment on any other thing that they were working on, that to me is not even close to what I've experienced with them.

Q. Does that concern you?

A. If it's true, it would concern me, for sure. But I just—I have a hard time believing that occurred. If it did, that's incredibly unprofessional.<sup>100</sup>

Likewise, upon being confronted with Cariens's statement, Shapiro testified:

No. I mean, I have no idea what happened here, to be very—this is

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<sup>98</sup> Morell Interview at 30-31.

<sup>99</sup> *Quid pro quo*, Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (11th ed. 2020) ("something given or received for something else.").

<sup>100</sup> Polymeropoulos Interview at 24.

the first I'm hearing of this.

But my guess—and lawyers would probably tell me not to guess or defend the PRB, but what I could've seen happen is someone in the PRB being inappropriate and asking, hey, are you signing this thing? Which, PRB shouldn't be sharing, like, materials they get from one former with other formers. Like, that shouldn't be.

Because, as a former, if you send something—I've never sent something, but I know people who have—you're doing that because you're supposed to, but you're also hoping it stays within confidence. Like, usually, if you're going to send something to the PRB, you're sending it elsewhere, and you don't want the PRB spreading that.

So my guess for this was that it was someone who acted inappropriately and was just stupidly outing it and asking these folks if they were going to sign it.

I can't imagine the PRB trying to get someone to sign it by offering to clear something else. That would be really bad.<sup>101</sup>

Given the gravity of this allegation, the Committees sent a letter to CIA Director William J. Burns, on March 21, 2023, requesting documents about the CIA's review of the statement and its interactions with former CIA employees, such as Cariens, about the statement.<sup>102</sup> The Committees requested that the CIA furnish these documents by April 4, 2023.<sup>103</sup> To date, the CIA has failed to respond to this request. The Committees have also sought to follow up with Cariens for additional information.

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<sup>101</sup> Transcribed Interview of Mr. Nick Shapiro at 26 [hereinafter "Shapiro Interview"].

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Chairman Jim Jordan, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, and Chairman Michael R. Turner, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, to Hon. William J. Burns, Dir., Cent. Intel. Agency (Mar. 21, 2013).

<sup>103</sup> *Id.*

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### **III. The Biden campaign coordinated with the organizers to promote the public statement with the media.**

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The Committees' oversight has also revealed that the Biden campaign worked with Morell and the other organizers of the statement to promote the statement publicly. Specifically, in coordination with the Biden campaign, Morell enlisted Shapiro, a long-time "national security and strategic communications" aide, to coordinate dissemination efforts with the media.<sup>104</sup>

#### **A. Morell and Shapiro worked with the Biden campaign to release the statement to the media.**

According to testimony provided to the Committees, Morell worked with Shapiro to disseminate it publicly. Morell testified that, "in terms of getting [the statement] to the media, that was entirely Nick Shapiro's responsibility here. So he took that responsibility on."<sup>105</sup> Email correspondence between Morell and Shapiro, Shapiro and journalists, and Shapiro and the Biden campaign reveal the extent of this effort.

On October 19, as Morell continued to recruit former intelligence officials to affix their names to the statement, he emailed Shapiro that he "[s]hould have something to give to the media through you tomorrow afternoon."<sup>106</sup> Morell promised Shapiro that he would "explain on the phone tomorrow how this came to be."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See 10th Avenue Consulting, <https://www.10thavenueconsulting.com/> (last visited May 4, 2023) ("Founder and CEO, Nick Shapiro has more than 15 years of crisis management, national security and strategic communications experience in the White House, at the CIA and in the private sector. Previously, Shapiro was the CIA's Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director. Shapiro also served in the White House as a Senior Counterterrorism and Homeland Security Aide on the National Security Council, and he was a National Security Spokesperson for President Obama.").

<sup>105</sup> Morell Interview at 16.

<sup>106</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:36:42 AM) (on file with the Committees). In emails that Mr. Shapiro produced to the Committees, the timestamps are inconsistent with the times and, in one instance, the date, in which events unfolded. When the Committees inquired about these discrepancies, Mr. Shapiro's counsel provided the following response: "[I]t appears that such timestamp inaccuracies are a common issue faced by individuals, like Mr. Shapiro, who use the Gmail email server. The primary cause for these discrepancies appears to be the result of inaccurate time zone settings in the Gmail application, the web browser, and/or the computer settings itself. Unless the user manually corrects the time zone settings in Gmail, the computer's setting, and/or their web browser, the emails will continue to reflect an inaccurate time zone – regardless of where the user may have sent the email. Although we cannot rule out other technical issues, various online publications suggests that this is the most common reason for these discrepancies." Email from Timothy Sini, counsel for Nick Shapiro, to Committee staff (May 3, 2023, 10:00 PM) (on file with the Committees). Mr. Shapiro's counsel affirmed that, despite the timestamp discrepancies, Mr. Shapiro "emailed the *Washington Post*, the *AP*, and *Politico*, prior to the publication being run in the *Politico*. He emailed [Andrew] Bates at some point after contacting at least one of these media companies and prior to *Politico* running the story." Email from Timothy Sini, counsel for Nick Shapiro, to Committee staff (May 5, 2023, 11:53 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>107</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:36:42 AM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Michael Gmail New [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 6:36:42 AM  
**To:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Request to Sign Statement

Great and great. I will explain tomorrow on the phone how this came to be.

I've sent the draft to David Kris and Lisa Monaco but have not yet heard back. They should sign.

I'm looking for two things — pairs of senior who served in the same position from different administrations (Hayden and Panetta, Jeh Johnson and Mike Chertoff, Lisa and Ken Wainstein, Clapper and Coats, etc) and then a slew of former IC and national security who worked Russia.

Should have something to give to the media through you tomorrow afternoon. Let's talk when you get a chance in the morning.

Sent from my iPad

On Oct 18, 2020, at 11:55 PM, Nick Shapiro [REDACTED] wrote:

happy to sign and will also send around to folks if you want me to

Nick Shapiro  
Former CIA Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director

Later on October 19, Morell sent Shapiro “some thoughts when dealing with reporters.”<sup>108</sup> Specifically, Morell informed Shapiro that, “[b]etween us,” the Biden campaign preferred that a certain reporter with the *Washington Post* run the statement first.<sup>109</sup> Morell asked Shapiro to “share with the campaign when you share with” the reporter.<sup>110</sup> Morell also sent Shapiro a lengthy script of information to share on various levels of sourcing—on the record, off the record, and on background.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro (Oct. 19, 2020, 8:21:10 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

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**From:** Michael M [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 8:21:10 PM  
**To:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** The Letter

Will send to you shortly.

Some thoughts when dealing with reporters:

1. Between us, the campaign would like [REDACTED] to go first. Please share with the campaign when you share with [REDACTED]. But, by all means, get it to other reporters as well.
2. On the record from you: What is this? A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former IC leaders, all saying that the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed here are diverse in that they worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know.
3. OTR: Make sure reporters know that we are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that Moscow played a role in getting the information out. I'm afraid people might miss this point and say that we are saying that this is all disinformation.
4. If asked: On background from you: Why Michael? In talking to people, outside of government, who he worked with and who know Russia, he was struck by the fact that all of them thought Russia is involved here. Michael thought people should know that.
5. Also on background from you: We did not speculate on how the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

In the background information that Morell gave Shapiro to tell reporters, Morell claimed the genesis of the public statement came from feedback from other Russia experts: “In talking to people, outside of government, who [Morell] worked with and who know Russia, [Morell] was struck by the fact that all of them thought Russia is involved here. [Morell] thought people should know that.”<sup>112</sup> This assertion is disingenuous for several reasons.

First, Morell admitted in testimony to the Committees that he spearheaded the effort to publish the public statement for overtly political reasons—to help Vice President Biden in the debates and ultimately win the election.<sup>113</sup> Second, other than soliciting thoughts from and collaborating with Polymeropoulos,<sup>114</sup> Morell testified he did not speak to anyone about potential Russian involvement with Hunter Biden’s laptop, but rather researched the issue himself following his conversation with Blinken. He explained:

- A. The first thing I did when Mr. Blinken called me is I did some research. I had not read *The New York Post* article. I went and read it. I did some internet searches. I did a little

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<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

<sup>113</sup> See Morell Interview at 11, 78, 102.

<sup>114</sup> See text message exchange between Michael Morell to Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 17, 2020, 2:16 PM) (on file with the Committees).

bit of research here before I reached out to [Polymeropoulos].

\*\*\*

Q. [A]s part of the research that you did in between the contact with Mr. Blinken and the contact with [Polymeropoulos], did you contact any individuals as a part of your research?

A. I did not.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, Morell’s claim is undercut by his disclosure that a majority of the people who he asked to sign the statement declined to do so.<sup>116</sup> Although the precise reasons they declined are not yet known, these facts cast doubt on Morell’s intended perception that a groundswell of Russia experts organically concluded that the Hunter Biden laptop was a Russian intelligence operation.

Shapiro emailed the *Washington Post* reporter the statement, along with scripted on-the-record comments and background information.<sup>117</sup> It is important to note that Shapiro kept one of the most important elements of this story off the record—namely, “We are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that Moscow played a role in getting the information out.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Morell Interview at 20

<sup>116</sup> See Morell Statement at 3 n.9. Bertrand, *supra* note 4. Morell solicited the signatures of 36 former intelligence officials, and 26 of those individuals did not sign the public statement.

<sup>117</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to *Washington Post* reporter (Oct. 19, 2020, 9:25 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>118</sup> *Id.*



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**From:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 9:25:33 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** The Letter  
**Attachments:** Former IC Officers Public Statement.docx

Ok - here you go.

Giving this to you exclusively first if you guys want to run with it. Then will give to others once you post.

You can also use this **on the record** from me (Nick Shapiro, Former CIA Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director) describing what this is:

"A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former intelligence community leaders, are all saying that they believe the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed this letter worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here however is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know that once again the Russians are interfering."

**Off The Record:** We are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that we believe Moscow played a role in getting the information out.

**On Background:** We did not speculate on how exactly the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

Appearing not to receive a favorable response from their preferred *Washington Post* journalist, Shapiro sent the public statement and an identical email to an *Associated Press* reporter about two hours later.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to *Associated Press* reporter (Oct. 19, 2020, 11:15 PM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 11:15:06 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** The Letter  
**Attachments:** Former IC Officers Public Statement.docx

Ok - here you go.

Giving this to you exclusively first if you guys want to run with it. Then will give to others once you post.

You can also use this **on the record** from me (Nick Shapiro, Former CIA Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director) describing what this is:

"A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former intelligence community leaders, are all saying that they believe the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed this letter worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here however is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know that once again the Russians are interfering."

**Off The Record:** We are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that we believe Moscow played a role in getting the information out.

**On Background:** We did not speculate on how exactly the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

Shapiro made sure to update the Biden campaign—specifically, Andrew Bates, Director of Rapid Response—after reaching out to the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press*, stating, “This is what I gave them.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to Andrew Bates (Oct. 19, 2020, 11:22 PM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/19/2020 11:22:24 PM  
**To:** Andrew Bates [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Letter  
**Attachments:** Former IC Officers Public Statement.docx

This is what I gave them -

Ok - here you go.

Giving this to you exclusively first if you guys want to run with it. Then will give to others once you post.

You can also use this **on the record** from me (Nick Shapiro, Former CIA Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director) describing what this is:

"A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former intelligence community leaders, are all saying that they believe the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed this letter worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here however is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know that once again the Russians are interfering."

**Off The Record:** We are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that we believe Moscow played a role in getting the information out.

**On Background:** We did not speculate on how exactly the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

After apparently not receiving a favorable response from the *Associated Press* reporter, Shapiro later sent the email with the public statement to *Politico* about an hour later.<sup>121</sup> *Politico*, of course, eventually published the story.

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<sup>121</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to Natasha Bertrand (Oct. 20, 2020, 12:27 AM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/20/2020 12:27:59 AM  
**To:** Natasha Bertrand [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** The Letter  
**Attachments:** Former IC Officers Public Statement.docx

Ok - here you go.

Giving this to you exclusively first. Then will give to others once you post your story.

You can also use this **on the record** from me (Nick Shapiro, Former CIA Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director) describing what this is:

"A large group of former career intelligence officers, many specializing in Russia, joined by a group of former intelligence community leaders, are all saying that they believe the Russians were somehow involved here. The IC leaders who have signed this letter worked for the past four Presidents, including Trump. The real power here however is the number of former, working-level IC officers who want the American people to know that once again the Russians are interfering."

**Off The Record:** We are not making a call on whether the materials are true or not, just that we believe Moscow played a role in getting the information out.

**On Background:** We did not speculate on how exactly the Russians played in this particular case because there are so many different possibilities.

In his transcribed interview, Shapiro testified about the process of soliciting the statement to the media. He testified:

Q. And we understand from your productions that there were three journalists that you sent the statement to: [REDACTED] of *The Washington Post*, [REDACTED] of the *Associated Press*, and Natasha Bertrand of *Politico*?

A. Yep.

Q. Why those three?

A. [REDACTED] because I was asked to go to [REDACTED] first. And then the *AP* is a really good outlet you want stories in. And then *Politico* – I don't know why I went to *Politico* after that.

\*\*\*

Q. We know that Natasha Bertrand is the one that ultimately ran with the article. Why did [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] decline to do so?

A. I don't remember. I know we – I'm sure we spoke. But you'd have to ask them. Reporters decline things all the time.

Q. Okay. But they did get back to you, I assume, over the phone?

A. Yeah.

Q. Because we didn't have any of those records and –

A. Yeah. I looked back at the emails, and it's clear that I spoke to them before I emailed them, which is normal. When I'm talking to a reporter, I'll call them and say, "Hey, you know, I've got this idea. What do you want to do?" And then, considering it was a letter, I'm sure I said, "I'll follow up and send it to you," which is what I did with each of them.

And then, for each of them, we got back on the phone. And *Washington Post* and *AP* said no. And *Politico* I think I probably just reiterated these points to Natasha.<sup>122</sup>

**B. *Politico* ultimately published a story about the statement, falsely calling the Hunter Biden laptop and emails Russian disinformation.**

On October 19, 2020, at 10:30 p.m., *Politico* published the public statement it received from Shapiro, with an accompanying article titled: "Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former intel officials say."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Shapiro interview at 20-22.

<sup>123</sup> Bertrand, *supra* note 4.

NATIONAL SECURITY

## Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former intel officials say

More than 50 former intelligence officials signed a letter casting doubt on the provenance of a New York Post story on the former vice president's son.



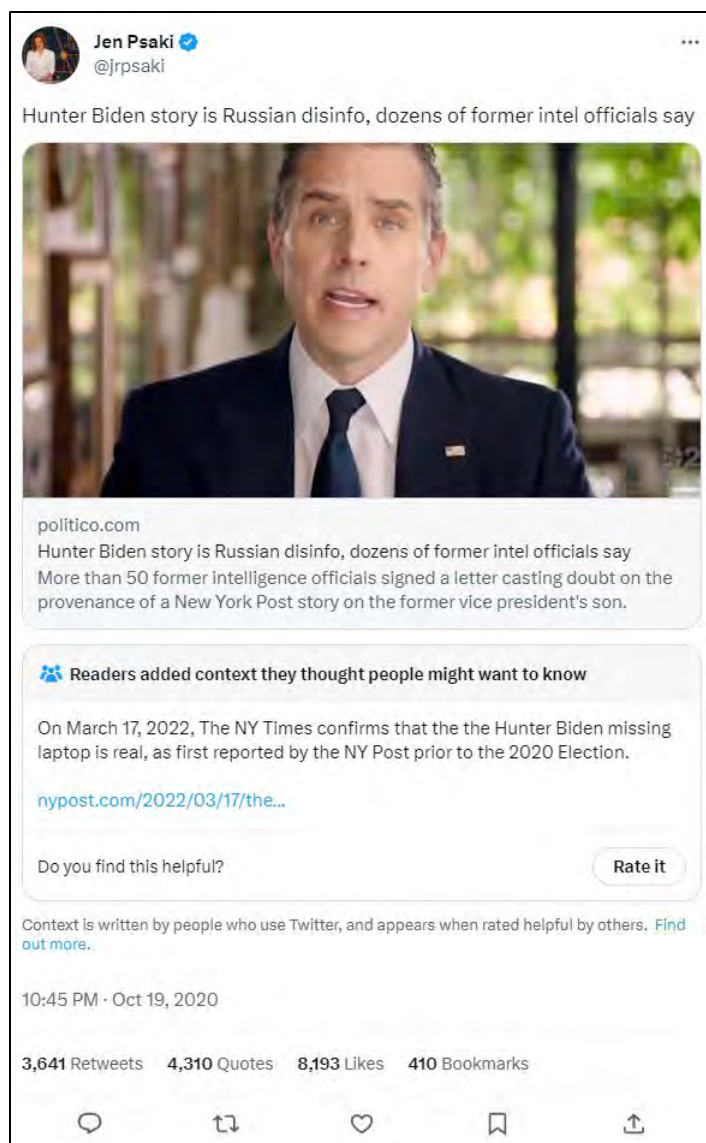
More than 50 former senior intelligence officials have signed on to a letter outlining their belief that the recent disclosure of emails allegedly belonging to Hunter Biden, pictured here, "has all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation." | Handout/DNCC via Getty Images

By NATASHA BERTRAND  
10/19/2020 10:30 PM EDT



Supporters of the Biden campaign immediately promoted the article, including Jen Psaki, who would later become the White House Press Secretary under President Biden.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Jen Psaki (@jrpsaki), Twitter (Oct. 19, 2020, 10:45 PM), <https://twitter.com/jrpsaki/status/1318382779659411458>.



Despite *Politico*'s conclusory headline, Morell, Polymeropoulos, and Shapiro all testified that their statement was not intended to make a conclusive determination about whether the Hunter Biden allegations were disinformation. Morell testified that “the statement clearly says that we’re not saying this is disinformation.”<sup>125</sup> Polymeropoulos testified that, at the presidential debate, “Vice President Biden” had “mischaracterize[ed]” the statement by calling “it disinformation, which is not what the letter said.”<sup>126</sup> And Shapiro testified:

Q How do you feel now that you know that the contents on the laptop were not Russian disinformation?

A Meaning that they were real?

<sup>125</sup> Morell Interview at 26.

<sup>126</sup> Polymeropoulos Interview at 28.

Q Yes.

A I'm sure glad that we put that in the letter, saying that we don't know if this is real or not.<sup>127</sup>

Notwithstanding these recent protestations, there is no evidence that the statement's signers attempted to correct *Politico's* misleading headline. Indeed, Morell "knew" the media would not run the letter's caveats. He testified:

Q. Do you regret that those caveats [in the statement] that you seem to be relying on heavily today weren't really part of the public discourse and the political discourse around this letter?

A. I knew they wouldn't be. I knew they wouldn't be, as much as we tried, right? As you guys know better than anybody, right, politics is hyperbole and particularly debates. There's a lot of hyperbole around, a lot of people taking things and taking them a little bit further, right? You know that better than I do. So I wasn't surprised at all that – you know, when President Biden – when Vice President Biden talked about this at the debate that he didn't say, "Hey, I have to put some caveats on this." That's not what happens at debates.

\*\*\*

Q. So you knew when you put this product out with caveats that its utilization politically likely wouldn't include those caveats?

A. I guessed that politicians would not use the caveats. I was hoping that fact-checkers and I was hoping the media – disappointed in that regard – would pay more attention to them.

Q. But you testified earlier that you were accelerating – you were requesting an acceleration of the review of this material so it could be used in a debate, right?

A. Yes, sir.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, contemporaneous documents show that some of the signatories adopted *Politico's* framing that the laptop was Russian disinformation. One of the intelligence officials who signed onto the statement, Thomas Fingar, the former Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis and Chair of the National Intelligence Council, wrote to colleagues at Stanford University that the statement "conveys our judgment that the Hunter Biden emails story

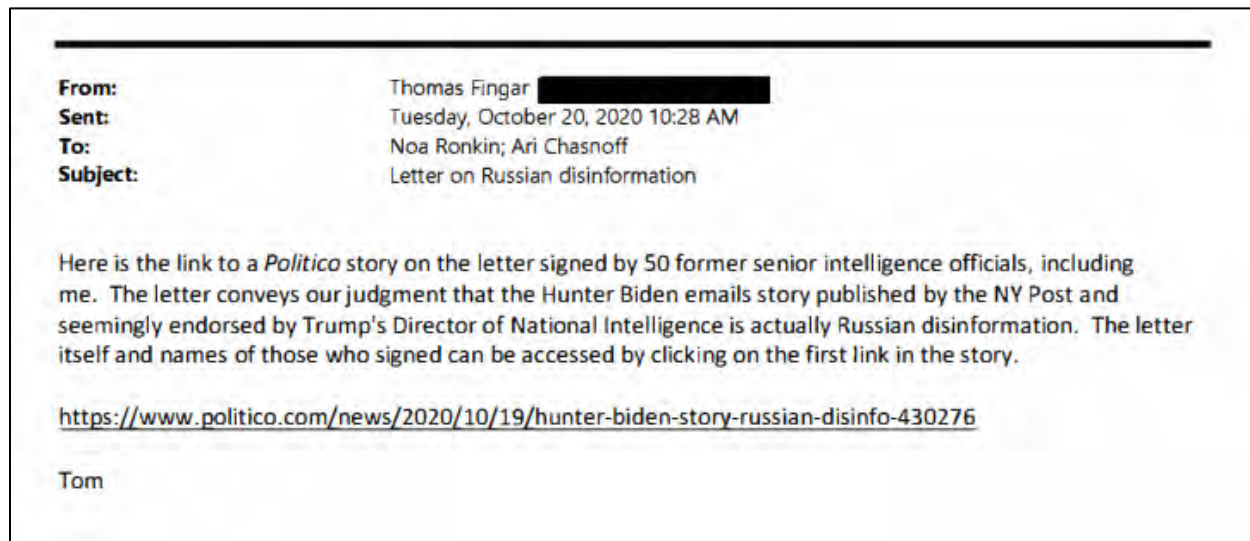
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<sup>127</sup> Shapiro Interview at 28.

<sup>128</sup> Morell Interview at 88-89.



published by the NY Post and seemingly endorsed by Trump’s Director of National Intelligence is actually Russian disinformation.”<sup>129</sup>



Fingar, in sharing the *Politico* story with Stanford’s public affairs team, appeared intent on having the university promote the story among its networks.<sup>130</sup> But Fingar’s Stanford colleagues did not seem willing. One Stanford employee immediately grasped the statement was nothing more than a political document.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, she used the word “political” four times in her terse response to Fingar explaining that Stanford cannot endorse these sorts of “political opinions.”<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Email from Thomas Fingar to Noa Ronkin and Ari Chasnoff (Oct. 20, 2020, 10:28 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>130</sup> STANFORD-FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, All FSI People / Staff, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/people/noa-ronkin-0>; <https://fsi.stanford.edu/people/ari-chasnoff> (last visited May 4, 2023).

<sup>131</sup> Email from Noa Ronkin to Thomas Fingar (Oct. 20, 2020, 1:00 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>132</sup> *Id.*

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**From:** Noa Ronkin [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 20, 2020 1:00 PM  
**To:** Thomas Fingar  
**Cc:** Ari Chasnoff  
**Subject:** Re: Letter on Russian disinformation

Thank you, Tom, but this is something that we are advised not to promote, per the guidelines for political activities the University released last month. While all members of the University community may express their political opinions and engage in political activities in their individual capacities using personal resources, we must avoid even the appearance that they are speaking or acting for the University in political matters.

Thanks for your understanding,  
Noa

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Noa Ronkin, DPhil  
Associate Director for Communications and External Relations  
Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC)  
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies  
Stanford University  
[REDACTED]  
[aparc.fsi.stanford.edu](http://aparc.fsi.stanford.edu) | [REDACTED]

In an October 20 email to the signers of the statement, Morell wrote that “*Politico* did a nice job getting out the story of our letter.”<sup>133</sup> Morell, however, expressed no concern about the story’s conclusory headline that the laptop was Russian disinformation.

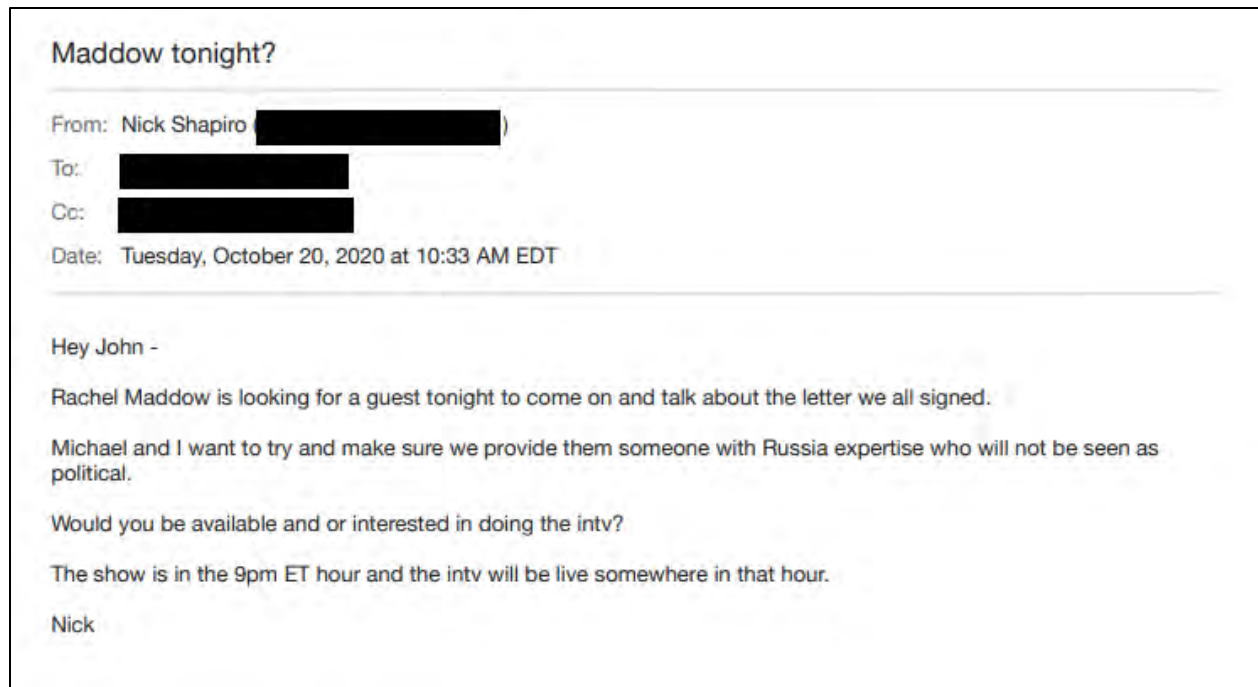
Similarly, on October 20, a day after *Politico* ran its story about the statement, Shapiro emailed another signatory, John Sipher, a former career CIA officer, to sit for an interview with MSNBC commentator Rachel Maddow.<sup>134</sup> Shapiro noted an interest in placing a statement signatory before a friendly talk show host and ensuring that signatory had “Russia expertise” and “will not be seen as political.”<sup>135</sup> Here, too, there was no mention about nuancing *Politico*’s headline or caveating the assertions in the statement.

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<sup>133</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 20, 2020, 1:40 PM) (on file with Committees).

<sup>134</sup> Email from Nick Shapiro to John Sipher (Oct. 20, 2020, 10:33 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>135</sup> *Id.*



Likewise, Jeremy Bash,<sup>136</sup> another former intelligence community official, appeared on MSNBC the same day the statement was released. His assertions about Hunter Biden’s laptop and emails were unambiguous and did not include nuanced caveats in the statement. He said:

We need to talk about it, Nicole. [The Hunter Biden allegations] looks like Russian intelligence, this walks like Russian intelligence, this talks like Russian intelligence. This effort by Rudy Giuliani and the *New York Post* and Steve Bannon to cook up supposed dirt on Joe Biden looks like a classic Russian playbook disinformation campaign.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> President Biden appointed Bash to the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board in August 2022. White House, *President Biden Announces Key Appointments to Boards and Commissions* (Aug. 26, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/26/president-biden-announces-key-appointments-to-boards-and-commissions-6/>.

<sup>137</sup> Nicole Wallace, *Bash On Pushing Of Disinformation On Biden: This Looks, Walks, & Talks Like Russian Intelligence*, MSNBC (Oct. 19, 2020); *see also* Deadline: White House, MSNBC (Oct. 19, 2020).



The MSNBC host then amplified the falsehood: “I think Jeremy has made clear we shouldn’t look at [the statement] as anything other than a Russian disinformation operation.”<sup>138</sup> If these intelligence officials were concerned about *Politico*’s misrepresentation of their public statement, there has been no contemporaneous indication of such a concern.

**C. The *Politico* article and public statement helped to support the continued suppression of the allegations uncovered from emails on Hunter Biden’s laptop.**

In a recent retrospective, the *New York Post* explained how the public statement contributed to the continued suppression of the underlying allegations contained in the emails on Hunter Biden’s laptop—namely, Hunter Biden’s pattern of monetizing his familial relationship with Vice President Biden’s likely knowledge. The *Post* piece reasoned:

Yes, that letter from the Dirty 51 had “all the classic earmarks” of a disinformation operation, all right — one designed to ensure Joe Biden won the presidency. And it was essentially a CIA operation, considering 43 of the 51 signatories were former CIA.

In the two years since, not one of them has admitted they are wrong.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.*

[One signer] David Priess at least gets marks for subjecting himself to a cross-examination on Fox News one recent afternoon. He tried to defend the letter by saying people were too stupid to understand it. The letter was “still true” because it did not use the words “Russian disinformation,” but concocted the weasel phrase “earmarks of a Russian information operation.”

He knows perfectly well that Biden and the media drew no distinction, that the letter he signed was used to censor and deride *The Post*’s accurate story and deny the American people the truth about one of the two candidates for president.<sup>139</sup>

Similarly, an opinion writer with the *Washington Post* observed:

In addition to these meetings with current officials, a group of 51 former intelligence officials released a public letter when the story broke in which they alleged that the release of Hunter Biden’s emails “has all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation,” adding, “If we are right, this is Russia trying to influence how Americans vote in this election.”

They were not right. But together, these warnings by current and former national security officials gave Twitter the pretext to censor the story — and mainstream news outlets the excuse to dismiss or ignore it, which many of them did.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Miranda Devine, *It’s been two years since 51 intelligence agents interfered with an election — they still won’t apologize*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 19, 2022).

<sup>140</sup> Marc A. Thiessen, *The suppression of Hunter Biden’s laptop is a huge scandal*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Dec. 9, 2022).

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**IV. The statement had its intended effect of giving Vice President Biden a “talking point” to use in the presidential debate.**

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The public statement signatories had a common goal: “to help Vice President Biden in the debate” and to help him win the presidency.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, some of the former intelligence officials who signed the public statement were deeply satisfied that Vice President Biden referred to the statement in the final presidential debate before the election. After the debate, the signers congratulated themselves on a job well done, and the Biden campaign even called to thank Morell for organizing the effort.

**A. Then-Vice President Biden relied on the public statement in the presidential debate to falsely assert that Hunter Biden allegations were a Russian “plan.”**

On October 22, 2020, the last debate between then-Vice President Biden and President Trump took place at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>142</sup> After President Trump pressed Vice President Biden about his son’s laptop and emails, Biden called the American people’s attention to the statement, noting the significance of the intelligence community officials who signed the statement:

President Trump: It’s the laptop from hell.

Moderator: President Trump, we’re talking about race right now and I do want to stay on the issue of race. President Trump –

Vice President Biden: Nobody – Kristen, I have to respond to that.

Moderator: Please, very quickly.

Vice President Biden: Look, there are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what this, he’s accusing me of is a Russian plan. They have said that this has all the characteristics — four– five former heads of the CIA, both parties, say what he’s saying is a bunch of garbage. Nobody believes it except him and his good friend Rudy Giuliani.

President Trump: You mean, the laptop is now another Russia, Russia, Russia hoax? You gotta be –

Vice President Biden: That’s exactly what — That’s exactly what –

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<sup>141</sup> Morell Interview at 78, 102.

<sup>142</sup> COMM. ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES, *supra* note 5.

President Trump: Is this where you're going? This is where he's going.  
The laptop is Russia, Russia, Russia?<sup>143</sup>

Two days later, the *Washington Post* took note of Vice President Biden's reliance upon the public statement, noting critically:

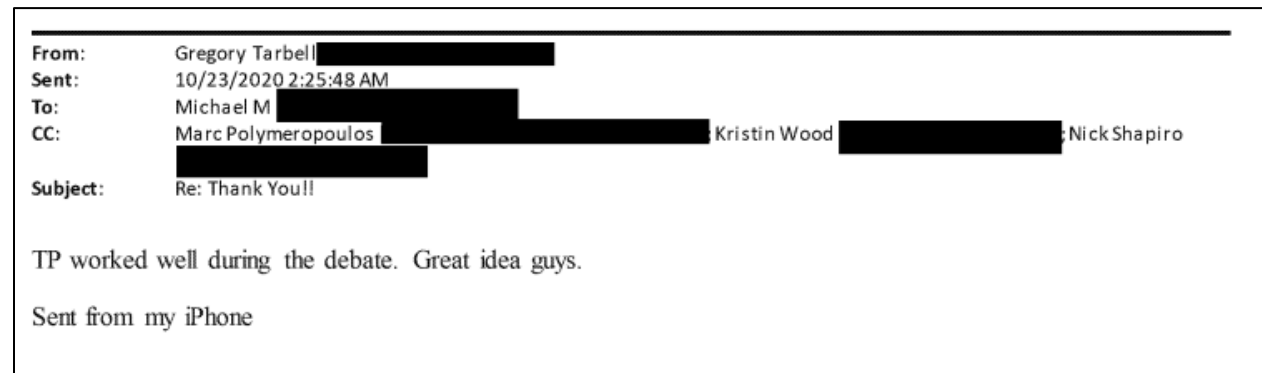
Joe Biden leaned heavily on a letter from former U.S. intelligence and defense officials in Thursday night's debate to argue that Russia orchestrated a disinformation operation allegedly involving damaging information obtained from his son's laptop that was promulgated by President Trump's personal attorney, Rudolph W. Giuliani.

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The Biden campaign's decision to lean into accusations of Russian involvement in the episode, despite lacking specific proof, risks eroding public trust in U.S. allegations of foreign election interference if the suspicions in this case turn out to be unfounded, according to intelligence and foreign policy experts.<sup>144</sup>

#### **B. The statement's signatories celebrated after the debate.**

The signers of the statement were pleased with Vice President Biden's response and his reliance upon the statement during the debate, as emails between them make clear. One signer, Gregory Tarbell, former CIA Deputy Executive Director, wrote that the talking points "worked well during the debate" and applauded Morell, Polymeropoulos, Wood, Shapiro, and others on what the "[g]reat idea" for the statement.<sup>145</sup>



<sup>143</sup> *Id.*

<sup>144</sup> Annie Linskey & Paul Soone, *Biden relies on pattern of activity to blame Russia for release of data from what is said to be his son's laptop*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Oct. 24, 2020).

<sup>145</sup> Email from Gregory Tarbell to Michael Morell (Oct. 23, 2020, 2:25 AM) (on file with the Committees).

In response, Wood stated that Vice President Biden’s mention of the statement during the debate “was really cool.”<sup>146</sup>

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**From:** Kristin W [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/23/2020 3:02:06 AM  
**To:** Gregory Tarbell [REDACTED]  
**CC:** Michael M [REDACTED]; Marc Polymeropoulos [REDACTED]; Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Thank You!!

That was really cool.

Hope you are well, Mr. Tarbell!

On Oct 22, 2020, at 10:25 PM, Gregory Tarbell [REDACTED] wrote:

TP worked well during the debate. Great idea guys.

Sent from my iPhone

Polymeropoulos voiced similar sentiments, calling it “very cool.”<sup>147</sup>

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**From:** Marc Polymeropoulos [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 10/23/2020 4:34:13 AM  
**To:** Kristin W [REDACTED]  
**CC:** Gregory Tarbell [REDACTED]; Michael M [REDACTED]; Nick Shapiro [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Thank You!!

I fell asleep! Just saw now....very cool....

Sent from my iPhone

On Oct 22, 2020, at 23:02, Kristin W [REDACTED] wrote:

That was really cool.

Hope you are well, Mr. Tarbell!

On Oct 22, 2020, at 10:25 PM, Gregory Tarbell [REDACTED] wrote:

TP worked well during the debate. Great idea guys.

Sent from my iPhone

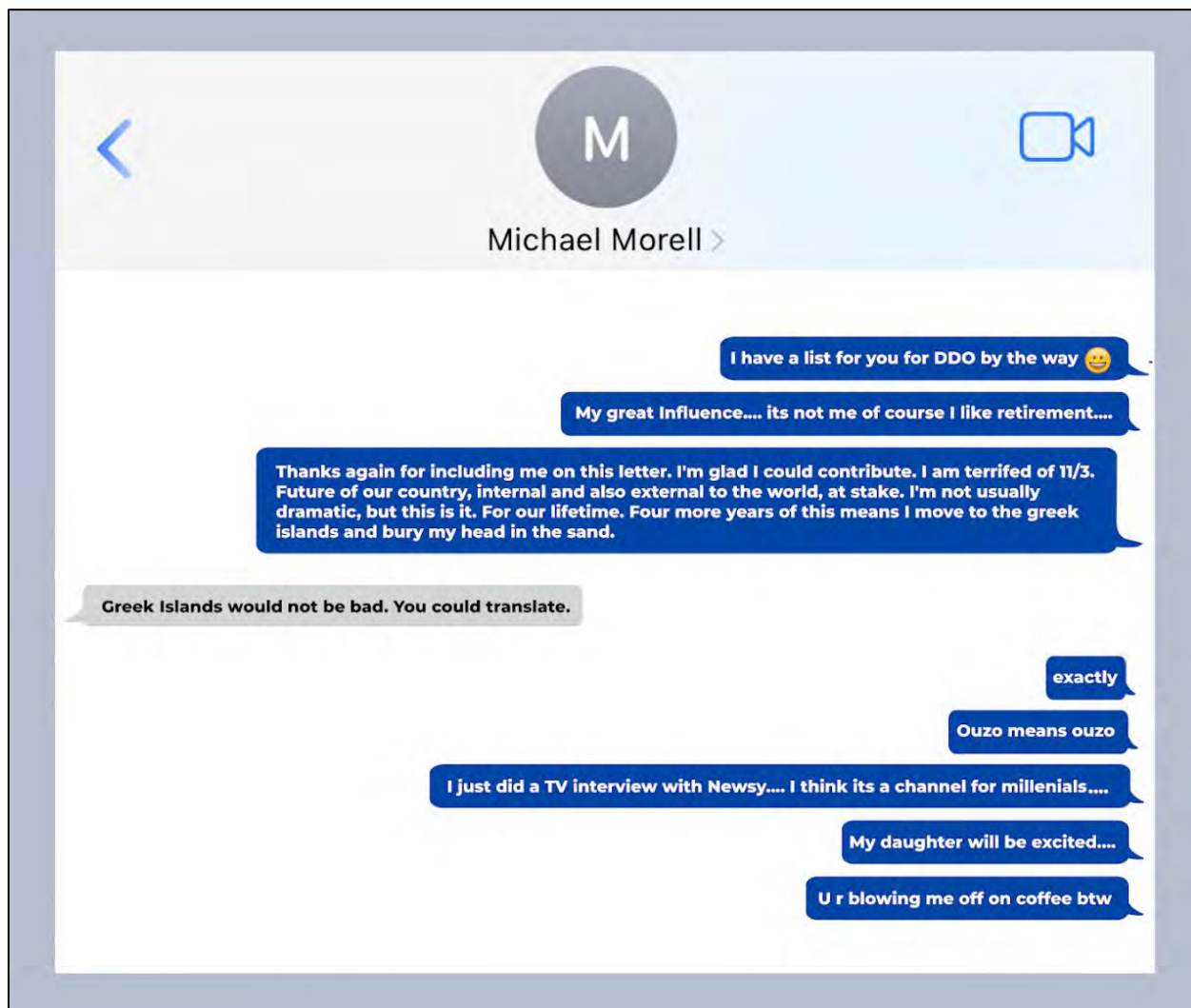
<sup>146</sup> Email from Kristin Wood to Gregory Tarbell (Oct. 23, 2020, 3:02 AM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>147</sup> Email from Marc Polymeropoulos to Kristin Wood (Oct. 23, 2020, 4:34 AM) (on file with the Committees).



Four day earlier, in a private exchange with Morell, Polymeropoulos expressed his appreciation for “including me on this letter.” He wrote:

Thanks again for including me on this letter. I’m glad I could contribute. I am terrified of 11/3. Future of our country, internal and also external to the world, at stake. I’m not usually dramatic, but this is it. For our lifetimes. Four more years of this means I move to the greek [sic] islands and bury my head in the sand.<sup>148</sup>



Text message between Michael Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos (Oct. 19, 2020)

Morell testified to the self-satisfaction the signatories felt for their involvement in the presidential debate. He testified:

Q. And then we also have a number of emails that have been produced

<sup>148</sup> Text message from Marc Polymeropoulos to Michael Morell (Oct. 19, 2020, 5:51 PM) (on file with the Committees).

to the committee where the people on – a number of the people who signed it were sort of congratulating each other for the fact that it was, in fact, used in the debate.

A. Yes, sir.<sup>149</sup>

In a final email to the signatories, Morell expressed his own satisfaction in successfully getting the statement published. He wrote to his co-signatories:

I think this is the most important election since 1860 and 1864 when the very existence of the country was on the ballot. Now, it is our democracy and the Constitution that are on the ballot. We all, of course, took an oath to “preserve, protect, and defend” the Constitution. I think all of you did that yesterday by signing this letter.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Morell Interview at 99.

<sup>150</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Unnamed Intelligence Officials (Oct. 20, 2020, 1:40 PM) (on file with the Committees).

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**From:** Michael M [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 20, 2020 9:40 AM  
**To:** Michael M  
**Cc:** Marc Polymeropoulos; Kristin Wood; Nick Shapiro  
**Subject:** Thank You!!

To all,

[I put most everyone on the bcc line to protect email addresses]

I just want to thank everyone for signing the letter on the Hunter Biden emails. We ended up with over 50 signatories.

Politico did a nice job getting out the story of our letter. Here is a link to the article for those who have not seen it. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/19/hunter-biden-story-russian-disinfo-430276>

We will monitor how much media coverage it gets and will let you know.

I also want to thank Marc for helping to draft the letter, Kristin for helping to spread the word, and Nick for working with the media.

By the way, if any reporters reach out to you, feel free to either talk to them or to send them Nick's way. Nick has the final version of the letter, if any reporters are looking for that (although there is a link to the letter itself in the Politico piece).

I think this is the most important election since 1860 and 1864 when the very existence of the country was on the ballot. Now, it is our democracy and the Constitution that are on the ballot. We all, of course, took an oath to "preserve, protect, and defend" the Constitution. I think all of you did that yesterday by signing the letter. Thank you.

Michael

**C. The Biden campaign called Morell and thanked him for his service to the campaign.**

After the October 22, 2020, presidential debate, Biden campaign chairman Steve Ricchetti called Morell and thanked him for the statement. Morell testified:

Q. Did you talk to [Steve Ricchetti] at all regarding the statement that you helped organize and put out?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. When did you talk with him?

A. After the debate – I think it was after the debate – in fact, I'm pretty sure it was after the debate – I got a phone call from Jeremy Bash, who I work with at Beacon and who is active politically. And Jeremy said: Do you have a minute to talk to Steve Ricchetti? I said: Of course. He was the head of the Biden campaign at the time. And

Jeremy got him on the line, and Steve thanked me for putting the statement out.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Morell Interview at 96-97.

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**V. Some signatories expressed outrage about Congressional oversight into the origins of the statement.**

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The Committees are in possession of emails exchanged among some of the senior former intelligence officials following the Committees’ oversight requests regarding the origins of the statement. While the Committees fully recognize and respect every Americans’ right to engage in the political process, the Committees have a legitimate legislative purpose in understanding how these officials used their intelligence credentials and official titles to mislead American voters about serious Biden family allegations in the final days before the 2020 election.

The emails exchanged following the Committees’ oversight suggest outrage among some signatories for having to explain the origins of the statement. Former National Security Agency Director Michael Hayden asked some co-signers—including Morell, John Brennan, Jeremy Bash, Thomas Fingar, and others—if they “should have a coordinated response.”<sup>152</sup> Brennan responded that he would voice his “strong opposition to such political tactics,” asserting that complying with the Committees’ request for documents and testimony “would serve as a precedent that [Chairman Jordan] and others could seek to leverage when making frivolous requests of other former intelligence officials in the future.”<sup>153</sup>



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<sup>152</sup> Email from Michael Hayden to Jim Clapper et al. (Feb. 7, 2023, 1:11 PM) (on file with the Committees).

<sup>153</sup> Email from John Brennan to Michael Hayden (Feb. 7, 2023, 2:18 PM) (on file with the Committees).

On Feb 7, 2023, at 14:18, **John Brennan** wrote:

Mike,

Thanks for your query.

Like you, I am weighing my options.

Although I have not yet received any of Mr. Jordan's letters, I find his request for a transcribed interview and documentation related to my decision to sign a public statement, *as a private citizen*, a gross infringement of my First Amendment right of freedom of speech. Indeed, as a former senior intelligence and national security official, I believe I need to signal my strong opposition to such political tactics. Acceding to Mr. Jordan's request, in my view, would serve as a precedent that he and others could seek to leverage when making frivolous requests of other former intelligence officials in the future.

I am mindful that this issue involves a very important principle that potentially affects all former intelligence officials, and, accordingly, I want to proceed thoughtfully.

Best,

John

Morell, to his credit, rejected Hayden's suggestion to coordinate a response, counseling his former colleagues: "If at least some of us respond, I think it would be a mistake to coordinate. We would, for sure, be accused of a conspiracy to obstruct a Congressional investigation."<sup>154</sup>

**From:** Michael J Morell [redacted]  
**Subject:** Re: Letter from Jordan & Turner  
**Date:** February 7, 2023 at 1:39 PM  
**To:** Michael Hayden, **Jim Clapper**, John McLaughlin, Jeremy Bash, **Mike Vickers**, Richard Ledgett, **Thomas Fingar**, **Nick Rasmussen**, **John Brennan**  
**Cc:** Mike Hayden, Jeanine Hayden

MM

Mike,

I'm chatting with my lawyer about my options. If at least some of us respond, I think it would be a mistake to coordinate. We would, for sure, be accused of a conspiracy to obstruct a Congressional investigation.

Michael

[Get Outlook for iOS](#)

<sup>154</sup> Email from Michael Morell to Michael Hayden et al. (Feb. 7, 2023, 1:39 PM) (on file with the Committees).

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## Conclusion

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The American people deserve to know that Hunter Biden’s laptop and emails were real. They always were real. The allegations that they were the product of Russian disinformation were false. Even the *New York Times* was forced to acknowledge, almost two years after the 2020 election, “a cache of files that appears to have come from a laptop abandoned by [Hunter] Biden in a Delaware repair shop” was “authenticated by people familiar with them and with the investigation.”<sup>155</sup>

On the morning of October 19, 2020, at least 12 hours before the statement was released by *Politico*, then-Director Ratcliffe publicly stated, on behalf of the intelligence community, that Hunter Biden’s laptop and emails were not Russian disinformation.<sup>156</sup> Within 24 hours of then-Director Ratcliffe’s statement, the Department of Justice and the FBI confirmed his declaration.<sup>157</sup>

Reflecting on that moment, former-Director Ratcliffe recently stated:

You had the intelligence community and the law enforcement community on behalf of the United States of America saying this is not Russian disinformation. . . . You have literally had the Bidens lie about it—Hunter Biden, Joe Biden, the Biden administration, Biden White House officials, the Democratic Party, Democratic politicians, the left-leaning media. . .

The gaggle of former intelligence and law enforcement officials—you know—the famous 51 . . . . All of this was really a domestic disinformation campaign for political reasons. . . . There is no other explanation for it.

The people that had access to the intelligence and had possession of Hunter Biden’s laptop . . . all of the people in a position to talk about the evidence and the intelligence told the American people the truth.<sup>158</sup>

As the *Wall Street Journal* opined, the American people will “never know what effect the ‘October Surprise’ of 2020, the *New York Post*’s reporting of the discovery of a laptop belonging to Hunter Biden containing all sorts of embarrassing emails, might have had on the election that year if it had received wider circulation.”<sup>159</sup> Former Attorney General William Barr

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<sup>155</sup> Katie Benner et al., *Hunter Biden Paid Tax Bill, but Broad Federal Investigation Continues*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 16, 2022).

<sup>156</sup> Moore, *supra* note 87.

<sup>157</sup> Perez, *supra* note 91.

<sup>158</sup> Brooke Singman, *Ratcliffe: Hunter Biden laptop was a partisan domestic 'disinformation campaign'*, FOX NEWS (Feb. 2, 2023).

<sup>159</sup> Gerard Baker, *Hunter Biden’s Laptop and America’s Crisis of Accountability*, WALL ST. J. (Mar. 21, 2022).

believes the suppression of the Hunter Biden laptop story “probably affected the outcome” of the 2020 election, “given how close the election was.”<sup>160</sup>

On November 3, 2020, the American people went to the polls to elect the president of the United States with the false impression that Hunter Biden’s laptop was Russian disinformation. The American people cannot get back the 2020 election, but they have every right to demand reforms from Congress so that the 2024 election will not be similarly compromised.

The United States is witnessing in real time the growth of a censorship industrial complex, in which partisan “experts”—like the former intelligence officials who signed the statement—reserve for themselves the right to determine what is and is not true and what Americans can and cannot hear. Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the 2020 election, a writer for the *New York Times* observed that, in the United States, “[f]ree speech threatens democracy as much as it also provides for its flourishing.”<sup>161</sup> To address this threat, progressive “experts prescribe[] two critical steps: [1] America must become less free and [2] less democratic. . . .”<sup>162</sup> These goals, in their view, will only be achieved by “following the wisdom of disinformation experts and outgrowing our parochial attachment to the Bill of Rights.”<sup>163</sup> This is frightening and shows why the Committees’ oversight is so important.

There is a direct line between Twitter’s continued suppression of the *New York Post* story on Hunter Biden’s laptop and the statement by the former intelligence officials. One disinformation commentator captured the significance of the censorship of the Hunter Biden laptop and emails story to American democracy and self-government:

The laptops are real. The FBI has known this since 2019, when it first took possession of them. When the *New York Post* attempted to report on them, dozens of the most senior national security officials in the United States lied to the public, claiming the laptops were likely part of a Russian “disinformation” plot. Twitter, Facebook, and Google, operating as fully integrated branches of the state security infrastructure, carried out the government’s censorship orders based on that lie. The press swallowed the lie and cheered on the censorship.

The story of the laptops has been framed as many things, but the most fundamental truth about it is that it was the successful culmination of the yearslong effort to create a shadow regulatory bureaucracy built specifically to prevent a repeat of Trump’s 2016 victory.

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<sup>160</sup> Jerry Dunleavy, *Barr says Hunter Biden Russian disinformation claims ‘probably affected’ election outcome*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Mar. 22, 2022).

<sup>161</sup> Emily Bazelon, *The Problem of Free Speech in an Age of Disinformation*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 13, 2020) (internal quotations marks and citation omitted).

<sup>162</sup> Jacob Siegel, *A Guide to Understanding the Hoax of the Century*, TABLET (Mar. 28, 2023).

<sup>163</sup> *Id.*



It may be impossible to know exactly what effect the ban on reporting about Hunter Biden's laptops had on the 2020 vote, but the story was clearly seen as threatening enough to warrant an openly authoritarian attack on the independence of the press. The damage to the country's underlying social fabric, in which paranoia and conspiracy have been normalized, is incalculable.<sup>164</sup>

This interim report presents the material facts the Committees have learned to date about the origins of the public statement signed by 51 former intelligence officials that falsely discredited—on the eve of the 2020 presidential election—legitimate allegations about the Biden family's influence-peddling operation. The Committees present this information now to keep the House of Representatives apprised of our oversight work. The Committees' oversight into this matter continues in earnest.

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<sup>164</sup> *Id.*