

counterintelligence investigation and the related investigations of Papadopoulos, Page, Manafort, and Flynn.

A. Receipt of Information from the Friendly Foreign Government and the Opening of Crossfire Hurricane

By March 2016, Papadopoulos, Page, and Flynn were among several individuals serving as foreign policy advisors for the Trump campaign. Manafort joined the Trump campaign in March 2016 as the campaign convention manager. In the weeks that followed, Papadopoulos met with officials of an FFG in a European city that had arranged several meetings in May 2016 to engage with members of the Trump campaign. During one of these meetings, Papadopoulos reportedly “suggested” to an FFG official that the Trump campaign “received some kind of a suggestion from Russia” that it could assist the campaign by anonymously releasing derogatory information about presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.¹⁶⁴ However, the FFG did not provide information about Papadopoulos’s statements to the U.S. government at that time.

On July 26, 2016, 4 days after WikiLeaks publicly released hacked emails from the DNC, the FFG official spoke with a U.S. government (USG) official in the European city about an “urgent matter” that required an in-person meeting. At the meeting, the FFG official informed the USG official of the meeting with Papadopoulos. The FFG official also provided [REDACTED] information from [REDACTED] FFG officials [REDACTED] following the May 2016 meeting (hereinafter referred to as the FFG information). [REDACTED] stated, in part, that Papadopoulos

¹⁶⁴ During October 25, 2018 testimony before the House Judiciary and House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, Papadopoulos stated that the source of the information he shared with the FFG official was a professor from London, Joseph Mifsud. Papadopoulos testified that Mifsud provided him with information about the Russians possessing “dirt” on Hillary Clinton. Papadopoulos raised the possibility during his Congressional testimony that Mifsud might have been “working with the FBI and this was some sort of operation” to entrap Papadopoulos. As discussed in Chapter Ten of this report, the OIG searched the FBI’s database of Confidential Human Sources (CHS), and did not find any records indicating that Mifsud was an FBI CHS, or that Mifsud’s discussions with Papadopoulos were part of any FBI operation. In Chapter Ten, we also note that the FBI requested information [REDACTED]

We refer to Joseph Mifsud by name in this report because the Department publicly revealed Mifsud’s identity in The Special Counsel’s Report (public version). According to The Special Counsel’s Report, Papadopoulos first met Mifsud in March 2016, after Papadopoulos had already learned that he would be serving as a foreign policy advisor for the Trump campaign. According to The Special Counsel’s Report, Mifsud only showed interest in Papadopoulos after learning of Papadopoulos’s role in the campaign, and told Papadopoulos about the Russians possessing “dirt” on then candidate Clinton in late April 2016. The Special Counsel found that Papadopoulos lied to the FBI about the timing of his discussions with Mifsud, as well as the nature and extent of his communications with Mifsud. The Special Counsel charged Papadopoulos under Title 18 U.S.C. § 1001 with making false statements. Papadopoulos pled guilty and was sentenced to 14 days in prison. See *The Special Counsel’s Report*, Vol. 1, at 192-94.

suggested the Trump team had received some kind of suggestion from Russia that it could assist this process with the anonymous release of information during the campaign that would be damaging to Mrs. Clinton (and President Obama). It was unclear whether he or the Russians were referring to material acquired publicly of [sic] through other means. It was also unclear how Mr. Trump's team reacted to the offer. We note the Trump team's reaction could, in the end, have little bearing of what Russia decides to do, with or without Mr. Trump's cooperation.

On July 27, 2016, the USG official called the FBI's Legal Attaché (Legat) and [REDACTED] in the European city to her office and provided them with the FFG information.¹⁶⁵ The Legat told us he was not provided any other information about the meetings between the FFG and Papadopoulos.¹⁶⁶ The Legat also told us that he did not know under what FBI case number the FFG information should be documented and transmitted. At the recommendation of the European city Assistant Legal Attaché (ALAT) for Counterintelligence, the Legat contacted a former ALAT who at the time was an Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC) in the FBI's Philadelphia Field Office. The ASAC told the Legat that he believed the FFG information was related to the hack of DNC emails and identified a case number for that investigation for the Legat to use to transmit the information. The following day, on July 28, 2016, the Legat sent an EC documenting the FFG information to the Philadelphia Field Office ASAC. The same day, the information in the EC was emailed to the Section Chief of the Cyber Counterintelligence Coordination Section at FBI Headquarters.

From July 28 to July 31, officials at FBI Headquarters discussed the FFG information and whether it warranted opening a counterintelligence investigation. The Assistant Director (AD) for CD, E.W. "Bill" Priestap, was a central figure in these discussions. According to Priestap, he discussed the matter with then Section Chief of CD's Counterespionage Section Peter Strzok, as well as the Section Chief of CD's Counterintelligence Analysis Section I (Intel Section Chief); and with representatives of the FBI's Office of the General Counsel (OGC), including Deputy General Counsel Trisha Anderson and a unit chief (OGC Unit Chief) in OGC's National Security and Cyber Law Branch (NSCLB). Priestap told us that he also discussed the matter with either then Deputy Director (DD) Andrew McCabe or then Executive Assistant Director (EAD) Michael Steinbach, but did not recall discussing the matter with then Director James Comey told the OIG that he did not recall being briefed on the FFG information until after the Crossfire Hurricane investigation was opened, and that he was not involved in the decision to open the case. McCabe said that although he did not specifically recall meeting with Comey immediately after the FFG information was received, it was "the kind of thing that would have been brought to Director Comey's attention immediately." McCabe's

¹⁶⁵ A Legal Attaché (Legat) is the FBI Director's personal representative in a country in which the FBI has regional responsibility.

¹⁶⁶ According to the Legat, the [REDACTED] stated at the meeting with the USG official that the FFG information "sounds like an FBI matter."

contemporaneous notes reflect that the FFG information, Carter Page, and Manafort, were discussed on July 29, after a regularly scheduled morning meeting of senior FBI leadership with the Director. Although McCabe told us he did not have an independent recollection of this discussion, he told us that, based upon his notes, this discussion likely included the Director. McCabe's notes reflect only the topic of the discussion and not the substance of what was discussed.

McCabe told us that he recalled discussing the FFG information with Priestap, Strzok, then Special Counsel to the Deputy Director Lisa Page, and Comey, sometime before Crossfire Hurricane was opened, and he agreed with opening a counterintelligence investigation based on the FFG information. He told us the decision to open the case was unanimous. McCabe said the FBI viewed the FFG information in the context of Russian attempts to interfere with the 2016 U.S. elections in the years and months prior, as well as the FBI's ongoing investigation into the DNC hack by a Russian Intelligence Service (RIS). He also said that when the FBI received the FFG information it was a "tipping point" in terms of opening a counterintelligence investigation regarding Russia's attempts to influence and interfere with the 2016 U.S. elections because not only was there information that Russia was targeting U.S. political institutions, but now the FBI had received an allegation from a trusted partner that there had been some sort of contact between the Russians and the Trump campaign. McCabe said that he did not recall any discussion about whether the FFG information constituted sufficient predication for opening a Full Investigation, as opposed to a Preliminary Investigation, but said that his belief at the time, based on his experience, was that the FFG information was adequate predication.¹⁶⁷

According to Priestap, he authorized opening the Crossfire Hurricane counterintelligence investigation on July 31, 2016, based upon these discussions. He told us that the FFG information was provided by a trusted source—the FFG—and he therefore felt it "wise to open an investigation to look into" whether someone associated with the Trump campaign may have accepted the reported offer from the Russians. Priestap also told us that the combination of the FFG information and the FBI's ongoing cyber intrusion investigation of the DNC hacks created a counterintelligence concern that the FBI was "obligated" to investigate. Priestap said that he did not recall any disagreement about the decision to open Crossfire Hurricane, and told us that he was not pressured to open the case.

We interviewed all of the senior FBI officials who participated in these discussions about their reactions to the FFG information and assessments of it as

¹⁶⁷ As detailed in Chapter Two, the DIOP provides for two types of predicated investigations, Preliminary Investigations and Full Investigations. A Preliminary Investigation may be opened based upon "any allegation or information" indicative of possible criminal activity or threats to the national security; a Full Investigation may be opened based upon an "articulable factual basis" of possible criminal activity or threats to the national security. In cases opened as Preliminary Investigations, all lawful investigative methods (including CHS and UCE operations) may be used except for mail opening, physical searches requiring a search warrant, electronic surveillance requiring a judicial order or warrant (Title III wiretap or a FISA order), or requests under Title VII of FISA. A Preliminary Investigation may be converted to a Full Investigation if the available information provides predication for a Full Investigation.

predication for Crossfire Hurricane. Each of these officials told us the information warranted opening a counterintelligence investigation. For example, Anderson told us that when the information from the Legat arrived it was "really disturbing," and that she told Priestap the information needed to be reviewed by the Deputy Director immediately (Anderson and Priestap, in fact, briefed McCabe that day, July 28). She also told us that the decision to open the case was based upon the concern that the U.S. democratic process could be manipulated by a foreign power. Anderson also told us that "[the FBI] would have been derelict in our responsibilities had we not opened the case," and that a foreign power allegedly colluding with a presidential candidate or his team members was a threat to our nation that the FBI was obligated to investigate under its counterintelligence mission.

Similarly, then FBI General Counsel James Baker told us that everyone was in agreement about opening an investigation because the information came from a trusted intelligence partner, and it concerned a "Russian connection to the Trump campaign." He told us the FBI had information about the Russian's hacking activities, which they considered "a threat." Baker could not specifically recall whether Crossfire Hurricane was opened as a Preliminary Investigation or a Full Investigation, but told us that a Full Investigation "would have been justified under these facts."

The Intel Section Chief also told us that he recalled the discussions about the FFG information when it arrived and said no one disagreed with opening a counterintelligence investigation based on the information. The Intel Section Chief also said that in the context of what was occurring with the DNC hacks and the release of the DNC emails, there was a possibility that the Russians reached out to a campaign to offer their assistance, and the FBI needed to investigate the allegation. The OGC Unit Chief had the same recollection, telling us that there was no real question about whether to investigate and that her impression was everyone thought the FFG information was so serious that the FBI had to investigate the allegations: "[T]his is not something we were looking to do, but given the allegations, we thought they were serious enough [that] we had to investigate."

Like Priestap, these officials told us that their evaluation of the FFG information was informed by the FBI's ongoing cyber investigation involving Russia and the DNC hack. According to the Intel Section Chief and Strzok, when the FFG information arrived, the FBI already had strong corroborating information indicating that senior officials in the Russian government were responsible for directing attacks on the 2016 U.S. elections, including the hack of the DNC. Anderson said the FBI's ongoing cyber investigation supported the decision to open a counterintelligence case based on the FFG information. Anderson stated:

...I don't remember exactly when we felt, you know, the moment in time when we felt that we had Russian attribution, not just to the hack, but also to the release of the emails. So though that was suspected or we had some information to support that theory for quite some time, but whether you...can attribute that to the Russians with a

high degree of certainty or...not, it sort of puts the whole thing together. On the one hand you've got the Russian efforts to obtain material that could be used as part of a foreign influence campaign and then on the other hand you've got [this] information about the possibility of collusion between the Russians and members of a presidential candidate's campaign.

Priestap told the OIG that before arriving at a final decision, he considered whether to provide a "defensive briefing" to any member of the Trump campaign in lieu of opening an investigation. According to Priestap, defensive briefings occur when U.S. government or corporate officials are being targeted by a foreign adversary and the FBI determines the officials should be alerted to the potential threat. Priestap did not recall who first raised the issue of defensive briefings, but said he discussed the subject collaboratively with other FBI officials. Priestap told us that he ultimately decided not to conduct defensive briefings and explained his reasoning:

While the Counterintelligence Division does regularly provide defensive briefings to U.S. government officials or possible soon to be officials, in my experience, we do this when there is no indication, whatsoever, that the person to whom we would brief could be working with the relevant foreign adversary. In other words, we provide defensive briefings when we obtain information indicating a foreign adversary is trying or will try to influence a specific U.S. person, and when there is no indication that the specific U.S. person could be working with the adversary. In regard to the information the [FFG] provided us, we had no indication as to which person in the Trump campaign allegedly received the offer from the Russians. There was no specific U.S. person identified. We also had no indication, whatsoever, that the person affiliated with the Trump campaign had rejected the alleged offer from the Russians. In fact, the information we received indicated that Papadopoulos told the [FFG] he felt confident Mr. Trump would win the election, and Papadopoulos commented that the Clintons had a lot of baggage and that the Trump team had plenty of material to use in its campaign. While Papadopoulos didn't say where the Trump team had received the "material," one could reasonably infer that some of the material might have come from the Russians. Had we provided a defensive briefing to someone on the Trump campaign, we would have alerted the campaign to what we were looking into, and, if someone on the campaign was engaged with the Russians, he/she would very likely change his/her tactics and/or otherwise seek to cover-up his/her activities, thereby preventing us from finding the truth. On the other hand, if no one on the Trump campaign was working with the Russians, an investigation could prove that. Because the possibility existed that someone on the Trump campaign could have taken the Russians up on their offer, I thought it wise to open an investigation to look into the situation.

McCabe said that he did not consider a defensive briefing as an alternative to opening a counterintelligence case. He said that based on the FFG information, the FBI did not know if any member of the campaign was coordinating with Russia and that the FBI did not brief people who “could potentially be the subjects that you are investigating or looking for.” McCabe told us that in a sensitive counterintelligence matter, it was essential to have a better understanding of what was occurring before taking an overt step such as providing a defensive briefing.¹⁶⁸

We also asked those FBI officials involved in the decision to open Crossfire Hurricane whether the FBI received any other information, such as from members of the USIC, that the FBI relied upon to predicate Crossfire Hurricane. All of them told us that there was no such information and that predication for the case was based solely on the FFG information.¹⁶⁹ We also asked Comey and McCabe about then CIA Director John Brennan’s statements reported in several news articles that he provided to the FBI intelligence on Russian contacts with U.S. persons that predicated or prompted the opening of Crossfire Hurricane. Comey told us that while Brennan shared intelligence on the overarching efforts by the Russian government to interfere in the 2016 U.S. elections, Brennan did not provide any information that predicated or prompted the FBI to open Crossfire Hurricane. McCabe said that he did not recall Brennan providing the FBI with information before the FBI’s decision to open an investigation about any U.S. person potentially cooperating with Russia in the efforts to interfere with the 2016 U.S. elections. Priestap and the Intel Section Chief also told us that Brennan did not provide the FBI any intelligence that predicated the opening of Crossfire Hurricane. We did not find information in FBI or Department electronic communications, emails, or other documents, or through witness testimony, indicating otherwise.

On July 31, 2016, the FBI opened a full counterintelligence investigation under the code name Crossfire Hurricane “to determine whether individual(s) associated with the Trump campaign are witting of and/or coordinating activities with the Government of Russia.” As the predicated information did not indicate a specific individual, the opening EC did not include a specific subject or subjects. As described in Chapter Two, the factual predication required to open a Full Investigation under the Attorney General’s Guidelines for Domestic Operations (AG

¹⁶⁸ McCabe told us that the decision to brief the DNC and Clinton campaign about the DNC hack was a different situation than the decision not to brief the Trump campaign about allegations of Russian efforts to assist the Trump campaign. He said that the DNC was a victim of hacking and the FBI had known that the DNC was not responsible for the hacks for some time.

¹⁶⁹ As we describe in Chapter Four, although the FBI first received reporting from Christopher Steele regarding alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections in early July 2016, the agents and analysts investigating the FFG information (the Crossfire Hurricane team) did not become aware of the Steele reporting until September 19, 2016. We found no evidence the Steele election reporting was known to or used by FBI officials involved in the decision to open the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.

In the *OIG’s Review of Various Actions in Advance of the 2016 Election*, we describe in Classified Appendix One certain information that the FBI was in possession of in 2016 but the vast majority of which the FBI had not reviewed by June 2018. Given that timing, we did not see any evidence that any of that information was considered for or part of the predication for the opening of Crossfire Hurricane.

Guidelines) and the FBI's Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide (DIOG) is an "articulable factual basis" that reasonably indicates that one of several circumstances exist:

- An activity constituting a federal crime or a threat to the national security has or may have occurred, is or may be occurring, or will or may occur and the investigation may obtain information relating to the activity or the involvement or role of an individual, group, or organization in such activity;
- An individual, group, organization, entity, information, property, or activity is or may be a target of attack, victimization, acquisition, infiltration, or recruitment in connection with criminal activity in violation of federal law or a threat to the national security and the investigation may obtain information that would help to protect against such activity or threat; or
- The investigation may obtain foreign intelligence that is responsive to a requirement that the FBI collect positive foreign intelligence—*i.e.*, information relating to the capabilities, intentions, or activities of foreign governments or elements thereof, foreign organizations or foreign persons, or international terrorists.

The opening EC describing the predication for Crossfire Hurricane relied exclusively on Papadopoulos's statements to the FFG [REDACTED] in the FFG information.

Crossfire Hurricane was opened by CD and was assigned a case number used by the FBI for possible violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), 22 U.S.C. § 611, *et seq.*, and 18 U.S.C. § 951 (Agents of Foreign Governments).¹⁷⁰ As described in Chapter Two, the AG Guidelines recognize that activities subject to investigation as "threats to the national security" may also involve violations or potential violations of federal criminal laws, or may serve important purposes outside the ambit of normal criminal investigation and prosecution by informing national security decisions. Given such potential overlap in subject matter, neither the AG Guidelines nor the DIOG require the FBI to differently label its activities as criminal investigations, national security investigations, or foreign intelligence collections. Rather, the AG Guidelines state that, where an authorized purpose exists, all of the FBI's legal authorities are available for deployment in all cases to which they apply.¹⁷¹

The opening EC also designated Crossfire Hurricane as a "sensitive investigative matter," or SIM, which as described in Chapter Two, includes matters

¹⁷⁰ We have previously found differing understandings between FBI agents and federal prosecutors and NSD officials about the intent of FARA as well as what constitutes a "FARA case." See DOJ OIG, *Audit of the National Security Division's Enforcement and Administration of the Foreign Agents Registration Act*, Audit Division 16-24 (September 2016), <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1624.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2019).

¹⁷¹ See AG Guidelines § A, II.

involving the activities of a domestic public official or political candidate (involving corruption or a threat to the national security), or a domestic political organization or an individual prominent in such an organization.¹⁷² The term “domestic political organization” includes, in relevant part, a committee or group formed to elect an individual to public office. According to David Laufman, then Chief of the National Security Division’s (NSD) Counterintelligence and Export Control Section (CES), the case was designated a SIM because it involved a campaign and “people associated with a campaign.” The DIOG requires that cases opened and designated as SIMs by FBI Headquarters be reviewed by OGC and approved by the appropriate FBI Headquarters operational section chief. The DIOG also requires that the FBI provide an “appropriate NSD official” with written notification of the opening of a SIM.¹⁷³ The DIOG does not impose any additional special requirements on SIMs, but does state particular care should be taken when considering whether a planned course of action is the least intrusive method and if reasonable based upon the circumstances of the investigation.¹⁷⁴

After Priestap authorized the opening of Crossfire Hurricane, Strzok, with input from the OGC Unit Chief, drafted and approved the opening EC.¹⁷⁵ Strzok told us that the case agent normally drafts the opening EC for an investigation, but that Strzok did so for Crossfire Hurricane because a case agent was not yet assigned and there was an immediate need to travel to the European city to interview the FFG officials who had met with Papadopoulos. With respect to the DIOG’s notification requirement to NSD, we located in the Crossfire Hurricane case file a Letterhead Memorandum (LHM) dated August 3, 2016, addressed to NSD. However, NSD officials told us that NSD has no record showing it received the LHM, and we were unable to determine whether the FBI in fact provided the LHM to NSD.¹⁷⁶

In addition to being designated a SIM, witnesses told us that, because the information being investigated related to an ongoing presidential election campaign, the Crossfire Hurricane case file was designated as “prohibited” meaning that access to the file was restricted and viewable to only those individuals assigned to

¹⁷² The DIOG requires that if a case is designated as a SIM at the time of opening, the title or case caption must contain the words “Sensitive Investigative Matter.” The opening EC for Crossfire Hurricane met this DIOG requirement.

¹⁷³ There is no requirement under the AG Guidelines or the DIOG that a senior Department official approve of or be consulted prior to the opening of an investigation designated a SIM.

¹⁷⁴ The DIOG requires that the least intrusive means or method be considered and—if reasonable based upon the circumstances of the investigation—used to obtain intelligence or evidence in lieu of a more intrusive method. The concept of least intrusive method applies to the collection of all information.

¹⁷⁵ Strzok was promoted to a CD Section Chief in February 2016, and later to Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) of CD’s Operations Branch I on September 4, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ According to FBI documents, although the FBI usually provides an LHM to NSD, “due to the extreme sensitivity of both predication and subject of [Crossfire Hurricane], NSD was orally briefed.” Notes and testimony reflect that in early August, NSD officials were briefed on at least two occasions at FBI Headquarters about the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.

work on the investigation. Agents and analysts referred to the investigation as “close-hold” and, as discussed later in this chapter, used covert investigative techniques to ensure information about the investigation remained known only to the team and FBI and Department officials.

B. The FBI Opens Counterintelligence Investigations on Papadopoulos, Carter Page, Manafort, and Flynn

On August 1, 2016, Strzok and a supervisory special agent (SSA 1) traveled to the European city to interview the FFG officials who met with Papadopoulos in May 2016.¹⁷⁷ According to Strzok and SSA 1, during the interview they learned that Papadopoulos did not say that he had direct contact with the Russians; that while his statement did not include him, it did not exclude him either; and that Papadopoulos stated the Russians told “us.” Strzok and SSA 1 also said they learned that Papadopoulos did not specify any other individual who received the Russian suggestion. Strzok, the Intel Section Chief, the Supervisory Intelligence Analyst (Supervisory Intel Analyst), and Case Agent 2 told the OIG that, based on this information, the initial investigative objective of Crossfire Hurricane was to determine which individuals associated with the Trump campaign may have been in a position to have received the alleged offer of assistance from Russia.

After conducting preliminary open source and FBI database inquiries, intelligence analysts on the Crossfire Hurricane team identified three individuals—Carter Page, Paul Manafort, and Michael Flynn—associated with the Trump campaign with either ties to Russia or a history of travel to Russia. On August 10, 2016, the team opened separate counterintelligence FARA cases on Carter Page, Manafort, and Papadopoulos, under code names assigned by the FBI. On August 16, 2016, a counterintelligence FARA case was opened on Flynn under a code name assigned by the FBI. The opening ECs for all four investigations were drafted by either of the two Special Agents assigned to serve as the Case Agents for the investigation (Case Agent 1 or Case Agent 2) and were approved by Strzok, as required by the DIOG.¹⁷⁸ Each case was designated a SIM because the individual subjects were believed to be “prominent in a domestic political campaign.”¹⁷⁹

As summarized below, the opening ECs for the investigations provided similar descriptions of the predicated information relied upon to open the cases. The ECs

¹⁷⁷ Email exchanges reflect that the FBI planned to interview the FFG officials by telephone; however, the Legat told Strzok that a Senior Executive Service-level (SES) FBI official from CD should make the trip and meet with the FFG officials. Emails also reflect that a USG official advised the FBI that one of the FFG officials the FBI planned to interview would be unavailable on August 9 and suggested the interview take place prior to that date.

¹⁷⁸ Although the opening ECs identified Strzok, SSA 1, and the OGC Unit Chief as approvers, the OGC Unit Chief said that she provided legal review of the opening ECs only. As we described in Chapter Two, when a case is opened and designated a SIM by FBI Headquarters, the case opening requires review by OGC and approval by the FBI Headquarters operational Section Chief (SC).

¹⁷⁹ We did not locate any records that indicated the FBI provided written notification to NSD about the opening of these cases. However, as we described earlier in this chapter, the FBI orally briefed NSD officials on at least two occasions in August 2016 about the Crossfire Hurricane investigation to include Papadopoulos, Manafort, Flynn, and Carter Page.

differed in their descriptions of the particular activities of the subjects that gained the FBI's attention.

- The opening EC for the Carter Page investigation stated that there was an articulable factual basis that Carter Page "may wittingly or unwittingly be involved in activity on behalf of the Russian Federation which may constitute a federal crime or threat to the national security." The EC cross-referenced the predication for Crossfire Hurricane and stated that Page was a senior foreign policy advisor for the Trump campaign, had extensive ties to various Russia-owned entities, and had traveled to Russia as recently as July 2016. The EC also noted that Carter Page was the subject of an open, ongoing counterintelligence investigation assigned to the FBI's New York Field Office (NYFO), which we describe in the next section.
- The opening EC for the Manafort investigation stated that there was an articulable factual basis that Manafort "may wittingly or unwittingly be involved in activity on behalf of the Russian Federation which may constitute a federal crime or threat to the national security." The EC cross-referenced the predication for Crossfire Hurricane and stated that Manafort was designated the Delegate Process and Convention Manager for the Trump campaign, was promoted to Campaign Manager for the Trump campaign, and had extensive ties to pro-Russian entities of the Ukrainian government.
- The opening EC for the Papadopoulos investigation stated that there was an articulable factual basis that Papadopoulos "may wittingly or unwittingly be involved in activity on behalf of the Russian Federation which may constitute a federal crime or threat to the national security." The EC cross-referenced the predication for Crossfire Hurricane and stated that Papadopoulos was a senior foreign advisor for the Trump campaign and had "made statements indicating that he is knowledgeable that the Russians made a suggestion to the Trump team that they could assist the Trump campaign with an anonymous release of information during the campaign that would be damaging to the Clinton Campaign."
- The opening EC for the Flynn investigation stated that there was an articulable factual basis that Flynn "may wittingly or unwittingly be involved in activity on behalf of the Russian Federation which may constitute a federal crime or threat to the national security." The EC cross-referenced the predication for Crossfire Hurricane and stated that Flynn was an advisor to the Trump campaign, had various ties to state-affiliated entities of Russia, and traveled to Russia in December 2015.

C. The Pre-Existing FBI New York Field Office Counterintelligence Investigation of Carter Page

The OGC Unit Chief told us that of all the individuals associated with the Trump campaign best positioned to have received the alleged offer of assistance from Russia, Carter Page “quickly rose to the top” of the list because of his past connections to Russian officials and the FBI’s previous contacts with Page. As reflected in the FISA applications described in Chapters Five and Seven, as well as in other FBI documents, NYFO had an interest in Carter Page for several years before August 2016 and had interviewed him on multiple occasions because of his relationships with individuals the FBI knew to be Russian intelligence officers.

An FBI counterintelligence agent in NYFO (NYFO CI Agent) with extensive experience in Russian matters told the OIG that Carter Page had been on NYFO’s radar since 2009, when he had contact with a known Russian intelligence officer (Intelligence Officer 1). According to the EC documenting NYFO’s June 2009 interview with Page, Page told NYFO agents that he knew and kept in regular contact with Intelligence Officer 1 and provided him with a copy of a non-public annual report from an American company. The EC stated that Page “immediately advised [the agents] that due to his work and overseas experiences, he has been questioned by and provides information to representatives of [another U.S. government agency] on an ongoing basis.” The EC also noted that agents did not ask Page any questions about his dealings with the other U.S. government agency during the interviews.¹⁸⁰

NYFO CI agents believed that Carter Page was “passed” from Intelligence Officer 1 to a successor Russian intelligence officer (Intelligence Officer 2) in 2013 and that Page would continue to be introduced to other Russian intelligence officers in the future.¹⁸¹ In June 2013, NYFO CI agents interviewed Carter Page about these contacts. Page acknowledged meeting Intelligence Officer 2 following an introduction earlier in 2013. When agents intimated to Carter Page during the interview that Intelligence Officer 2 may be a Russian intelligence officer, specifically, an “SVR” officer, Page told them he believed in “openness” and because

¹⁸⁰ On or about August 17, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received a memorandum from the other U.S. government agency detailing its prior relationship with Carter Page, including that Page had been approved as an operational contact for the other agency from 2008 to 2013 and information that Page had provided to the other agency concerning Page’s prior contacts with certain Russian intelligence officers. We found no evidence that, after receiving the August 17 Memorandum, the Crossfire Hurricane team requested additional information from the other agency prior to submission of the first FISA application in order to deconflict on issues that we believe were relevant to the FISA application. According to the U.S. government agency, “operational contact,” as that term is used in the August 17 Memorandum, provides “Contact Approval,” which allows the agency to contact and discuss sensitive information with a U.S. person and to collect information from that person via “passive debriefing,” or debriefing a person of information that is within the knowledge of an individual and has been acquired through the normal course of that individual’s activities. According to the U.S. government agency, a “Contact Approval” does not allow for operational use of a U.S. person or tasking of that person.

¹⁸¹ CI agents refer to this as “slot succession,” whereby a departing intelligence officer “passes” his or her contacts to an incoming intelligence officer.

he did not have access to classified information, his acquaintance with Intelligence Officer 2 was a "positive" for him. In August 2013, NYFO CI agents again interviewed Page regarding his contacts with Intelligence Officer 2. Page acknowledged meeting with Intelligence Officer 2 since his June 2013 FBI interview.

In January 2015, three Russian intelligence officers, including Intelligence Officer 2, were charged in a sealed complaint, and subsequently indicted, in the Southern District of New York (SDNY) for conspiring to act in the United States as unregistered agents of the Russian Federation.¹⁸² The indictment referenced Intelligence Officer 2's attempts to recruit "Male-1" as an asset for gathering intelligence on behalf of Russia.

On March 2, 2016, the NYFO CI Agent and SDNY Assistant United States Attorneys interviewed Carter Page in preparation for the trial of one of the indicted Russian intelligence officers. During the interview, Page stated that he knew he was the person referred to as Male-1 in the indictment and further said that he had identified himself as Male-1 to a Russian Minister and various Russian officials at a United Nations event in "the spirit of openness." The NYFO CI Agent told us she returned to her office after the interview and discussed with her supervisor opening a counterintelligence case on Page based on his statement to Russian officials that he believed he was Male-1 in the indictment and his continued contact with Russian intelligence officers.

The FBI's NYFO CI squad supervisor (NYFO CI Supervisor) told us she believed she should have opened a counterintelligence case on Carter Page prior to March 2, 2016 based on his continued contacts with Russian intelligence officers; however, she said the squad was preparing for a big trial, and they did not focus on Page until he was interviewed again on March 2. She told us that after the March 2 interview, she called CD's Counterespionage Section at FBI Headquarters to determine whether Page had any security clearances and to ask for guidance as to what type of investigation to open on Page.¹⁸³ On April 1, 2016, the NYFO CI Supervisor received an email from the Counterespionage Section advising her to open a [REDACTED] investigation on Page. The NYFO CI Supervisor said that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In addition, according to FBI records, the relevant CD section at FBI Headquarters, in consultation with OGC, determined at that time that the Page investigation opened by NYFO was not a SIM, but also noted, "should his status change, the appropriate case modification would be made." The NYFO CI Supervisor told us that based on what was documented in

¹⁸² Intelligence Officer 3 pled guilty in March 2016. The remaining two indicted Russian intelligence officers were no longer in the United States.

¹⁸³ CI agents in NYFO told us that the databases containing security clearance information were located at FBI Headquarters. When a subject possesses a security clearance, the FBI opens an espionage investigation; if the subject does not possess a security clearance, the FBI typically opens a counterintelligence investigation.

the file and what was known at that time, the NYFO Carter Page investigation was not a SIM.

Although Carter Page was announced as a foreign policy advisor for the Trump campaign prior to NYFO receiving this guidance from FBI Headquarters, the NYFO CI Supervisor and CI Agent both told the OIG that this announcement did not influence their decision to open a case on Page and that their concerns about Page, particularly his disclosure to the Russians about his role in the indictment, predated the announcement. However, the NYFO CI Supervisor said that the announcement required noting his new position in the case file should his new position require he obtain a security clearance.

On April 6, 2016, NYFO opened a counterintelligence [REDACTED] investigation on Carter Page under a code name the FBI assigned to him (NYFO investigation) based on his contacts with Russian intelligence officers and his statement to Russian officials that he was "Male-1" in the SDNY indictment. Based on our review of documents in the NYFO case file, as well as our interview of the NYFO CI Agent, there was limited investigative activity in the NYFO investigation between April 6 and the Crossfire Hurricane team's opening of its investigation of Page on August 10. The NYFO CI Agent told the OIG that the steps she took in the first few months of the case were to observe whether any other intelligence officers contacted Page and to prepare national security letters seeking Carter Page's cell phone number(s) and residence information. The NYFO CI agent said that she did not use any CHSs to target Page during the NYFO investigation. The NYFO investigation was transferred to the Crossfire Hurricane team on August 10 and became part of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.

III. Organization and Oversight of the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation

The FBI conducted and oversaw the Crossfire Hurricane investigation from July 31, 2016, to May 17, 2017, at which time it was transferred to the Special Counsel's Office. Over that 10-month period, three different teams of agents and analysts were assigned to the case: the first team worked out of FBI Headquarters from the opening of the case through December 2016; the second team worked out of three FBI field offices and FBI Headquarters from approximately January 2017 through April 2017; and the third team worked, like the second team, out of the three FBI field offices and FBI Headquarters from April 2017 to May 17, 2017. In this section, we describe the organization and staffing of the three investigative teams and the FBI's reasons for making changes as to how the investigation was organized. We also describe the role played by FBI and Department senior leadership in the investigation.

A. FBI Staffing of the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation

1. The Management and Structure of the Crossfire Hurricane Team

Witnesses told us that because of the sensitivity of the investigation, CD officials originally decided to conduct the investigation out of FBI Headquarters, under the program management of Operational Branch I, Section CD-4, rather than out of one or more field offices, which is more typical. The original team consisted of intelligence analysts, special agents, and SSAs from multiple field offices who were assigned to Headquarters for 90-day temporary duty assignments (TDYs). CD assigned the original team to the same office space at Headquarters, with both agents and analysts working together in close proximity. Agents and analysts on the Crossfire Hurricane team told the OIG that the decision to conduct the investigation out of FBI Headquarters instead of a field office presented multiple challenges, such as difficulties in obtaining needed investigative resources, including surveillance teams, electronic evidence storage, technically trained agents, and other investigative assets standard in field offices to support investigations. We were told that these were known risks consciously taken by CD officials, including Priestap, in order to minimize the potential for unauthorized public disclosure of the investigation and allow for better coordination with Headquarters and interagency partners.

Priestap told us that although he was ultimately responsible for the investigation, Strzok and the Intel Section Chief managed Crossfire Hurricane. Following the opening of the case, the team held meetings three times a week to discuss and determine the next investigative and analytical steps. The agents and analysts told us that the investigative and analytical decisions for the investigation were made at these meetings by the agents and analysts and then presented to the supervisors. Priestap said that while Strzok managed the operational side of Crossfire Hurricane, Priestap also sought the opinions of the Intel Section Chief and the OGC Unit Chief on operational decisions. Priestap also told us that he originally wanted to assign the investigation to a Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) other than Strzok because, although he had confidence in Strzok's counterintelligence capabilities, he had concerns about Strzok's personal relationship with Lisa Page affecting the Crossfire Hurricane team. According to Priestap, he told Steinbach about his concerns and Steinbach was supportive of his decision to remove Strzok from the team, but his decision was overruled by McCabe. Steinbach told us that he had concerns about Strzok and Lisa Page working together because he was aware of instances where they bypassed the chain of command to advise McCabe about case related information that had not been provided to Priestap or Steinbach. Priestap and Steinbach said they did not know why McCabe kept Strzok assigned to the investigation. Strzok told the OIG he did not ask McCabe to keep him on the investigation and does not know whether Lisa Page requested Strzok remain on the investigation in conversations with McCabe. We found no evidence that Page made any such request of McCabe.

McCabe told us that he recalled separate conversations with Steinbach and Priestap about Strzok's work on Crossfire Hurricane, but he said that in neither

conversation did he (McCabe) overrule a decision by Priestap to remove Strzok from the case. According to McCabe, Steinbach said that he wanted to remove Strzok from his role on Crossfire Hurricane after Strzok became DAD (in September 2016) so that Strzok could have a “traditional DAD experience,” rather than spending too much attention on a single, major sensitive case. McCabe told us that he did not disagree with Steinbach, and he saw it as a decision for Steinbach and Priestap to make on their own. McCabe said that in a separate conversation with Priestap, Priestap raised a concern about Strzok and Page, but that it was not about any personal relationship between the two, which McCabe said he did not know about at the time. According to McCabe, Priestap expressed frustration about the amount of time Page and Strzok were spending together talking about casework and that it was interfering with Strzok’s ability to carry out his other responsibilities. McCabe told us that he did not recall Priestap requesting that Strzok be removed from the case because of this concern, but McCabe said that he talked to Page about reducing the amount of time she was interacting with Strzok.

Over a dozen agents, analysts, and one Staff Operations Specialist (SOS) were originally assigned on a full-time basis to the Crossfire Hurricane team. Only one of the team members on Crossfire Hurricane, Case Agent 3, had previously been assigned to the team that conducted the investigation, known as “Midyear Exam” or “Midyear,” of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s use of personal email for official purposes. However, the supervisory chain of DAD Strzok, the Intel Section Chief, AD Priestap, EAD Steinbach, Deputy Director McCabe, and Director Comey was the same for the Midyear and Crossfire Hurricane investigations. EAD Steinbach retired in February 2017 and was succeeded by Carl Ghattas. The Crossfire Hurricane team members were selected by Strzok, the Intel Section Chief, and SSA 1. The agents reported to SSA 1 and the analysts reported to the Supervisory Intel Analyst. SSA 1 reported operational activities to Strzok. The Supervisory Intel Analyst reported analytical findings to the Intel Section Chief. In addition, an OGC line attorney (OGC Attorney) was supervised by the OGC Unit Chief and provided legal support to the team.¹⁸⁴ The OGC Unit Chief reported to Anderson, who reported to Baker.

Case Agent 1 and the SOS were the original Crossfire Hurricane team members who had primary responsibility over the Carter Page investigation. They were joined by Case Agent 3 and Case Agent 4 who worked on the Papadopoulos and Manafort investigations, respectively.

Following the November 2016 U.S. elections, the 90-day TDY assignments ended for the agents and analysts on the original investigative team, and many of the team members, including SSA 1, returned to their field offices. In addition, in January 2017, CD reorganized the structure of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation by transferring the day-to-day operations of the four individual investigations to three field offices, and dividing oversight of the investigations between two operational branches at FBI Headquarters—Operations Branch I and Operations Branch II. According to Priestap, he transferred the cases to the field offices

¹⁸⁴ Both of these attorneys were also assigned to the Midyear team to provide legal support.