

THE ODD PROJECTION BY THE STEELE DOSSIER'S CLAIMED ALFA BANK SOURCE

Way back in March 2017, I noted that there was a clear feedback loop behind the Steele dossier. As part of that post, I noted how weird the single report on Alfa Bank in the dossier was. Rather than writing damning information about Trump – which was the entire point of the dossier – it instead described the relationship between Putin and a guy named Oleg Govorun, who the dossier claimed worked for Alfa in the 1990s (that date was wrong but not the affiliation).

Consider report 112, dated September 14. It pertains to “Kremlin-Alpha Group Cooperation.” It doesn’t have much point in a dossier aiming to hurt Trump. None of his associates nor the Russian DNC hack are mentioned. It does suggest that that Alfa Group had a “bag carrier ... to deliver large amounts of illicit cash to” Putin when he was Deputy Mayor of St. Petersburg, though describes the current relationship as “both carrot and stick,” relying in part on kompromat pertaining to Putin’s activities while Deputy Mayor. It makes no allegations of current bribery, though says mutual leverage helps Putin “do his political bidding.”

As I said, there’s no point to have that Alfa Bank passage in a dossier on Trump. But it does serve, in its disclosure, to add a data point (albeit not a very interesting one) to the Alfa Server story that (we now know) FBI was already reviewing but which hadn’t been pitched to the press yet. In Corn’s piece, he mentions the Alfa Bank story but not the report on Putin’s ties to it. It may be

in there because someone – perhaps already in possession of the Alfa Bank allegations – asked Steele to lay out more about Alfa’s ties with Putin.

Here’s one reason that’s interesting, though. Even aside from all the other reasons the Alfa story is dodgy, it was deliberately packaged for press consumption. Rather than the at least 19 servers that Trump’s spam email was pinging, it revealed just two: Alfa Bank and Spectrum Health (the latter of which got spun, anachronistically, as a DeVos organization that thus had to be tight with Trump). Which is to say, the Alfa story was dodgy *and packaged* by yet unknown people.

Even though the report didn’t say anything really damning about current Alfa bank personnel, the oligarchs who own the bank have nevertheless engaged in protracted lawfare that seems set on ruining those behind the dossier. As part of the lawsuit against Fusion GPS, the Alfa oligarchs recently submitted declarations from the presumed sources of Igor Danchenko, Steele’s primary subsource. (And yes, two of these declarations claim to be Subsource 4, in both English and Russian.)

Subsource 1: Sergey Vladimirovich Abyshev

Subsource 2: Ivan Mikhailovich Vorontsov

Subsource 3: Olga Aleksandrovna Galkina

Subsource 4: Alexey Sergeyevich Dundich

Subsource 4: Ivan Ivanovich Kurilla

Subsource 5: Lyudmila Nikolayevna Podobedova

With the exception of Galkina, all of these purported subsources state that they have not read the dossier *except* for the Alfa Bank report, and then assert that they were not a source for the dossier. For example, this is how Dundich disclaimed being a source for the

dossier as a whole, which he is sure is low-quality, while admitting he only read one report from it.

I am aware of the Steele Dossier ("Dossier"), but I have never read it save for Company Intelligence Report 112 ("CIR 112").

[snip]

In contrast to what Mr. Danchenko told U.S. authorities, I was not a "source" of information for the Dossier. I never gave Mr. Danchenko (or anyone else) any information associated with the contents of the Dossier, including CIR 112, Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, Mr. Khan, or Alfa. I believe that Mr. Danchenko framed me as Sub-Source 4 to add credibility to his low-quality work, which is not based on real information or in-depth analysis.

Even Galkina, who stated that she had read the dossier when it was published by BuzzFeed, issues a non-denial denial, stating only that when she traveled to the US in 2016 she and Danchenko did not discuss anything about the dossier (the FBI interviewed her in August 2017, which she doesn't mention here, and she does travel to the States, so she'd be at risk of prosecution if she said anything conflicting with her prior statements or material known to have been obtained from her via FISA 702).

Mr. Danchenko and I met once in 2016. In connection with my job at Servers.com, I traveled to the United States in the spring of 2016 to participate in the Game Developers Conference event and investigate the prospects of running a public relations campaign for the company in the United States. I asked Mr. Danchenko to assist those efforts, and he introduced me to a third party, Charles Dolan, whom he thought could help. Mr. Danchenko and I did not

discuss anything related to the Dossier or its contents during this meeting.

But she doesn't describe her communications with Danchenko via phone and text, which is how Danchenko said he got some of the most important stories sourced to her. And a later denial in her declaration seems to be a (poorly translated) denial limited to providing information specific to the Alfa Bank materials, not a denial of providing other information in it.

I did not provide Mr. Danchenko (or anyone else) with any information mentioned in the Dossier and that was connected to Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, Mr. Khan, or Alfa. I believe that Mr. Danchenko identified me as Sub-Source 3 to create more authoritativeness for his work.

In short, none of these declarations could be denials they provided Danchenko information in the dossier, because the one person who has actually read it doesn't deny she did provide information (that said, her information was some of the most likely to be deliberate disinformation).

These declarations, then, don't do what a filing attempting to use them to force Danchenko to set for a deposition claims they do, making general denials of being a source for the dossier.

Even more importantly, Mr. Danchenko's claimed sub-sources have now denied, under penalty of perjury, providing Mr. Danchenko with information related to the contents of the dossier generally or with respect to CIR 112 and Plaintiffs specifically.⁷

Galkina's the only one who'd be able to make such a denial, and she doesn't do so in her declaration.

But I find Abyshev's denials of interest for other reasons. He admits that he and Vorontsov met with Danchenko on June 15, 2016 and claims that Danchenko got very drunk (earlier he claimed that Danchenko had a drinking problem for a year or two after the compilation of the dossier).

I met with Mr. Danchenko once in 2016, the year that, as I understand, the Dossier was prepared. On June 15, 2016, Mr. Danchenko, Ivan Vorontsov, and I met in Moscow. I recall that Mr. Danchenko appeared very intoxicated and was not able to maintain a conversation. During the meeting, I spoke with Mr. Vorontsov about investments and finance. I do not recall any conversation related to the contents of the Dossier, including allegations related to CIR 112, Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, Mr. Khan, or Alfa. This was my last meeting with Mr. Danchenko.

He further admits that Danchenko raised Alfa on a phone call with him at some time that year, but claims he told Danchenko the subject was inappropriate and he should go find out the answers to the question himself.

On one occasion, during a phone call in 2016, Mr. Danchenko asked me how close Mr. Fridman is to President Putin and whether Mr. Fridman had met with President Putin in 2016. I did not respond to Mr. Danchenko's questions. Instead, I made it clear that the questions were inappropriate and that Mr. Danchenko should seek out answers to them himself.

This denial comes on top of Abyshev's more general denial about being a source for the report in question.

Contrary to what Mr. Danchenko told U.S.

authorities, I was not a “source” of the Dossier. I never provided Mr. Danchenko (or anyone else) with any information related to the contents of the Dossier, including CIR 112, Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, Mr. Khan, or Alfa.

On this point, Abyshev’s denial is the only one that is really pertinent, because he’s the only one that Danchenko mentioned in his FBI interview in conjunction with this report (the FBI interviewed Danchenko two more times after this, but those interviews must not be helpful for Trump, because Republicans have never demanded those reports be declassified).

(U//FOUO) St. Petersburg & Dossier Report 2016/112

(U//FOUO) Primary Subsource explained that the overall subject of this report - Govorun, Alfa Bank - has been a topic he Primary Subsource has been working for over ten years. It hearkens back to his time SIA with USPER, where they would hypothesize about relationships between Russian corruption and the Alfa Fellowship.

(U//FOUO) As an aside, Primary Subsource told another corruption-related story wherein Source 1 told Primary Subsource that [someone had told him] about how Marat Bashirov, who had been head of the Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) and has been sanctioned by the EU, left the LPR after 5-6 months to become a top lobbyist for Renova Group - specifically Renova’s arm dealing with heating and power distribution. Bashirov is a Moscow-based lobbyist who is working to get the EU sanctions lifted.

While Danchenko seems to suggest that Source 1, Abyshev, was involved in this story, he doesn’t actually say that. Instead, he explained that he had been working on this story for ten years and that Source 1 had provided him other information on corruption unrelated to Alfa.

That’s interesting, not least because Vorontsov actually said that if you wanted information about the oligarchs running Alfa, you’d look outside of Russia (probably London).

I do not believe that Mr. Danchenko asked anyone inside Russia about Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, or Mr. Khan. If Mr. Danchenko were interested in those individuals, he would have sought information from people living outside Russia who would have greater knowledge of Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, and Mr. Khan.

In Vorontsov's opinion, this is the part of the dossier for which Danchenko wouldn't *need* a source in Russia.

Here's where things get interesting. Like everyone save Galkina, Abyshev says the only part of the dossier he read was the Alfa Bank report.

I am aware of the so-called Steele Dossier ("Dossier"), but I have never read it save for the Russian translation of Company Intelligence Report 112 ("CIR 112"), which raises various allegations about Mikhail Fridman, Petr Aven, German Khan, and Alfa.

Having not read the dossier, however, Abyshev claims that Danchenko's job was to substantiate stories his clients want him to tell.

My understanding of Mr. Danchenko's information-gathering process is that he first receives a story from his clients that he then must substantiate in any manner possible

This actually conflicts with Danchenko's FBI interview, at least part of which Abyshev claims to have read, in which he says he tried to find information on Paul Manafort but failed to find much.

More interesting still, Abyshev offers up this explanation for what Danchenko was doing.

I infer from my interactions with Mr. Danchenko, from that 2016 telephone conversation, and from the content of what was ultimately published in CIR 112, that Mr. Danchenko had a working theory regarding the relationship between Alfa and its shareholders on the one hand, and President Putin on the other, and that Mr. Danchenko was fishing for information that would fit that preconceived narrative.

I believe it is likely that someone ensured that CIR 112 was included in the Dossier in an effort to persuade U.S. authorities to sanction Mr. Fridman, Mr. Aven, Mr. Khan, and Alfa.

I find that interesting – first, because decades old allegations of corruption would not substantiate a sanctions designation. Abyshev's claims make no sense given the content that ended up in the report.

More interesting still is how closely Abyshev's claims match Petr Aven's testimony to Mueller's team about how Putin pressured him to try to set up a back channel with Trump's team during the transition by warning that Alfa would be sanctioned in the aftermath of the 2016 election.

Aven told the Office that he is one of approximately 50 wealthy Russian businessmen who regularly meet with Putin in the Kremlin; these 50 men are often referred to as "oligarchs."⁹⁷⁷ Aven told the Office that he met on a quarterly basis with Putin, including in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2016, shortly after the U.S. presidential election.⁹⁷⁸ Aven said that he took these meetings seriously and understood that any suggestions or critiques that Putin made during these meetings were implicit directives, and that there would be consequences for A ven if he did not follow through.⁹⁷⁹ As was typical, the 2016 Q4 meeting with Putin was preceded by a preparatory meeting with Putin's chief of staff, Anton Vaino.⁹⁸⁰

According to Aven, at his Q4 2016 one-on-one meeting with Putin,⁹⁸¹ Putin raised the prospect that the United States would impose additional sanctions on Russian interests, including sanctions against Aven and/or Alfa-Bank.⁹⁸² Putin suggested that Aven

needed to take steps to protect himself and Alfa-Bank.⁹⁸³ Aven also testified that Putin spoke of the difficulty faced by the Russian government in getting in touch with the incoming Trump Administration.⁹⁸⁴ According to Aven, Putin indicated that he did not know with whom formally to speak and generally did not know the people around the President-Elect.⁹⁸⁵

Aven [grand jury redaction] told Putin he would take steps to protect himself and the Alfa-Bank shareholders from potential sanctions, and one of those steps would be to try to reach out to the incoming Administration to establish a line of communication.⁹⁸⁶

[snip]

In December 2016, weeks after the one-on-one meeting with Putin described in Volume I, Section IV.B.1.b, *supra*, Petr Aven attended what he described as a separate “all-hands” oligarch meeting between Putin and Russia’s most prominent businessmen. ¹¹⁶⁷ As in Aven’s one-on-one meeting, a main topic of discussion at the oligarch meeting in December 2016 was the prospect of forthcoming U.S. economic sanctions. ¹¹⁶⁸

After the December 2016 all-hands meeting, Aven tried to establish a connection to the Trump team. Aven instructed Richard Burt to make contact with the incoming Trump Administration. Burt was on the board of directors for LetterOne (L 1), another company headed by Aven, and had done work for Alfa-Bank. ¹¹⁶⁹ Burt had previously served as U.S. ambassador to Germany and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, and one of his primary roles with Alfa-Bank and L1 was to facilitate introductions to business

I've always believed the Trump Tower server story to be an elaborate disinformation effort, which had the added benefit of drawing attention to Erik Prince but not the things that Prince was doing that were key to the Russian operation (his communications about which were done via garden variety encrypted apps). I likewise always believed that Aven's testimony might explain why Russia would craft such disinformation: not only to distract from the things that Prince and others really were doing, but to present a way to recruit Alfa's oligarchs more centrally into Russia's efforts to push back on sanctions, as oligarchs who weren't as western-focused had long been.

Here, a filing in a lawsuit attempting to make maximal advantage of whatever success Russia had feeding an old nemesis of theirs disinformation as part of the larger 2016 operation makes the same argument that (according to Aven's own testimony) Putin made to Aven, only insinuating that the argument would have come from Danchenko, not a Russian disinformation source.

Abyshev is, in addition to Danchenko's source on the pee tape (at that meeting where Abyshev says Danchenko was badly drunk), also someone Danchenko understood to have close ties to Russian intelligence who appears to have known of Danchenko's tie to Steele.