

ADVERTISEMENT

Trump Associate Boasted That Moscow Business Deal 'Will Get Donald Elected'



Donald J. Trump with Felix H. Sater, right, and Tevfik Arif at the official unveiling of Trump SoHo in September 2007. Mark Von Holden/WireImage

By [Matt Apuzzo](#) and [Maggie Haberman](#)

Aug. 28, 2017



WASHINGTON — A business associate of President Trump promised in 2015 to engineer a real estate deal with the aid of the president of [Russia, Vladimir V. Putin](#), that he said would help Mr. Trump win the presidency.

The associate, Felix Sater, wrote a series of emails to Mr. Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, in which he boasted about his ties to Mr. Putin. He predicted that building a Trump Tower in Moscow would highlight Mr. Trump's savvy negotiating skills and be a political boon to his candidacy.

"Our boy can become president of the USA and we can engineer it," Mr. Sater wrote in an email. "I will get all of Putins team to buy in on this, I will manage this process."

> Michael I arranged for Ivanka to sit in Putins private chair at his desk and office in the Kremlin. I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected. We both know no one else knows how to pull this off without stupidity or greed getting in the way. I know how to play it and we will get this done. Buddy our boy can become President of the USA and we can engineer it. I will get all of Putins team to buy in on this, I will

A portion of an email Felix Sater sent to Michael Cohen on Nov. 3, 2015.

The emails show that, from the earliest months of Mr. Trump's campaign, some of his associates viewed close ties with Moscow as a political advantage. Those ties are now under investigation by the Justice Department and multiple congressional committees.

American intelligence agencies have concluded that the Russian government interfered with the 2016 presidential election to try to help Mr. Trump. Investigators want to know whether anyone on Mr. Trump's team was part of that process.

Mr. Sater, a Russian immigrant, said he had lined up financing for the Trump Tower deal with VTB Bank, a Russian bank that was [under American sanctions](#) for involvement in Moscow's efforts to undermine democracy in Ukraine. In another email, Mr. Sater envisioned a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Moscow.

"I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected," Mr. Sater wrote.

Mr. Sater said he was eager to show video clips to his Russian contacts of instances of Mr. Trump speaking glowingly about Russia, and said he would arrange for Mr. Putin to praise Mr. Trump's business acumen.

"If he says it we own this election," Mr. Sater wrote. "Americas most difficult adversary agreeing that Donald is a good guy to negotiate."

There is no evidence in the emails that Mr. Sater delivered on his promises, and one email suggests that Mr. Sater overstated his Russian ties. In January 2016, Mr. Cohen wrote to Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, asking for help restarting the Trump Tower project, which had stalled. But Mr. Cohen did not appear to have Mr. Peskov's direct email, and instead wrote to a general inbox for press inquiries.

The project never got government permits or financing, and died weeks later.

"To be clear, the Trump Organization has never had any real estate holdings or interests in Russia," the Trump Organization said Monday in a statement. Mr. Trump, however signed a nonbinding "letter of intent" for the project in 2015. Mr. Cohen said he discussed the project with Mr. Trump three times.

The Trump Organization on Monday turned over emails to the House Intelligence Committee, which is investigating Russian meddling in the presidential election and whether anyone in Mr. Trump's campaign was involved. Some of the emails were obtained by The Times.

A portion of an email Mr. Sater sent to Mr. Cohen on Nov. 3, 2015.

The emails obtained by The Times do not include any responses from Mr. Cohen to Mr. Sater's messages.

In a statement on Monday that was also provided to Congress, Mr. Cohen suggested that he viewed Mr. Sater's comments as puffery. "He has sometimes used colorful language and has been prone to 'salesmanship,'" the statement said. "I ultimately determined that the proposal was not feasible and never agreed to make a trip to Russia."

The emails obtained by The Times make no mention of Russian efforts to damage Hillary Clinton's campaign or the hacking of Democrats' emails. Mr. Trump, who began praising Mr. Putin years before the presidential campaign, has said there was no collusion with Russian officials. [Previously released emails](#), however, revealed that his campaign was willing to receive damaging information about Mrs. Clinton from Russian sources.

Mr. Sater said it would be "pretty cool to get a USA President elected" and said he desired to be the ambassador to the Bahamas. "That my friend is the home run I want out of this," he wrote.

Mr. Sater — a former F.B.I. informant who is famous for having once smashed a martini glass stem into another man's face — has maintained a relationship with Mr. Cohen over the years. The two men have spent decades operating in the world of New York commercial real estate, where the sources of funding can be murky.

Through his lawyer, Mr. Sater declined on Monday to address why he thought the deal would be a political win for Mr. Trump. He said he brought the project to Mr. Cohen in late 2015, but that he was not working for the Trump Organization and “would not have been compensated” by them.

“During the course of our communications over several months, I routinely expressed my enthusiasm regarding what a tremendous opportunity this was for the Trump Organization,” Mr. Sater said.

Mr. Sater was a broker for the Trump Organization for several years, typically paid to deliver real estate deals. A company he worked for, Bayrock, played a role in financing the Trump SoHo Hotel in New York. Mr. Sater and Mr. Cohen even worked together on a peace plan for Ukraine and Russia that they sought to get in front of Mr. Trump's national security adviser earlier this year.

As a broker for the Trump Organization, Mr. Sater had an incentive to overstate his business-making acumen. He presents himself in his emails as so influential in Russia that he helped arrange a 2006 trip that Mr. Trump's daughter, Ivanka, took to Moscow.

“I arranged for Ivanka to sit in Putins private chair at his desk and office in the Kremlin,” he said. Ms. Trump said she had no involvement in the discussions about the Moscow deal other than to recommend possible architects. In a statement, she said that during the 2006 trip she took “a brief tour of Red Square and the Kremlin” as a tourist. She said it is possible she sat in Mr. Putin's chair during that tour but she did not recall it. She said she has not seen or spoken to Mr. Sater since 2010. “I have never met President Vladimir Putin,” she said.

The Times [reported earlier this year](#) on the plan for a Trump Tower in Moscow, which never materialized. On Sunday, The Washington Post [reported the existence](#) of the correspondence between Mr. Sater and Mr. Cohen, but not its content.

Spokespeople for the House Intelligence Committee had no comment on the documents.

Mr. Cohen has denied any wrongdoing, and the Trump Organization turned over the emails to the House as part of his ongoing cooperation with the investigation.

Earlier this month, Mr. Cohen's lawyer, Stephen M. Ryan, wrote a letter to congressional investigators that contained what he said was a point-by-point refutation of a dossier suggesting that Mr. Cohen colluded with Russian operatives. That dossier, compiled by a retired British spy and briefed to Mr. Trump during the transition, was published online early this year.

"We do not believe that the committee should give credence to or perpetuate any of the allegations relating to Mr. Cohen unless the committee can obtain independent and reliable corroboration," Mr. Ryan wrote.

Get politics and Washington news updates via [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [the Morning Briefing newsletter](#).

A version of this article appears in print on , on Page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Trump Associate Boasted in Email Of Ties to Putin. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe



Related Coverage

For Trump, Three Decades of Chasing Deals in Russia Jan. 16, 2017

A Back-Channel Plan for Ukraine and Russia, Courtesy of Trump Associates Feb. 19, 2017

ADVERTISEMENT

By David G. ...

[Go to Home Page »](#)

NEWS

Open in the app

ARTS

LIVING

LISTINGS & MORE