



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on July 8, 2021

Report: Carlson Sought Interview With Putin. Sources: NSA Knew It.

Tucker Carlson had good reason last week [to claim](#) the National Security spied on him.

Just before he accused NSA of illegally reading his emails, [Axios has reported](#), he learned that the agency knew he was trying to set up an interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Though NSA [has denied](#) the eavesdropping, it has not denied viewing his emails. The agency might have picked up his communications inadvertently by eavesdropping on someone else, but then “unmasked” the Fox commentator to reveal his identity.



Tucker Carlson (AP Images)

Putin Talks

Unidentified sources told *Axios* that Carlson sought the interview with Putin.

“Tucker Carlson was talking to U.S.-based Kremlin intermediaries about setting up an interview with Vladimir Putin shortly before the Fox News host accused the National Security Agency of spying on him, sources familiar with the conversations tell *Axios*,” the website reported.

The feds found out about the feelers, but then Carlson found out what the feds found out.

“Carlson learned that the government was aware of his outreach — and that’s the basis of his extraordinary accusation, followed by a rare public denial by the NSA that he had been targeted,” [Axios reported](#):

On Wednesday, Carlson told Maria Bartiromo on Fox Business that only his executive producer knew about the communications in question and that he didn’t mention it to anybody else, including his wife.

But, of course, the recipients of Carlson’s texts and emails also knew about their content. And we don’t know how widely they shared this information. ...

The NSA’s public statement didn’t directly deny that any Carlson communications had been swept up by the agency. ...

An NSA spokesperson declined to comment and referred *Axios* back to the agency’s earlier, carefully worded, statement. In other words, the NSA is denying the targeting of Carlson but is not denying that his communications were incidentally collected.

Carlson Unmasked?



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The blow-up between Carlson and the super-secret NSA began when Carlson divulged that a whistleblower “repeated back to us information about a story that we are working on that could have only come directly from my texts and emails.”

“The NSA captured that information without our knowledge and did it for political reasons,” [he continued](#). “The Biden administration is spying on us. We have confirmed that.”

The goal: Put Carlson off the air.

NSA’s “denial” was as murky as a cloud of octopus ink. “Tucker Carlson has never been an intelligence target of the Agency and the NSA has never had any plans to try to take his program off the air,” the agency claimed.

But NSA *did not* deny reading his emails.

“NSA also did not deny that it may have accessed Carlson’s communications through ‘incidental collection,’” former CIA man [Fred Fleitz wrote](#) for the *Federalist*:

Incidental collection is a well-known and controversial way the NSA collects vast amounts of Americans’ communications without warrants. This happens when an innocent American communicates with a legitimate NSA target, such as someone believed to be under the control of or to be collaborating with a hostile foreign power.

When this happens, the name of the innocent American is supposed to be “redacted” or masked. There are very strict rules on how incidentally collected communications of U.S citizens can be used.

NSA didn’t likely seek or procure a warrant to spy on the popular television host, [Axios reported](#). Instead, NSA was surveilling the Putin intermediary:

Carlson’s emails or text messages could have been incidentally collected as part of monitoring this person, but Carlson’s identity would have been masked in any intelligence reports.

A government official would have to request that Carlson’s identity be unmasked, “something that’s only permitted if the unmasking is necessary to understand the intelligence.”

If NSA intercepted Carlson’s emails while it eavesdropped on someone in “Putin’s orbit,” then “under this scenario, too, Carlson’s identity would have been masked in reports as part of his protections as a U.S. citizen.”

Again, divulging his identity would have required a government official’s request.

[Continued Axios](#):

Two sources familiar with Carlson’s communications said his two Kremlin intermediaries live in the United States, but the sources could not confirm whether both are American citizens or whether both were on U.S. soil at the time they communicated with Carlson.



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This is relevant because if one of them was a foreign national and on foreign soil during the communications, the U.S. government wouldn't necessarily have had to seek approval to monitor their communications.

[NSA has](#) a long history of spying on Americans. In 1975, James Bamford, who worked for NSA and wrote a book about it, told the Church Committee that the NSA spied on Americans. In 2013, [Edward Snowden leaked](#) incriminating documents.

Susan Rice, President Obama's National Security Adviser, [confessed that](#) "she unmasked Trump campaign aides during the Obama administration and now serves in the Biden White House," [Fleitz recalled](#). "Has Rice resumed her previous efforts to weaponize NSA reporting against the political enemies of another Democratic president?"



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