WHICH WAS A MORE SENSITIVE OPEN SECRET REVEALED AS A RESULT OF THE REALITY WINNER STORY: DETAILS ON RUSSIAN HACKS OF VOTING EQUIPMENT, OR INVISIBLE PRINTER DOTS?

Mr. EW doesn't follow my work all that closely. He's most apt to read something I wrote if it gets cited in TechDirt, a fact that occasionally makes me fantasize about getting Mike Masnick to publish secret messages about fixing leaky toilets or broken screen doors.

So I was pretty interested in Mr. EW's take on the Reality Winner story. He believes, as many people do, that Winner was caught using the printer dot technology that Rob Graham laid out here.

I don't doubt that the FBI or NSA used the printer dot technology to confirm that they had gotten the right person before they charged Winner. But it's not mentioned at all in DOJ's narrative of how they caught Winner (who, remember, pled not guilty even though she confessed to the FBI). They cite the following steps (search warrant affidavit, complaint affidavit):

1. May 30: The Intercept contacts NSA and provides a copy of the document. NSA confirms for itself that it is real and classified.

2. June 1: NSA makes a leak referral to the FBI.
3. Undated:
    1. NSA notes that the document has been folded, suggested it was printed off.
    2. NSA checks who has accessed and printed the document.
    3. NSA checks the work computers of the six people who have printed the document, including Winner.
    4. NSA finds a direct email, from March, from Winner's work computer to The Intercept using her personal Gmail account pertaining to TI's podcast.
4. June 1: For the second time, The Intercept contacts a contractor to validate the document (he or she had told them it was fake on May 24), telling the contractor that the NSA has confirmed its authenticity. The contractor provided a document number to The Intercept, and on the same day, the contractor informed the NSA about the May 24 and June 1 interactions, probably also

passing on the detail that the document had been sent from Augusta, GA.

5. June 2: FBI verifies Winner's residence for a search warrant.
6. June 3: FBI interviews Winner, who admits to "removing the classified intelligence reporting from her office space, retaining it, and mailing it from Augusta, Georgia."

Winner was arrested on June 3; her arrest was unsealed on June 5, just after The Intercept published the document.

On June 5, Graham posted a piece explaining how the hidden dots on the hard copy of the document would have told NSA that the document had been printed out on May 9, making it even easier for the NSA to pinpoint who had printed out the document.

> The document leaked by the Intercept was from a printer with model number 54, serial number 29535218. The document was printed on May 9, 2017 at 6:20. The NSA almost certainly has a record of who used the printer at that time.

As I explained to Mr. EW last night, nothing in the official record says the NSA used this hidden dot technology in its hunt for the leaker. I explained that while my friends started talking about the hidden dots almost immediately, there was nothing in the public record about it.

Clearly, the government didn't exactly want that (and no doubt a number of other investigative methods, presumably including at a minimum checks on the non-government computer

communications of the six people who printed out the document, and potentially also a check of postal records) detail to become public.

Yet, as a result of the reporting on this, people like Mr. EW not only know about the dot technology, but believe it was the key factor in identifying Winner. If they follow Rob Graham closely, they'll also know that (in response to my question) another presumed leaker to The Intercept had managed to pass on a printed (and frankly far more important leaked) document — FBI's Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide — without including the telltale dots (I told Mr. EW about the follow-up but he's more likely to read it if TechDirt links so…) So they would have learned that the dots are an operational security issue, but there are as yet unknown ways to mitigate that problem.

As I've stated several times, while the document Winner leaked to The Intercept provides new details about Russian attempts to hack the election, it simply adds to the widely known narrative already in the public (though the redacted details would no doubt be even more interesting). The secret dots though! — that was news to most people (including me).

Which secret do you think the government is most grumpy about having been made public?