

GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS WAS TRYING TO HIDE EVIDENCE HE THOUGHT MIGHT AMOUNT TO TREASON WHEN HE LIED TO THE FBI

Chuck Ross' description of a September 2016 conversation between Stefan Halper and George Papadopoulos has evolved over the course of his reporting on it. In March, he described it this way:

According to a source with knowledge of the meeting, Halper asked Papadopoulos: "George, you know about hacking the emails from Russia, right?"

Papadopoulos told Halper he didn't know anything about emails or Russian hacking, said the source, who spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 campaign. The professor did not follow up on the line of inquiry.

In his next story on the exchange, Ross described it this way:

Sources familiar with Papadopoulos's version of their meetings said Halper randomly asked Papadopoulos whether he knew about Democratic National Committee emails that had been hacked and leaked by Russians.

Papadopoulos strongly denied the allegation, sources familiar with his version of the exchange have told TheDCNF. Halper grew agitated and

pressed Papadopoulos on the topic. Papadopoulos believes that Halper was recording him during some of their interactions, sources said.

The very next day, here's how Ross described it:

During one of their dinners, Halper asked Papadopoulos whether he was involved in the Russian theft of Democrats' emails, sources familiar with Papadopoulos' account have told TheDCNF. Papadopoulos denied the allegation, saying that stealing emails would be treason.

Halper grew frustrated, according to sources.

This is the first story in this series where Ross describes what Papadopoulos pled guilty to, but he gets it wrong in a key way I'll describe below.

Finally, Ross offers yet another description in a new story today.

Sources familiar with Papadopoulos' version of events say that during one conversation, Halper asked Papadopoulos whether he was involved in the release of DNC emails. Papadopoulos denied it, telling Halper that hacking emails would be treason. Halper grew frustrated, according to the sources.

Today's story claims we don't know what Alexander Downer told FBI. We do know one detail he omitted: That Downer told the FBI that Papadopoulos told him Mifsud said the Russians were going to release the emails to help Trump.

Now, as I said, in yesterday's story, Ross described the substance of the lies Papadopoulos told the FBI slightly wrong.

Papadopoulos has pleaded guilty to lying

to the FBI about the timing of his encounters with Mifsud and two Russian nationals. He did, however, tell the FBI in his initial interviews that Mifsud mentioned Clinton documents.

Ross leans on his misunderstanding of Papadopoulos' guilty plea to argue today that FBI should have interviewed Papadopoulos back in August, rather than ask a lifelong Republican to ask the same questions while hiding the FBI interest.

Papadopoulos has pleaded guilty to the special counsel's office for lying to the FBI during that interview. As part of his plea deal, Papadopoulos admitted he lied about the timing of his interactions with two Russian nationals and a Maltese professor named Joseph Mifsud. Papadopoulos initially told FBI agents that the contacts occurred prior to joining the Trump campaign when, in fact, they occurred after he learned that he would be joining the Trump campaign in March 2016.

FBI defenders could point to Papadopoulos' deception in the January 2017 interview to argue that he would have lied had he been questioned earlier in Crossfire Hurricane. But that argument is undercut by what else Papadopoulos said in his FBI interview.

According to a statement of offense Special Counsel Robert Mueller filed, Papadopoulos told FBI agents that Mifsud mentioned the stolen Clinton emails.

And sources familiar with Papadopoulos's version of the FBI interview say he claims that he, and not the FBI agents, first mentioned Mifsud during the interview, which was conducted in Chicago without lawyers present.

That is, Ross argues that because Papadopoulos offered up that he met a weird guy named Mifsud who told him the Russians were offering dirt in the form of Hillary emails, he could be trusted to have been honest had the FBI asked him in August.

As I said, though, Ross' first description of Papadopoulos' guilty plea is wrong in several ways. Ross hides how important Papadopoulos said Mifsud seemed; the FBI describes Papadopoulos claiming Mifsud was just BSing. The former Trump aide similarly denied having any relationship with the Russian woman Mifsud introduced him to. Both those details make Papadopoulos' lies about the timing more important: he lied about how important he believed these two were and he lied about the way their outreach to him tied to his role on the campaign.

In Ross' first description of his plea, however, he suggested that Papadopoulos affirmatively lied "about the timing of his encounters with Mifsud **and two Russian nationals**," the second of whom we know to be Ivan Timofeev. That's wrong. In the first interview, Papadopoulos (successfully) hid the entire existence of Timofeev. That's key because Papadopoulos was forwarding communications from Timofeev, a Russian official, talking about setting up meetings with campaign officials. He was forwarding these emails to the campaign in the weeks leading up to the June 9 meeting. Indeed, Papadopoulos told Timofeev that Trump's first campaign speech was a sign that the candidate was willing to meet. By hiding Timofeev, Papadopoulos was hiding high level campaign knowledge of the outreach (including Paul Manafort).

Ross fails to mention another damning thing the purportedly forthcoming Papadopoulos did the day after his second FBI interview: delete his Facebook account, and with it his communications with Timofeev, and get a new cell phone, presumably destroying secure communications.

There is no way Papadopoulos would have been any

more honest with FBI in August 2016 than he was in January.

And if the third and fourth version of Ross' description of the Halper-Papadopoulos exchange is any indication, then it's very clear why Papadopoulos would have always lied about the communications: because he considered the very same kind of back and forth with Russians tied to the email release treason.

Papadopoulos was trying to cover up evidence he thought might prove treason.