

ADAM ENTOUS' COY KIRILL DMITRIEV FLIRTATIONS

Adam Entous has a curious 15,000-word story about, “the Unraveling U.S.-Ukraine Partnership.”

As he describes, the story is based on, “more than 300 interviews with national security officials, military and intelligence officers and diplomats in Washington, Kyiv and across Europe.” Unsurprisingly, then, it has new details of Trump’s failed attempt to capitulate to Russia in a way that the President might claim was victory, such as an anecdote of how Trump came to treat Volodymyr Zelenskyy differently after Ukraine’s president chatted up a former beauty pageant wife of a Trump friend.

But this would not be a replay of the Oval Office blowup of nearly six months before.

Mr. Trump would remark to aides that when he owned the Miss Universe pageant, the Ukrainian contestants were often the most beautiful. Now, he blurted out, “Ukrainian women are beautiful.”

“I know, I married one,” Mr. Zelensky responded.

Mr. Trump explained that an old friend, the Las Vegas mogul Phil Ruffin, had married a former Miss Ukraine, Oleksandra Nikolayenko; the president had met her through the Miss Universe pageant. Now, he called Mr. Ruffin, who put his wife on the phone. Mr. Trump did the same for Mr. Zelensky, and for the next 10 to 15 minutes, the room went on pause as the two spoke in Ukrainian.

Ms. Nikolayenko talked about her family, still in Odesa. “He was surprised they

didn't leave," she recalled of Mr. Zelensky. "My father wouldn't leave. He's an old-school officer. And he believes that if he leaves, there will be nothing to come back to. He wants to be with his home, with his land, with his country."

"You could feel the room change," said an official who was there. "The temperature dropped. Everyone laughed. What it did was create a human connection. It was kind of a mind meld. It humanized Zelensky with Trump."

A month later, in New York for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Trump called Mr. Zelensky "a great man" who was "putting up a hell of a fight." Later, on Truth Social, he wrote that after coming to understand "the Ukraine/Russia Military and Economic situation," he believed that "Ukraine, with the support of the European Union, is in a position to fight and WIN all of Ukraine back in its original form."

Even most of the president's top advisers were startled by what seemed like an abrupt about-face. But according to one adviser, he was trying to shock the Russians.

There are new details of how CIA sustained its ties to Ukraine even as Whiskey Pete Hegseth betrayed them.

But there are at least two enormous gaps which would be central to explaining why Trump is betraying the Western order to ally with Russia.

First, there's no discussion of Trump's venality, and barely any discussion of the goodies Russia has offered to get Trump to betray Ukraine.

Worse, Entous minimizes Russia's serial

electoral assistance to Trump. Entous briefly describes the Russian investigation – not contesting Trump’s use of the term “hoax” – when explaining why (Entous claimed) Trump’s aides were reluctant to begin negotiations with Russia during the transition without sanction from Joe Biden.

Mr. Trump’s aides knew he was eager to get started, but they were also aware of the shadow that outreach to Russia had cast over his first term. **Then, several aides’ undisclosed contacts with the Russians before the inauguration had become part of the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election. Mr. Trump took to bitterly calling it “the Russia, Russia, Russia hoax.”**

This time, his aides decided, they needed official cover.

“Look, we’ve been getting all kinds of outreach,” Mr. Trump’s pick for national security adviser, Michael Waltz, told his Biden administration counterpart, Jake Sullivan. “We’d like to go ahead and start testing some of these, because Trump wants to move quickly.”

And so Mr. Waltz made a request, never before reported, for a letter of permission from Mr. Biden. [my emphasis]

And he once again doesn’t probe Trump’s narrative when describing how Trump blamed Ukraine for Russia’s 2016 interference.

There would be much tortured back story to contend with. During his first term, Mr. Trump had come to blame Ukraine, not the Kremlin, for the 2016 election interference that spawned the Russia investigation. And it was his effort to have Ukraine investigate the Bidens that led to his first impeachment. In meetings, according to five aides, Mr.

Trump would sometimes say of Mr. Zelensky, "He's a motherfucker."

If you want to explain why Trump continues to claim to believe Russia's lies, you would need to unpack why he would have either the political or psychological incentive to tell such lies about 2016.

You might also want to explain that, in addition to their 2016 election interference on Trump's behalf, Russia *also* provided Trump electoral help in 2020 (in the form of Andrei Derkach's outreach to Rudy Giuliani) and 2024 (which included at least more Derkach interference and a propaganda campaign targeted Tim Walz).

Why is Trump switching sides? Well maybe we should consider that we still don't know how much help Russia gave him last year? Maybe we should consider why Nikolay Patrushev insisted that Trump "will be obliged to fulfill" the obligations Trump incurred to "certain forces" that helped him win? Why is Trump switching sides? I can't imagine.

With that in mind, consider how Entous introduces Kirill Dmitriev, the central player in massaging Trump (and Steve Witkoff's) venality to get them to flip sides.

Dmitriev is first introduced 14¶¶ *after* the paragraph describing how, "several aides' undisclosed contacts with the Russians before the inauguration had become part of the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election." Kirill Dmitriev's origin story in this 15,000-word story dates to the time, in 2021, when Amos Hochstein tried to stave off Russia's invasion.

In secret, a close Biden adviser, Amos Hochstein, had also tried to forestall invasion through talks with the chief of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, Kirill Dmitriev.

Is this some secret explanation for Trump's nonsense claim that, had he been President in 2022, Russia wouldn't have invaded Ukraine? Did Hochstein exhibit insufficient venality for Putin's needs?

Whatever the case, when Entous returns to Dmitriev another 15~~99~~ later – the chronology so far is: Mike Waltz tries to get Joe Biden's blessing to negotiate during the transition, which is the context for the Hochstein mention, but fails, and meanwhile even though Trump's aides said they wouldn't negotiate during the transition because of what happened in 2016, lo-and-behold, Steve Witkoff *is!!!* – the only specific history he invokes is that brief “flirt[ation] with Hochstein, before describing that Dmitriev flirts with everyone, though without providing details.

Mr. Dmitriev hadn't only flirted briefly with the Biden administration. He'd had repeated flirtations with Trumpworld and come to know the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

A month into his job as Middle East envoy, Mr. Witkoff traveled to Riyadh to meet with the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, about the war in Gaza. The crown prince was aware of Mr. Trump's campaign pledge to quickly negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine, and he proffered an introduction.

“You're going to have a lot of people come to you claiming to have a line into President Putin,” the crown prince told Mr. Witkoff. And Mr. Dmitriev, he added, was “the right guy. We've done business with him.” Mr. Kushner vouched for him, too.

Maybe this is the work of deceitful editors, but the silences in this narrative are stunning.

Dmitriev “hadn't only flirted briefly with the Biden administration; he'd had repeated

flirtations with Trumpworld.” The substance of those flirtations is absolutely central to this story. He had flirted, first, with Jared’s hedgeie buddy Rick Gerson, who knew enough that it would be awkward to carry out such discussions during the transition.

When Dmitriev and Gerson met, they principally discussed potential joint ventures between Gerson’s hedge fund and RDIF.¹¹⁰¹ Dmitriev was interested in improved economic cooperation between the United States and Russia and asked Gerson who he should meet with in the incoming Administration who would be helpful towards this goal.¹¹⁰² Gerson replied that he would try to figure out the best way to arrange appropriate introductions, but noted that confidentiality would be required because of the sensitivity of holding such meetings before the new Administration took power, and before Cabinet nominees had been confirmed by the Senate.¹¹⁰³ Gerson said he would ask Kushner and Michael Flynn who the “key person or people” were on the topics of reconciliation with Russia, joint security concerns, and economic matters.¹¹⁰⁴

Then, via child molester George Nader, Dmitriev met with Eric Prince in the Seychelles, about which meeting both Prince and Steve Bannon mysteriously lost their communications.

Working both channels, Dmitriev pitched a plan not dissimilar from the one he’s pursuing now. Via Gerson, he pitched it to *Kushner*.

Dmitriev told Gerson that he had been tasked by Putin to develop and execute a reconciliation plan between the United States and Russia. He noted in a text message to Gerson that if Russia was “approached with respect and willingness to understand our position, we can have

Major Breakthroughs quickly.”¹¹⁰⁵ Gerson and Dmitriev exchanged ideas in December 2016 about what such a reconciliation plan would include.¹¹⁰⁶ Gerson told the Office that the Transition Team had not asked him to engage in these discussions with Dmitriev, and that he did so on his own initiative and as a private citizen.¹¹⁰⁷

On January 9, 2017, the same day he asked Nader whether meeting Prince would be worthwhile, Dmitriev sent his biography to Gerson and asked him if he could “share it with Jared (or somebody else very senior in the team) – so that they know that we are focused from our side on improving the relationship and my boss asked me to play a key role in that.”¹¹⁰⁸

[snip]

On January 16, 2017, Dmitriev consolidated the ideas for U.S.-Russia reconciliation that he and Gerson had been discussing into a two-page document that listed five main points: (1) jointly fighting terrorism; (2) jointly engaging in anti-weapons of mass destruction efforts; (3) developing “win-win” economic and investment initiatives; (4) maintaining an honest, open, and continual dialogue regarding issues of disagreement; and (5) ensuring proper communication and trust by “key people” from each country.¹¹¹¹ On January 18, 2017, Gerson gave a copy of the document to Kushner.¹¹¹² Kushner had not heard of Dmitriev at that time.¹¹¹³ Gerson explained that Dmitriev was the head of RDIF, and Gerson may have alluded to Dmitriev’s being well connected.¹¹¹⁴ Kushner placed the document in a file and said he would get it to the right people.¹¹¹⁵ Kushner ultimately gave one copy of the document

to Bannon and another to Rex Tillerson; according to Kushner, neither of them followed up with Kushner about it.¹¹¹⁶

Entous started his chronology with the lingering sensitivities about, “several aides’ undisclosed contacts with the Russians before the inauguration [which] become part of the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election,” but never mentioned that *Dmitriev is one of the key Russians in question* (the only other main one being Sergey Kislyak). He never mentioned that back in 2017, Dmitriev was affirmatively asking to work via Kushner.

And then when he finally got to Witkoff’s first meetings with Dmitriev, during the transition in spite of every one else’s concerns about a repeat of 2016, ... Kushner is already there, vouching for the guy who attempted to broker a very same kind of deal in 2017.

Dmitriev had “come to know the president’s son-in-law Jared Kushner,” Entous reveals, but doesn’t say how. He describes Mohammed bin Salman (whose welcome by the Trump camp was brokered by Tom Barrack, who is also one of the two guys who got Trump to “hire” Paul Manafort to work for free) offering up Dmitriev’s name to carry out a job that Witkoff does not yet have, brokering peace in Ukraine, because, “We’ve done business with him.”

Entous doesn’t describe who MbS means by “we” in this context.

He simply follows that immediately by describing that MbS’ agent Jared Kushner, “vouched for him, too.” (Read Judd Legum’s piece on how Jared’s lucrative ties to MbS make his involvement in these negotiations illegal.)

And the real story no doubt starts there, with Jared’s seeming ongoing interactions with the guy who first tried to cultivate him eight years ago.

By all means, read the story.

But as you do, keep an eye on the degree to which Entous' silences really obscure the meat of the story.