

Who is the Mastermind Behind Russiagate?

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The report ("The Dossier") that claims that Donald Trump colluded with Russia, was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign.

The company that claims that Russia hacked DNC computer servers, was paid by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign.

The FBI's counterintelligence probe into Trump's alleged connections to Russia was launched on the basis of information gathered from a report that was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign.

The surveillance of a Trump campaign member (Carter Page) was approved by a FISA court on the basis of information from a report that was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign.

The Intelligence Community Analysis or ICA was (largely or partially) based on information from a report that was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign. (more on this below)

The information that was leaked to the media alleging Russia hacking or collusion can be traced back to claims that were made in a report that was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton campaign.

The entire Russia-gate investigation rests on the "unverified and salacious" information from a dossier that was paid for by the DNC and Hillary Clinton Campaign. Here's how Stephen Cohen sums it up in a recent article at The Nation:

"Steele's dossier... was the foundational document of the Russiagate narrative...from the time its installments began to be leaked to the American media in the summer of 2016, to the US "Intelligence Community Assessment" of January 2017....the dossier and subsequent ICA report remain the underlying sources for proponents of the Russiagate narrative of "Trump-Putin collusion." ("Russia gate or Intel-gate?", The Nation)

There's just one problem with Cohen's statement, we don't really know the extent to which the dossier was used in the creation of the Intelligence Community Assessment. (The ICA was the IC's flagship analysis that was supposed to provide ironclad proof of Russian meddling in the 2016 elections.) According to some reports, the contribution was significant. Check out this excerpt from an article at Business Insider:

"Intelligence officials purposefully omitted the dossier from the public

intelligence report they released in January about Russia's election interference because they didn't want to reveal which details they had corroborated, according to CNN." ("Mueller reportedly interviewed the author of the Trump-Russia dossier — here's what it alleges, and how it aligned with reality", Business Insider)

Bottom line: Despite the denials of former-CIA Director John Brennan, the dossier may have been used in the ICA.

In the last two weeks, documents have been released that have exposed the weak underpinnings of the Russia investigation while at the same time revealing serious abuses by senior-level officials at the DOJ and FBI. The so called Nunes memo was the first to point out these abuses, but it was the 8-page "criminal referral" authored by Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley and Senator Lindsey Graham that gave credence to the claims. Here's a blurb from the document:

"It appears the FBI relied on admittedly uncorroborated information, funded by and obtained for Secretary Clinton's presidential campaign, in order to conduct surveillance of an associate of the opposing presidential candidate. It did so based on Mr. Steele's personal credibility and presumably having faith in his process of obtaining the information. But there is substantial evidence suggesting that Mr. Steele materially misled the FBI about a key aspect of his dossier efforts, one which bears on his credibility."

There it is. The FBI made a "concerted effort to conceal information from the court" in order to get a warrant to spy on a member of a rival political campaign. So -at the very least- there was an effort, on the part of the FBI and high-ranking officials at the Department of Justice, to improperly spy on members of the Trump team. And there's more. The FBI failed to mention that the dossier was paid for by the Hillary campaign and the DNC, or that the dossier's author Christopher Steele had seeded articles in the media that were being used to support the dossier's credibility (before the FISA court), or that, according to the FBI's own analysts, the dossier was "only minimally corroborated", or that Steele was a ferocious partisan who harbored a strong animus towards Trump. All of these were omitted in the FISA application which is why the FBI was able to deceive the judge. It's worth noting that intentionally deceiving a federal judge is a felony.

Most disturbing is the fact that Steele reportedly received information from friends of Hillary Clinton. (supposedly, Sidney Blumenthal and others) Here's one suggestive tidbit that appeared in the Graham-Grassley" referral:

"...Mr. Steele's memorandum states that his company "received this report from REDACTED US State Department," that the report was the second in a series, and that the report was information that came from a foreign sub-source who "is in touch with REDACTED, a contact of REDACTED, a friend of the Clintons, who passed it to REDACTED."

It is troubling enough that the Clinton campaign funded Mr. Steele's work, but that these Clinton associates were contemporaneously feeding Mr. Steele allegations raises additional concerns about his credibility." (Lifted from The Federalist)

What are we to make of this? Was Steele shaping the dossier's narrative to the specifications of his employers? Was he being coached by members of the Hillary team? How did that impact the contents of the dossier and the subsequent Russia investigation?

These are just a few of the questions Steele will undoubtedly be asked if he ever faces prosecution for lying to the FBI. But, so far, we know very little about man except that he was a former M16 agent who was paid \$160,000 for composing the dubious set of reports that make up the dossier. We don't even know if Steele's alleged contacts or intermediaries in Russia actually exist or not. Some analysts think the whole thing is a fabrication based on the fact that he hasn't worked the Russia-scene since the FSB (The Russian state-security organization that replaced the KGB) was completely overhauled. Besides, it would be extremely dangerous for a Russian to provide an M16 agent with sensitive intelligence. And what would the contact get in return? According to most accounts, Steele's sources weren't even paid, so there was little incentive for them to put themselves at risk? All of this casts more doubt on the contents of the dossier.

What is known about Steele is that he has a very active imagination and knows how to command a six-figure payoff for his unique services. We also know that the FBI continued to use him long after they knew he couldn't be trusted which suggests that he served some other purpose, like providing the agency with plausible deniability, a 'get out of jail free' card if they ever got caught surveilling US citizens without probable cause.

But that brings us to the strange case of Carter Page, a bit-player whose role in the Trump campaign was trivial at best. Page was what most people would call a "small fish", an insignificant foreign policy advisor who had minimal impact on the campaign. Congressional investigators, like Nunes, must be wondering why the FBI and DOJ devoted so much attention to someone like Page instead of going after the "big fish" like Bannon, Flynn, Kushner, Ivanka and Trump Jr., all of whom might have been able to provide damaging information on the real target, Donald Trump. Wasn't that the idea? So why waste time on Page? It doesn't make any sense, unless, of course, the others were already being surveilled by other agencies? Is that it, did the NSA and the CIA have a hand in the surveillance too?

It's a moot point, isn't it? Because now that there's evidence that senior-level officials at the DOJ and the FBI were involved in improperly obtaining warrants to spy on members of the opposite party, the investigation is going to go wherever it goes. Whatever restrictions existed before, will now be lifted. For example, this popped up in Saturday's The Hill:

"House Intelligence Committee lawmakers are in the dark about an investigation into wrongdoing at the State Department announced by Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) on Friday. ...Nunes told Fox News on Friday that, "we are in the middle of what I call phase two of our investigation. That investigation is ongoing and we continue work toward finding answers and asking the right questions to try to get to the bottom of what exactly the State Department was up to in terms of this Russia investigation."...

Since then, GOP lawmakers have been quietly buzzing about allegations that an Obama-era State Department official passed along information from allies of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that may have been used by the FBI to launch an investigation into whether the Trump campaign had improper contacts with Russia.

"I'm pretty troubled by what I read in the documents with respect to the role the State Department played in the fall of 2016, including information that was

used in a court proceeding. I am troubled by it," Gowdy told Fox News on Tuesday." ("Lawmakers in dark about 'phase two' of Nunes investigation", The Hill)

So the State Department is next in line followed by the NSA and, finally, the Russia-gate point of origin, John Brennan's CIA. Here's more background on that from Stephen Cohen's illuminating article at The Nation:

"....when, and by whom, was this Intel operation against Trump started?

In testimony to the House Intelligence Committee in May 2017, John Brennan, formerly Obama's head of the CIA, strongly suggested that he and his agency were the first, as The Washington Post put it at the time, "in triggering an FBI probe." Certainly both the Post and The New York Times interpreted his remarks in this way. Equally certain, Brennan played a central role in promoting the Russiagate narrative thereafter, briefing members of Congress privately and giving President Obama himself a top-secret envelope in early August 2016 that almost certainly contained Steele's dossier. Early on, Brennan presumably would have shared his "suspicions" and initiatives with James Clapper, director of national intelligence. FBI Director Comey... may have joined them actively somewhat later....

When did Brennan begin his "investigation" of Trump? His House testimony leaves this somewhat unclear, but, according to a subsequent Guardian article, by late 2015 or early 2016 he was receiving, or soliciting, reports from foreign intelligence agencies regarding "suspicious 'interactions' between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents."

In short, if these reports and Brennan's own testimony are to be believed, he, not the FBI, was the instigator and godfather of Russiagate." ("Russiagate or Intelgate?", Stephen Cohen, The Nation)

Regular readers of this column know that we have always believed that the Russiagate psyops originated with Brennan. Just as the CIA launched its disinformation campaigns against Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gadhafi, so too, Russia has emerged as Washington's foremost rival requiring a massive propaganda campaign to persuade the public that America faces a serious external threat. In any event, the demonizing of Russia had already begun by the time Hillary and Co. decided to hop on the bandwagon by blaming Moscow for hacking John Podesta's emails. The allegations were never persuasive, but they did provide Brennan with some cover for the massive Information Operation (IO) that began with him.

According to the Washington Times:

"It was then-CIA Director John O. Brennan, a close confidant of Mr. Obama's, who provided the information — what he termed the "basis" — for the FBI to start the counterintelligence investigation last summer....Mr. Brennan told the House Intelligence Committee on May 23 that the intelligence community was picking up tidbits on Trump associates making contacts with Russians."

It all started with Brennan. After Putin blocked Brennan's operations in both Ukraine and Syria, Brennan had every reason to retaliate and to use the tools at his disposal to demonize Putin and try to isolate Russia. The "election meddling" charges (promoted by the Hillary

people) fit perfectly with Brennan's overall strategy to manipulate perceptions and prepare the country for an eventual confrontation. It provided him the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, to deliver a withering blow to Putin and Trump at the very same time. The temptation must have been irresistible.

But now the plan has backfired and the investigations are gaining pace. Trump's allies in the House smell the blood in the water and they want answers. Did the CIA surveil members of the Trump campaign on the basis of information they gathered in the dossier? Who saw the information? Was the information passed along to members of the press and other government agencies? Was the White House involved? What role did Obama play? What about the Intelligence Community Assessment? Was it based on the contents of the Steele report? Will the "hand-picked" analysts who worked on the report vouch for its conclusions in or were they coached about what to write? How did Brennan persuade the reluctant Comey into opening a counterintelligence investigation on members in the Trump campaign when he knew it would be perceived as a partisan attempt to sabotage the elections by giving Hillary an edge?

Soon the investigative crosshairs will settle on Brennan. He'd better have the right answers.

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