

Donald Trump Jr.'s meeting with Russians undermines Christopher Steele's dossier



Former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele and his Orbis Business Intelligence firm were not part of Hillary Clinton's campaign or the Democratic National Committee. The money trail to Mr. Steele went through a lawyer who represents the DNC and the ... Former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele ... [more >](#)

The amateurish nature of the infamous meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and two Russian lobbyists in June 2016 undermines a major accusation in a so-called dossier: its assertion of a long, information-trading relationship between Russian intelligence and Donald Trump and his aides.

If the Trump team had such a productive Moscow liaison for years, as the dossier, written by former British spy Christopher Steele, and his Russian sources claim, then why did the president's son need to listen to two nominal Russian sources, a former U.S. intelligence official asks.

"If the Trumps actually had a long-standing relationship with the Russian intelligence services and were regularly receiving information on Hillary Clinton — this is one of the claims in the Steele dossier — there would be no reason to accept a meeting with an unknown lawyer who claimed to have compromising information," Larry Johnson, a former CIA officer and State Department counterintelligence official, told The Washington Times.

"If I'm friends with the owners of the Washington Nationals and getting box seat tickets from them, why would I go out on the street and buy tickets from a scalper? It just does not make sense."

The dossier, financed by Democratic money and containing unverified accusations from a bevy of Russian sources, says a Kremlin source told Mr. Steele that the Russians were providing dirt on Hillary Clinton to the Trump operation.

Some Democrats who have criticized foreign influence in U.S. elections have embraced the dossier and its Russian sourcing and have spread the information around Washington, including at a key congressional hearing.

The Trump Jr. meeting was set up by a Russian talent agent who said the lawyer-lobbyist, Natalia Veselnitskaya, had derogatory information on Mr. Trump's opponent, Mrs. Clinton. The Associated Press said another U.S.-based Russian lobbyist, Rinat Akhmetshin, also attended the meeting.

Donald Trump Jr. told Fox News' Sean Hannity that Ms. Veselnitskaya failed to provide such opposition research and instead wanted to lobby against an anti-Russian sanctions law, the Magnitsky Act.

Michael Caputo, a Trump campaign adviser who briefly advised the Russian government years before, testified Friday at a closed hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence that he never heard the word "Russia" inside the Trump operation.

Mr. Caputo told Spectrum News that Democrats are pursuing a "collusion delusion" in a plan launched quickly after Mrs. Clinton lost the election for the purpose of stopping Mr. Trump.

Mr. Steele's memos, written for cash from Fusion GPS, a Democratic Party-connected opposition research firm, referred at least a half-dozen times to a long-standing Trump-Russian intelligence connection. Among his assertions:

- "The Kremlin had been feeding TRUMP and his team valuable intelligence on his opponents, including Democratic presidential candidate Hillary CLINTON for several years."
- "Further evidence of extensive conspiracy between TRUMP's campaign team and Kremlin, sanctioned at highest levels and involving Russian diplomatic staff based in the U.S."
- "Russians receiving intel from TRUMP's team on Russian oligarchs and their families in U.S."
- "A well-developed conspiracy of co-operation between [the Trump campaign] and the Russian leadership."
- Trump and "his inner circle have accepted a regular flow of intelligence from the Kremlin, including on his Democratic and other political rivals."
- "Regular exchange with Kremlin has existed for at least 8 years, including intelligence fed back to Russia on oligarchs activists in U.S."

During the campaign, the Trump team did not appear to spring any anti-Clinton ads that were based on Moscow sourcing. If an extensive connection existed for years, official public reports have not confirmed it.

In fact, former FBI Director James B. Comey testified to the contrary last month before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Democrats cite dossier's lies

A New York Times story that said U.S.-intercepted communications showed that Trump aides "had repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officers" was almost entirely false, Mr. Comey testified. He said that when the story appeared in February, he immediately notified Republicans and Democrats that it was not true.

Mr. Comey said “many, many stories” on the Trump-Russia probe were “dead wrong.”

A smattering of intelligence committee members have said as late as June that they have not seen evidence of Trump-Russian intelligence collusion.

Former Trump campaign aides argued that if there was any confirmed collusion and coordination with Russians, it was by Democrats to destroy Mr. Trump.

It was Democratic donors who funded Mr. Steele, who in turn paid Kremlin sources to dish unverified dirt on Mr. Trump and his aides and accused them of lawbreaking. He also accused Mr. Trump of salacious activity in a Moscow hotel room during his promoted 2013 Miss Universe contest there.

Mr. Steele packed his Russia-fed allegations into a series of memos handed out by Fusion GPS and Democrats to try to influence the presidential election.

After Mr. Trump won the election, Democrats continued to use the dossier to hurl charges, using Russian sources to accuse Mr. Trump of Russian collusion.

Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, read charges from the dossier at a much-watched hearing as if they were true. Another Democrat tried to get Mr. Comey, a hearing witness, to back up Mr. Steele's contention that Mr. Trump met with prostitutes in Moscow.

In an exclusive Oval Office interview with The Washington Times in April, the president said it was a disgrace that Democrats were citing a dossier that had been proved untrue in a number of instances.

“The dossier has been totally discredited, No. 1. No. 2, Adam Schiff is totally partisan, as partisan as you can get,” Mr. Trump said. “And No. 3, the Russia story is a fake story. It was made up so that they can justify the fact that Hillary Clinton lost an election that a Democrat should not lose because it's almost impossible for a Democrat to lose the Electoral College. And not only did she lose, but she lost by a lot because I got 306 and [she got] 232.”

Referring to Mr. Steele, the president said, “He made it up.”

Mr. Steele said Mr. Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, traveled to Prague last year to orchestrate a hacking cover-up with Russian agents. Mr. Cohen said he had never been to Prague and presented evidence that he was in California at the time.

Perhaps no Trump associate has felt the ramifications of Mr. Steele's Russian sources more than Carter Page, whose business career as an energy sector investor thrust him into many contacts with Russians. Merrill Lynch stationed him in Moscow for years.

He joined the Trump campaign as a volunteer adviser but was cast aside when leaks from the dossier during the campaign accused him of having discussions on Russian sanctions with Kremlin figures while on a publicized trip to Moscow to deliver a speech in July.

Since then, Mr. Page has dedicated much of his waking hours to trying to clear his name from what he says are Mr. Steele's “fabrications.”

For example, Mr. Page said, he never met with the two Kremlin figures identified by Mr. Steele, and that while he knew of one of them he had never heard of the other.

Mr. Steele's most sensational charge is that Mr. Page and Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort organized the Russian hacking of Democratic computers.

Mr. Page said he had never met Mr. Manafort and did not know of the hacking until it appeared in the press in June 2016.

'What was their motivation?'

A former Navy officer, Mr. Page has spent hours with FBI agents rebutting what Mr. Steele and his Russian sources said about him. He has asked the Senate and House intelligence committees, which are investigating Russian interference in the presidential election, to let him testify, but he has been given no date.

Mr. Page told The Washington Times: "Congress has continued to block my open public testimony before all of the committees in both the House and Senate despite prior invitations, including those whose senior Democratic members repeated countless defamatory lies against me from the 'dodgy dossier' during extensive nationally televised testimony earlier this year."

He accused Democrats of a "persistent support of the dominatrix tactics used by the Clinton-Obama-Comey regime to keep a surveillance leash on supporters of the Trump movement."

Perhaps the best inside look at how Mr. Steele did his work came from Michael Morell, a Hillary Clinton loyalist who served as President Obama's acting CIA director.

"I have subsequently learned that he used intermediaries," Mr. Morell said in March at conference sponsored by Cipher Brief. "And then I asked myself, 'Why did these guys provide this information? What was their motivation?' And I subsequently learned that he paid them, that the intermediaries paid the sources and the intermediaries got the money from Chris. And that kind of worries me a little bit because if you're paying somebody, particularly former FSB officers, they are going to tell you truth and innuendo and rumor, and they're going to call you up and say, 'Hey, let's have another meeting. I have more information for you.' I think you've got to take all that into consideration when you consider the dossier."

One of Mr. Steele's targets, Russian entrepreneur Aleksey Gubarev of Webzilla fame, has sued him for slander in a London court. Mr. Steele accused him of flooding Democratic computers with porn and spying malware — a charge Mr. Gubarev calls fiction.

In a court filing first reported by The Washington Times, Mr. Steele admitted that he did not verify any of the charges against Mr. Gubarev. His defense is that the dossier should have never been made public — a position that would indicate a number of allegations in his memos were unconfirmed Kremlin hearsay.

A number of liberal news sites have said they were unable to confirm Mr. Steele's major allegations.

BuzzFeed posted the entire dossier online in January, though its editor expressed doubts about its accuracy.

Mr. Gubarev and the Russian Alfa-Bank are suing BuzzFeed. The dossier accused Alfa — which Mr. Steele spelled "Alpha" — of paying bribe money to Russian President Vladimir Putin, citing a "top level Russian official."

- *Rowan Scarborough can be reached at rscarborough@washingtontimes.com.*