

Project Osprey – Twitter Files 21

 cnav.news/2023/04/27/news/project-osprey-twitter-files-21/

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The twenty-first [Twitter Files](#) thread dropped two days ago (April 25), this one about Project Osprey. This was Twitter Trust and Safety’s project to find – or invent – accounts with an alleged connection to Putin’s Russia.

How and why Project Osprey began

According to Matt Orfalia, the latest Twitter Files journalist, the impetus for Project Osprey began after the Election of 2016. Trump had won, and Senate Democrats were furious. The Senate Intelligence Committee asked Twitter to find all accounts that were part of Russia’s Internet Research Agency. Twitter found only 22 provable members of IRA, plus 179 accounts somehow “linked” to those 22. That didn’t satisfy Senator Mark Warner (D-Va.). So he called the report “inadequate on every level” and all but ordered Twitter to look again. That “looking again” became Project Osprey.

CNAV has talked about the Russia Disinformation narrative [before](#), that being an earlier Twitter Files installment. But this thread discusses the very beginnings of the search for, or invention of, Russian influence on Twitter.

Project Osprey “distinguished” between two kinds of “Russian” accounts. *A priori* Russian accounts, outsiders identify as such. “Inferred” Russian accounts use Cyrillic text or have a Russian IP address. Whether Project Osprey distinguished a non-Russian who might be using a Virtual Private Network with a Russian proxy server, is not clear.

What is clear is that the broad nature of the “inference” of Russian affiliation would so label “innocent” people. Case in point: Jill Stein, who ran for President in 2012 and 2016 on the Green Party ticket. When someone advised her that Project Osprey had caught her in this “dragnet,” she scornfully compared the result to the Communist Party card hunt by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisc.).

Other ways to draw an accusation of Russian-ism

Evidently Project Osprey identified other accounts as “Russian,” that would incur the wrath of the Deep State on their own accounts. WikiLeaks is an obvious example. Similarly, anyone who would use a privacy-guarding system like The Onion Router (TOR) would invite suspicion of being Russian.

Disclaimer: TOR has sometimes been a base for abusive behavior, classically including Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. CNAV once had to block every domain having the letters “tor” in it, and often blocked Motorola’s ISP network as a result. Other Web administrators have blocked TOR for similar reasons. Having said that, TOR becomes the “enemy of the (Deep) State” by reason of its origin-hiding nature.

Orfalia goes on to show how Twitter – and those to whom it answered – used Project Osprey more to “round up the usual suspects” than anything else.

Herewith Matt Orfalia’s full thread:

1/ [#TWITTERFILES 21](#)

How to Find Russians Anywhere

Pt.1 – PROJECT OSPREY –

After the 2016 election, the Senate Intel Committee asked Twitter to identify accounts from Russia’s Internet Research Agency. But both Twitter and 3rd party researchers struggled to find Russian agents. pic.twitter.com/MZHGnIV157

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

3/ In "Project Osprey," Twitter counted 2 types of Russians.

1. "A Priori" Russians – identified as Russian by outside researchers like QIntel

2. "Inferred" Russians (aka is_russian) – identified by algorithm tracking "signals" like Cyrillic text or a Russian IP address pic.twitter.com/cGP5dqL6Do

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

5/ Even Twitter understood. Noting Green Party candidate [@DrJillStein](#) was "captured by is_russian" – the "inferred Russians" list – Twitter analysts commented on the "overly broad nature of is_russian." pic.twitter.com/64HNHRWXkP

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

7/ Another account deemed "is_Russian" was [@Wikileaks](#). Shown the attribution, [@Stella_Assange](#) said, "Wikileaks does not fit the definition," noting that anyone using surveillance-resistant search tools like the Tor Browser might also be deemed "Russian." pic.twitter.com/HaMeFShM4q

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

9/ In the same Osprey document, Twitter notes the hashtag [#WarAgainstDemocrats](#) (which NYT reported was posted a scary 1,700 times on election day) only garnered a microscopic 6,953 impressions—a hydrogen atom in Twitter's vast ocean of tweets. pic.twitter.com/bT9GzyR5il

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

11/ Even as Twitter began referring openly to "IRA-linked" accounts, the company had no sure way to make such identifications. They were only "potentially connected". pic.twitter.com/6cvKysQZoo

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

13/ Twitter knew that if they couldn't identify IRA accounts with certainty, outside researchers lacking Twitter's internal data couldn't either.

PART 2 – Russian Troll Hunters

"They just don't have the chops" pic.twitter.com/wbEDQt768l

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

15/ Outside of Hamilton 68, about which Twitter stayed quiet despite internal knowledge that it was "bullshit," Twitter analysts may have had the most disdain for Clemson's Media Forensics Hub, a major driver of print and TV cyber-scare stories of Russian subversion. pic.twitter.com/z5ER4HCND0

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

17/ When asked how they knew an account was Russian. Warren confessed he can't be "100% sure" but Livill said he was "certain". He wouldn't say how though. "Transparency just isn't possible," he said. pic.twitter.com/yNgkxQGZXD

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

19/ That was false: It started prior to that morning, and not by [@drkwarlord](#), who is an American living in the US, not Asia. When I asked why his sleep sched seemed off, he laughed, and told me, "I'm a nurse at a hospital in Indiana. In 2020, I worked the night shift." pic.twitter.com/F7D0Y0GPwQ

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

21/ Another example occurred w the [#DCBlackout](#) hoax. As Twitter exchanged emails with the FBI, describing the campaign as "a small-scale domestic troll effort...not a significant bot or foreign angle," Linvill described the campaign as having employed "a classic Russian move". pic.twitter.com/IUgILae5En

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

23/ But to the Clemson researchers' credit, they found Twitter was "scraping the barrel" too, having looped in several Americans in a list of "Russian bots" given to Congress. So clearly, Twitter's own false positives didn't stop with its project, Osprey. pic.twitter.com/o8jU3cT05b

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

25/ After years of Red Scare stories (citing the Clemson duo, Ham68, & others) that fueled such awful censorship, Linvill leveled with PBS in 2022: "You know, Russian trolls aren't as common as people think they are." pic.twitter.com/5B3SkzbxIA

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

27/ The Clemson professors' comments to Racket News pic.twitter.com/dx55itaZrG

— Matt Orfalea (@0rf) [April 25, 2023](#)

In addition, this account left this link to where one can find every Twitter Files thread thus far, and promised regular updates:

All Twitter File releases to date have been aggregated here 📌 Will add part 21 soon. <https://t.co/k4aJzvtuFI>

— Crowdsourced News (@CrowdsrsrcNews) [April 26, 2023](#)

Reaction has been mostly positive, with much sarcasm at the expense of Hillary Clinton and others:

Wait, college professors are lazy and arrogant and fudge data to fit their thesis? Get. Out!

— Saint Snap 🌸 Amateur Market Crasher (@EastVillageSnap) [April 26, 2023](#)

It all boils down to the DC Swamp is a private club. You and I and about 300 million tax paying American Citizens are not members. Time to disband their club.

— Ultra MAGA (@frlarson) [April 26, 2023](#)

Just like the PCR test kits used initially for covid testing, the more you keep digging into files or in the case of increasing the cycle threshold for the PCR tests, the likelihood that you will find something eventually.

— Lil oh Dave (@DM_4USA) [April 26, 2023](#)

The Russia Hoax of 2016, is a lie cooked up and paid for by Hillary Rodham Clinton. Why is she not in prison for the pain and destruction she caused?

— Ultra MAGA (@frlarson) [April 26, 2023](#)

Keystone Cops to the rescue.

— degree zero (@davidcomdico) [April 25, 2023](#)

But this statement, far from sarcastic, points out the chief danger of Project Osprey:

This is a textbook example of torturing the data: they couldn't find enough actual Russian interference, so they had to develop some convoluted logic until they hit the number people wanted. It would be hilarious if it wasn't so dangerous.

— Alfarabius (@Alfarabius870) [April 26, 2023](#)