

Center for Strategic and International Studies

**Bob Schieffer's "About the News" with H. Andrew Schwartz
Podcast**

**Subject: "Collusion and Denial: Wash Post's Adam Entous' Big
Story on Trump's Appeals to the DNI and NSA Director"**

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Date: Wednesday May 24, 2017

*Transcript By
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(Music plays.)

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm Bob Schieffer.

H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: And I'm Andrew Schwartz.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And these are conversations about the news. We are in the midst of a communications revolution. We have access to more information than any people in history. But are we more informed, or just overwhelmed by so much information we can't process it?

MR. SCHWARTZ: These conversations are a year-long collaboration of the Bob Schieffer College of Communication at Texas Christian University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

(Music plays.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: As we continue our focus on the journalists who cover the Trump White House, this time our guest is Adam Entous of The Washington Post, who wrote that story that President Trump not only asked the FBI chief, James Comey, to stop the investigation into the Russian situation, but also asked the director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, and the director of the National Security Agency, Admiral Mike Rogers, to do the same.

Adam, I will start by saying you're new to The Washington Post, but you're not new to this beat. You've been covering national security for a long time. You were stationed, for Reuters, in Jerusalem. You worked for Reuters on this beat, and then covering intelligence matters for The Wall Street Journal. So this is not new territory for you. But what about this? What about this story that you just broke?

ADAM ENTOUS: Yeah. I mean, you know, obviously, I think what we're trying to do is try to advance this – get to the bottom of the Russia story, kind of looking at it from sort of two angles. One of them is trying to figure out what is the FBI investigating. What's the scope of that investigation. That's sort of one track for us. A second track for us is looking at the way the president dealt with it. You know, the – looking at sort of what some people might describe as obstruction – whether it's obstruction of the narrative surrounding the Russia story or it's obstruction of justice is something that I'm not clear in my own mind as to what is actually taking place here.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So tell us, in this story that you broke, give me – just give me the facts on that.

MR. ENTOUS: So, you know, I think the context is critical. The president had made appeals to FBI Director Comey to basically stop investigating Michael Flynn, the national security adviser, for the first short period of the Trump White House. He had made an appeal to Comey for loyalty, according to Comey's associates accounts of their interactions. And on March 20th, Comey appeared before the House Intelligence Committee. And during that

appearance he made an extraordinary disclosure. He was authorized by the Justice Department to acknowledge that the FBI was investigating Russia's role meddling in the 2016 election. And that he said – Comey said that that investigation included looking into the possibility that there was coordination between the Russian government and members of the Trump campaign.

When Trump heard that, I think, according to officials, he was quite upset. And he was, I would say, a person looking for people that would be on his side, that would, you know, help deflect the pressure that was building over the Russia investigation, calls on the Hill for a special counsel were building at the time. So during that period, in the days that followed Comey's testimony, the president reaches out to the director of national intelligence, to the National Security Agency head, and basically made an appeal, which is: Can you go out there publicly and basically tell the American people that there's nothing here, that there is no evidence of collusion, if you will, or coordination, which Comey had just revealed.

Now, keep in mind that in February there was a report in The New York Times which very much upset the White House. And that report said that the FBI and the intelligence community had information that members of the Trump campaign were in frequent contact with Russian intelligence officers. After that story ran, the White House – this wasn't at the presidential level; it was below the president – reached out to the heads of the intelligence community on the Hill. So the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, as well as the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, as well as – as well as others, and asked them to call reporters at competing newspapers – The New York Times, including The Washington Post – and asked them to – told them that there's nothing there, that that New York Times story is false.

That was an example of the Trump White House basically trying to use members of the intelligence community to push back at a news account. It is a totally different, more serious issue when the president himself is appealing to members of the intelligence community, the leaders of that intelligence community, to basically push back against a narrative that was spelled out by the FBI director himself as part of an active ongoing investigation. So we think – you know, with this story, we're basically getting a clearer picture of how Trump responded to what he sees, I think, as a serious threat to his administration, which is this FBI investigation into possible collusion.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Now, when this was going on, was this at about the same time that Congressman Nunes, who is the – was then the chairman of, what, the House Intelligence Committee – he was making this mysterious trip to the White House, and the reporting to the president what he claimed he had found out from his own administration?

MR. ENTOUS: Right. I think that we have seen a pattern of this. What Nunes did and what the president did in March after Comey's testimony is very similar. In a sense, it's designed to muddy the waters. The goal of having Nunes, in this case, who was a top adviser on intelligence to the transition – the Trump transition – to have Nunes go to the White House and basically share intelligence, which he actually had obtained at the White House and viewed for the first time at the White House, was basically an attempt to say that there is abuse by the intelligence community.

He was, again, trying to basically make the argument that we're missing the real story here, and that the real story – according to Nunes and according to the White House – would be incidental collection, as it's known, where the intelligence community is targeting the Russians or foreign entities and sucking up communications either to, from, or about U.S. persons, in this case members of the Trump campaign, and that being, in the minds of Nunes, some sort of abuse, which it's a very common thing that occurs. It happens every day. And during the presidential campaign, I'm sure the intelligence community was sucking up not only Russian and other communications about Trump and about Trump – members of Trump's team, but similarly about Hillary and Hillary's team.

In fact, they probably were sucking up more stuff about Hillary and her team because the presumption around the world, and in the United States, frankly, was that Hillary was going to win. And so they were, I'm sure, talking among themselves in all the capitals around the world – and our NSA was sucking that up – about what Hillary would do when she was president. Just like later on, as Nunes reveals – not that it should be a shock to anybody – that we were sucking up communications about what Trump would do when he became – if he became president.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, I think this is – this is very important, to hear you lay this out. And I want to make sure I understand what you're saying here. You're saying that our intelligence was listening in on conversations of foreigners, foreign diplomats, Russian diplomats, as well they should. And in the process of doing that, they heard them talking to U.S. officials or U.S. persons, as it were. They weren't targeting the U.S. people. They were targeting the Russians, and they picked up this while monitoring these Russian conversations.

MR. ENTOUS: To target a U.S. person they would need to get the approval of – they would need to get a court approval to do so. And what we did learn and what we disclosed a few weeks ago – which is that there was one FISA Court warrant to listen to Carter Page, who was an adviser to Trump in the early part of his campaign, and sort of was pushed out of the campaign, you know, over the summer – late in the summer. There was one warrant to target his communications directly.

Otherwise, as far as we know, at least through the end of calendar year '16 – 2016, the only collection – which is a term of art for collecting the communications of foreigners – the only types of collection that were coming here in were through so-called incidental collection where, like you said, we were targeting foreigners. We were tapped into communications networks of foreign governments – the Russians in particular. We were listening to the ambassador – Ambassador Kislyak, the Russian ambassador.

And during – as they were having their conversations, those conversations might be directly with a member of the Trump campaign, in which case the NSA or the FBI would get both sides of that conversation, obviously. Or Kislyak, or another Russian official, might meet with a member of the Trump campaign and then, at the end of that meeting, write a report to Moscow, send it to Moscow, in which case the NSA, CIA or FBI might intercept that communication. And in which case what you're seeing there is Kislyak or other Russian officials talking about their interactions or views of members of the Trump team.

So, you know, this is – this is basically how this works. And it works everywhere. I mean, we're doing the same thing to the Israelis. The Israelis are doing it to us. We're doing it – you know, this is the game of spies, right? And in this case, my understanding is that most of the FBI's case for coordination, if you will, comes from this sort of incidental collection, where you basically have the Russians talking a great deal about their perceptions and their interactions with members of the Trump team.

MR. SCHIEFFER: There's one thing that I find interesting about all this. And when people say, why was Comey proceeding with this investigation? In my own mind, I would say because of this: We know that General Flynn talked to Kislyak, the Russian ambassador. What we don't know, as far as I'm concerned – as far as I know, we don't know what he said to the Russian ambassador. But obviously Director Comey knows what he said.

MR. ENTOUS: Right.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And that will be the next key thing, I think, in this investigation. What did he say? Do you have any indication? Have you – in your reporting, have you found out anything about what he said?

MR. ENTOUS: Yeah. So when we broke that story back in February, we had a rough outline of the conversation. And so what it was the sanctions were being imposed at the time by the outgoing Obama administration, in which basically they were going to expel Russian diplomats whom the U.S. officials described as spies. And they were going to close some facilities that the Russians have in the United States which, again, the Americans were alleging were being used as espionage purposes, or to provide comfort to spies – Russian spies.

And so what happened in that conversation, according to officials we spoke to and which we reported back in February, was that basically Flynn told Kislyak, you know, listen, if you don't respond to these sanctions – to these measures – punitive measures, when we take power – you know, when we become the government in a few weeks, we're going to revisit and look again at all of these sanctions. And so that's basically how that conversation went. And obviously, you know, at the time the conversation took place, maybe Flynn didn't realize, you know, this notion of the Logan Act, which is that, you know, somebody who's not in government trying to interfere with the current government's policies – you know, that that was an issue.

Now, nobody really thinks the Logan Act is something that the Justice Department is going to prosecute anybody on. And that may – it may be in Flynn's mind, when he realized that there was this obscure law that barred him from doing what he was doing, maybe that's why he decides to lie in the way he describes that conversation. And then, of course, the administration sends Pence, the vice-president elect – and others out there to basically characterize, falsely, the nature of that conversation.

Which, of course, triggers the acting attorney general later, after the inauguration, to go to the top lawyer at the White House and explain that the Russians knew that Flynn was not telling the truth, because Kislyak – unlike Flynn – or we don't know, actually, how Flynn handled it.

But Kislyak accurately reported back to Moscow his conversation with Flynn. So Moscow knew what was discussed in that call.

But Pence seemed to not really – not have an idea. Either he was lying when he – when he recounted the nature of that call, or Flynn had lied to Pence, which is what I think Sally Yates concluded, that there was this lie and the Russians knew about a lie and they could potentially use this lie down the road to try to, you know, pressure Flynn on issues that were important to Russia, by threatening to expose him for that lie.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's bring in Andrew Schwartz.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thanks, Bob.

Adam, you know, you broke a pretty huge story this week, that claims that the president of the United States reached out to two U.S. intelligence heads of their respective agencies to try to influence this investigation. When you got this story, did you then go to the White House and confront them? And what was that like?

MR. ENTOUS: Yeah. I mean, it's – you know, I covered the Clinton White House. I covered the Bush White House. I covered the Obama White House. And now I'm covering the Trump White House. I've never been in a situation before where it is so antagonistic. And, you know, in the old days, even, you know, at the height of the Iraq War tension, you know, over WMD in Iraq and so on, I felt like I could go to people in the Bush White House and basically give them, in some cases, days to respond, to think about what I'm asking them, to come up with a comprehensive response.

That is very different now. It's much more antagonistic. I'm – you know, the feeling I have, and maybe it's a misperception on my part, can't rule that out – but I feel like I'm going to be lied to no matter what.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Really?

MR. ENTOUS: And, you know, maybe they perceive that I am going to do my story no matter what, but increasingly I feel like I need to 100 percent be done with my reporting by the time I go to the White House, which is a terrible thing, frankly; you know, and obviously if no matter what they provide me I'm going to incorporate it into my story for sure, but I have this fear as I'm approaching them that I'm not going to be getting the truth. And that comes from the experience of the last few months – in fact, the last six months – of reporting on this story, where over and over again we were lied to, such as on Flynn and his conversation with Kislyak. And only after we basically told them we're not changing our story, we're standing by our sources, do they then change their account.

I'll give you a great example, and it's not just the White House. We had a story last week about a conversation – a private conversation in June 2016 on Capitol Hill between the majority leader on the Republican side of the House and Paul Ryan, the speaker, and several other Republican leaders. So the story was that basically McCarthy, the Republican leader, in a

private moment after meeting with the Ukrainian prime minister, talked about how the Russians had just hacked the DNC, and that he believed that they stole the opposition research on Trump. And then Ryan basically says, to give it to whom? And then, basically, McCarthy says, you know, I think there are two people that Putin pays, Dana Rohrabacher – the California congressman, Republican, who has been a longtime defender of Putin and Russia – and Trump. There's some laughter in the room, and then McCarthy adds "swear to God." Ryan then responds by basically telling everybody in the room not to leak what was just said, and then there's a series of exchanges that culminate in Ryan saying what's said in the family stays in the family.

So I went to Ryan's office, McCarthy's office, and the other leadership offices, and I initially told them – I didn't want to tell them about the sourcing of this because I was afraid that they would try to track down the source and threaten the person or persons. So I just told – I just gave them the quotes of the exchange. They came back to me and said this is fiction. I then went back to them and I said, listen, we're going to be attributing this to a transcript of the exchange. Then all the – Ryan's office came back and said all five spokespeople for the members that were in that meeting will publicly deny that it took place; in fact, they were all there and remember 100 percent that that conversation never happened.

So then I told them about an hour before publication that we actually are attributing this to an audio recording of the conversation, and that we had verified it, and that we were going to be quoting on the record one of the participants who actually was in the meeting to also confirm it in addition to attributing it to an audio recording. To which, at that point, the same person from Ryan's office calls my editor, the national security editor – excuse me, the national editor and basically says, you know, listen, we were all in that meeting, we remember it clearly, and it was a joke.

So, obviously, you can see, like, this is basically what we're dealing with now, where I don't know who to believe anymore. Whether it's the White House or the people on the Hill, I feel like, in order for me to publish a story, I need to be so confident in the information before I even approach them so that I can do what I did with Ryan's office, which is basically stand up to the bullying and basically say bullshit, you know, this is what it is. And that's what I have to do now every time. In the Bush years, I could have that conversation with them and they could – like, I could trust that they would honestly tell me. Maybe they would spin it, but they would honestly give me an account. And now I feel like that I'm going to be intentionally misled in every interaction.

And that is so bad for everybody. It's not sustainable for them. It's horrible for us. The trust is gone. And, you know, for our – if us in the – you know, in the mainstream media, if you will, are trying to basically educate the public to what's going on behind the scenes in Washington, it just becomes incredibly difficult for us to – you know, to do our jobs. It raises the bar, obviously, for everything we publish. But I think it's a disservice to them in the long run to create this antagonism, and I don't know how we're going to get – we're going to get past it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me – my reaction to that is wow.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I've been here a long time, and I've covered a lot of different stories and confronted people with – and gotten some very weird responses. I have never heard anything as outrageous as the story that you have just told. Did you talk to Speaker Ryan himself about that?

MR. ENTOUS: No, I didn't. You know, and you know, to the defense of the – of the spokesperson and the spokespeople, you know, I understand where they're coming from in the sense that obviously they wanted to – they wanted to kill a story that was unfavorable. I get that. You know, but at the same –

MR. SCHWARTZ: More than unfavorable. Explosive.

MR. ENTOUS: True. But –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I'm sure there were stories Richard Nixon would like to have killed, I mean. (Laughs.) But –

MR. ENTOUS: I mean, you know, the idea –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And he tried, but –

MR. ENTOUS: The idea that I'm ever going to trust those people again – you know, next time I have something, am I ever going to believe what they tell me? The answer is no. I mean, they've totally burned the bridge with me. I mean, you know –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, that's – I mean, I wouldn't trust them either.

MR. ENTOUS: No, I don't.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And I've dealt with that office for years.

MR. ENTOUS: Yeah. And so, you know, I – you know, it's really been terribly depressing for me, you know, somebody who – I obviously have not been working in Washington as long as you have, but you know, I have never encountered so much lying.

And I think in some ways maybe it's good for journalism in the sense that, you know, I don't do fishing expeditions anymore. I mean, there used to be – you know, I'm sure we've all done fishing expeditions. We've maybe bluffed sometimes, thought – you know, tried to get somebody to confirm something when you think you know what's true and you're just trying to get a little bit over the hump. You can't – you really can't do that anymore because the answer you're going to get from so many people nowadays is just – is you no longer can trust that the answer's true.

And there are still a few people that are left that I feel like are honest to us. I was at the

Pentagon the other day and saw, you know, an old – you know, an old hand over there who I was explaining this to, and he also was lamenting this kind of total, you know, willingness to just bald-faced lie that we're getting these days.

And so it's bad for, frankly, the professional communicators in government who, just like us, trade on our – you know, on us being reliable. You know, I never want to make a mistake in a story. I don't want to get it wrong. I want to get it right. I want to get it exactly right, you know, every time. And every time, you know, that there's a mistake, which happens, I'm killing myself about it. But this –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And correcting it.

MR. ENTOUS: And correcting it. I mean, it's a horrible feeling to make a mistake, and I've made mistakes, you know, and always want to correct them. But to now go into every encounter on a story that's explosive or not and feel like one side no matter what is going to tell you something that's not true, it really is disheartening to be a journalist in this town at this point in time. It's very exciting, obviously, but it's also very disheartening. And how do we get past this? Is this something that's going to correct itself?

MR. SCHWARTZ: So what happens when you go to the White House with this story, your next story? Are you getting the same kind of experience with the White House as you are with the speaker's office?

MR. ENTOUS: Yes. I mean, sometimes it's hard to tell if this White House – I mean, certainly the strategy of the White House is to basically deny everything, and then only grudgingly later acknowledge it and act upon it, such as what we saw with Flynn, such as what we saw with Sessions when he had to recuse himself for failing to disclose his contacts with the Russian ambassador during his confirmation hearings. Increasingly, what I'm doing is trying to find these kind of, if you will, perfect boxes where somebody says something, you fact-check it, you find that it's incorrect in an irrefutable way, you go back to them, and you give them a chance to acknowledge that they had misrepresented something. Unfortunately, every time they are doubling down with the lie initially before it becomes impossible for them to continue with that lie, in which case they basically switch to a we don't recall sort of position, which, frankly, is probably the smarter position to take from the very beginning if you're – if you're not prepared to stand by a lie.

This is sort of the game – the game now, which is, you know, fact-check, get irrefutable evidence that there's a lie, go back to them, give them a few hours – I mean, in the case of the story from earlier this week, we gave them five hours. We had multiple sources confirming that, both current and former. And we went to the White House at 12:30 in the afternoon the day of publication and we gave them until 6:00 p.m. to respond to it, and they basically asked us, frankly, to not publish the story until the next day. They wanted to wait until President Trump woke up in the Middle East during his travels to ask him about it. And the editors decided that waiting overnight was not feasible because certain members of the – of the congressional delegations who are investigating Russia and Trump's connections with the Russians had already been notified about this. So we didn't feel like we had – that we couldn't wait overnight for that,

plus we felt like five hours, six hours was enough time.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So the congressional investigators actually knew about this before you knew about it.

MR. ENTOUS: Yeah. My understanding is, is they found out about it a few days before we found out about it. Now, where – you know, where that goes, you know, I have no idea. Obviously, in the case of Rogers, there's a memo that was written – I'm not sure if there's a similar memo on the DNI side – that, obviously, like the Comey memos, could eventually be part of, you know, an investigation to contemporaneously review the notes of top officials describing their interactions with the president, again, with regard to, you know, the way he was handling this FBI investigation.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, I keep getting people asking me about the Watergate parallels. And I must say, in the beginning I didn't quite see it. But now, as this continues to unfold – trying to fire the chief investigator, these stories that – trying to get other people to deny it – I mean, Richard Nixon went through all of these steps. I mean, we saw that. We also know where that came out. And I keep thinking about Iran-Contra and Ronald Reagan and George Schultz. People within the administration came to Schultz and asked him to do certain things and he said no, I'll have no part of that. And then, when the congressional investigators called George Schultz up to Capitol Hill, I'll never forget it; he walked up, he sat down at the table, he brought not even a briefcase let alone a prepared statement. He just sat down at the table, folded his hands, and said basically I'm here to answer your questions, which he did.

Ronald Reagan managed to get past Iran-Contra. Richard Nixon, obviously, never got past Watergate, and I wonder if we're seeing something like that unfold here. This Russian investigation, to my way of thinking, will never be settled by just President Trump denying that it ever happened. Now we have this investigation underway. Do you see any indication that the Trump White House is changing its strategy, that eventually they'll have to put it all out on the table, they'll have to cooperate with the investigators? Or do you see it going the way it's going?

MR. ENTOUS: At this point, frankly, I don't know. I mean, so far their strategy has basically been to deny that there's anything here. And, you know, at this point, in terms of, you know, obviously, smoke and this effort to try to change the narrative or kind of discourage the FBI from proceeding, either through Comey himself or through other people, is this an effort to change the narrative, an uncomfortable narrative? Or is this an effort to obstruct justice? Or is it a combination of those two things? I'm not sure. I think President Trump is obsessed with narrative, as we've seen. So, you know, he could have started down this path of lying and pushing back as part of an effort to basically kind of change the narrative, rather than to actually get in the way of an FBI investigation or congressional investigations. But it could become – it could have the impact of affecting it.

I mean, would we have a special counsel named if Comey had not, you know, been fired? And then, subsequent to Comey's firing, the disclosures about his communications with the president, if that had not been revealed and that pressure hadn't increased, would there have been the – would there have been an appointment of a special counsel? I'm skeptical.

You know, I think, by trying to change the narrative, by trying to muddy the waters so that people are not sure what the truth is, I think the goal is to buy space for the Republicans on the Hill and, frankly, for the Justice Department not to take this investigation and put it to the next level, which is what they did last week with the appointment of the special counsel.

In the end, is the White House going to cooperate? I think there – you know, there might be a situation where it's divided, and you see some people cooperate and others don't. I think, you know, you do have professionals like – I mean, frankly, Rogers and Coats, the way they handled this request by the president in March I thought was – you know, seemed appropriate. I mean, they basically deemed it an inappropriate ask by the president, and they did not do it. They did not comply with the president's requests. So that seems to me like intelligence chiefs thinking principally about their buildings, frankly, and the integrity that they want the staffs that they represent to feel about their services, right?

And, you know, the intel services liked – you know, certainly try to not get involved in politics and don't want to be seen as taking sides, particularly against, you know, a powerful, well-liked within the building FBI director. So again, you know, Coats is thinking about his employees and his service, right, and his own personal reputation. You know, Rogers, long-time – you know, long-time military officer, Admiral Rogers is thinking, again, of, you know, his employees and the integrity of not only himself but of his – of the National Security Agency.

That's what's on the line here for these people. If they're not willing to do the bidding of the president just because the president's asking them to do it and they don't feel comfortable with it and the fact that they're willing to say, I'm not going to do that, to the president I think is an encouraging sign that there are – there are pockets of people who are thinking about integrity and are thinking about independence, which, frankly, is reassuring to people like myself, and I'm sure, you, that it's – that we're – it's not completely a smoke-and-mirrors game here that's being played, which is – which increasingly feels like.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, to brag on CSIS a little bit, Heather Conley from CSIS has headed the team that's put together a remarkable book "The Kremlin Playbook," which I'm sure you're familiar with. And she and her team had gone in and analyzed what the Russians were doing in Central and Eastern Europe. And basically, they're going in, they're trying to undermine institutions, they're trying to buy off people that they think can convert things to their cause. It's no longer just the old Soviet Union with their troops and tanks. They've adopted an entirely different method now of trying to influence and basically dominate these countries. And when you read Heather Conley's analysis, it's very difficult to believe that the Russians weren't doing exactly the same thing during our election. Do you have any doubt in your mind that – about whether the Russians were meddling in this election and, in the word of the week, suborning U.S. persons, as John Brennan, the former CIA director, put it the other day?

MR. ENTOUS: Yeah, I mean, certainly, the intelligence community reached a high confidence assessment to this effect. And to reach a high confidence assessment is a pretty – something that I know that they don't take lightly.

Now, do I think that there were maybe other governments that also were looking to, you know, find, if you will, friendlies within the various campaigns? I would be surprised if, you know, there were other governments – if there weren't other governments doing something similar to what it appears the Russians were doing. I mean, you know, when you – when you look at who's – you know, there's a few governments that have – a lot – have gained a lot from Trump's victory. I think you can argue that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel in addition to Russia potentially and maybe even more than Russia have a lot to gain from the current makeup of the Cabinet and the current makeup of the White House. And so what – you know, I think it is – it is normal for foreign governments, especially friends and foes alike, to attempt to find friendlies and influence the policies of incoming administrations.

But what happened in this case, obviously, was truly extraordinary in the way we had, you know, what appears to be the Russians, you know, obviously stealing information as part of normal espionage. Now, the Chinese might have been doing the exact same thing, and I'm sure – and frankly, I'd be surprised if they weren't. But they did not take that information and then inject it – through WikiLeaks, in this case – into the bloodstream, if you will, in order to basically support one candidate and undermine another candidate. The events of 2016 are really extraordinary. And, you know, obviously, the disclosures that were made at the end of the Obama administration about the findings of the intelligence community have in some ways made it very difficult for the Trump team now to operate the way they may have hoped they might have been able to operate with regard to Russia because that is out there. You know, it's something that is going to make it – has made it very difficult because of the public attention.

And we got to keep in mind here, if – you know, I take – the intelligence community says that the goal here, number one, of the Russians was basically to undermine confidence in our system and, therefore, make their system look in comparison equal if – you know, or not so bad, if you will. And the current churn in Washington, this constant, you know, questioning of Trump and his motives, they must be, frankly, lapping it up in the Kremlin. You know, they maybe didn't get what they maybe were hoping for by having Trump elected in the sense that the sanctions remain in place, and Trump's ability to loosen them is limited by this political environment.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think it's going to be harder now for him to lift the sanctions than it would've been.

MR. ENTOUS: No, absolutely. And they must be – I'm sure that must be frustrating for them. But if their number one objective was to cast out on the American system and our government and, you know, our moral high ground, chip away at that, I think what we're seeing now is – you know, may not be the loosening of the sanctions, but certainly, they – if the objective was to chip away at our perceived credibility as a system, I think they've more than succeeded at raising doubts about our system.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, someone say that they were initially trying to meddle in our election because they were trying to hurt Hillary Clinton. They thought Hillary was going to win, as most people thought Hillary was going to win, and it's no secret that there's no love lost between Putin and the Clintons. So, you know, some would say that they were trying to hurt the

Clintons.

I want to ask you this, Adam. There's been breaking stories just about every day. You've been breaking some big ones we've talked about here. I saw something on Twitter last night that I want your reaction to, and it comes from your former colleague from The Wall Street Journal, Yaroslav Trofimov, who said, these stories are fascinating, but at some point the leaks have got to stop. What do you say to that?

MR. ENTOUS: I think what's – I mean, I don't want to use – it's a loaded term, but there's a bit of, if you will, an insurgency within the bureaucracies. Now, you know, fighting insurgencies, there are kind of two ways you can deal with insurgencies. One of them is you can punish people to try to raise the price of leaking, in this case – which I think we have seen already, you know. And the president, one of his comments to Comey, according to The New York Times' account, was, you know, why don't you jail some journalists instead of investigating the Russia stuff and the Flynn stuff? Another way to address leaks and an insurgency is basically a hearts and minds campaign where people inside feel like they're being heard and that, you know, they're not – that the things that they cherish are not being undermined.

So far this administration's approach to dealing with the leaks has I think been a stick. It's been designed to scare people. And I think that has to some degree been effective at reducing the number of leaks, although I think the last few weeks have proven that fear alone is not inhibiting people from talking.

You know, I do agree with Yaroslav in the sense that I think this will ebb and flow. I think we saw some amazing disclosures in February, January and February. Then there was a lull. And then now we've seen another spike, connected maybe to Comey's firing. And there could be another lull. Certainly, the appointment of a special counsel addresses one of the objectives, I think, of some of the people who were talking.

That said, I think when people see things that really outrage them and offend their sense of right, what's right, that people will find a way to talk. So I think there could be another lull in the flow of information, either because people are afraid or because they're – you know, they feel like their concerns are being addressed. But I do think, you know, in the end, the truth will come out. I mean, that's been my experience. It's every – (chuckles) – I keep on telling this to the spokespeople that I sometimes deal with, which is, like, you know, the lies are going to be exposed. And why even go there, you know? And so I do think it may take time, and people might be seeing that the pace of the coverage might slow during periods of time and disclosures might dry up. But in the end, hopefully, the truth will fully come out about what occurred.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Adam Entous, who's had one of the most important stories of this whole series of big stories and may prove to be one of the most important stories of all, once we finally get through this. Thanks so much for being with us this morning.

And, for Andrew Schwartz, this is Bob Schieffer. Thanks for listening.

(Music plays.)

(END)