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Former foreign policy advisor to President Donald Trump's election campaign, George Papadopoulos, leaves the US District Courts in Washington, DC, on Sept. 7, 2018. (MANDEL NGAN/AFP/Getty Images)

# Questions for George Papadopoulos

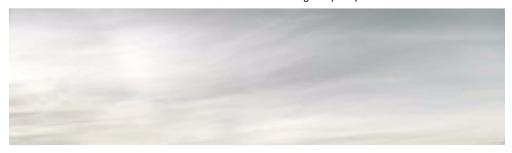


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News Analysis

ADVERTISING



George Papadopoulos formally joined then-candidate Donald Trump's presidential campaign on March 21, 2016, as a foreign policy adviser specializing in the Middle East and Israel. He would later become a central figure in the Trump–Russia collusion narrative.

Papadopoulos was targeted by a number of individuals beginning in March 2016—and perhaps earlier. British and Australian officials were involved, as were U.S. intelligence agencies. Many of the targeting attempts seem to have been efforts to establish evidence of collusion with Russia. They appear to have all failed.

Papadopoulos has often been portrayed as a low-level campaign volunteer, but this characterization isn't entirely fair. Papadopoulos played an active role in brokering the initial meeting between Trump and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

Likewise, the targeting of Papadopoulos made him an important figure in the creation of the Russia-collusion narrative. Exact details of events related to him could provide crucial insight into how the FBI's investigation into the Trump campaign was started.

On Nov. 2, Papadopoulos gave an in-depth, hour-long interview on the "Dan Bongino Show." (You can find a full transcript of the interview here.)

Bongino allowed Papadopoulos to develop his story with minimal interruption. Unlike most interviewers, Bongino understands the intricate details behind this topic, providing an expertise that makes for an in-depth and compelling result.

It should be noted that my questions below aren't meant to be a criticism of the Bongino interview—far from it. I wouldn't have many of these questions if Bongino hadn't allowed Papadopoulos the opportunity to detail his version of events in such depth.

#### **London Center for International Law Practice**

In the interview, Papadopoulos discussed his place of employment at the time when the unusual events began to transpire:

"I was working at this organization in London, the London Center for International Law Practice, that, unbeknownst to me at the time, was apparently some sort of front group for ex-Western diplomats and ex-Western intelligence types of personalities."

As Papadopoulos noted, "the legal counsel for the FBI in the UK, Arvinder Sambei, just happens to also be a director at this organization."

There's a lot of ambiguity surrounding Papadopoulos' employment at the London Center for International Law Practice (LCILP), and many basic questions remain unanswered.



A mysterious organization, the London Center for International Law Practice, is at the center of some of the suspicious meetings Papadopoulos had. (Screenshot)

Who was it that hired Papadopoulos at LCILP, and what was the exact starting date of his employment?

How did Papadopoulos come to hear of this organization? Even seasoned journalists have had a difficult time obtaining any meaningful information about LCILP. Did Papadopoulos have prior interaction with LCILP or any associated individuals previously? And is he still in contact with anyone from LCILP?

Who was Papadopoulos reporting to and what was his job description—what work did Papadopoulos actually do? What does LCILP actually do? Papadopoulos was pictured attending a July 20, 2016, American Jewish Committee panel discussion, where he was listed as the "director of the Center for International Energy & Natural Resources Law at the London Centre of International Law Practice."

When, exactly, did Papadopoulos decide to leave LCILP? Details on this have always been a bit tenuous. Most reports seem to indicate April or May 2016, but the American Jewish Committee panel discussion would seem to indicate otherwise. And what caused him to leave the position? Was it duties back home, was he required in Washington, or was there some other reason for his departure?

## The Link Campus

Papadopoulos first met Professor Josef Mifsud on March 14, 2016, one week after joining the Trump campaign, at another unusual institution—the Link Campus in Rome:

"They introduce me to Josef Mifsud at this university in Rome called Link Campus. This isn't any normal university. At the time, I had no idea what this place was. But apparently, it's a training ground for Western intelligence operatives in Rome. The CIA has held symposiums there."

Papadopoulos said that he was told, "Before you leave [for Washington], you really need to come to Rome with us. We want to introduce you to some people there."

Who was it that told Papadopoulos he needed to go to the Link Campus to meet Mifsud? Was it Sambei, as Papadopoulos seems to imply in the interview? Was anyone else involved in the process? Who else was Papadopoulos introduced to while in Rome beyond his introduction to Mifsud? I would also like more information on Link Campus—is it intelligence community-affiliated? And what exactly do they do there?

Given that Papadopoulos had just joined the Trump campaign, was he suspicious of the intelligence community element he suddenly found himself immersed in? One might expect an abundance of caution, especially given his new position with the campaign.

Importantly, is there any association or affiliation with the FBI's Eurasian Crime Squad and its head, Michael Gaeta? Gaeta personally received the first draft of the Steele dossier from former British MI6 agent Christopher Steele—whose work was paid for by the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee—after receiving permission from State Department official Victoria Nuland in early July 2016 to meet him.

Finally, had Papadopoulos been to Link Campus before, and was he associated with any of its affiliates previously?

On May 25, 2016, a tweet by Nagi Idris shows Papadopoulos among an LCILP delegation visiting Link Campus University. Was this a second visit or a delayed photo from the March 14 visit?

#### Josef Mifsud

Papadopoulos met with Mifsud a second time, on March 24, 2016. This time, Mifsud brought along a young woman named Olga Polonskaya (Vinogradova is her maiden name), who was

introduced to him as "Putin's niece." Papadopoulos noted that others played up her supposed status:

"A week later, I'm back in London, preparing my life to move back to the U.S. and he emails me out of the blue, 'I need to introduce you to a very important girl.' ... I go back to the LCILP, and all of a sudden, the directors over there are telling me, 'Guys, this is Putin's niece.' So, they were all in on this scam. It wasn't just Mifsud telling me that I'm meeting Putin's niece. It was the directors at the LCILP."

Papadopoulos said that at the meeting, Polonskaya "just sits there ... doesn't say much, just obscure, barely speaks English."

But she began to email Papadopoulos the following month, in April, and went "from speaking barely any English, to all of a sudden, she's fluent in the language. She's some sort of insider to Moscow."

When was it that Papadopoulos realized that she isn't really Putin's niece? And when did he find himself alarmed at her newfound fluency? When he discovered the falsehood, did he ever question Mifsud or those at LCILP who vouched for her status?

In fairness, Papadopoulos said that, at some point, he asked her, "Are you the same person that I met in London with Mifsud?" When did this happen, and how many times was he emailing her prior to this?

Papadopoulos noted in the interview with Bongino that Polonskaya was actually a "manager at a wine store." Did he ever pursue her status further to determine if intelligence community elements existed? Did he speak with her after discovering her identity?

#### The Clinton Emails

About a third of the way into the interview, Papadopoulos discussed the April 26, 2016, meeting where Mifsud told him the following:

"George, I have information that the Russians have thousands of Hillary Clinton's emails."

Papadopoulos said that he was surprised to hear that. "I'm just thinking, 'Is this guy just validating rumors that Judge Napolitano, I think the day before, was openly speculating on Fox News. Many people in the media were speculating about it."

The first reference I can find of Napolitano speaking of the Russians having Clinton's emails is on May 9, 2016, during an interview with Fox News' Megyn Kelly. Napolitano would write

about that two days later, on May 11, 2016.

Perhaps that's an innocent revision of history—perhaps Napolitano spoke of this earlier—but I found this specific reference odd.

Papadopoulos noted that it was at this meeting that he decided to distance himself from Mifsud, saying, "I just wanted to get as far away as possible from this guy, Mifsud."

Several days later, on April 30, 2016, "Papadopoulos thanks Mifsud for his 'critical help' in arranging a meeting between the campaign and the Russian government, and remarked, 'It's history-making if it happens.'"

George Papadopoulos arrives at a closed-door hearing before House committees on Oct. 25, 2018. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)

Contact between Papadopoulos and Mifsud does indeed fall off. Mifsud emails Papadopoulos an update of "recent conversations" on May 13, 2016. There is nothing more known until Oct. 1,

2016, when Papadopoulos sends Mifsud a private Facebook message with a link to an article from Interfax.com, a Russian news website. What was this final contact for?

Another question worth asking: If Papadopoulos distrusted Mifsud, why did he continue to communicate with Ivan Timofeev, an official at a state-sponsored think tank called Russian International Affairs Council, who he was introduced to directly by Mifsud?

One of the biggest questions surrounding Papadopoulos is why he continuously allowed a seemingly endless sequence of questionable contacts to occur in the first place. A parallel question exists: Did Papadopoulos inform anyone else—including the Trump campaign—of these recurring events?

### **Gregory Baker and Terrence Dudley**

On May 5 or 6, 2016, immediately following an infamous interview with the Times of London—in which Papadopoulos said then-Prime Minister David Cameron should apologize for calling Trump "divisive, stupid, and wrong"—two Americans from the U.S. Embassy, Gregory Baker and Terrence Dudley, reached out to him and they met for dinner.

"They're spending a lot of money on me, their probing me, they're asking me about my ties in the Middle East. They're asking me about what Trump wants to do with Russia," Papadopoulos noted.

He said he was "just deflecting them" throughout the entire dinner.

Why did these men reach out to Papadopulos and what agencies did they represent? Had Papadopoulos ever met with these men before? Did he hear from them again?

Papadopoulos has stated he thought the men may have been from the Defense Intelligence Agency. What led him to believe that was so? Did he believe that going into the dinner meeting?

An important question Papadopoulos may not be able to answer: Who instructed the two men to reach out to Papadopoulos in the first place?

# The Alexander Downer Meeting

The following day, Erika Thompson messaged Papadopoulos, saying, "Hi George, I would just like to let you know that Alexander Downer just wants to meet with you." Thompson is an Australian intelligence officer and an assistant to Downer.

Papadopoulos was previously introduced to Thompson by her boyfriend, an Israeli diplomat named Christian Cantor.

As Papadopoulos correctly noted in his interview, Downer "isn't a random low-level Australian diplomat. This man ran the equivalent of the CIA in Australia for 17 years. He was the foreign minister and he was their biggest diplomat in London."

Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Alexander Downer in London on January 24, 2017. (Jack Taylor/Getty Images)

In fairness to Papadopoulos, the meeting with Downer appears to have been strained from the start. As Papadopoulos said, "He basically was there to pass a message along from the UK to Trump to stop supporting Brexit. The meeting was not a pleasant one at all. No one was sitting there drinking or getting drunk."

Papadopoulos said he also felt he was being recorded:

"I go to meet Downer, within one minute or two minutes of sitting down with this person, he pulls his phone out of his pocket and he starts holding it up to me, as if he's filming me or taking a picture, or something very strange. That is why I was always under the suspicion that this guy was filming me, recording my conversation. And now, there's evidence that he was actually recording this conversation."

Papadopoulos also noted the obvious:

"I also find it very strange that Downer just wanted to meet around 10 days after Mifsud tells me this information. The whole thing seems very strange and very orchestrated."

Papadopoulos was emphatic that "emails" were never mentioned:

"I remember so much about this meeting and I have zero memory whatsoever of ever talking about emails, so I'm confident that I never did talk about emails. I have no memory of talking about emails."

Given the odd sequence of meetings so close together, why did Papadopoulos accept the meeting? Perhaps the fair answer is that he felt he had no choice.

# Sergei Millian

Around July 23 to 25, 2016, Papadopoulos had a meeting with Sergei Millian. Papadopoulos had previously messaged Ivan Timofeev, asking for any information on Millian. The two met in New York, and Papadopoulos noted that he thought Millian was recording him using his phone. Millian contacted Papadopoulos in late September or early October 2016, and they met again. Millian proposed a suspect arrangement:

"He comes to me, saying 'I have a deal for you, for \$30,000 a month, a great office in Manhattan, it's simply PR for, I think he said, some ex-minister in Russia. But the qualifier is you have to work for Trump at the same time—in his administration—and you can't tell anybody."

Papadopoulos said he told Millian, "Listen, I don't know what you're talking about, I'm not interested and I think you should just leave." An appropriate response. But again, why take the meeting in the first place, following the suspicions carried from the initial meeting?

# Stefan Halper

Stefan Halper, who has been revealed as an "FBI informant," was already maintaining ongoing contact with Trump campaign adviser Carter Page since July 11, 2016, when he met Page at a Cambridge symposium. Halper also met with Trump campaign national co-chairman Sam Clovis.

On Sept. 13, 2016, Papadopoulos had his meeting with Halper. Papadopoulos apparently had been met the evening before by Halper's assistant, Azura Turk, who he said is "a Turkish national, she wasn't American."

When did Papadopoulos realize her background? How did he view her attempts "to try and seduce me and get me to say things that aren't true, for example about Russia"? Does he bring this unusual sequence of events up with Halper?

Click on the infographic to enlarge.

Papadopoulos, according to his version of events, said little to Halper and, like the Downer attempt, the meeting ends quickly. I agree with the theory on Halper put forth by Papadopoulos:

"Stefan Halper's role was to cover for Alexander Downer, so that Alexander Downer would never have to be revealed as a source for this potential fake information."

Papadopoulos appears to have handled things with Halper correctly, but why did he choose to go to London in the first place? There were other significant events unfolding at the same time.

The FBI's counterintelligence investigation into the Trump campaign was opened on July 31, 2016. Then-Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) would send his first letter on Aug. 27, 2016, hinting at events. Paul Manafort resigned from the Trump campaign on Aug. 19, 2016, amid reports of foreign lobbying efforts. Clinton accused Russia of interfering in the presidential election on Sept. 5, just one week before the Papadopoulos–Halper meeting.

So why did Papadopoulos choose to meet with Halper? Why was this meeting not canceled? And why was it accepted in the first place?

### Meeting With UK Foreign and Commonwealth Officials

On the same day as the Halper meeting, Papadopoulos had a working-level meeting with UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials. According to Papadopoulos, one of these officials was Tobias Ellwood, "the No. 2 to Boris Johnson at the time." Details as to what was discussed at this meeting were not provided. Papadopoulos also noted that Elwood had been trying to meet with him "for months."

I find this odd. Papadopoulos appeared to take any number of meetings without hesitation. If Elwood had been wanting to meet with him, why didn't this happen previously? I would also like to know what was discussed at the dinner, and exactly who was in attendance.

#### **Charles Tawil**

Papadopoulos's meeting with Charles Tawil was perhaps the strangest of his many encounters.

Papadopoulos was interviewed by the FBI twice in early 2017: once on Jan. 27, which resulted in his eventual indictment for lying to FBI, and a second time on Feb. 16. Shortly after the second interview, Papadopoulos first met Charles Tawil:

"I had met this individual, I think, two weeks after the FBI had interviewed me. He just popped into my life, from heaven, I guess, and decided that he wanted to talk business of some nature with me. He was introduced to me by this other intermediary [David Ha'ivri, an Israeli activist and author].

"As soon as I get there, he starts telling me, 'You know, everyone can hear our conversation right now.' And I started to feel very suspicious of what this guy was talking to me about. Fast forward to the end of the lunch, he goes to me, and he says, 'I want you to go to my friend and I want to take a picture of you.' Now, I've had many people take pictures of me during this entire episode and every single one who wanted to do that was connected to some intelligence operation."

Why would anyone take a meeting with an unknown individual two weeks after being interviewed by the FBI? As noted in the Oct. 5, 2017, statement of the offense, Papadopoulos had been unnerved by the two FBI interviews, to the point where he apparently scrubbed his social-media accounts and changed phone numbers.

Papadopoulos said he was highly suspicious of this meeting. Did Papadopoulos have any further contact with Tawil prior to their next described meeting in the summer of 2017? One other question: Who was "the friend" that Tawil referenced regarding the photo?

In July 2017, Tawil sent an email to Papadopoulos, while he was on vacation in Mykonos with Simona Mangiante, his then-girlfriend. Tawil reportedly said, "George, I want to come see you to finalize our business agreement."

What business agreement? This was never elaborated on with regard to the initial meeting.

Papadopoulos described the Mykonos meeting as follows:

"Tawil then comes to me and wants to meet in Mykonos. He starts talking strange to me and my girlfriend, basically asking if my girlfriend at the time was an operative, like he was. And then he says, 'It's very important for you come to Israel, so we can finalize this agreement."

Again, what agreement? Equally important, Tawil apparently identifies himself as an "operative" at this meeting. And questions if Mangiante, Papadopoulos's girlfriend, is an operative, as well.

Why on earth would Papadopoulos continue to meet with someone who has identified himself as an operative—especially following two FBI interviews?

Also, why was it imperative that Papadopoulos come to Israel—and why would Papadopoulos agree to do so? He said he had no understanding of what was transpiring:

"To this day, I never understood what on earth this person wanted to do, except set me up."

Regardless, Papadopoulos does go to Israel. In his version of events, the trip made an impact:

"[Tawil] puts me in a room with these ex-Israeli intelligence people. I had absolutely no idea why I was in this room. And they were talking to me about some program of theirs that the CIA and the FBI were clients of—that helped with social-media manipulation.

"Immediately, when I was stuck in this room with this person and these individuals, I knew I was being framed and I was being entrapped. Because that's not obviously what I was supposed to be doing, when I went to Israel."

In Papadopoulos's version of events, this would appear to be a tactic of intimidation—leading to the sudden offer of money:

"As soon as that meeting ends, he takes me to a hotel, where I'm completely terrified. I was texting my girlfriend at the time, 'How do I get out of here, I think this guy is going to kill me.'

"We're in a room, and he's like, 'Come into my room, I need to talk to you.' He hands me \$10,000 in U.S. \$100 bills. Right there and then, I said, 'If I don't take this money, this guy could possibly kill me, or if I take the money, let me get out of here, leave Israel and just tell him to take his money and never contact me again.' And that's exactly what happened."

Papadopoulos said he flew back to Greece "a couple of days later."

Why would you wait for days to leave Israel after that sequence of events? One would assume you would be on the very next flight back.

While in Greece, Papadopoulos contacted his lawyers, who were apparently in Greece. Did he previously have legal representation in Greece, did he hire them on the spot, or were they provided through someone else? If so, who?

Papadopoulos noted he offered to return the money at that point, some days following the meeting in Israel, but that offer was rebuffed by Tawil. Was this on the advice of his Greek lawyers? Papadopoulos later stated in a Twitter DM that Tawil later asked for the money to be returned after Papadopoulos was sentenced.

Papadopoulos has claimed the money was likely marked and offered to turn it over to congressional investigators. If so, the sudden change of heart by Tawil makes some sense, but why would Tawil wait until the point of sentencing to ask for the money's return?

Meanwhile, Tawil has spoken to Scott Stedman, a reporter for Medium. In a Nov. 6, 2018, article, Tawil was quoted as disputing Papadopoulos's version of events:

"I met him when he was out of a job and offered him a job and gave him, on his demand, a loan—cash, as he requested—because he did not have an account in Europe.

"He mentioned that I am working with Mossad or the FBI or some crap like this. He is a lunatic."

According to Tawil, the money was a "loan on the request of Mr. Papadopoulos, who was seeking to extend his European honeymoon with his new wife, Simona Mangiante." Tawil said he has "copies of emails and WhatsApp communication with George that can prove that he is a liar."

Tawil also claimed that Mangiante told him "her dad was Swiss." Papadopoulos noted in his interview that he had "met her parents—they're the most Italian people you can possibly imagine."

Some reconciling of events is clearly in order.

#### The Arrest of Papadopoulos

According to Papadopoulos, he left Greece "three or four days after that exchange," leaving the money in the possession of his Greek lawyers. He also appears to have left his fiancee, Mangiante, in Greece. Instead of flying into Chicago, where I understand he lived at that time, Papadopoulos flew into Washington, where he was promptly arrested by the FBI.

What transpired in Greece following the Israel meeting with Tawil? What, exactly, did his lawyers instruct him to do? Was Papadopoulos told to leave Greece, and if so, by whom? His Greek lawyers? An official from the United States? Or was this a pre-established return planned before the vacation's start? If his return was previously planned, why did Papadopoulos leave his fiancee behind? And why did he fly into Dulles, as opposed to O'Hare?

Papadopoulos has proven fairly descriptive of most events, but his recollection of his arrest seems particularly hazy:

**Papadopoulos:** So, I get to the airport, there's agents waiting for me, I'm handcuffed, I've never been arrested before. And I was thinking, is this all for lying?

**Bongino:** Are you arrested before clearing customs or after?

Papadopoulos: Before.

**Bongino:** Did you fill that blue slip out—the customs slip?

**Papadopoulos:** I don't remember, but all I know is I never got to passport control.

Bongino: You don't know what happened to that blue slip—did they take it from you?

Papadopoulos: I can't remember, I can't remember.

Bongino: Do they grab you right off the plane?

**Papadopoulos:** I get on the shuttle train ... everyone's exhausted—I just got off a transatlantic flight. I hadn't slept in about 20 hours. It's probably like 7 o'clock at night. And I notice these two guys in crisp suits and ties, and I say these guys are probably agents of some sort. And before I get to passport control, I'm basically detained and people are looking through my bag—and looking for money, I think. And then, the "you're under arrest," kinda thing.

**Bongino:** So, they arrested you right there. Did they talk to you, then arrest you—or did they tell you you're under arrest and then interview you?

**Papadopoulos:** "You're under arrest," and then tried to interview me, and then, I just told them I want my lawyer now, because I have no idea what's going on. ... So everything, you have to understand, this was summer of 2017, before ...

**Bongino:** Did they show you a warrant?

Papadopoulos: No.

**Bongino:** So what were you under arrest for?

**Papadopoulos:** I never understood why I was under arrest until I got in front of the magistrate the next day. There were charges there [lying to the FBI & obstruction]. I never understood why I was being detained or why I was under arrest.

In response to further questioning by Bongino, Papadopoulos closed with this:

"I think Politico wrote an article about this. It was Josh Gerstein—wrote some article about it. My understanding, as I said, I had no idea why I was being arrested until the next day in front of the magistrate. I heard lying to the FBI and obstruction. I have to agree with you, I think it was rushed and there was probably a reason for that. I don't know why that happened though."

Bongino's questioning regarding Papadopoulos's customs declaration is key. Why was Papadopoulos arrested prior to going through customs?

If Tawil gave \$10,000 to Papadopoulos to serve as an entrapment by special counsel Robert Mueller, who is continuing the FBI's investigation into Russia collusion, why did the FBI arrest Papadopoulos before he crossed customs, since nothing would have been formally declared—unless the Mueller team wanted to prevent any declaration?

## Special Counsel Mueller

Papadopoulos's agreement to cooperate with the government was reached swiftly—and with no attorney present. Papadopoulos would later plead guilty to one count of lying to the FBI and was sentenced to 14 days in prison. Mueller noted that Papadopoulos "did not provide 'substantial assistance'" in the sentencing memorandum.

The May 17, 2017, appointment of Mueller as special counsel accomplished one very significant thing: It shifted control of the Russia investigation to Mueller from the FBI and Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe. Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein would retain ultimate authority over the probe, and any expansion of Mueller's investigation required authorization from Rosenstein.

Papadopoulos was arrested on July 27, 2017. This was the same day that Mueller was informed by DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz of the discovery of the existence of the Strzok–Page texts.

On July 28, 2017, McCabe lied to Horowitz while under oath regarding authorization of the leaking to The Wall Street Journal. At this point, Horowitz knew McCabe was lying to him.

One could argue that the arrest of Papadopoulos by the Mueller team—before he crossed customs—separated the case from McCabe and Strzok.

More than anything else, I would like to know what Papadopulos discussed with the Mueller team in the 24 hours following his arrest. I think that set of conversations might hold the key to unlocking the answers to most of the other outstanding questions.

Interestingly, Papadopoulos has said little to nothing about Mueller and his team. Perhaps he can't legally do so.

One last thing: Papadopoulos has noted there was at least one spy in the Trump campaign. Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson, who was responsible for hiring Steele, the former British spy, to produce the dossier on Trump, had previously disclosed this in his Senate testimony—although he did his best to distance himself from his statements later.

Papadopoulos told us this person is known both to himself and to congressional investigators:

"This is a person that probably no one has really heard of. He was a low-level player, but he was connected to our intelligence people. That information will definitely come out. Congress knows who it is. And I'm sure in a report, or whatever they're going to release, they'll probably be releasing him as a confidential source."

The individual also may be identified in Mueller's coming report.



JASPER FAKKERT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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