

OLEG DERIPASKA PROBABLY FED BOTH PARTIES DIRT IN 2016 ELECTION

As I disclosed last month, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.

In this post arguing that some if not much of the Steele dossier was disinformation planted by the Russians, I noted that Chuck Grassley seemed to believe Oleg Deripaska leaked the dossier to BuzzFeed.

Grassley seems to think Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska was in on the loop of this. Deripaska is important to this story not just for because he owns Paul Manafort (he figures heavily in this worthwhile profile of Manafort). But also because he's got ties, through Rick Davis, to John McCain. This was just rehashed last year by Circa, which has been running interference on this story.

There is a report that Manafort laid out precisely the strategy focusing on the dossier that is still the main focus of GOP pushback on the charges against Trump and his campaign (and Manafort).

It was about a week before Trump's inauguration, and Manafort wanted to brief Trump's team on alleged inaccuracies in a recently released dossier of memos written by a former British spy for Trump's

opponents that alleged compromising ties among Russia, Trump and Trump's associates, including Manafort.

"On the day that the dossier came out in the press, Paul called Reince, as a responsible ally of the president would do, and said this story about me is garbage, and a bunch of the other stuff in there seems implausible," said a person close to Manafort.

[snip]

According to a GOP operative familiar with Manafort's conversation with Priebus, Manafort suggested the errors in the dossier discredited it, as well as the FBI investigation, since the bureau had reached a tentative (but later aborted) agreement to pay the former British spy to continue his research and had briefed both Trump and then-President Barack Obama on the dossier.

Manafort told Priebus that the dossier was tainted by inaccuracies and by the motivations of the people who initiated it, whom he alleged were Democratic activists and donors working in cahoots with Ukrainian government officials, according to the operative.

If Deripaska learned of the dossier — and obtained a copy from McCain or someone close to him — it would make it very easy to lay out the strategy we're currently seeing.

It would make sense that someone working on behalf of Deripaska would leak the dossier and the Paul Manafort, working on Deripaska's instructions, orchestrated the strategy we've seen since, attempting to discredit the entire Russian investigation by discrediting the dossier.

I spent much of that post suggesting other ways that Russians may have learned of the Steele dossier project so as to be able to insert disinformation in it, including via Fusion GPS' clients Natalia Veselnitskaya or Rinat Akhmetshin. I've since suggested Democrats may have been discussing hiring Steele while GRU's hackers were still in the Democrat's email server.

But the right wing propagandists' latest obsession offers a far more alarming suggestion: that it was Deripaska from the start who learned of the dossier and arranged to have it filled with disinformation.

Of the several stories on former DOJ organized crime head Bruce Ohr's call logs, is this one from Byron York. It describes Christopher Steele's discussions with Ohr in early 2016, including efforts to pitch Deripaska as a useful source on organized crime who therefore should be permitted a visa to the US.

The emails, given to Congress by the Justice Department, began on Jan. 12, 2016, when Steele sent Ohr a New Year's greeting. Steele brought up the case of Russian aluminum magnate Oleg Deripaska (referred to in various emails as both OD and OVD), who was at the time seeking a visa to attend an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in the United States. Years earlier, the U.S. revoked Deripaska's visa, reportedly on the basis of suspected involvement with Russian organized crime. Deripaska was close to Paul Manafort, the short-term Trump campaign chairman now on trial for financial crimes, and this year was

sanctioned in the wake of Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election.

"I heard from Adam WALDMAN [a Deripaska lawyer/lobbyist] yesterday that OD is applying for another official US visa ice [sic] APEC business at the end of February," Steele wrote in the Jan. 12 email. Steele said Deripaska was being "encouraged by the Agency guys who told Adam that the USG [United States Government] stance on [Deripaska] is softening." Steele concluded: "A positive development it seems."

And in February, Steele was very excited that Deripaska might be rehabilitated by the US government.

Steele said he was "circulating some recent sensitive Orbis reporting" on Deripaska that suggested Deripaska was not a "tool" of the Kremlin. Steele said he would send the reporting to a name that is redacted in the email, "as he has asked, for legal reasons I understand, for all such reporting be filtered through him (to you at DoJ and others)."

Byron goes to great lengths to assume all further conversations are about Trump and not Deripaska. He describes many of these conversations as taking place on Skype, which was not yet encrypted, confirming my belief (based in part on personal experience) that DOJ and FBI have truly shoddy operational security.

But he's right about one thing: Steele relied on Deripaska for intelligence, and even while he was screaming about Trump's compromise by the Russians, he was under the impression that Deripaska, who virtually owned Donald Trump's campaign manager during most of the time Steele was digging dirt on Trump, had been purified of

his corrupt ways and influence by the Kremlin.

If this is what it appears, it should be an opportunity for both sides to step back and agree, Jeebus christmas did Russia ever pawn our collective asses in 2016!, and move on to cooperating on ways to recover from all that.

That won't happen, of course, because both sides still believe the parties were in charge of dealing the dirt, and not Russia, dealing it on both sides.

Update: For those asking for the case on disinformation, here's a very dated post. The dossier was, on the hack-and-leak, way behind contemporary reporting and flat out embarrassingly wrong on a number of points. Per Glenn Simpson, Hillary used the dossier to decide how to respond to the hack, which would have (and may have) led her to be complacent. As for the rest, some might be rumor (such as who Page met in Russia, even though who he actually met was public). But other stuff—notably blaming Gubarev for what Prigozhin was known to be doing—almost certainly also has to be disinformation.

Update: One other point. Almost everyone in this thread appears to be missing the import of the dossier being used to feed disinformation, if that's the case. In the same way it is important to know how Russia fed disinformation via Internet trolls and the press, it is important to understand how they fed disinformation directly to the people who were responding to the attack. Understanding that will remain critical going forward, in part because without it we won't understand how Russia succeeded.