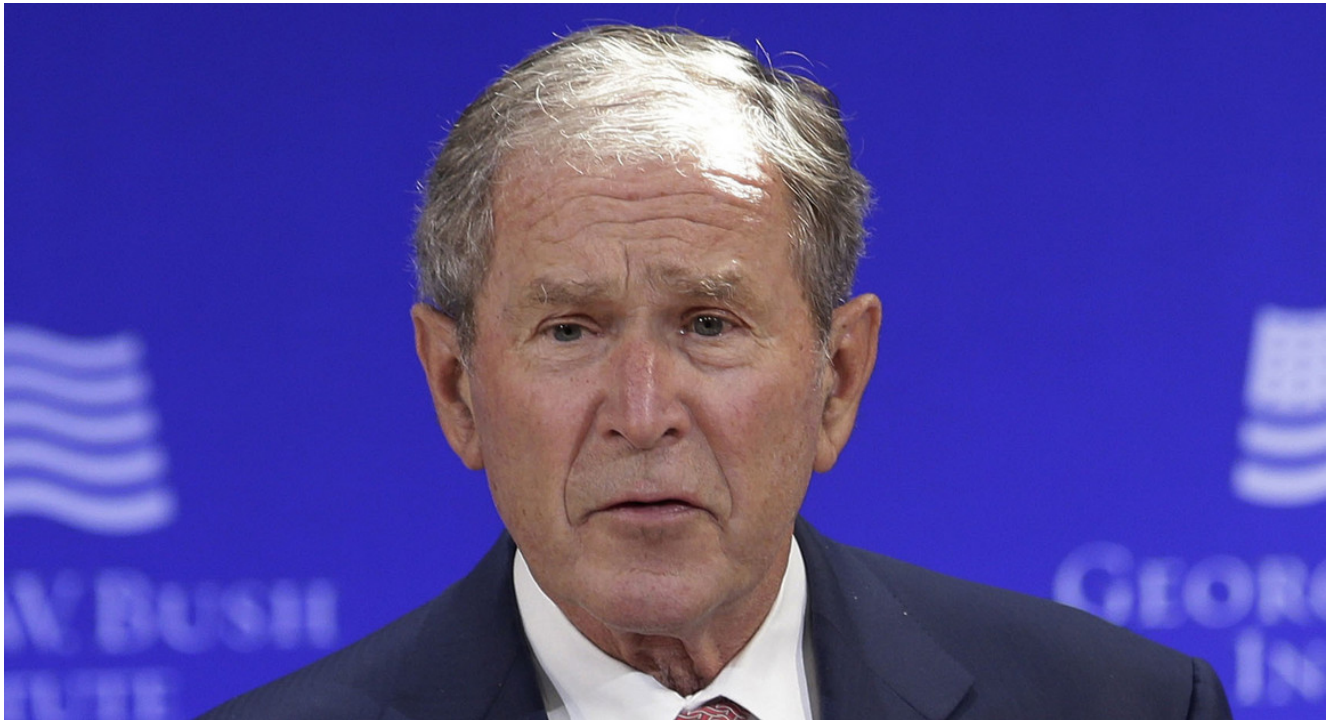


# George W. Bush: There's clear evidence Russia 'meddled' in 2016 election



“It’s problematic that a foreign nation is involved in our election system. Our democracy is only as good as people trust the results,” former President George W. Bush said. | Seth Wenig/AP Photo

Former President George W. Bush said Thursday that there is “pretty clear evidence that the Russians meddled” in the 2016 presidential election, a seeming rebuke of President Donald Trump, who has at times questioned the intelligence community’s assessment that the Kremlin is to blame.

“Whether [Russia] affected the outcome is another question,” Bush said at a conference in Abu Dhabi, according to a USA Today report. “It’s problematic that a foreign nation is involved in our election system. Our democracy is only as good as people trust the results.”

The former president did not mention Trump by name, but Bush’s unequivocal statements on the issue ran counter to the rhetoric that has emerged from the

Trump administration. Trump himself was slow to accept the intelligence community's conclusion that Russia had operated an interference campaign targeting the 2016 election with the aim of aiding his candidacy, insisting for a time that it was China or even a "400-pound person sitting in bed."

The president has since conceded that the Russian government was behind the cyber campaign but has been decidedly soft in his rhetoric toward the Kremlin, especially relative to his get-tough approach to foreign policy elsewhere around the globe. Trump's stance on Russia has puzzled U.S. allies and lawmakers from both parties.

Of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who U.S. intelligence agencies have suggested knew of and directed the 2016 meddling effort, Bush said "He can't think, 'How can we both win?' He only thinks, 'How do I win, you lose?'"

"He's got a chip on his shoulder. The reason he does is because ... the demise of the Soviet Union troubles him," the former president said. "Therefore, much of his moves [are] to regain Soviet hegemony. ... That's why NATO is very important."

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