

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

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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.

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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.