

DC COOTIES

There have been a series of stories fed to the press this week intended to heighten concerns about Trump advisor Paul Manafort's ties to Russian thugs (but not his numerous ties to other thugs). The NYT had a story about Manafort receiving cash payments from 2007 to 2012 (that is, well before Trump decided to run for President). And the AP has a story headlined, "AP Sources: Manafort tied to undisclosed foreign lobbying" that describes how Manafort's partner, Rick Gates, funneled funds from a pro-Yanukovych non-profit to two DC lobbying firms.

Paragraph 10 of the story reveals that it relies on sources from the Podesta Group, one of the lobbying firms in question.

Paragraph 15 begins to explain salient information about the Podesta group: that its ties to the Clinton campaign are as close as Gates' ties to the Trump campaign.

The founder and chairman of the Podesta Group, Tony Podesta, is the brother of longtime Democratic strategist John Podesta, who now is campaign chairman for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. The head of Mercury, Vin Weber, is an influential Republican, former congressman and former special policy adviser to Mitt Romney. Weber announced earlier this month that he will not support Trump.

After being introduced to the lobbying firms, the European nonprofit paid the Podesta Group \$1.13 million between June 2012 and April 2014 to lobby Congress, the White House National Security Council, the State Department and other federal agencies, according to U.S. lobbying records.

[snip]

One former Podesta employee, speaking on

condition of anonymity because of a non-disclosure agreement, said Gates described the nonprofit's role in an April, 2012 meeting as supplying a source of money that could not be traced to the Ukrainian politicians who were paying him and Manafort.

In separate interviews, three current and former Podesta employees said disagreements broke out within the firm over the arrangement, which at least one former employee considered obviously illegal. Podesta, who said the project was vetted by his firm's counsel, said he was unaware of any such disagreements.

In other words, the headline and lead of this story should say something to the effect of, "Trump's campaign manager's partner funneled potentially illegal funds to Hillary's campaign manager's brother."

Or more succinctly: "DC is a corrupt, incestuous cesspool."

But it doesn't. Instead of telling the story about the broken foreign registry system that permits elites of both parties to take funding from some unsavory characters – some we like, some we hate – the story instead spins this as a uniquely Trump and Manafort problem.

Sure. Vladimir Putin is one scary bastard. But there are a lot of scary bastards, and they're feeding both sides of the DC pig's trough.