

LATEST CARTER PAGE SCOOP MAY NOT BE THAT INCRIMINATING

Several months before Ali Watkins (followed by ABC, though that didn't stop ABC from claiming credit) confirmed that a person named in the complaint against Evgeny Buryakov is Carter Page, Rayne was examining potential connections between that case – in which Buryakov eventually plead guilty to being a Russian spy (after his two colleagues, working under official cover, had returned to Russia) and allegations of Russian influence on Donald Trump.

While many people are insinuating that this confirmation damns Page, that's not at all clear.

As the complaint – which was unsealed on January 26, 2015 – describes, Victor Podobnyy tried to recruit Page in the period leading up to April 2013. Podobnyy complained that Page left on a trip to Moscow without returning his call. In that complaint, Podobnyy emphasized Page's interest in getting Gazprom business.

[Page] wrote that he is sorry, he went to Moscow and forgot to check his inbox, but he wants to meet when he gets back. I think he is an idiot and forgot who I am. Plus he writes to be in Russian [to] practice the language. He flies to Moscow more often than I do. He got hooked on Gazprom thinking that if they have a project, he could rise up. Maybe he can. I don't know, but it's obvious that he wants to earn lots of money.

Podobnyy then jokes with fellow spy Igor Sporyshev about (presumably) Russia blowing “a couple of borrowed million” before screwing Page over.

Podobnyy: I also promised him a lot;

that I have connections in the Trade Representation, meaning you[,] that you can push contracts [laughs]. I will feed him empty promises.

Sporyshev: Shit, then he will write me. Not even me, to our clean one.

Podobnyy: I didn't say the Trade Representation... I didn't even indicate that this is connected to a government agency. This is intelligence method to cheat, how else to work with foreigners? You promise a favor for a favor. You get the documents from him and tell him to go fuck himself.

The complaint then describes a June 13, 2013 FBI interview with Page in which Page describes meeting Podobnyy at an energy symposium. Page told the FBI agents he shared his outlook on the current and future of the energy industry and provided documents to him about the energy business. That is consistent with Podobnyy's mocking description of their relationship.

Again, all of that occurred in 2013, and it was made public in early 2015. Page even complained to BuzzFeed that the complaint had made it obvious (back in 2015) that he was the one the Russian spies were recruiting and mocking.

Page suggested that the complaint was written so that it was obvious he was the Gazprom-connected man Podobnyy talked about recruiting.

"In this city? Give me a break," he said. "It is so obvious."

Which is all a way of saying that Page knew that he had been recruited by Russian spies in 2013 and knew how they were trying to recruit him before he went to Russia and allegedly met with Rosneft President Igor Sechin. Here's how Christopher Steele's dossier described the July 7 or 8, 2016 meeting between Page and Sechin:

[T]he Rosneft President (CEO) had raised with PAGE the issues of future bilateral energy cooperation and prospects for an associated move to lift Ukraine-related western sanctions against Russia. PAGE had reacted positively to this demarche by SECHIN but had been generally non-committal in response. [Report dated July 19, 2016, sourced to a Russian source close to Sechin]

[snip]

[T]he Rosneft President was so keen to lift personal and corporate western sanctions imposed on the company, that he offered PAGE/TRUMP's associates the brokerage of up to a 19 per cent (privatised) stake in Rosneft in return. PAGE had expressed interest and confirmed that were TRUMP elected US president, then sanctions on Russia would be lifted. [Report dated October 18, 2016, sourced to a close associate of Sechin]

Importantly, Steele's sources reported that Russia was dangling the same thing that showed up in Page's 2013 conversations with Podobnyy: business with Rosneft. That could either be taken as a sign the Russian integrated information they learned in 2013 – that Page wanted to get rich working with Rosneft (which would have been obvious anyway). Or it could be taken as a sign that they dangled something that Page would have known the Russians were already talking to him about.

Note that the two reports on his meeting with Sechin conflict on one key detail: whether Page took the bait. The first report (at a time when Steele was not as urgently trying to ensure Trump would lose the election) stated that Page was non-committal. Having a huge deal of the sort he had been pursuing for three years dangled before him, Page did not immediately jump. The later report, however, did seem to

promise a quid pro quo dealing precisely the same thing he had got caught talking to Russians about three years earlier.

Now consider the other allegation about Page from the dossier. It claims that a senior colleague in the Presidential Administration Head, Divyekin, dangled something else: kompromat on Hillary (as I explained here, in context this is just about intelligence gathered while she was First Lady and Secretary of State, even though this report was written a year after FSB started hacking the DNC, four months after GRU allegedly started hacking the DNC and John Podesta, and more than a month after the former two things were public). But even here, this is a dangle.

Their agenda had included DIVEYKIN raising a dossier of 'kompromat' the Kremlin possessed on TRUMP's Democratic presidential rival, Hillary CLINTON, and its possible release to the Republican's campaign team.

However, the Kremlin official close to S. IVANOV added that s/he believed DIVEYKIN also had hinted (or indicated more strongly) that the Russian leadership also had 'kompromat' on TRUMP which the latter should bear in mind in his dealings with them.

In the context of having had another Russian spy explicitly state he would dangle promises but not deliver, it's unclear how Page would take this information. But he would presumably at least consider what he had learned in 2013 about dealing with Russian spies, which is that they might not deliver on their promises.

Page strikes me as a dummy. So maybe he didn't learn anything from being targeted in 2013. Or maybe the inconclusive language relayed here, even if true (Page still denies the Sechin meeting) can be explained by the fact that Page had already been recruited at least once by a

Russian spy, with the embarrassing result that (he believed) everyone in NY knew he had been taken for a chump in 2013.

But there are two other parts of the complaint that – given what we’ve learned since Rayne wrote about this – deserve new scrutiny.

First, in a discussion on April 10, 2013, Podobnyy had a discussion with his boss at SVR. The boss asked Podobnyy what Sporyshev’s cover was. “What is his cover? The Chamber of Commerce?” Podobnyy corrected him, explaining that Sporyshev worked as a Trade Representative.

The exchange is interesting because one of the people believed to be a key figure in the Steele dossier, described as Source D in parts of the dossier, founded a Russian American Chamber of Commerce in 2006. The figure, Sergei Millian, has insinuated himself into Trump’s circle since that time, including posting pictures of himself on inauguration day. It seems as if Podobnyy’s boss knew of someone who was working under the cover of some kind of Chamber of Commerce. There are two other “Chambers” he might have been thinking of – the US-Russian Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation. But Millian’s organization certainly looks like a cover, and the reference of a an SVR manager to a Chamber used as cover could back that claim.

Finally, there’s the point Rayne raised in her post. Buryakov’s cover was working at Vnesheconombank, the same bank whose FSB-tied head Jared Kushner met with in December. The key to busting Buryakov was an undercover FBI employee pretending to represent the interests of a “wealthy investor looking to work with [Vnesheconombank] to develop casinos in Russia.” As Rayne noted, Buryakov and the UCE toured some Atlantic City casinos at a time when Trump still had some there. And while Trump may not be the only wealthy casino owner considering business opportunities in Russia in 2013, he definitely was doing so (recall that the Golden Shower incident allegedly happened in 2013, so

before the casino meetings).

The reason all that is interesting is because of the claimed ties between Trump associates like Felix Sater and the FBI. While Sater has served as an informant, not an FBI employee (and Sater's informant role was already public by 2013, meaning the Russians would be unlikely to treat him as a real entrée to reach Trump), there's still other reasons to think Trump might have been the purported investor used to set up Buryakov (which, again, was Rayne's point).

In any case, we know that a figure that ended up in Trump's inner circle was recruited as early as 2013 for information. That doesn't necessarily mean subsequent attempts, such as they occurred, would be more or less successful (indeed, if Page weren't such a dummy you'd figure they'd be less successful, if only because Page had already had to deal with the FBI over his Russian ties). But it does raise interesting questions about that network of spies and any subsequent efforts to reach out to Trump's associates.