

# THE FROTHING RIGHT PREFERS OLEG DERIPASKA AS AN FBI ASSET TO CHRISTOPHER STEELE

If John Solomon were still doing journalism, the lede of this piece would be that the FBI interviewed Oleg Deripaska in September 2016, even as the Russian operation to tamper in the election was ongoing.

Two months before Trump was elected president, Deripaska was in New York as part of Russia's United Nations delegation when three FBI agents awakened him in his home; at least one agent had worked with Deripaska on the aborted effort to rescue Levinson. During an hour-long visit, the agents posited a theory that Trump's campaign was secretly colluding with Russia to hijack the U.S. election.

"Deripaska laughed but realized, despite the joviality, that they were serious," the lawyer said. "So he told them in his informed opinion the idea they were proposing was false. 'You are trying to create something out of nothing,' he told them." The agents left though the FBI sought more information in 2017 from the Russian, sources tell me. Waldman declined to say if Deripaska has been in contact with the FBI since Sept, 2016.

Telling that story would make it clear that the FBI pursued an investigation into Russian tampering at the source, by questioning Russians suspected of being involved. Republicans *should* be happy to know the FBI was using such an approach.

But Solomon isn't doing journalism anymore – even his employer now acknowledges that that's true. After complaints about his propaganda (in part, attacking the Mueller investigation) he has been relegated to the opinion section of The Hill.

Not before his last effort to impugn Mueller, though, claiming that because the FBI used Deripaska as a go-between in a 2009 effort to rescue Robert Levinson, Mueller is prevented from investigating him now.

In 2009, when Mueller ran the FBI, the bureau asked Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska to spend millions of his own dollars funding an FBI-supervised operation to rescue a retired FBI agent, Robert Levinson, captured in Iran while working for the CIA in 2007.

[snip]

Deripaska's lawyer said the Russian ultimately spent \$25 million assembling a private search and rescue team that worked with Iranian contacts under the FBI's watchful eye. Photos and videos indicating Levinson was alive were uncovered.

Then in fall 2010, the operation secured an offer to free Levinson. The deal was scuttled, however, when the State Department became uncomfortable with Iran's terms, according to Deripaska's lawyer and the Levinson family.

FBI officials confirmed State hampered their efforts.

"We tried to turn over every stone we could to rescue Bob, but every time we started to get close, the State Department seemed to always get in the way," said Robyn Gritz, the retired agent who supervised the Levinson case in 2009, when Deripaska first cooperated, but who left for another

position in 2010 before the Iranian offer arrived. "I kept Director Mueller and Deputy Director [John] Pistole informed of the various efforts and operations, and they offered to intervene with State, if necessary."

FBI officials ended the operation in 2011, concerned that Deripaska's Iranian contacts couldn't deliver with all the U.S. infighting.

Even assuming Solomon's tale – which is that offered by Deripaska's lawyer – is factually correct, what this means is that the FBI used Deripaska as an asset, just like they've used Christopher Steele as a source. Of course, using ex-MI6 officer Steele, for the frothy right, is a heinous crime. But using a Russian billionaire, according to a propagandist who has been regurgitating Trump spin since he was elected, is heroic. Perhaps that's why a Trump crony, Bryan Lanza, is also trying to help Deripaska's company beat the sanctions recently imposed on him.

Of course, Solomon doesn't consider the possibility that FBI and State balked in 2011 because Deripaska himself had proven unreliable. Which would explain a lot of what transpired in the years since. Nor does he consider – nor has the frothy right generally – the possibility that any damning disinformation in the Steele dossier ended up there in part via Deripaska.

Certainly, Deripaska's own asset, Paul Manafort, seemed prepared to capitalize on that disinformation.

As the Mueller investigation has proceeded, we've gotten just a glimpse of how the spooks trade in information, involving allies like Steele and Stefan Halper, and more sordid types like George Nader (who appears to have traded information to get out of consequences for a child porn habit), Felix Sater (who claims, dubiously, to be offering full cooperation with

Mueller based on years of working off his own mob ties), and even Deripaska.

Curiously, it's Deripaska that propagandists spewing the White House line seem most interested in celebrating.

Update: Chuck Ross did a story based on Solomon's report, and *did* note that the FBI questioned Deripaska in September 2016. But, fresh off complaining that I had called him out for doing this in another story, turns a story about Manafort and his long-time Russian associate into a story about the dossier (in which Deripaska is not named).

In September 2016, FBI agents approached Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska to ask about allegations President Donald Trump's campaign was colluding with the Russian government to influence the election, according to a new report.

Deripaska, who was at his apartment in New York City for the interview, waved the three agents off of the collusion theory, saying there was no coordination between the Trump team and Kremlin, The Hill reported Monday.

The agents, one of whom Deripaska knew from a previous FBI case, said they believed former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was involved in the conspiracy, an allegation made in the infamous Steele dossier.

Ross then continues on, dossier ... dossier ... dossier ... dossier ... dossier, including this claim not supported by any public evidence.

It is also an indicator of how they investigated some of the allegations made in the dossier.

By the time September 2016 rolled around, it had been two months since Deripaska go-between Konstantin Kilimnik emailed (probably via a

PRISM service) Manafort about paying off his debt to Deripaska by giving inside dirt on the campaign. There were meetings in NYC. In September 2016, Alex Van der Zwaan was actively covering up the ongoing efforts to hide Manafort's involvement in Ukraine's persecution of Yulia Tymoshenko, and doing so in the servers of a law firm going to pains to clear their name.

And all that's before you consider what hasn't been shared with Congress and leaked to the press.

Meanwhile, the only mention of Deripaska in the dossier by September was an undated July report claiming that Manafort was happy to have the focus on Russia because the Trump corruption in China was worse (and also suggesting that Manafort used Carter Page as a go-between with Russia); given reports about when Steele shared reports with the FBI, it's not clear the Bureau would have had that yet. In any case, the more extensive discussion of Manafort comes later, after the Deripaska interview.

Had Manafort been a surveillance focus solely for the dossier (something that wasn't even true for Page), you'd have heard that by now.

Every time Mueller submits a filing explaining how the Manafort Ukraine investigation came out of the Russia investigation, he has mentioned Deripaska. Trump's own team leaked questions suggesting that Mueller is sitting on information that Manafort reached out to Russians asking for help (and Deripaska was among those we know he was in touch with).

And yet, after competently noting that the FBI interviewed Deripaska, Ross made the crazy pants suggestion that any suspicion of Manafort would arise from the dossier and not abundant other known evidence.