

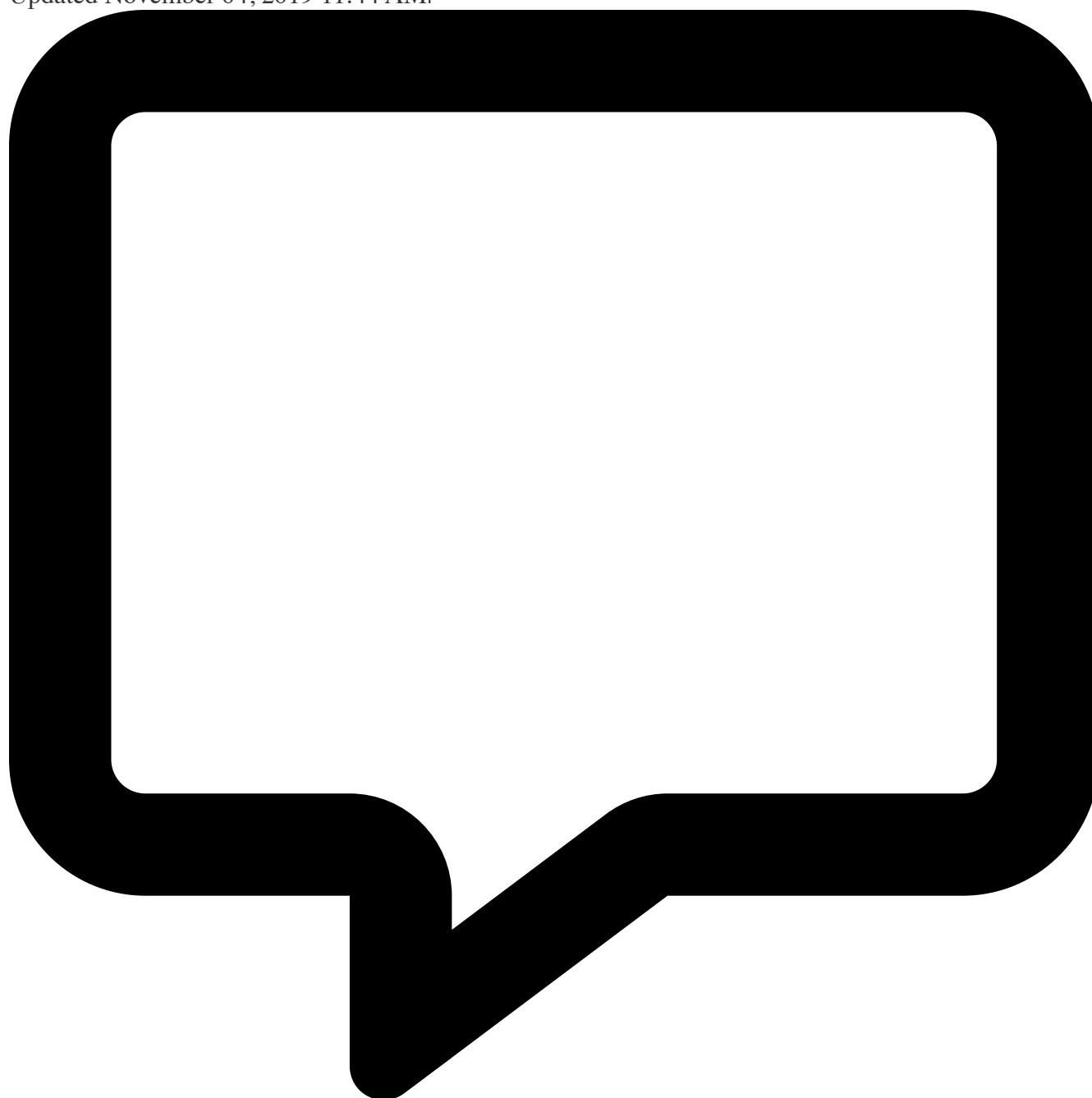
Russian billionaire says it was 'pure coincidence' his jet twice shadowed Trump's

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Since George H.W. Bush, every U.S. president has flown aboard a Boeing 747 with the call sign "Air Force One." Here are a few facts about the famous jet. By Jason Boatright

WASHINGTON

A Russian billionaire, whose jet-setting travel intersected with Donald Trump's stops at the Charlotte and Las Vegas airports during the presidential campaign, says their intersecting paths were "pure coincidence" and nothing more.

"A number of theories have been circulating about the supposed relationship between Dmitry Rybolovlev and President Donald Trump," Sergey Chemitsyn, an adviser to the Russian billionaire, said in a statement to McClatchy. "None of these theories has any foundation in fact."

Rybolovlev's travels prompted speculation that he was somehow shadowing Trump in yet another tie between the new president and Russia.

"Mr. Rybolovlev has never met Mr. Trump personally and has no connection whatsoever to Mr. Trump or his team of advisers," Chemitsyn said.

Trump, a billionaire through real estate dealings, has also denied ever meeting the Russian, who built his fortune in the fertilizer business.

Rybolovlev had previously given only a terse explanation for the coinciding flights before [McClatchy published a story](#) this week describing how their aircraft pulled into gates at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport less than an hour apart on Nov. 3, 2016. Rybolovlev's jet landed shortly before Trump appeared at a rally in nearby Concord. Rybolovlev's plane had first flown to the airport in Concord, and then took a 24-minute flight to Charlotte, where Rybolovlev spent the night.

Chemitsyn said Rybolovlev "was in North Carolina for a business meeting, and we can state categorically that he did not have any contact with Mr. Trump or any of his advisers at the time he was there."

Rybolovlev's aide did not disclose the nature of Rybolovlev's business activity, but the Russian billionaire's plane also was in Charlotte last April 21 at 1:20 p.m., according to a Charlotte man who didn't want to be identified. He told McClatchy that he noticed the jet at the Charlotte airport and took a photo because he wanted to show his granddaughter, named Mary Kate, that her name was on a jet. The jet's identifying registration is MKATE, which are the letters on its tail.

Last Oct. 30, four days before his second Charlotte visit and on the same day that Trump was in Las Vegas, Rybolovlev's plane landed at Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport early in the afternoon and taxied to the private hangar of casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson, flight records obtained by McClatchy show. Rybolovlev's plane was only on the ground for about an hour and 20 minutes, even less than the two hours reported earlier.

Adelson, a major campaign benefactor for Trump, hosted a rally for the Republican presidential nominee that morning at his Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.

Neither spokespeople for the Sands nor Rybolovlev would comment about why he visited Adelson's hangar, which does not service most general aviation aircraft.

Rumors about Rybolovlev's direct or indirect relationship with Trump have swirled in part because Rybolovlev's family trust paid [\\$95 million in 2008](#) to buy a Palm Beach mansion from Trump as the global financial crisis took hold. Trump, who had purchased the property out of foreclosure for \$41 million, is believed to have reaped a significant profit at a time when the global financial meltdown was hurting all real estate values and loans were tough to obtain.

Chemitsyn said Rybolovlev purchased the oceanfront mansion as an investment for a cost “below the asking price and following a process of negotiation.”

Trump’s initial asking price for the mansion was \$125 million.

Rybolovlev no sooner closed on the purchase [than his marriage went sour](#), and his wife, Elena, filed legal papers to prevent him from selling the property. He said that he never set foot inside.

Their legal spat initially yielded the largest divorce award in modern U.S. history, \$4.5 billion, but that 2014 verdict was eventually reduced in an out-of-court agreement.

The mansion has since been razed and the prime 6.3-acre estate divided into three parcels.

One has already been sold drawing \$34.34 million for 2.35 acres.

Chemitsyn said “there is every prospect that (Rybolovlev’s) investment will turn out to be profitable.”

Rybolovlev sold off his industrial assets a few years ago, making it difficult to gauge what assets he owns beyond his high-profile stake in the storied AS Monaco soccer club.

David Newman, the attorney who represented Elena Rybolovleva in the divorce litigation, said he found tracing Rybolovlev’s assets a tough task. Newman said those assets included luxury homes and works of art that were all hidden behind layers of shell companies and trusts “so that the true identity of ownership is not obvious or clear or easy to discern — even through investigation.”

“Whether it is an ex-spouse or ex-business partners, a government or creditors, people of high net worth have a lot of exposure, and it’s not unusual that they will use a lot of schemes or mechanisms to protect those assets,” said Newman, now an attorney with Sills Cummis & Gross, a large New York-area law firm.

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