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Russia Reacts to Charges of Election Meddling in Mueller Investigation

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The U.S. Department of Justice **T.J. Kirkpatrick / Bloomberg**

Russian officials have collectively mocked the first indictments issued by a U.S. special investigation into Russian election meddling.

Special Counsel Robert Mueller charged 13 Russians and three companies on Friday for involvement in a sophisticated, years-long conspiracy to meddle in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the alleged financier of the infamous St. Petersburg-based "troll farm" named in the indictment, exuded confidence when dismissing the charges.

"The Americans are really impressionable people, they see what they want to see. I greatly respect them. I am not at all disappointed to be on this list. If they want to see the devil — let them see one," he told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency on Friday.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova seized on the influence campaign's

efficiency when dismissing the indictments as "absurd."

"Thirteen people intervened in the elections in the U.S.?! Thirteen against the special services' billion-dollar budgets? Against intelligence and counterintelligence, against the latest developments and technologies?... Absurd? Yes. But this is modern American political reality," she wrote in a Facebook post on Friday.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov dismissed the charges as "empty talk" not backed by evidence.

"Until we see facts, everything else is just empty talk. Excuse me for a not very diplomatic expression," Lavrov said Friday at the Munich Security Conference, hours after the Mueller indictments were unveiled.

Andrei Kislyak, Russia's Ambassador to the U.S. during the 2016 influence campaign, questioned American law enforcement "as a reliable source of information about Russia's actions."

"We as a government did not interfere in the political life of the U.S., I never did anything of the sort and neither did my embassy. Whatever accusations are made against us are pure fantasy with inner political connotations," RIA Novosti cited him as saying at the security conference.

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