

THE FALSE STATEMENTS GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS MADE ABOUT “DIRT” WERE DESIGNED TO HIDE WHETHER HE TOLD THE CAMPAIGN ABOUT THE EMAILS

In response to Monday's server hiccups and in anticipation that Mueller is nowhere near done, we expanded our server capacity overnight. If you think you'll rely on emptywheel reporting on the Mueller probe, please consider a donation to support the site.

Other outlets have now caught up to this post I wrote on Monday showing that a footnote in George Papadopoulos' plea, describing a May 21, 2016 exchange between Paul Manafort and Rick Gates, probably means Manafort was trying to hide the campaign's outreach to Russia rather than tamp it down via a low level staffer.

I want to turn now to some other details that become clear when similarly comparing Papadopoulos' plea with the complaint, written two months earlier. In the plea, Papadopoulos' false statements are listed as:

1. PAPADOPOULOS met the professor and learned about Russian “dirt” before he joined the campaign
2. PAPADOPOULOS's contacts with the professor were inconsequential
3. PAPADOPOULOS met the female Russian national before he

joined the campaign, and his
contacts with her were
inconsequential

That is, the plea describes these false statements to pertain to the *timing* and *significance* of Papadopoulos' communications with Professor Joseph Mifsud and the still unnamed woman that Papadopoulos once believed was the niece of Vladimir Putin (this WaPo story has the best descriptions of who is who in the documents). The plea disproves those three false statements by focusing on the timing of his meetings with the two (and his complete silence about Russian International Affairs Council program director Ivan Timofeev) and the sheer volume of his communications with the two. Significantly, the plea focuses on the impact of "omitt[ing] the entire course of conduct with the Professor and [Timofeev] regarding his efforts to establish meetings between the Campaign and Russian government officials."

As I have noted, the grand jury testimony of at least one other person, Sam Clovis, appears to have downplayed that latter point, the assertiveness with which the campaign tried to set up meetings with the Russians. That and the limited hangout of these details shared with the WaPo in August suggests Trump people, collectively, know that email records show evidence the campaign was trying to set up meetings, and that more than one person has been lying to downplay how assertive they were.

The false statements as laid out in the affidavit supporting the complaint, however, have a significantly different emphasis. False statements 1 and 2 (as I've numbered them) were treated as one discussion under the heading "False Statements by PAPADOPOULOS Regarding Foreign Contact 1." The first three paragraphs of the discussion look like this:

13. During the course of his January 27, 2017 interview with the FBI, GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS, the defendant,

acknowledged that he knew a particular professor of diplomacy based in London ("Foreign Contact 1"). Foreign Contact 1 is a citizen of a country in the Mediterranean and an associate of several Russian nationals, as described further below. PAPADOPOULOS stated that Foreign Contact 1 told him that the Russians had "dirt" on Clinton.

a. PAPADOPOULOS told the Agents that, in the early part of 2016, Foreign Contact 1 "actually told me that the Russians had emails of Clinton. That guy told me." PAPADOPOULOS further stated that Foreign Contact 1 told him that the Russians "have dirt on her," meaning Clinton, and that "they have thousands of emails."

b. PAPADOPOULOS, however, claimed to have received this information prior to joining the Campaign. He told Agents: "This isn't like [Foreign Contact 1 was] messaging me while I'm in April with Trump."

c. PAPADOPOULOS stated that he did not tell anyone on the Campaign about the "dirt" on Clinton because he "didn't even know [if] that was real or fake or he was just guessing because I don't know, because the guy [Foreign Contact 1] seems like he's ... he's a nothing."

Laid out this way, the description of the false statements makes the import of them far more clear (import that the Special Counsel seems to want to obscure for now). Papadopoulos lied about the circumstances of his conversations with Mifsud – the FBI appears to have believed when they arrested him in July – as part of a story to explain why, after having heard about dirt in the form of thousands of emails from Hillary, he didn't tell anyone else on the campaign about them. Laid out like this, it's clear Papadopoulos was trying to hide both *when*

he learned about the emails (just three days before the DNC did, as it turns out, not much earlier as he seems to have suggested in January), but also how important he took those emails to be (which in his false story, he tied to to a false story about how credible he found Mifsud to be).

FBI found those lies to be significant enough to arrest him over because they obscured whether he had told anyone on the campaign that the Russians had dirt in the form of Hillary emails.

To be sure, nothing in any of the documents released so far answer the questions that Papadopoulos surely spent two months explaining to the FBI: *whether* he told the campaign (almost certainly yes, or he wouldn't have lied in the first place) and *when* (with the big import being on whether that information trickled up to Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner before they attended a meeting on June 9, 2016 in hopes of obtaining such dirt).

I'm sure that's intentional. You gotta keep everyone else guessing about what Mueller knows.

But we can be pretty sure what the answers are.

Between the time they arrested Papadopoulos and the time he pled guilty, he became more forthcoming about his extensive efforts to broker a meeting between the campaign and the Russians, something Mifsud made clear was a high priority for the Russians. Mueller is perfectly happy – after securing the testimony of people like Clovis – to let everyone know that.

But Mueller is still hiding the pretty obvious answer to the question about whether Papadopoulos lied about Mifsud specifically to hide that he told people on the campaign that Russians had emails to deal in conjunction with such meetings.