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OPINION | BUSINESS WORLD

Hillary Is a Russian Asset

Democrats trying to revive 'collusion' must want Trump back in the White House.



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Hillary Clinton in New York, April 12. PHOTO: BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS

In a difficult period for our country, everyone is let down by commentary that relies on stale talking points. Channeling Hillary Clinton's latest podcast eruption, some pundits have lately returned to trying to keep Trump-Russia collusion alive, so let's go through it again.

To give the complete Trump quote, he said during the 2016 campaign. "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to

find the 30,000 [Hillary Clinton] emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press."

In other words, a wisecrack any of us might have made (though hopefully a presidential candidate wouldn't) playing off the insecurity of Mrs. Clinton's email practices as well as the press's hypocritical eagerness to traffic in Russian leaks.

Nor is any honest purpose served by still pretending that Don Jr.'s idiotic response to a British publicist offering Russian dirt on Hillary Clinton was anything but idiotic. It's not the iceberg tip of collusion.



Tulsi vs. Hillary, and Mayor Pete's Iowa Boost



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Donald Trump spent 40 years advertising himself to the country, and the advertising was not false. Wallowing in Russian distractions to explain his unlikely and unsuitable rise is to miss everything interesting about the times we're living in.

Let us also put aside lazy partisanship on the role of the intelligence agencies in this outcome.

How can any honest person at this point not want to know about the secret Russian intelligence that James Comey has said triggered his serial interventions in the Hillary case? Was this intelligence valid? Was it just a strained rationale for actions that were clearly improper and may have elected Donald Trump?

And if federal agencies were seriously worried about a Trump conspiracy with Russia, why choose Carter Page to spy on? The FBI already knew enough about Mr. Page to know he wasn't, as the Steele dossier portrayed him, collusion's Mr. Big.

When the whole world was speculating about Russian hacking of Hillary's emails, how could a secondhand account of one such conversation between a lowly Trump campaign worker and a London professor be a reason to launch an intelligence investigation of a U.S. presidential candidate?

When the press wouldn't report Christopher Steele's unsupported allegations about Mr. Trump, Democrats tried to exploit the FBI to get the allegations into the media. How can any "intelligence community" worth the name now not be investigating this abuse of its own processes by a foreign agent trying to influence a U.S. presidential campaign?

We can understand the commercial reward system at work when it comes to the press. Many journalists don't have minds in any high sense. But why are some putatively serious analysts still trying to claim a dribble of Facebook ads altered the election, while refusing to acknowledge the *avalanche* of innuendo on cable TV (where most voters actually got their news) portraying

candidate Trump as a Putin stooge? (Failing to account for the difference between gross and net would get you flunked out of most ninth-grade social-science classes.)

The Trump-Russia conspiracy theory was self-refuting in the first place not because of Mr. Trump's virtues: He can't keep a secret. He's mercurial and undisciplined. His campaign was so clearly a lark from his back pocket, not a long-hatching plot. The Kremlin hardly needed his cooperation if it saw an interest in promoting the Trump boomlet. Any such cooperation would also have been difficult to hide from our foreign intelligence apparatus.

At some point, reality has to be acknowledged. Mr. Trump was innocent, the evidence was fabricated by his opponents, and the press and intelligence agencies in some sense allowed themselves to be party to this.

A new book by James Stewart provides what might be called the official story, with official characters like Mr. Comey giving their official two-dimensional rationalizations. Missing is everything interesting: The torrent of illegal leaks from many of these same people defaming the incoming Trump administration. The ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee claiming to have "more than circumstantial evidence" of a Trump-Russia conspiracy. The top leaders of the Obama intelligence agencies going on television to declare that Vladimir Putin was Mr. Trump's "case officer" and had placed him in the White House.

Democrats may be oblivious but much of the country noticed the self-*jujitsu* by which Mr. Trump's enemies have turned Mr. Trump's vices into their own, with their sleazy and self-defeating approach to opposing him.

Democrats would help themselves now by shutting Mrs. Clinton up. Her podcast with campaign guru David Plouffe is becoming famous for all the wrong reasons. Mrs. Clinton clearly *will*s another loss for her party at the presidential level, which she is eager to blame on assorted Russian "assets" (i.e., everybody in the U.S. political system, including fellow Democrats, she finds inconvenient), as a way to exculpate herself for losing to Donald Trump.