

# Three Republicans were still in the presidential race. The Russians only contacted one

By Anita Kumar, David Goldstein And Kevin G. Hall [McClatchy Washington Bureau](#)

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In this photo from President Donald Trump's Twitter account, posted on March 31, 2016, George Papadopoulos, third from left, sits with then-candidate Trump and others at what is labeled as a national security meeting in Washington. Papadopoulos, a former Trump campaign aide, has provided evidence in the first criminal case resulting from Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation that connects Trump's team and intermediaries for Russia seeking to interfere in the campaign. AP

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Almost immediately after Hillary Clinton campaign emails were hacked, Russians turned to Donald Trump —and not his Republican opponents — to try to use the documents against her.

A professor with ties to the Russian government contacted Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos in April 2016 to tell him Russians had “dirt” on Clinton in the form of “thousands of emails,” according to records released Monday.

Those details come from a plea agreement released after former Trump adviser George Papadopoulos pleaded guilty to lying to federal officials about his contacts with Russian officials during the presidential campaign.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, the only two Republicans remaining in the presidential race in April 2016, were not contacted by anyone offering similar information, according to the campaign officials.

“They did not reach out,” said John Weaver, Kasich's chief campaign strategist. Cruz’s then campaign manager Jeff Roe said the campaign was not contacted.

Clinton’s campaign did not learn that its chairman [John Podesta’s emails](#) were hacked until nearly six months later when the anti-secrecy website Wikileaks began to release them in early October. That was four months after Democratic National Committee emails were breached.

The document did not say which Clinton emails the professor was referring to, but Clinton campaign officials and lawmakers assume it refers to Podesta’s emails, which were [released for weeks](#) starting in October 2016.

“That conversation took place *before* the American people were even aware

that emails had in fact been stolen by the Russian government from both Clinton campaign officials as well as the Democratic National Committee,” said Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

Schiff said that Papadopoulos’ plea underscores the importance of the June 2016 meeting in Trump Tower attended by campaign Chairman Paul Manafort; Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner; Trump’s eldest son, Donald Trump Jr.; and several Russians. The meeting occurred after a go-between reached out to Trump Jr. offering incriminating information from the Russians about Clinton.

The plea, according to Schiff, “establishes that at the time Manafort, Kushner and Don Jr. met at Trump Tower with a Russian lawyer with close Kremlin ties, the Trump campaign already had been informed that the Russians were in possession of the Clinton emails — something that might further explain both why the high level Trump campaign officials took the meeting and what they hoped to obtain.”

## *Schiff talks about indictments of Manafort and Gates in Russia investigation*

California Congressman Adam Schiff, the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, spoke with North Carolina reporters on Oct. 30, 2017 after former Trump campaign chief Paul Manafort and his business partner Rick Gates were indicted. Schiff talks about the indictments and the guilty plea unsealed on Oct. 30, 2017, related to Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos.

**Anne Blythe** ablythe@newsobserver.com

No information contained in government documents released today indicating that Papadopoulos or the campaign contacted the FBI about the emails. The campaign did not respond to a question Monday.

“We've known for a little over a year that a foreign adversary hacked our campaign to influence the election,” said Jesse Ferguson, who served as a spokesman for the Clinton campaign. “We now know that the first Americans to know about that were Trump campaign advisers.”

Trump was immediately criticized in the summer of 2016 for calling on Russia to find the [30,000 emails](#) Clinton deleted from the personal server she used during her time as secretary of state.

“I will tell you this, Russia: If you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing,” he said. “I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press.”

His campaign said he was joking.

For months, Trump has denied his campaign colluded with Russia in meddling in the presidential election, calling it fake news and a hoax, and belittled special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. But Papadopoulos's guilty plea and the [indictment](#) of Manafort and his business associate Rick Gates Monday made it real.

“After the indictment and guilty plea announced today, it's hard to see how anyone could allege with a straight face that Mueller's inquiry is a hoax or waste of taxpayer dollars,” said Matthew Axelrod, a former senior Justice Department official during the Obama administration. “People don't plead guilty to hoaxes.”

The Papadopoulos plea agreement repeatedly refers to a London-based

professor who federal officials say served as a go-between Papadopoulos and the Russian government. It does not name the professor but he appears to be Joseph Mifsud, based out of London, with ties to Malta and a close relationship with Russia, according to news reports.

The [website for the Russian Embassy](#) in London has a photo of Mifsud, whom it says is the director of the London Academy of Diplomacy. Mifsud met with a delegation from the Lomonosov Moscow State University July 10 to discuss “cooperation in the sphere of high education (sic)” and collaboration between schools of diplomacy, it says.

Mifsud’s page on the London Academy of Diplomacy was apparently taken down Monday, but other online biographies show that at one time he was the president of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia. His biography on that post said he had served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta, and was a “prime mover” of Malta’s joining the European Union.

Mifsud also ran the London Centre of International Law Practice, where Papadopoulos noted on his [LinkedIn page](#) he worked briefly in 2016 before joining the Trump campaign; the LinkedIn page boasts that he was “Former Advisor at Donald J. Trump for President.”

The plea agreement cites one email in which the professor had just returned from meeting people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who told him that the Russians “have thousands of (Hillary Clinton) emails.”

The screenshot shows the website of the Russian Embassy in London. The header includes the Russian coat of arms and the text "The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" and "DIPLOMACY ONLINE". The date is 30 October 2017, with contact times for Moscow (00:25) and London (21:25). A search bar and social media icons are also present.

The main menu includes: Main menu, Contact us / ask a question, Visas, consular services, and Russia. The left sidebar lists various sections such as Embassy, Ambassador, Diplomatic list, Embassy informs, Speeches, interviews, articles, Ambassador's Articles, Press Releases and News, Photo Reports, Videos, Ambassador Rewards, Different Opinions, Travel advice, The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation, Bilateral relations, Economic co-operation, Ambassador's Business Council, Bilateral agreements, History of Russia-UK relations, Embassy history, Arctic Allied Convoys, Russian landmarks of London, Map of Russian places in Britain, 300 years of Russian Church in Britain, Information for visiting journalists, Russian speaking community associations, Russian Mass Media in London, and Requests for Quotations.

The main content area features a "PHOTO REPORTS" section with the title "Counsellor of the Russian Embassy Ernest Chernukhin attended London Academy of Diplomacy". The text below the title states: "On 10 July, representative of the Russian Embassy in London, counsellor Ernest Chernukhin together with the delegation from the Lomonosov Moscow State University attended University of East Anglia, London Academy of Diplomacy. He met Professor Joseph Mifsud, Director Academy of Diplomacy. Different issues of Russian-British cooperation in the sphere of high education including the collaboration between the Faculty of Global Processes of MSU and the London Academy of Diplomacy on the international relations were discussed."

The photo shows two men in suits standing in front of a purple wall with the text "London Academy of Diplomacy". The man on the right is identified as Professor Joseph Mifsud. Below the photo are social media sharing icons (Google+, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Email, Print, RSS, YouTube, Instagram, and a star icon) and a Twitter follow button for @russianembassy with 58.7K followers.

At the bottom left, there is a red box with the text "Телефон для экстренных случаев (угроза жизни, здоровью и безопасности граждан России в Великобритании) For Russian nationals only +44 (0) 7768 566 868". Below this is a "TRAVEL ADVICE" section with a flag icon. At the very bottom, it says "Ambassador Yakovenko for" with a green bar.

This screenshot of the Russian Embassy in London website shows Professor Joseph Mifsud (r), who news reports described the professor cited in a plea deal struck with Special Counsel Robert Mueller that was unsealed on Oct. 30, 2017. The plea deal describes the professor as a go-between for Russia and junior members of the Trump campaign.

Nikolay Lakhonin, a spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Washington, did not respond to a request for comment.

The plea agreement said the professor introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian

woman who in at least one email was described as “Putin’s niece.” Most of Trump’s foreign policy team did not include former diplomats or people who knew details of Russian leadership and were unlikely to be aware that Putin did not have brothers or sisters or a niece.

At the White House Monday, aides downplayed Papadopoulos’ actions, describing him as a volunteer who sat on an advisory board that met once. “There are no activities or official capacity in which the Trump campaign was engaged in any of these activities,” Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters at her daily briefing.

“The moment I expect will come when people in the White House are looking at empty chairs near them of people who are down in the grand jury and come back silent,” said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a former U.S. attorney. “When that phase begins, that’s when people are waking up 2-3 in the morning asking, ‘Me next?’”

*Ben Wieder contributed.*