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On The Origins of Russia-gate

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(OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY SHEALAH CRAIGHEAD)

The two sources that originated the allegations claiming that Russia meddled in the 2016 election — without providing convincing evidence — were both *paid for* by the Democratic National Committee, and in one instance also by the Clinton campaign: the Steele dossier

and the CrowdStrike analysis of the DNC servers. Think about that for a minute.

We have long known that the DNC did not allow the FBI to examine its computer server for clues about who may have hacked it – or even if it was hacked – and instead turned to CrowdStrike, a private company co-founded by a virulently anti-Putin Russian. Within a day, CrowdStrike blamed Russia on dubious evidence.

Now we know that the Clinton campaign and the DNC paid for opposition research memos written by former British MI6 intelligence agent Christopher Steele using hearsay accusations from anonymous Russian sources to claim that the Russian government was blackmailing and bribing Donald Trump in a scheme that presupposed that Russian President Vladimir Putin foresaw Trump's presidency years ago when no one else did.

Since then, the U.S. intelligence community has struggled to corroborate Steele's allegations, but those suspicions may have still been the basis of the thinking of President Obama's intelligence chiefs who, according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "hand-picked" the analysts who produced the Jan. 6 "assessment" claiming that Russia interfered in the U.S. election.

In other words, possibly all of the Russia-gate allegations, which have been taken on faith by Democratic partisans and members of the anti-Trump Resistance, trace back to claims paid for or generated by Democrats. If for a moment one could remove the often justified hatred many people feel toward Trump, it would be impossible to avoid the impression that the scandal may have been devised by the DNC and the Clinton camp in league with Obama's intelligence chiefs to serve political and geopolitical aims.

Absent new evidence based on forensic or documentary proof, we could be looking at a partisan concoction in the midst of a bitter general election campaign, a manufactured "scandal" that has also fueled a dangerous New Cold War against Russia. It could be a case of dirty political "oppo" research serving American ruling interests in reestablishing the dominance over Russia that they enjoyed in the 1990s, as well as feeding the voracious budgetary appetite of the Military-Industrial Complex.

Though lacking independent evidence of the core Russia-gate allegations, the "scandal" continues to expand into wild exaggerations about the impact of a tiny number of social media pages suspected of having links to Russia but that apparently carried very few specific campaign messages. (Some pages reportedly were devoted to photos of puppies.)

The indictment of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort on tax and money laundering charges is not linked to the core allegation of Russia-gate: that Russia colluded with the Trump campaign to flip the election to Trump. The only allegation that is actually a crime is the charge that Russia stole DNC and Clinton campaign manager John Podesta's emails. Collusion in itself is not a crime unless it is part of committing an offense.

There is also no statute against accepting opposition research from foreigners or foreign governments. If that were the case then the Clinton campaign would have broken the law. Based on the evidence so far, only one campaign has sought and paid for opposition research from Russians, and it's not Trump's. Trump's campaign was twice offered supposed Russian dirt on Clinton, but not by Russians—instead by a British entertainment promoter and a non-Russian professor (to low-level Trump foreign policy advisor George Papadopoulos, who was indicted only for lying to the FBI about it.) In neither case was any dirt delivered. Only the Clinton campaign got any from Russians, and most of it is unverified.

'Cash for Trash'

Based on what is now known, Wall Street buccaneer Paul Singer paid for GPS Fusion, a Washington-based research firm, to do opposition research on Trump during the Republican primaries, but dropped the effort in May 2016 when it became clear Trump would be the GOP nominee. GPS Fusion has strongly denied that it hired Steele for this work or that the research had anything to do with Russia. In April 2016 the DNC and the Clinton campaign paid its Washington lawyer Marc Elias to hire Fusion GPS to unearth dirt connecting Trump to Russia. This was three months before the DNC blamed Russia for hacking its computers and supposedly giving its stolen emails to WikiLeaks to help Trump win the election.

"The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee retained Fusion GPS to research any possible connections between Mr. Trump, his businesses, his campaign team and Russia, court filings revealed this week," The New York Times reported. Linking Trump to Moscow as a way to bring Russia into the election story was the Democrats' aim from the start. Tying presidential candidates to Moscow was a time-honored tradition during the first Cold War. In fact, Hillary Clinton's husband was attacked by George H.W. Bush for spending a week as a student on a tourist trip to Moscow in 1969. As there is now a second Cold War it only makes sense that the Democrats would revive the charge.

Fusion GPS then hired the former head of MI6's Russia desk, it says for the first time, to dig up that dirt in Russia for the Democrats. Steele produced classic opposition research, not an

intelligence assessment or conclusion, although it was written in a style and formatted to look like one. It's important to realize that Steele was no longer working for an government intelligence agency, which by rule, if not always in practice, would have imposed strict standards on his work and possibly disciplined him for injecting false information into the government's decision-making.

Instead, Steele was working for a political party and a presidential candidate looking for dirt that would hurt their opponent, what the Clintons used to call "cash for trash" when they were the targets. Had Steele been doing legitimate intelligence work for his government, he would have taken a far different approach. Intelligence professionals are not supposed to just give their bosses what their bosses want to hear. So, Steele would have verified his information. And it would have gone through a process of further verification by other intelligence analysts in his and perhaps other intelligence agencies. For instance, in the U.S., a National Intelligence Estimate requires vetting by all 17 intelligence agencies and incorporates dissenting opinions.

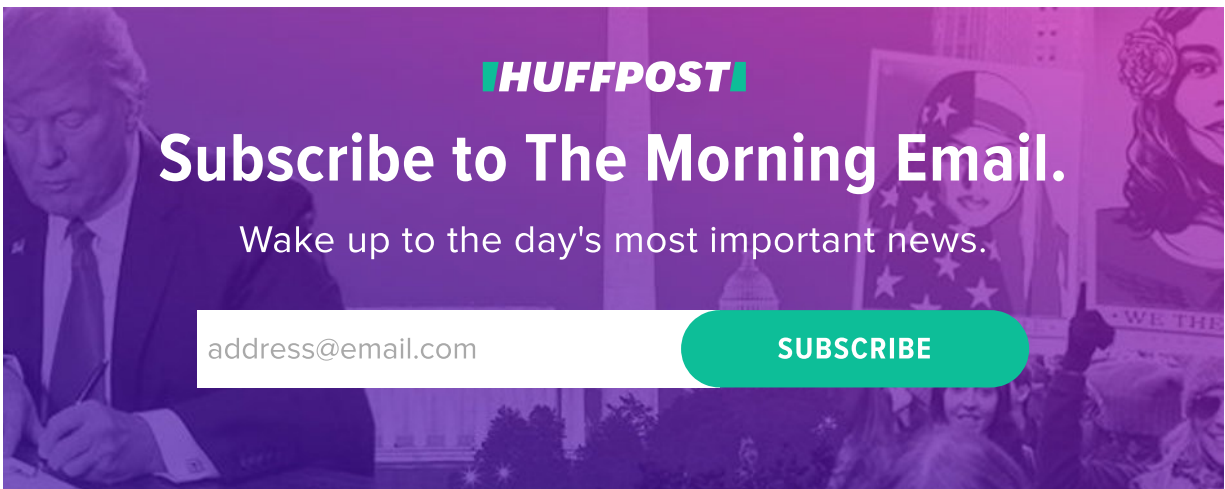
Instead Steele was producing a piece of purely political research and had different motivations. The first might well have been money, as he was being paid specifically for this project, not as part of his work on a government salary presumably serving all of society. Secondly, to continue being paid for each subsequent memo that he produced he would have been incentivized to please his clients or at least give them enough so they would come back for more. Steele may have had a political motivation as well, as Britain has an even worse view of Russia than the U.S. does, going back to the Great Game in Central Asia. The British establishment was fiercely anti-Trump as British intelligence was the first to raise Trump-Russia collusion allegations, before the Democrats did.

Dirty Stuff

Opposition research is about getting dirt to be used in a mud-slinging political campaign, in which wild charges against candidates are the norm. This "oppo" is full of unvetted rumor and innuendo with enough facts mixed in to make it seem credible. There was so much dubious stuff in Steele's memos that the FBI was unable to confirm its most salacious allegations and apparently refuted several key points.

The origins of Russia hacking the DNC computers is also in Steele's memos. He quotes Source E, described as an ethnic Russian close to Trump, saying the Russians did it. Why someone close to Trump, who was not in Russia, would allege that, is a mystery. For that

matter, Steele never went to Russia for his research either, and it's not known if he paid his sources. But Steele's unsubstantiated allegation of hacking was bought wholesale (for a huge fee) by the Clinton campaign, which blamed Russia for a "hack" the minute the emails were published.



Significantly, the corporate news media, which was largely partial to Clinton, didn't report the fantastic allegations after people close to the Clinton campaign began circulating the lurid stories before the election, hoping the material would pop up in the news. To their credit, established media outlets recognized this as ammunition against a political opponent, not a serious document. Despite this, the dossier was shared with the FBI by Steele in the summer of 2016 and apparently became the basis for the FBI to seek Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against members of Trump's campaign.

More alarmingly, it may have formed the basis for much of the Jan. 6 intelligence "assessment" by those "hand-picked" analysts from three U.S. intelligence agencies – the CIA, the FBI and the NSA – not all 17 agencies that Hillary Clinton continues to insist were involved. (Obama's intelligence chiefs, DNI Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan, publicly admitted that only three agencies took part and The New York Times printed a correction saying so.)

Then FBI Director James Comey told Congress the Steele dossier was "one of the sources of information the bureau has used to bolster its investigation." Clapper gave doublespeak testimony to Congress saying that while U.S. intelligence did not "rely" on Steele, it certainly took it into consideration. He said U.S. intelligence "has not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable, and we did not rely upon it in any way for our conclusions. However, part of our obligation is to ensure that policymakers are provided with the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security."

If in fact the Steele memos were a primary basis for the Russia collusion allegations against Trump, then there may be no credible evidence at all. It could be that because the three agencies knew the dossier was dodgy that there was no substantive proof in the Jan. 6 “assessment.” Even so, a summary of the Steele allegations were included in a secret appendix that Comey described to then-President-elect Trump just two weeks before his inauguration. Five days later, after the fact of Comey’s briefing was leaked to the press, the Steele dossier was published in full by the sensationalist website BuzzFeed behind the excuse that the allegations’ inclusion in the classified annex of a U.S. intelligence report justified the dossier’s publication regardless of doubts about its accuracy.

Russian Fingerprints

The other source of blame about Russian meddling came from the private company CrowdStrike, hired by the same Democratic Party law firm that hired Steele, after the DNC had blocked the FBI from examining its server after the suspected hack. Within a day, CrowdStrike claimed to find Russian “fingerprints” in the metadata of a DNC opposition research document, which had been revealed by an Internet site called DCLeaks, showing Cyrillic letters and the name of the first Soviet intelligence chief. That supposedly implicated Russia.

CrowdStrike also claimed the alleged Russian intelligence operation was extremely sophisticated and skilled in concealing its external penetration of the server. But CrowdStrike’s conclusion about Russian “fingerprints” resulted from clues that would have been left behind by extremely sloppy hackers or inserted intentionally to implicate the Russians. CrowdStrike’s credibility was further undermined when Voice of America reported on March 23, 2017, that the same software the company says it used to blame Russia for the hack wrongly concluded that Moscow also had hacked Ukrainian government howitzers on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine.

“An influential British think tank and Ukraine’s military are disputing a report that the U.S. cyber-security firm CrowdStrike has used to buttress its claims of Russian hacking in the presidential election,” VOA reported. A day later CrowdStrike rewrote the software. Dimitri Alperovitch, a CrowdStrike co-founder, is also a senior fellow at the anti-Russian Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised with WikiLeaks’ Vault 7 release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues

implicating others. Plus, there's the fact that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has declared again and again that WikiLeaks did not get the Democratic emails from the Russians. Buttressing Assange's denials of a Russian role, WikiLeaks associate Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said he met a person connected to the leak during a trip to Washington last year. And, William Binney, maybe the best mathematician to ever work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern have published a technical analysis of one set of Democratic email metadata showing that a transatlantic "hack" would have been impossible and that the evidence points to a likely leak by a disgruntled Democratic insider. Binney has further stated that if it were a "hack," the NSA would have been able to detect it and make the evidence known.

Fueling Neo-McCarthyism

Despite these doubts, which the U.S. mainstream media has largely ignored, Russia-gate has grown into something much more than an election story. It has unleashed a neo-McCarthyite attack on Americans who are accused of being dupes of Russia if they dare question the evidence of the Kremlin's guilt. Just weeks after last November's election, The Washington Post published a front-page story touting a blacklist from an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, that alleged that 200 news sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other leading independent news sources, were either willful Russian propagandists or "useful idiots."

Two weeks ago, a new list emerged with the names of over 2,000 people, mostly Westerners, who have appeared on RT, the Russian government-financed English-language news channel. The list was part of a report entitled, "The Kremlin's Platform for 'Useful Idiots' in the West," put out by an outfit called European Values, with a long list of European funders. The report's author has worked with the Atlantic Council.

Included on the list of "useful idiots" absurdly are CIA-friendly Washington Post columnist David Ignatius; David Brock, Hillary Clinton's opposition research chief; and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres. The report stated: "Many people in Europe and the US, including politicians and other persons of influence, continue to exhibit troubling naïveté about RT's political agenda, buying into the network's marketing ploy that it is simply an outlet for independent voices marginalised by the mainstream Western press. These 'useful idiots' remain oblivious to RT's intentions and boost its legitimacy by granting interviews on its shows and newscasts." The intent of these lists is clear: to shut down dissenting voices who question Western foreign policy and who are usually excluded from Western corporate

media. RT is often willing to provide a platform for a wider range of viewpoints, both from the left and right. American ruling interests fend off critical viewpoints by first suppressing them in corporate media and then condemning them as propaganda when they emerge on RT.

Geopolitical Risks

More ominously, the anti-Russia mania has increased chances of direct conflict between the two nuclear superpowers. The Russia-bashing rhetoric not only served the Clinton campaign, though ultimately to ill effect, but it has pushed a longstanding U.S.-led geopolitical agenda to regain control over Russia, an advantage that the U.S. enjoyed during the Yeltsin years in the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wall Street rushed in behind Boris Yeltsin and Russian oligarchs to asset strip virtually the entire country, impoverishing the population. Amid widespread accounts of this grotesque corruption, Washington intervened in Russian politics to help get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996.

The political rise of Vladimir Putin after Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999 reversed this course, restoring Russian sovereignty over its economy and politics. That inflamed Hillary Clinton and other American hawks whose desire was to install another Yeltsin-like figure and resume U.S. exploitation of Russia's vast natural and financial resources. To advance that cause, U.S. presidents have supported the eastward expansion of NATO and have deployed 30,000 troops on Russia's border. In 2014, the Obama administration helped orchestrate a coup that toppled the elected government of Ukraine and installed a fiercely anti-Russian regime. The U.S. also undertook the risky policy of aiding jihadists to overthrow a secular Russian ally in Syria.

The consequences have brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. In this context, the Democratic Party-led Russia-gate offensive was intended not only to explain away Clinton's defeat but to stop Trump — possibly via impeachment or by inflicting severe political damage — because he had talked, insincerely it is turning out, about detente with Russia. And that did not fit in well with the plan at all.

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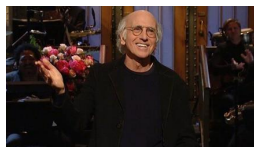
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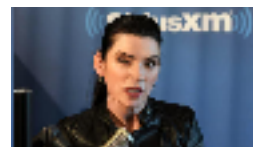
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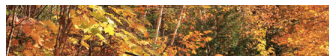


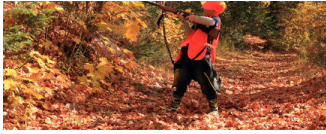
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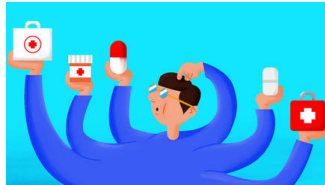
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