

## **Rand Paul delivers letter from Trump to Putin in Russia**

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WASHINGTON Sen. Rand Paul, one of the few Republicans who has championed President Trump's outreach to Russia, has gone even further to solidify ties: he's delivered a letter from Trump to Russian president Vladimir Putin's administration.

On a trip to Russia this week aimed at boosting engagement with the U.S. adversary, Paul said Wednesday he was "honored" to deliver the missive which he said "emphasized the importance of further engagement in various areas including countering terrorism, enhancing legislative dialogue and resuming cultural exchanges."

The White House said after Paul's declaration that it was Paul who had requested the letter - and that Trump mentioned issues that Paul has raised.

"At Senator Paul's request, President Trump provided a letter of introduction," deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley said, adding that Trump in the letter "mentioned topics of interest that Senator Paul wanted to discuss with President Putin."

The letter comes three weeks after Trump met with Putin in Helsinki, Finland, sparking a backlash in both parties after his initial refusal to side with the U.S. intelligence community over Russian denials about meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Paul said Trump was right to talk to U.S. adversaries and called the criticism directed at Trump a reflection of "how unhinged people are in their hatred for the president."

Paul later announced his own trip to Russia, saying that he hoped to better relations between the two countries. Earlier this week Paul announced that he had secured an agreement from for Russian legislators to visit the U.S. and "continue dialogue on vital issues such as nuclear non-proliferation and combating terrorism."

Texas Republican Sen. Don Huffines, who chaired Paul's 2016 presidential campaign in Texas, was along on the trip, financed by the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based libertarian think tank.

Huffines said via Twitter that he was "pressing Russian officials on election integrity & relaying my constituents' concerns. My message to the Russians: 'Don't mess with Texas elections!'" "

Paul was an enthusiastic supporter of Trump's decision to meet with Putin in the first place, writing that "dialogue is especially important when hundreds of millions of lives are at stake, as is the case in relations between the United States and nuclear-armed Russia."

The two had savaged each other on the 2016 presidential primary campaign trail, with Paul at one point deriding Trump as an "orange-faced windbag" and the president retorting that Paul was "truly weird."

Trump soon after his visit had invited Putin to Washington this fall, but his national security adviser, John Bolton, later said any meeting would be put off until 2019.