

United States Senate

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Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and CEO
Facebook
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

President Trump's vigorous defense of the Saudi government following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi raises questions about his ties, financial and otherwise, to Saudi Arabia. One such question is to what extent the Saudis provided assistance to the Trump campaign, including previously-reported proposals to manipulate voters through social media and online platforms.

Public reports indicate that in August 2016, George Nader, a representative of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, met with Donald Trump Jr. and a man named Joel Zamel to offer the Saudi government's help to the Trump Campaign.¹ Zamel is the founder of Psy-Group, a private firm which specializes in intelligence gathering and public influence campaigns for corporate and government clients.² Earlier this month, the *New York Times* reported that deputy Trump campaign chairman Rick Gates sought Psy-Group's assistance in March 2016 to create and spread disinformation to help defeat Trump's primary opponents and Hillary Clinton.³ The *Times* also reported that following the 2016 presidential election, the Saudi government paid Zamel up to \$2 million for unexplained reasons.⁴

These facts paint a narrative that is deeply concerning. We now know that Psy-Group pitched the Trump campaign on a sophisticated proposal to monitor and deceive voters through

¹ See Mark Mazetti, Ronen Bergman, and David Kirkpatrick, *Trump Jr. and Other Aides Met With Gulf Emissary Offering Help to Win Election*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/19/us/politics/trump-jr-saudi-uae-nader-prince-zamel.html>.

² See generally PSY-GROUP, REALITY IS A MATTER OF PERCEPTION, available at <https://www.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/psygroup.pdf>. A Psy-Group brochure bears the heading, "Reality is a Matter of Perception."

³ Mark Mazzetti, Ronen Bergman, David D. Kirkpatrick and Maggie Haberman, *Rick Gates Sought Online Manipulation Plans From Israeli Intelligence Firm for Trump Campaign*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 8, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/08/us/politics/rick-gates-psy-group-trump.html> [hereinafter *Rick Gates Sought Online Manipulation Plans*].

⁴ *Id.*

inauthentic accounts impersonating Americans and to spread inflammatory, false content on social media. The proposal sought by Gates, later named “Project Rome,”⁵ outlined a political influence operation across multiple media platforms to “help expose or amplify division among rival campaigns and factions.”⁶ Psy-Group further proposed “infiltrating target audiences with elaborately crafted social-media personas and spreading misleading information through websites meant to mimic news portals.”⁷ It has been reported that Gates even sought Psy-Group’s assistance to try to sway Republican delegates away from Ted Cruz and towards Donald Trump at the Republican National Convention.⁸ More recently, public reports indicate that botnets have been promoting pro-Saudi messages on the disappearance of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, further demonstrating that foreign actors continue to misuse social media platforms to influence and mislead the American public.⁹

The operations, proposals, and services described above are identical in nature to the election interference orchestrated by the Russian government on your platform and other social media sites during the 2016 election. Last October, Facebook disclosed that 126 million Americans using Facebook between January 2015 and August 2017 were exposed to false, misleading, and inflammatory posts generated by Russian agents. By providing transparency and notification of Russia’s activities, Facebook has taken an important and necessary step in providing a thorough accounting of a foreign adversary’s interference in our political processes.

The covert political interference proposed by Psy-Group warrants the same level of scrutiny and disclosure as those conducted by Russian actors. In keeping with its stated mission, Facebook owes its users full information regarding when, where, and how they may have been unwitting recipients and participants to any interference conducted by Zamel and his companies (including, but not limited to, Psy-Group, WhiteKnight, and Wikistrat, henceforth “Zamel-affiliated entities”). In keeping with that obligation, I respectfully write to ask you to answer the following questions:

1. Has Facebook engaged in any investigation into the activities of Zamel-affiliated entities on its platforms? If not, will Facebook commit to doing so?

⁵ See PSY-GROUP, PROJECT “ROME,” CAMPAIGN INTELLIGENCE & INFLUENCE SERVICES PROPOSAL (April 2016), available at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/360-trump-project-rome/574d679d1ff58a30836c/optimized/full.pdf#page=1>.

⁶ Rick Gates Sought Online Manipulation Plans, *supra* note 2. See also Byron Tau and Rebecca Ballhaus, *Mueller Probe Expands to Israeli Entrepreneur with U.A.E. Ties*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (May 19, 2018), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mueller-probe-expands-to-israeli-entrepreneur-with-u-a-e-ties-1526763816>.

⁷ Michael Riley and Lauren Etter, *Mueller Asked About Money Flows to Israeli Social-Media Firm, Source Says*, BLOOMBERG (May 22, 2018), available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-22/mueller-targeted-flows-of-money-to-israeli-social-media-company>.

⁸ Rick Gates Sought Online Manipulation Plans, *supra* note 2.

⁹ Ben Collins and Shoshana Wodinsky, *Twitter Pulls Down Bot Network that Pushed Pro-Saudi Talking Points About Disappeared Journalist*, NBC NEWS (Oct. 18, 2018), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/exclusive-twitter-pulls-down-bot-network-pushing-pro-saudi-talking-n921871>

2. To Facebook's knowledge, has any Zamel-affiliated entity purchased or administered advertisements or otherwise sponsored content on its platform or services? If so, what was the nature of these advertisements or sponsored content?
3. Has Facebook previously found any inauthentic accounts, "fake news", or other activities that would violate its terms of service that can be linked to Zamel-affiliated entities? If Facebook has found any such activities:
 - a. Has it taken steps to suspend these accounts?
 - b. Has it taken steps to disclose this content to its users, as it has done with other information operations?
4. Has Facebook found any activities on its platforms associated with Zamel-affiliated entities related to U.S. politics, including the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump, The Trump Organization, Jared Kushner, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates?
5. Has Facebook archived and retained records related to Zamel-affiliated entities in order to provide to investigators?
6. Has Facebook investigated reports of inauthentic accounts, "fake news", or other fraudulent activities promoting pro-Saudi positions, including with respect to the murder of Khashoggi? If so, has it made a determination regarding the source and nature of these influence campaigns, and will it disclose such findings?

I respectfully ask that you provide answers to my questions as soon as possible. Please contact Aparna Patrie at Aparna_Patrie@judiciary-dem.senate.gov or Collin Anderson at Collin_Anderson@blumenthal.senate.gov with any questions. Thank you in advance for your timely and thorough response.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate