

The Clinton camp and DNC funded what became the Trump-Russia dossier: Here's what it means

 [washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/10/25/the-clinton-camp-and-the-dnc-helped-pay-for-that-trump-russia-dossier-heres-what-it-means/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/10/25/the-clinton-camp-and-the-dnc-helped-pay-for-that-trump-russia-dossier-heres-what-it-means/)

By Aaron Blake

Clinton's campaign helped fund the research that led to the Russia dossier

The Washington Post's Adam Entous looks at the role that Hillary Clinton's campaign and the Democratic National Committee played in funding the research that led to a dossier containing allegations about President Trump's links to Russia. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde, Patrick Martin/Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post)

This post has been updated.

The Washington Post broke the story Tuesday night that the Hillary Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee [helped pay for that now-famous dossier of research on President Trump](#).

The Post's Adam Entous, Devlin Barrett and Rosalind S. Helderman report that powerful Democratic attorney Marc E. Elias retained the firm Fusion GPS for information, and Fusion GPS later hired Christopher Steele, a former British intelligence agent who was versed in Russia-related issues.

The dossier, which was published by BuzzFeed News in January, has been partially confirmed, though its most salacious allegations have not been.

There is a lot to sort through here. Below are four key points.

1) Clinton supporters — though not the campaign itself — were previously reported to fund the dossier

The fact Democrats were behind the funding for the dossier is not totally new. When [CNN first reported on the dossier's existence](#) back in January, it said the research effort was originally funded by President Trump's GOP opponents and then, when he won the nomination, by those supporting Clinton.

CNN reported back then that their sources "said that once Mr. Trump became the nominee, further investigation was funded by groups and donors supporting Hillary Clinton."

Until now, though, the dossier had not been tied specifically to the Clinton campaign or the DNC.

2) Yes, the dossier was funded by Democrats

Some of the pushback on the left has focused on the fact that a still-unidentified Republican client retained Fusion GPS to do research on Trump before the Clinton campaign and the DNC did. Thus, they argue, it's wrong to say the dossier was just funded by Democrats.

But The Post is reporting that the dossier's author, Steele, wasn't brought into the mix until *after* Democrats retained Fusion GPS. So while both sides paid Fusion GPS, Steele was only funded by Democrats.

3) Trump's allegation of FBI payments is still dubious

After the story posted, some on the right seized upon The Post noting the FBI had agreed to pay Steele for information after the campaign. The argument seemed to be that the FBI was engaged in a witch hunt against Trump using Democrats' sources.

But [The Post originally reported on the FBI's agreement back in February](#). At the time, it also reported it never actually paid for the work after the agent was identified in news reports:

The former British spy who authored a controversial dossier on behalf of Donald Trump's political opponents alleging ties between Trump and Russia reached an agreement with the FBI a few weeks before the election for the bureau to pay him to continue his work, according to several people familiar with the arrangement.

...

Ultimately, the FBI did not pay Steele. Communications between the bureau and the former spy were interrupted as Steele's now-famous dossier became the subject of news stories, congressional inquiries and presidential denials, according to the people familiar with the arrangement, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter.

Despite there being no proof the FBI actually paid Steele, Trump [suggested it might have in a tweet last week](#) — along with “Russia . . . or the Dems (or all).” Of those three groups, only Democrats have been reported to have actually paid Steele. And again, that was already kind-of known.

Workers of firm involved with the discredited and Fake Dossier take the 5th. Who paid for it, Russia, the FBI or the Dems (or all)?

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [October 19, 2017](#)

4) The appearance problems for Democrats

There is, presumably, a reason Democrats haven't copped to funding the dossier — something they still haven't publicly confirmed. Fusion GPS [threatening to plead the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination](#) raised eyebrows last week, for instance.

First among those reasons is paying a foreigner for opposition research for an American political campaign. Given Democrats' argument that Russia's interference on Trump's behalf was beyond the pale, the Clinton camp and the DNC paying a Brit for information would seem somewhat problematic.

(The Clinton campaign has also, notably, [denied working with the Ukrainian government](#) to dig up dirt on Trump. Republicans have [pushed dubious comparisons](#) between the Ukraine allegation and Russia's alleged Trump advocacy.)

Some on the right even alleged that Democrats paying Steele amounts to "collusion" with foreigners. But Russia-Steele comparisons aren't apples-to-apples. The British after all are, unlike the Russians, America's allies. Also, Steele was not acting as an agent of a foreign government, which is what would likely be required to prove collusion in the case of the Trump campaign and Russia.

Steele's dossier does include information it says was obtained from "a senior Russian Foreign Ministry figure and a former top level Russian intelligence officer still active inside the Kremlin." In other words, the Clinton camp and the DNC were essentially paying for information allegedly obtained from inside the Russian government, even as there is no proof they deliberately sought Russia's help.

Separately, the firm that the Clinton camp and the DNC paid also has alleged ties to the Kremlin. In Senate

testimony in July, Hermitage Capital Management chief executive William Browder accused Fusion GPS and its head, Glenn Simpson, of running a smear campaign against Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian whistleblower who in 2009 was tortured and killed in a Russian prison after uncovering a \$230 million tax theft. Magnitsky worked for Browder, and his name was used for a U.S. law containing sanctions that was passed by Congress and is a sore spot between the U.S. government and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Browder said the smear campaign was run by Fusion GPS with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya and Russian-American lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin. You might remember them from [the meeting with Donald Trump Jr.](#) that took place in June 2016. Veselnitskaya was the Russian lawyer with alleged Kremlin ties who arranged the meeting.

The story must be told.

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As The Post [reported in July](#) of Browder's accusations:

They were all allegedly working with the law firm Baker Hostetler to defend the Russian company Prevezon from charges it laundered funds stolen in the fraud Magnitsky uncovered.

“Veselnitskaya, through Baker Hostetler, hired Glenn Simpson of the firm Fusion GPS to conduct a smear campaign against me and Sergei Magnitsky in advance of congressional hearings on the Global Magnitsky Act,” Browder will testify. “He contacted a number of major newspapers and other publications to spread false information that Sergei Magnitsky was not murdered, was not a whistleblower and was instead a criminal. They also spread false information that my presentations to lawmakers around the world were untrue.”

Fusion GPS has confirmed [it worked on a lawsuit involving Veselnitskaya](#) for two years, The Post's Josh Rogin reported. It denied any involvement in the Trump Jr. meeting.

The firm has worked with both Democrats and Republicans over the years.

Helderman contributed to this post.

The FBI's Political Meddling

WSJ [wsj.com/articles/the-fbis-political-meddling-1508883468](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-fbis-political-meddling-1508883468)

10/24/2017



Former FBI Director Robert Mueller, now special counsel on the Russia investigation, following a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting on Capitol Hill, June 21. Photo: saul loeb/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

By
Oct. 24, 2017 6:17 p.m. ET



Let's give plausible accounts of the known facts, then explain why demands that Robert Mueller recuse himself from the Russia investigation may not be the fanciful partisan grandstanding you imagine.

Here's a story consistent with what has been reported in the press—how reliably reported is uncertain. Democratic political opponents of Donald Trump [financed](#) a British former spook who spread money among contacts in Russia, who in turn over drinks solicited stories from their supposedly “connected” sources in Moscow. If these people were really connected in any meaningful sense, then they made sure the stories they spun were consistent with the interests of the regime, if not actually scripted by the regime.

The resulting Trump dossier then became a factor in Obama administration decisions to launch an FBI counterintelligence investigation of the Trump campaign, and after the election to trumpet suspicions of Trump collusion with Russia.

We know of a second, possibly even more consequential way the FBI was effectively a vehicle for Russian meddling in U.S. politics. Authoritative news [reports](#) say FBI chief James Comey's intervention in the Hillary Clinton email matter was prompted by a Russian intelligence document that his colleagues suspected was a Russian plant.

OK, Mr. Mueller was a former close colleague and leader but no longer part of the FBI when these events occurred. This may or may not make him a questionable person to lead a Russia-meddling investigation in which the FBI's own actions are necessarily a concern.

But now we come to the Rosatom [disclosures](#) last week in The Hill, a newspaper that covers Congress.

Here's another story as plausible as we can make it based on credible reporting. After the Cold War, in its own interest, the U.S. wanted to build bridges to the Russian nuclear establishment. The Putin government, for national or commercial purposes, agreed and sought to expand its nuclear business in the U.S.

The purchase and consolidation of certain assets were facilitated by Canadian entrepreneurs who gave large sums to the Clinton Foundation, and perhaps arranged a Bill Clinton speech in Moscow for \$500,000. A key transaction had to be approved by Hillary Clinton's State Department.

Now we learn that, before and during these transactions, the FBI had uncovered a bribery and kickback scheme involving Russia's U.S. nuclear business, and also received reports of Russian officials seeking to curry favor through donations to the Clinton Foundation.

This criminal activity was apparently not disclosed to agencies vetting the 2010 transfer of U.S. commercial nuclear assets to Russia. The FBI made no move to break up the scheme until long after the transaction closed. Only five years later, the Justice Department, in 2015, disclosed a plea deal with the Russian perpetrator so quietly that its significance was missed until The Hill reported on the FBI investigation last week.

For anyone who cares to look, the real problem here is that the FBI itself is so thoroughly implicated in the Russia meddling story.

The agency, when Mr. Mueller headed it, soft-pedaled an investigation highly embarrassing to Mrs. Clinton as well as the Obama Russia reset policy. More recently, if just one of two things is true—Russia sponsored the Trump Dossier, or Russian fake intelligence prompted Mr. Comey's email intervention—then Russian operations, via their impact on the FBI, influenced and continue to influence our politics in a way far more consequential than any [Facebook](#) ad, the preoccupation of John McCain, who apparently cannot behold a mountain if there's a molehill anywhere nearby.

Which means that Mr. Mueller has the means, motive and opportunity to obfuscate and distract from matters embarrassing to the FBI, while pleasing a large part of the political spectrum. He need only confine his focus to the flimsy, disingenuous but popular (with the media) accusation that the shambolic Trump campaign colluded with the Kremlin.

Mr. Mueller's tenure may not have bridged the two investigations, but James Comey's, Rod Rosenstein's, Andrew Weissmann's, and Andrew McCabe's did. Mr. Rosenstein appointed Mr. Mueller as special counsel. Mr. Weissmann now serves on Mr. Mueller's team. Mr. McCabe remains deputy FBI director. All were involved in the nuclear racketeering matter and the Russia meddling matter.

Let's stop here. All this needs to be sorted out, but not in a spirit of panic and hysteria. We are a prosperous, successful country, in pretty good shape right now by historical standards, even if our officials behave in the frequently dubious, self-interested way they always have.

But still: By any normal evidentiary, probative or journalistic measure, the big story here is the FBI—its politicized handling of Russian matters, and not competently so.

To put it bluntly, whatever its hip-pocket rationales along the way, the FBI would not have so much to cover up now if it had not helped give us Mrs. Clinton as Democratic nominee and then, in all likelihood, inadvertently [helped](#) Mr. Trump to the presidency.

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