



Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi

Dec 24, 2022 · 58 tweets · [mtaibbi/status/1606701397109796866](https://twitter.com/mtaibbi/status/1606701397109796866)

1.THREAD: The Twitter Files TWITTER AND "OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES"

After weeks of “Twitter Files” reports detailing close coordination between the FBI and Twitter in moderating social media content, the Bureau issued a statement Wednesday.

[It](#) didn’t refute allegations. Instead, it decried “conspiracy theorists” publishing “misinformation,” whose “sole aim” is to “discredit the agency.”

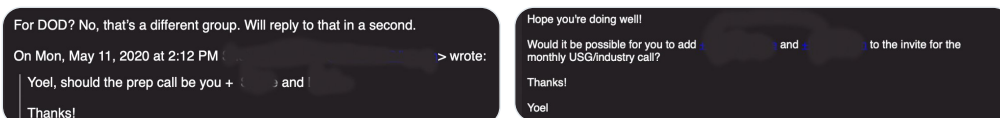
The men and women of the FBI work every day to protect the American public... It is unfortunate that **conspiracy theorists** and others are feeding the American public **misinformation** with the sole purpose of attempting to discredit the agency.

3.They must think us unambitious, if our “sole aim” is to discredit the FBI. After all, a whole range of government agencies discredit themselves in the [#TwitterFiles](#). Why stop with one?

4.The files show the FBI acting as doorman to a vast program of social media surveillance and censorship, encompassing agencies across the federal government – from the State Department to the Pentagon to the CIA.

5.The operation is far bigger than the reported 80 members of the Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF), which also facilitates requests from a wide array of smaller actors - from local cops to media to state governments.

6.Twitter had so much contact with so many agencies that executives lost track. Is today the DOD, and tomorrow the FBI? Is it the weekly call, or the monthly meeting? It was dizzying.



7.A chief end result was that thousands of official “reports” flowed to Twitter from all over, through the FITF and the FBI’s San Francisco field office.

8. On June 29th, 2020, San Francisco FBI agent Elvis Chan wrote to pair of Twitter execs asking if he could invite an “OGA” to an upcoming conference:

On Mon, Jun 29, 2020 at 11:24 AM Chan, Elvis M. (SF) (FBI) [redacted]@fbi.gov> wrote:
Stacia/[redacted] – I wanted to follow up to see if I could forward this invitation to an OGA? Specifically the people from [redacted]'s former employer were inquiring. Hope all is well. Thanks!

Regards,
Elvis

Elvis M. Chan
Supervisory Special Agent

9. OGA, or “Other Government Organization,” can be a euphemism for CIA, according to multiple former intelligence officials and contractors. Chuckles one: “They think it's mysterious, but it's just conspicuous.”

10. “Other Government Agency (the place where I worked for 27 years),” says retired CIA officer Ray McGovern.

11. It was an open secret at Twitter that one of its executives was ex-CIA, which is why Chan referred to that executive’s “former employer.”

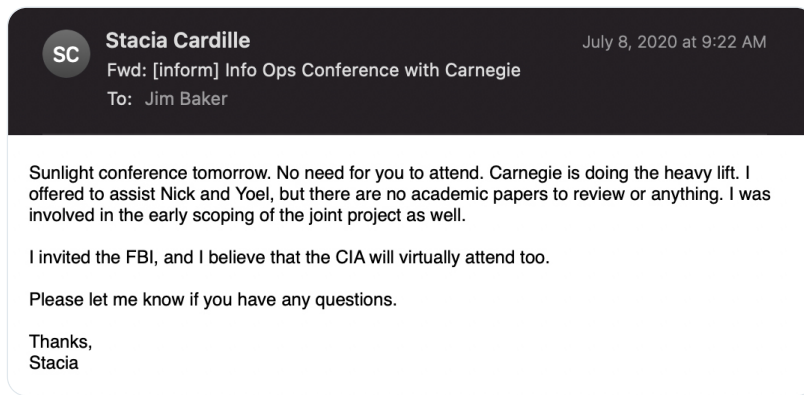
12. The first Twitter executive abandoned any pretense to stealth and emailed that the employee “used to work for the CIA, so that is Elvis’s question.”

On Mon, Jun 29, 2020 at 2:29 PM [redacted]@twitter.com> wrote:
Stacia, I have no involvement here - I leave this to you to respond.
[redacted] used to work for the CIA, so that is Elvis' question.

13. Senior legal executive Stacia Cardille, whose alertness stood out among Twitter leaders, replied, “I know” and “I thought my silence was understood.”

On Mon, Jun 29, 2020 at 2:45 PM Stacia Cardille [redacted]@twitter.com> wrote:
I know. Let me see if it is publicly announced and I will tell him that. (I thought my silence was understood.)

14. Cardille then passes on conference details to recently-hired ex-FBI lawyer Jim Baker.

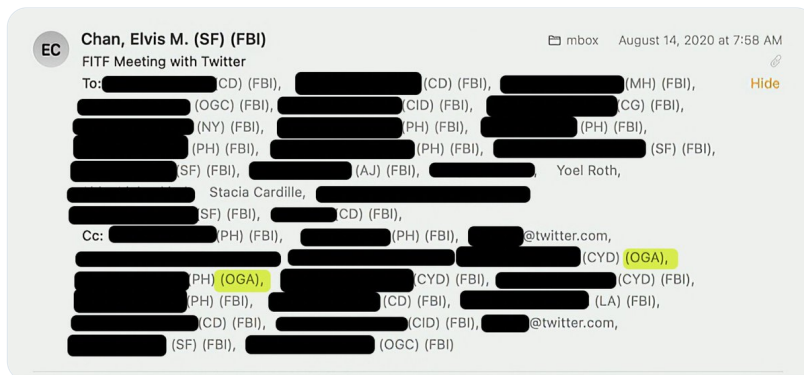


15. “I invited the FBI and the CIA virtually will attend too,” Cardille says to Baker, adding pointedly: “No need for you to attend.”

16. The government was in constant contact not just with Twitter but with virtually every major tech firm.

17. These included Facebook, Microsoft, Verizon, Reddit, even Pinterest, and many others. Industry players also held regular meetings without government.

18. One of the most common forums was a regular meeting of the multi-agency Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF), attended by spates of executives, FBI personnel, and – nearly always – one or two attendees marked “OGA.”



19. The FITF meeting agendas virtually always included, at or near the beginning, an “OGA briefing,” usually about foreign matters (hold that thought).

EC Chan, Elvis M. (SF) (FBI) 7/30/20
FITF Meeting with Twitter
To: & 20 more [Details](#)

All - please forward to whomever you deem appropriate.

Agenda:

Russia Status

- IRA Update
- **OGA Briefing**
- APT28 Update

China Status

- PRC Update
- APT31 Briefing

Global Status

- Iran Update
- Venezuela Briefing
- North Korea Briefing

Planning for the Elections

- FBI Posture
- Your Posture
- Information Sharing Channels and Methods

EC Chan, Elvis M. (SF) (FBI) August 14, 2020 at 7:58 AM
FITF Meeting with Twitter
[REDACTED] (CD) (FBI) & 39 more [Details](#)

All - please forward to whomever you deem appropriate.

Agenda:

Russia Status

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Planning for the Elections

- FBI Posture
- Your Posture

EC Chan, Elvis M. (SF) (FBI) July 16, 2020 at 5:09 PM
Next FITF Meetings
To: Stacia Cardille, Cc: [REDACTED] Yoel Roth & 1 more [Details](#)

Hi Stacia,

I know it's bananas right now over there, but I'm wondering if we can get something on the calendar for the next round of FITF meetings. Here are the open dates/times which are left:

Tuesday, August 11, 10:30 am to 12 pm PDT
Wednesday, August 12, 10:30 am to 12 pm PDT
Thursday, August 13, 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm PDT
Friday, August 14, 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm PDT

The tentative agenda is as follows:

Russia Status

- IRA Update
- **OGA briefing** (Software & influence campaign against Ukraine)

China Status

- General PRC Update
- APT31 briefing

Global Status

- Iran Update
- Venezuela briefing
- North Korea briefing

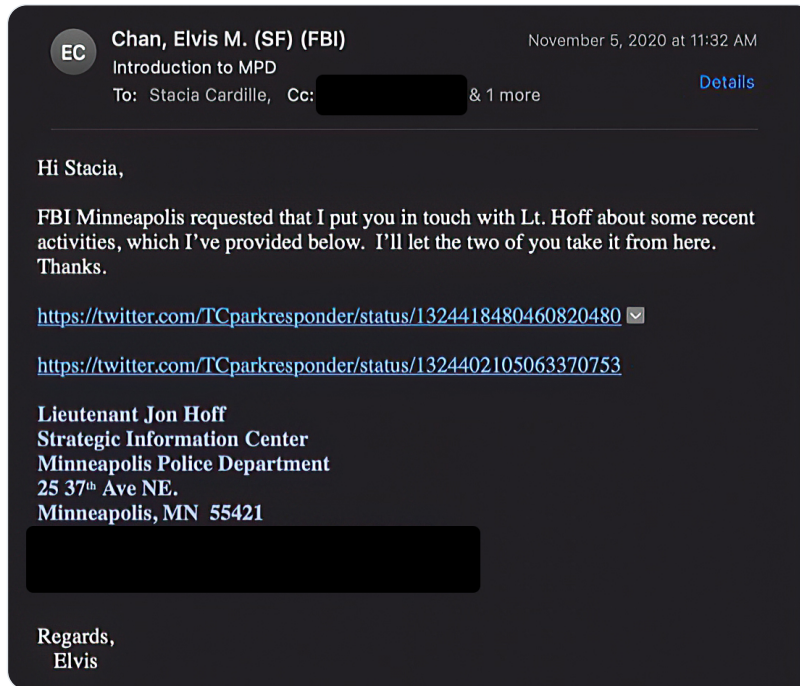
Planning for U.S. Elections

- FBI Posture
- Your Posture
- Information sharing channels and methods

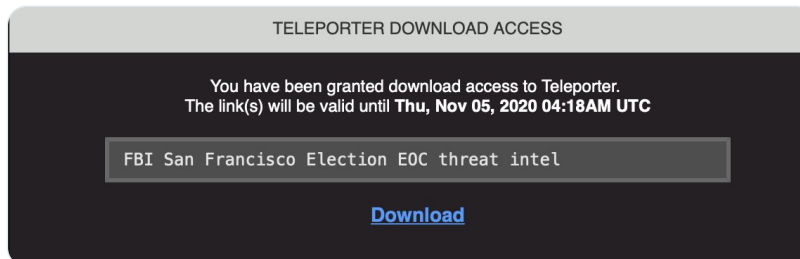
Regards,
Elvis

Elvis M. Chan
Supervisory Special Agent

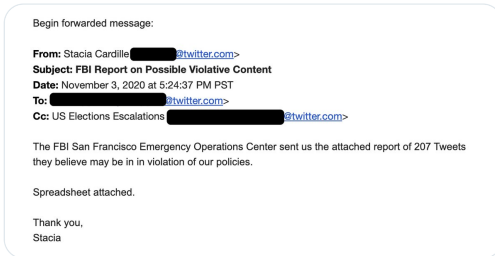
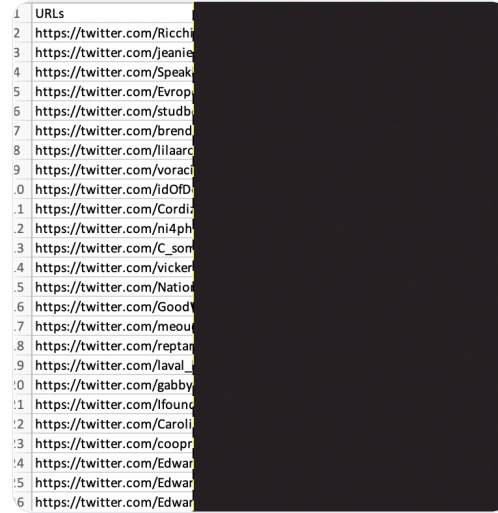
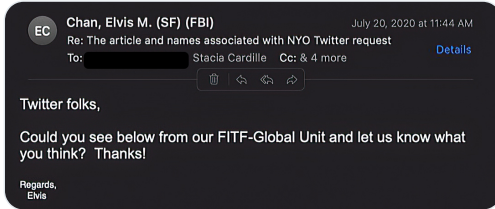
20. Despite its official remit being “Foreign Influence,” the FITF and the SF FBI office became conduit for mountains of domestic moderation requests, from state governments, even local police:



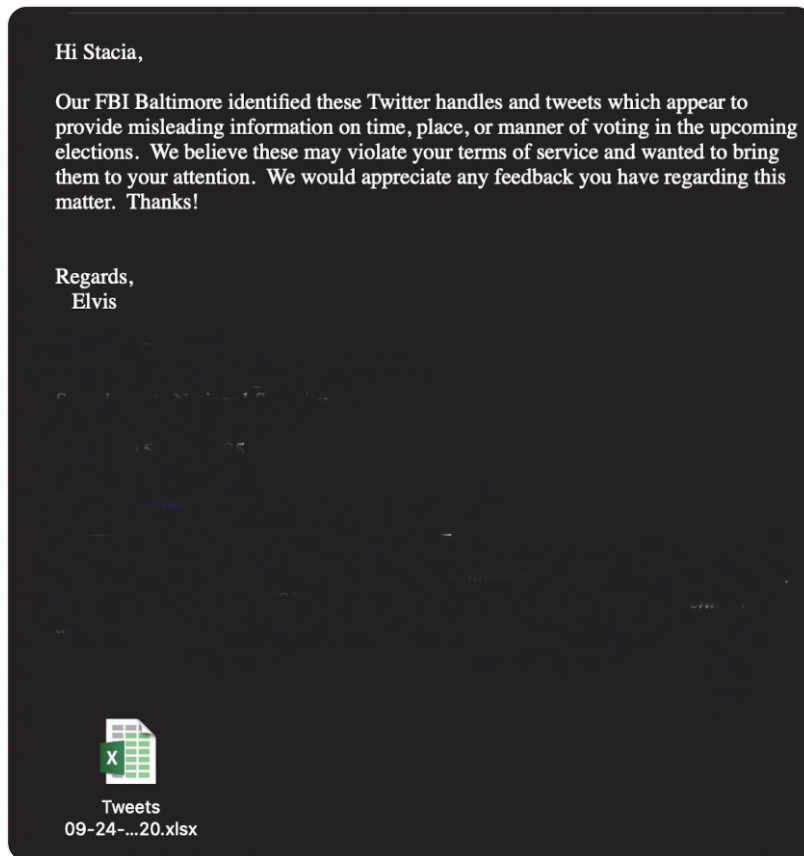
21. Many requests arrived via Teleporter, a one-way platform in which many communications were timed to vanish:



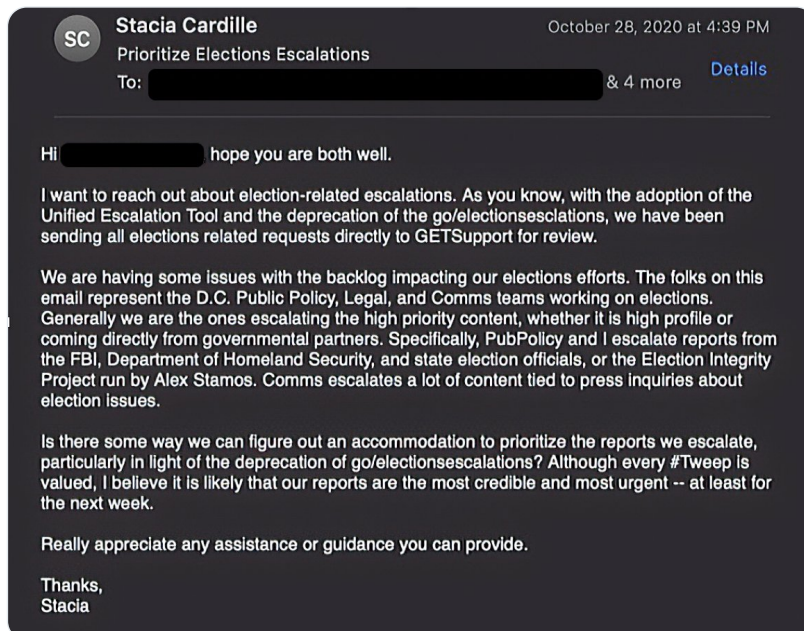
22. Especially as the election approached in 2020, the FITF/FBI overwhelmed Twitter with requests, sending lists of hundreds of problem accounts:



23. Email after email came from the San Francisco office heading into the election, often adorned with an Excel attachment:



24. There were so many government requests, Twitter employees had to improvise a system for prioritizing/triaging them:



25. The FBI was clearly tailoring searches to Twitter's policies. FBI complaints were almost always depicted somewhere as a "possible terms of service violation," even in the subject line:

Chan, Elvis M. (SF) (FBI)
FW: Possible Terms of Service Violation - Twitter

26. Twitter executives noticed the FBI appeared to be assigning personnel to look for Twitter violations.

27. "They have some folks in the Baltimore field office and at HQ that are just doing keyword searches for violations. This is probably the 10th request I have dealt with in the last 5 days," remarked Cardille.

SC **Stacia Cardille** November 3, 2020 at 5:45 PM
Re: FBI Report on Possible Violative Content
To: Jim Baker

They have some folks in the Baltimore field office and at HQ that are just doing keyword searches for violations. This is probably the 10th request I have dealt with in the last 5 days, but I never typically include a huge distribution on it because there wasn't really a need for this kind of visibility. Let me know if you have any other questions.

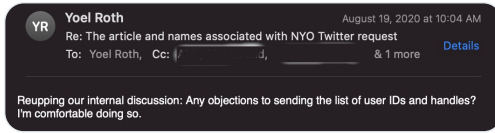
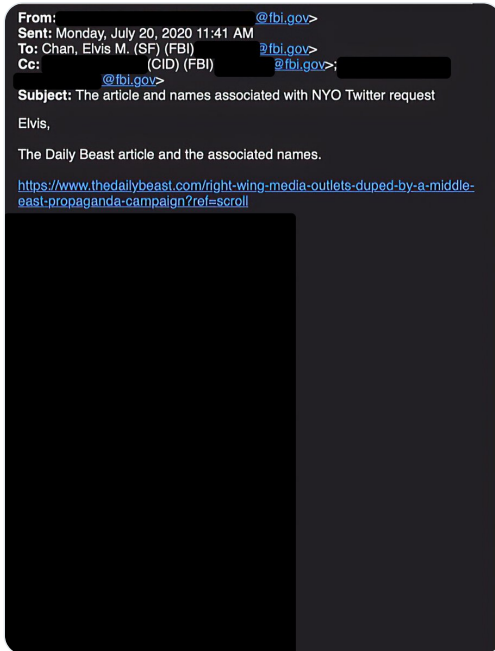
Thanks,
Stacia

28. Even ex-FBI lawyer Jim Baker agreed: "Odd that they are searching for violations of our policies."

JB **Jim Baker** November 3, 2020 at 6:34 PM
Re: FBI Report on Possible Violative Content
To: Stacia Cardille

But also odd that they are searching for violations of our policies.

29. The New York FBI office even sent requests for the “user IDs and handles” of a long list of accounts named in a Daily Beast article. Senior executives say they are “supportive” and “completely comfortable” doing so.



30. It seemed to strike no one as strange that a “Foreign Influence” task force was forwarding thousands of mostly domestic reports, along with the DHS, about the fringiest material:

 **THE AMERICAN REPORT**



Biden Using SCORECARD and THE HAMMER To Steal Another U.S. Presidential Election -- Just Like Obama And Biden Did In 2012 - The American Report

By Mary Fanning and Alan Jones | October 31, 2020 In February 2009, the Obama administration commandeered a powerful supercomputer system known as THE HAMMER. THE HAMMER includes an exploit application known as SCORECARD that is capable of hacking into elections and stealing the vote, according to CIA contractor-turned-whistleblower Dennis Montgomery, who designed and built [...]

31. “Foreign meddling” had been the ostensible justification for expanded moderation since platforms like Twitter were dragged to the Hill by the Senate in 2017:



32. Yet behind the scenes, Twitter executives struggled against government claims of foreign interference supposedly occurring on their platform and others:

[UE-193128] FITF Referral: IRA account on Reddit Created: 2022-08-09 Updated: 2022-08-15 Resolved: 2022-08-15	
Status:	Closed
Project:	Unified Escalations
Affects Version/s:	None
Fix Version/s:	None
Security Level:	SI RESTRICTED

33. The [#TwitterFiles](#) show execs under constant pressure to validate theories of foreign influence – and unable to find evidence for key assertions.

34. “Found no links to Russia,” says one analyst, but suggests he could “brainstorm” to “find a stronger connection.”

Comment by [REDACTED] [2022-03-08]

Hi [REDACTED]

After I reviewed the accounts, and found no links to Russia, I asked [REDACTED] on this ticket [REDACTED] and this was his answer:

"Thanks for tagging in the workflow. From my checks, I could not find any indicators to suggest that the account [REDACTED] is Russian. Even the other phone linked accounts [REDACTED] does not have indicators to suggest it is Russian proxy. Did checks via DomainTools for IP resolves, and email checks for OSINT. However, going by the content and narrative coming out from the account is definitely pro-Russian, and/or could be a Russian proxy."

I can brainstorm with [REDACTED] and see if we can dig even deeper and try to find a stronger connection.

35. “Extremely tenuous circumstantial chance of being related,” says another.

Hey [REDACTED]

Looked into this here. Didn't find any exact naming matches and really any information to link the reddit account(s) to any on-platform presence at Twitter. There was one account that has an *incredibly tenuous circumstantial chance* of being related so documenting the account here just incase we ever need to come back to it (created in a *similar* timeframe, RU login, sus english name): [REDACTED]

36. “No real matches using the info,” says former Trust and Safety chief Yoel Roth in another case, noting some links were “clearly Russian,” but another was a “house rental in South Carolina?”

No real matches using most of the info. The only thing that did turn up something was the IP addresses and accounts using multiple from the provided.

Even then, nothing looked particularly violative, some clearly Russian though, but also included an account for a house rental in South Carolina?

[Yoel Roth](#) not really anything worth taking out. But there are 2 personas linked to 2 clusters they might be interested in. Both appear to be Russian-like names. However, I wouldn't even call that a slam dunk since it was based on IP data and I think at least 1 of the returned accounts from the IP data doesn't at all look related.

37. In another case, Roth concludes a series of Venezuelan pro-Maduro accounts are unrelated to Russia's Internet Research Agency, because they're too high-volume:

Hey [REDACTED]

Thanks for reaching out. A couple of things from a quick review of this data:

A few of the accounts whose tweets appear in your list are not IRA/Russia-linked. In Feb 2019, we [re-released](#) our IRA-linked datasets, excluding a number of accounts that were operated out of Venezuela. Those accounts were **extremely high volume tweeters**, generally using automation (in a way that was pretty **uncharacteristic of a lot of the other IRA activity**). We have very high confidence that they are not linked to the IRA, or to Russian activity in any form. The current official datasets you can download from us do not include these accounts in the RU archive, and instead include them in a Jan 2019 release of Venezuelan activity (titled "Venezuela (January 2019, set 2) - 764 accounts"). If you download the unhashed Venezuela release, you should be able to cross-reference and exclude.

Also, at least a couple of the tweets I spot-checked were deleted by the users themselves. When we first published our archives of Russian activity, we indicated that we excluded tweets deleted prior to the suspension of the account, amounting to a less than 1% decrease in the volume of tweets (as

best we were able to tell). We had to exclude them due to legal constraints. But, again, the volume there should be a very small part of the overall RU activity - if you see something different after excluding the Venezuelan accounts, let me know and I can dig back in.

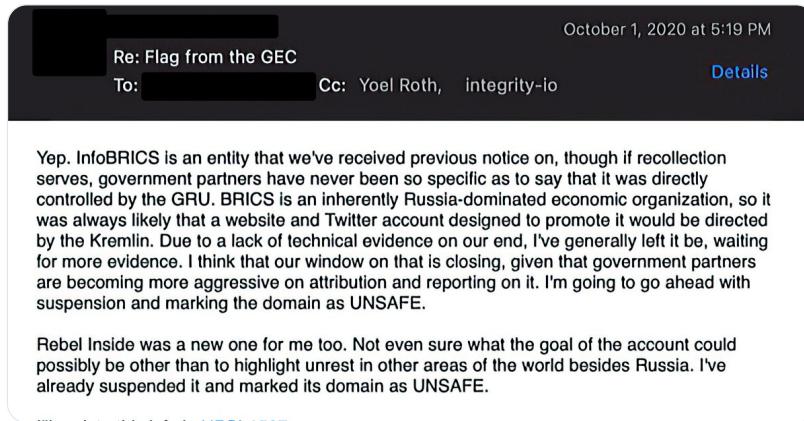
Thanks,

Yoel

38. The Venezuelans “were extremely high-volume tweeters... pretty uncharacteristic of a lot of the other IRA activity,” Roth says.

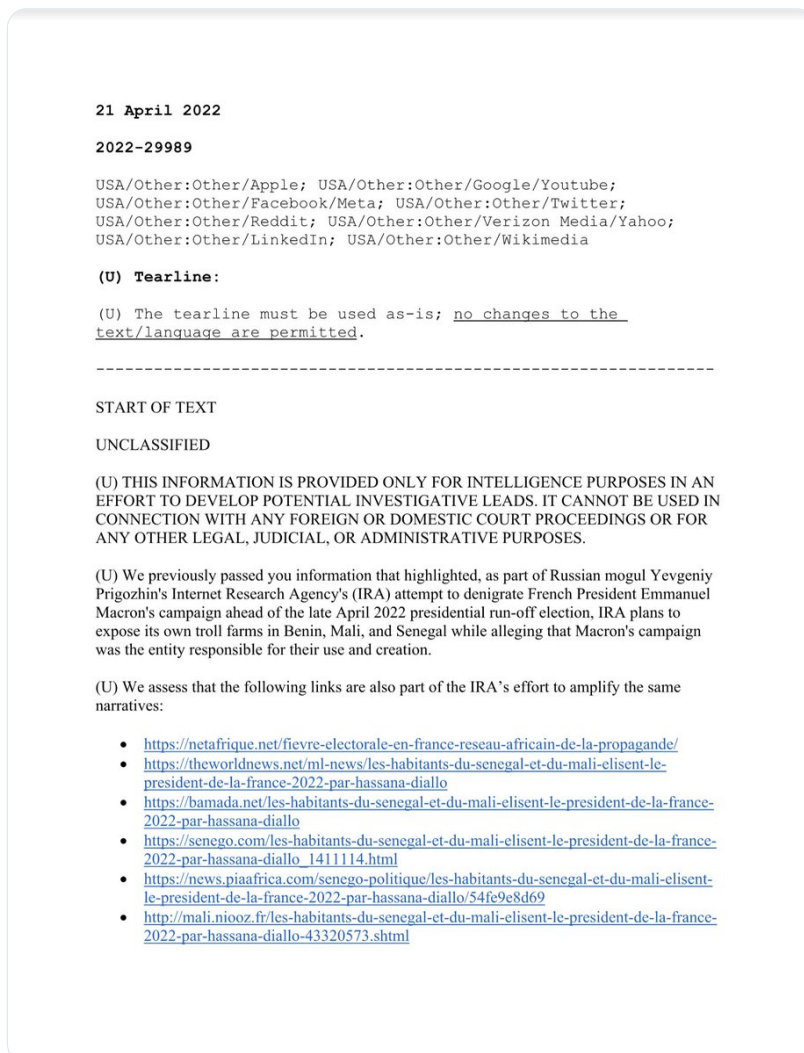
39. In a key email, news that the State Department was making a wobbly public assertion of Russian influence led an exec – the same one with the “OGA” past - to make a damning admission:

40. “Due to a lack of technical evidence on our end, I've generally left it be, waiting for more evidence,” he says. “Our window on that is closing, given that government partners are becoming more aggressive on attribution.”



41. Translation: “more aggressive” “government partners” had closed Twitter’s “window” of independence.

42. “Other Government Agencies” ended up sharing intelligence through the FBI and FITF not just with Twitter, but with Yahoo!, Twitch, Cloudflare, LinkedIn, even Wikimedia:



43. Former CIA agent and whistleblower John Kiriakou believes he recognizes the formatting of these reports.

44. “Looks right on to me,” Kiriakou says, noting that “what was cut off above [the “tearline”] was the originating CIA office and all the copied offices.”

45. Many people wonder if Internet platforms receive direction from intelligence agencies about moderation of foreign policy news stories. It appears Twitter did, in some cases by way of the FITF/FBI.

46. These reports are far more factually controversial than domestic counterparts.

47. One intel report lists accounts tied to “Ukraine ‘neo-Nazi’ Propaganda.” This includes assertions that Joe Biden helped orchestrate a coup in 2014 and “put his son on the board of Burisma.”

The image shows two intelligence reports. The left report, titled "Suspected Russian Troll Farm: Ukraine Propaganda," includes a line graph showing mentions of "Ukraine" in English, Spanish, Russian, and Ukrainian from February 18-24, 2022. It lists key findings such as 999 Twitter profiles linked to a suspected Russian troll farm, with 16K tweets mentioning "Ukraine" in the last 7 days. The right report, titled "Ukraine 'neo-Nazi' Propaganda Overview," features a line graph of "Ukraine 'neo-Nazi' Propaganda Tweets" from February 22-28, 2022. It lists key findings including 5.4K tweets gathered and 4.7K Twitter profiles identified between Feb 22-28, 2022, and identifies top influencers like @sahouraxo and @Enfance_R.

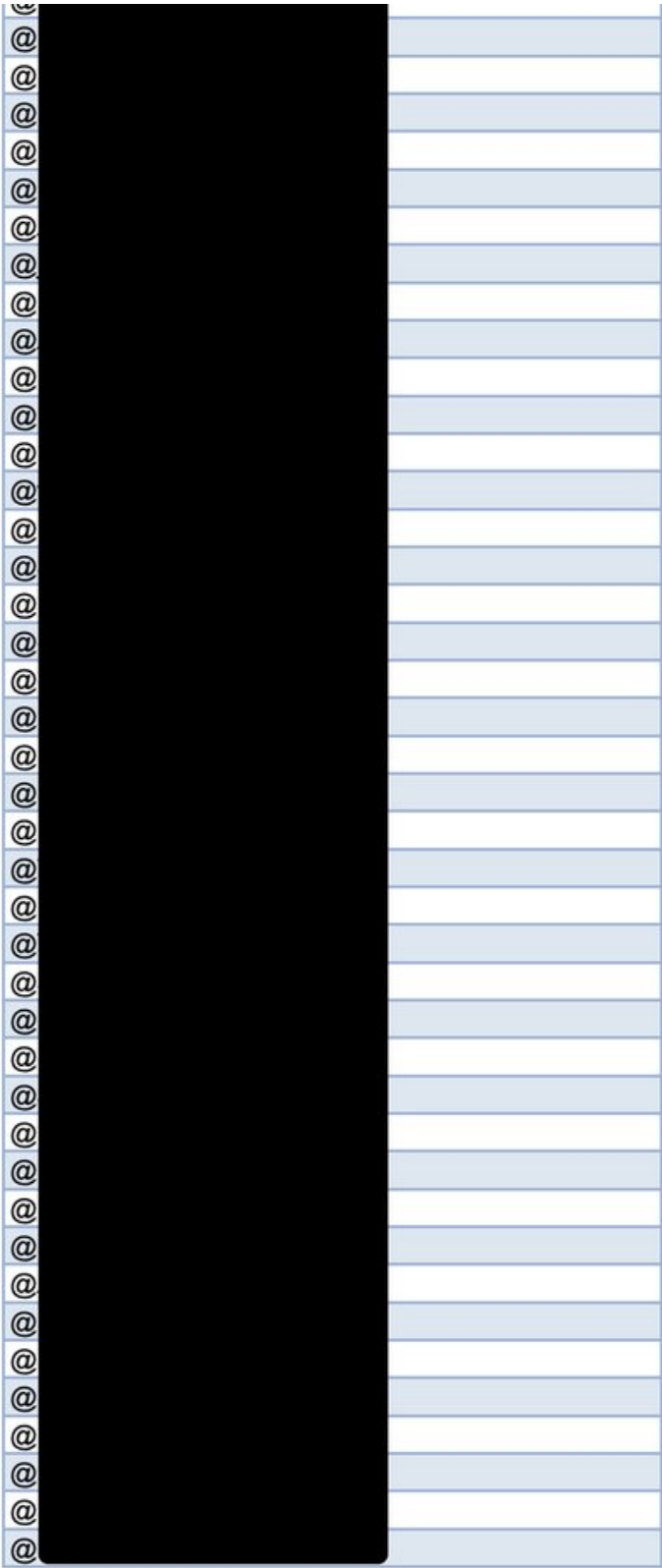
48. Another report asserts a list of accounts accusing the “Biden administration” of “corruption” in vaccine distribution are part of a Russian influence campaign:

(U) We also assess with high confidence that the IRA was responsible in mid-February 2022 for producing and placing in media and social media information in multiple languages, to include French, English, and Spanish, on the following two narratives:

- That Western Europeans in Africa were not acting in the best interests of the African nations, and specifically were involved in intimidation, coercion, and blackmail in the Sahara-Sahel zone, and were not interested in helping to fight terrorism in the Sahel.
- The Biden Administration was selling better places in the COVID-19 vaccine queue to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and therefore, U.S. corruption was influencing the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

49. Often intelligence came in the form of brief reports, followed by long lists of accounts simply deemed to be pro-Maduro, pro-Cuba, pro-Russia, etc. This one batch had over 1000 accounts marked for digital execution:

The slide is titled "Batch 7" in a red box. Below the title, it states: "These accounts were found to be linked to the Maduro (VEN) & Diaz-Canel (CUB) regimes AND propagating anti-Bolsonaro / pro-Lula Hashtags, but HAVE NOT been previously reported." At the bottom, there is a blue box labeled "Suspected BOT Accounts" with a list of social media handles, some of which are redacted with black boxes.



50. One report says a site “documenting purported rights abuses committed by Ukrainians” is directed by Russian agents:

2022-21593

USA/Other:Other/Apple; USA/Other:Other/Google/Youtube;
USA/Other:Other/Facebook; USA/Other:Other/Twitter;
USA/Other:Other/Reddit; USA/Other:Other/Verizon Media/Yahoo;
USA/Other:Other/LinkedIn; USA/Other:Other/Wikimedia;
USA/Other:Other/CloudFlare

(U) Tearline:

(U) The tearline must be used as-is; no changes to the text/language are permitted.

START OF TEXT

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED ONLY FOR INTELLIGENCE PURPOSES IN AN EFFORT TO DEVELOP POTENTIAL INVESTIGATIVE LEADS. IT CANNOT BE USED IN CONNECTION WITH ANY FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC COURT PROCEEDINGS OR FOR ANY OTHER LEGAL, JUDICIAL, OR ADMINISTRATIVE PURPOSES.

(U) We assess that The Tragedy of Donbas (donbasstragedy.info), a website documenting purported human rights abuses committed by Ukrainians since 2014, is directed by the Russian General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).

UNCLASSIFIED

END OF TEXT

51. Intel about the shady origin of these accounts might be true. But so might at least some of the information in them – about neo-Nazis, rights abuses in Donbas, even about our own government. Should we block such material?

52. This is a difficult speech dilemma. Should the government be allowed to try to prevent Americans (and others) from seeing pro-Maduro or anti-Ukrainian accounts?

55. The line between “misinformation” and “distorting propaganda” is thin. Are we comfortable with so many companies receiving so many reports from a “more aggressive” government?

56. The CIA has yet to comment on the nature of its relationship to tech companies like Twitter. Twitter had no input into anything I did or wrote. The searches were carried out by third parties, so what I saw could be limited.

Watch [@bariweiss](#), [@shellenbergerMD](#), [@lhfang](#), and this space for more, on issues ranging from Covid-19 to Twitter's relationship to congress, and more.

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