

OZ ON PAPADOPOULOS

I want to use this thread to review certain details about recent George Papadopoulos disclosures.

NYT's sources cannot be exclusively FBI

First, GOPers have suggested that the NYT story disclosing that Papadopoulos got drunk and told the Australian Ambassador, Alexander Downer, that Russians had dirt on Hillary is an FBI attempt to relieve pressure on Mueller by providing a different explanation for the start of the investigation. But that can't be true, at least not entirely. Here's how the NYT describes their sources:

four current and former American and foreign officials with direct knowledge of the Australians' role

That is, at least one (and possibly several) of their sources is a foreign official, presumably Australian. The description of these sources as "officials" could also mean they're current or former members of Congress.

The story also provides a really odd statement about Papadopoulos' lawyers' involvement, saying only that his lawyers declined to provide a statement.

In response to questions, Mr. Papadopoulos's lawyers declined to provide a statement.

This admits the possibility they said something off the record.

Finally, remember that Papadopoulos' fiancée told ABC that he had a bigger role in the campaign than Trump defenders have claimed; she also said she had emails to prove it.

Mangiante said Papadopoulos “set up meetings with leaders all over the world” for senior campaign officials. He was “constantly in touch with high-level officials in the campaign,” she added. That included direct communication with now-former senior Trump advisers Steve Bannon and Michael Flynn, Mangiante said, adding that she had seen correspondence supporting the assertion.

[snip]

Mangiante said that while she is eager to offer proof that Papadopoulos was a campaign insider, she has been instructed by attorneys to not provide emails or other possible evidence to reporters.

[snip]

She said she believes he will now have a firm place in history as “the first domino in the Russia investigation.”

If I were an enterprising NYT journalist, I’d certainly try to convince her to offer that proof, especially any proof she had that Papadopoulos was “the first domino” in the investigation – the story offered by the NYT.

So there’s no reason to believe the NYT story comes entirely – or even partially – from the FBI. It likely came from Papadopoulos and Australians, perhaps confirmed by former members of Congress.

Turnbull to Trump: Don’t blame me for the investigation

Meanwhile, the Australians are trying to dodge blame for this story coming out, accusing Americans of leaking Downer’s role.

It is also understood there is now annoyance and frustration in Canberra that the High Commissioner to Britain Alexander Downer has been outed through leaks by US officials as the source of information that played a role in sparking an FBI probe into the Trump campaign's dealings with Moscow.

Note, Downer is in the process of being replaced as Ambassador to the UK, so he may have some reason to make life difficult for Turnbull, who has a trip to the US scheduled for February. That said, the Age cites several other people, both at CSIS, who appear to have some familiarity with the story who could also be NYT's sources. And even in a piece trying to blame Americans for this story, it reveals that Ambassador to the US Joe Hockey personally worked with the FBI on this tip.

Aussie sources narrowing in on which emails were discussed?

While I don't take it to be definitive (because a lot of journalists, even in the US, don't track these details well enough), the Age claims that Papadopoulos described the emails as "hacked Democratic Party emails."

In May 2016, Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos told Mr Downer over drinks at an upscale London wine bar that the Russians had a dirt file on rival candidate Hillary Clinton in the form of hacked Democratic Party emails.

If that is indeed what Papadopoulos told Downer, it would be a key detail in the case against Trump's team, because it would mean they likely learned specifically what Russia had hacked and leaked.

Delayed reporting

The Age explains why the Aussies didn't report the conversation to the FBI right away (though, again, I'm not sure this is meant as definitive).

Downer conveyed the conversation to Canberra via an official cable, though apparently not immediately – perhaps because he did not take the 28-year-old adviser's claims altogether seriously until the hacked emails were released by Wikileaks in late July.

If this reporting is correct, it suggests the delay came on Downer's side, with Hockey informing the FBI in timely fashion after Downer submitted his report on an official cable. I'd still like to know why the Guccifer 2.0 releases didn't elicit any reporting. After all, it's possible that Downer only reported the conversation when it became clear their wayward citizen, Julian Assange, was acting in a way that might affect the elections.

In a follow-up post I'm going to look at some timing details in the Papadopoulos documents.