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Here's why the whole Russiagate scenario set out in Trump Dossier is totally absurd
The Trump Dossier upon which the whole Russiagate scandal rests describes a process of decision making within the Russian government that bears no relation to reality, thereby proving itself a fake.
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It has become increasingly clear over the last two weeks that the amateur sleuths who are driving Russiagate are taking the Trump Dossier prepared by the British ex-MI6 officer Christopher Steele as their starting point.

This is despite the fact that the Trump Dossier is still "uncorroborated", and has been trashed by seasoned intelligence professionals like former CIA Acting Assistant Director Michael Morell.

Right from the first moment the Trump Dossier was first published I speculated that it might be the original source of the 'Russiagate' story.  Here is what I wrote about it on 11th January 2017, immediately after it was published

"The big question is not whether the facts in this dossier are true or not; it is the extent to which the paranoid claims made in the dossier have shaped and might even have been the origin for the whole Russian hacking scandal.

"I say this because media reports confirm that the dossier or extracts from it have circulated amongst US politicians (including Hillary Clinton and John McCain), US intelligence agencies, and within the media for weeks if not months.  The earliest reports in the dossier are dated to July, which suggests that some of its claims - which include circumstantial details of who supposedly within the Russian government was behind the Clinton leaks - were already circulating early in the summer.  That is a very early point in the Russian hacking story, making it at least possible that the dossier at least influenced the thinking of some of the people in the US intelligence community and in the media who have been pushing the Russian hacking scandal most aggressively.

"Many have remarked on the absence of evidence in the ONDI report which was published last Friday.  Even Masha Gessen - one of President Putin's most relentless critics - has pointed this out.

"Publication of this dossier looks like an attempt to provide "evidence" which the ODNI report failed to do.  If so then that at least gives rise to the possibility that the dossier is the "evidence" - or more correctly a part of the evidence - that formed the background to the ONDI report but which the ODNI report omitted.

"Whatever the truth of this, the fact that an obviously concocted dossier like this has circulated for weeks if not months with its source apparently still considered "unimpeachable" and "reliable" by the West's intelligence agencies shows how wildly paranoid and ignorant about Russia the West's intelligence agencies and its politicians and journalists have become.

"Fantasy has replaced truth, and it seems that a clever fabricator out to make money has successfully cashed in on it, quite possibly doing serious harm along the way."

The US investigative reporter Robert Parry is now saying the same thing: that the Trump Dossier is the document which provides the frame narrative for the whole Russiagate story, and this was also confirmed by the BBC article I discussed yesterday, which says the following

"The roadmap for the investigation, publicly acknowledged now for the first time, comes from Christopher Steele, once of Britain's secret intelligence service MI6."

As it happens I am far from sure that the actual investigation being carried out into the Russiagate claims by the FBI is using the Trump Dossier as its 'roadmap'.  Contrary to what the BBC says I have never seen this "publicly acknowledged" anywhere.  However what is now indisputable is that the Democrats on the Senate and House Intelligence Committees are doing so, and that much of the media is following them.

This is extraordinary because even a cursory knowledge of how the Russian government operates ought to make it obvious that the scenario described in the Trump Dossier makes no sense, and is completely fantastic.

Briefly, the Trump Dossier's story is that a furious Putin, who supposedly hates Hillary Clinton, was persuaded by his press secretary Dmitry Peskov and his Chief of Staff Sergey Ivanov to order an elaborate campaign to interfere in the US election in order to swing the election to Donald Trump over whom the Russians supposedly possess various forms of leverage, including blackmail film of his cavorting with prostitutes.

The Russian intelligence officials supposedly carrying out Putin's orders are then supposed to have closely coordinated their actions with Trump's campaign.  They are also supposed to have discussed it with each other and with all sorts of other people who passed on information about these conversations to the Trump Dossier's compiler, Christopher Steele.

If one is to believe the Trump Dossier, the campaign to meddle in the election was also the subject of furious argument and recrimination within the Kremlin itself, with people like Ivanov, Peskov, Medvedev and Rosneft CEO Sechin complaining about it to each other and to various intimates, so that word of their arguments also found its way to Christopher Steele.

The Trump Dossier provides a phantasmagoric description of cloak and dagger meetings between Russian intelligence officials and Trump campaign associates in Moscow, Prague and other places, and of discussions of senior Russian officials with each other and of the recriminations which supposedly passed between them as the extent of Russian meddling in the US election supposedly became public.

There is so much wrong with this whole scenario that it is difficult know where to start, but a good point might be to question the whole starting thesis that President Putin "hates" Hillary Clinton.

There is virtually no evidence of this.  The origins of this claim appear to be a comment of Putin's made at the time of the election protests in Russia in December 2011.  Putin as reported by Reuters said the following

"She (Hillary Clinton - AM) set the tone for some opposition activists, gave them a signal, they heard this signal and started active work"

What a politician says during an election is not usually taken too seriously, and this comment scarcely seems to confirm the thesis that Putin "hates" Hillary Clinton.  By the standards of what Western leaders regularly say about Putin it comes across as rather temperate.  Compare it for example with Hillary Clinton's comparison in March 2014 of Putin with Hitler.

The claim that Putin "hates" Hillary Clinton is anyway at odds with a far more recent and much more thought through comment Putin made about her at the SPIEF conference in St. Petersburg last June, which because it hardly supports the claim Putin "hates" Hillary Clinton has gone almost completely unreported

"I worked with Bill Clinton, although for a very short time, and we had a very good relationship. I can even say that I am grateful to him for certain moments as I was entering the big stage in politics. On several occasions, he showed signs of attention, respect for me personally, as well as for Russia. I remember this and I am grateful to him.

"About Ms Clinton. Perhaps she has her own view on the development of Russian-US relations. You know, there is something I would like to draw [your] attention to, which has nothing to do with Russian-US relations or with national politics. It is related, rather, to personnel policy.

"In my experience, I have often seen what happens with people before they take on a certain job and afterward. Often, you cannot recognise them, because once they reach a new level of responsibility they begin to talk and think differently, they even look different. We act on the assumption that the sense of responsibility of the US head of state, the head of the country on which a great deal in the world depends today, that this sense of responsibility will encourage the newly elected president to cooperate with Russia and, I would like to repeat, build a more secure world."

These remarks do not suggest any hatred for Hillary Clinton.  Spoken at a time when the universal assumption was that Hillary Clinton would win the US Presidential election, they suggest on the contrary a willingness to work with her, a readiness to disregard her harsh anti-Russian election rhetoric, and a hope that her husband, former President Bill Clinton, would exercise a restraining influence over her.

Putting aside the fact that there is no real evidence that Putin "hates" Hillary Clinton, Putin at the time of the US election had been continuously at the top of the Russian power structure for 17 years, ever since Boris Yeltsin appointed him Russia's Prime Minister on 9th August 1999.  Over that long period Putin has gained immense experience and knowledge of politics, including of US politics.  No one moreover seriously doubts that Putin is also highly intelligent and well-informed, and is able to put this experience and knowledge to good use.

It beggars belief that such an experienced and knowledgeable person as Putin was in 2016 would seriously believe that Russia could influence a US Presidential election so as to effect its outcome.  That by the way is something which no outside power has ever previously managed to do.  Putin would surely know such a thing was impossible, and that it would be completely counter-productive and extremely dangerous to try it.

Let us assume however that Putin acted completely contrary to what we know of his background and character, and nonetheless ordered Russia's intelligence agencies to meddle in the US election in order to act out some feud he has against Hillary Clinton.

It beggars belief that Russia's intelligence agencies would agree.  Their chiefs - Patrushev, Ivanov, Fradkov and Bortnikov, all experienced intelligence professionals and like Putin all members of Russia's Security Council, together with General Shoigu, who is not only a member of Russia's Security Council but who as Russia's Defence Minister has overall charge of the Russian military's main intelligence agency the GRU - would undoubtedly have told Putin it couldn't be done, and that it would be extremely dangerous to try.

Let us nonetheless go on to assume - ever more farfetched though these assumptions become - that Putin acted even further against his known background and character, and decided to ignore their advice, and ordered them to conduct the operation regardless.

it beggars belief that they would not in that case have insisted on having his order formally debated by Russia's Security Council, Russia's most important policy making body, which significantly finds no mention in the Trump Dossier at all.  They would have been bound to do this if only to safeguard their positions when the operation went wrong - as it was bound to do - by putting it on formal record during the Security Council meeting that they opposed the order.

The Security Council is in theory an advisory body, and Putin could in theory have refused to convene it and have his order debated there.  However that would almost certainly have provoked a crisis at the heart of the Russian government, and there is no evidence that ever happened.  In practice it is inconceivable that an order of such magnitude would not have been discussed by the Security Council.

At that point Putin would have encountered the collective opposition of the entire Security Council, which includes people like Prime Minister Medvedev and Foreign Minister Lavrov who speak English and who know the US well, and who would also have told him what he wanted couldn't be done, and that it would be extremely dangerous to try

Putin has been Russia's leader for as long as he has precisely because he heeds the advice and warnings of his experts, and is careful to ensure the prior backing of the rest of Russia's political leadership for his decisions.  It is precisely because Putin acts in this way that he has a loyal and disciplined government behind him.

Conceivably Putin could have cast all this aside and in a fit of madness struck out on his own, ignoring what would almost certainly have been the collective opposition of the country's entire political and national security leadership in order to carry out a quixotic quest to stop Hillary Clinton from being elected.  However had he done such a thing he would have risked a government crisis and furious recriminations when it all went wrong, which would almost certainly have spilled over into public argument as does occasionally happen in Russia.  That there is no evidence of anything like this happening is the surest sign it didn't happen at all.

As it happens this focus on Putin is anyway completely misplaced.  If the the Russians did carry out hacks of the computers of the DNC and of John Podesta then the whole Trump Dossier/Russiagate story becomes even more surreal, since there is actually no need to introduce Putin to explain the hacks.

Russian intelligence would not have needed an order from Putin to hack John Podesta or the DNC.  At a time of extreme tension in US-Russian relations, with the militaries of the two countries cranking up towards a potentially disastrous face-off in Syria, the entirety of Russia's mighty foreign policy and intelligence establishment would have been working overtime trying to find out what the policies of the US after the election would be.  Ambassador Kislyak together with the diplomats and spies in his embassy would have been trying hard to build as many contacts with both the Hillary Clinton and the Donald Trump camps as they could, and Russian intelligence would have been pulling out all the stops to gather all the intelligence on Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump and their associates that it could.

Quite possibly this would have included reading the DNC's and John Podesta's emails.  Since both had obvious relevance to an information gathering effort intended to ascertain the future policies of a Hillary Clinton administration, it is easy to see why Russian intelligence might have wanted to read them, and it would not have needed an order from Putin for it to try to do so.

Conceivably the evidence of hacking by Cozy Bear and Fancy Bear discovered by CrowdStrike is evidence of this, though the crude way in which those hacks were done suggests they may actually have been the work of someone else.  Russian intelligence would hardly have been the only intelligence service trying to find out as much information about Hillary Clinton (and Donald Trump) as possible, and besides there is reason to think the Cozy Bear and Fancy Bear hacks were the work of private individuals.

In saying all this I wish to make it clear that I do not know for a fact that Russian intelligence did obtain the DNC's and John Podesta's emails.  My point is that they would not have needed an order from Putin to try to do so, since trying to obtain those emails would have been a normal part of their work, and there is no reason to introduce an angry and vengeful Putin to explain them doing it.

As for the question of whether Russian intelligence might have leaked the emails, the only possible scenario where they might have done so would have been if they had found in the emails - obtained as a result of an entirely conventional intelligence gathering operation almost certainly not ordered by Putin himself - things that were so damaging to Hillary Clinton that their effect on the election if they were published could be absolutely guaranteed.

At that point Russian intelligence might conceivably have reported this finding to Putin and Russia's Security Council, and have asked for permission to publish the emails.  However given Russia's longstanding policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and the extremely high political risks for Russia of publishing the emails, it would still even in those circumstances have been highly unlikely that Putin or the Security Council would have granted Russian intelligence permission to publish the emails.

Which in turn brings us to the contents of the emails themselves.  The actual content of the DNC and Podesta emails hardly fits the criteria of something so damaging that it would be guaranteed to effect the outcome of the election if it were published.  Putin himself made this very point in an interview he gave to Bloomberg on 5th September 2016

"I could never even imagine that such information would be of interest to the American public or that the campaign headquarters of one of the candidates - in this case, Mrs. Clinton - apparently worked for her, rather than for all the Democratic Party candidates in an equal manner. I could never assume that anybody would find it interesting. Thus, in view of what I have said, we could not officially hack it. You know, it would require certain intuition and knowledge of the U.S. domestic policy peculiarities. I am not sure that even our experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have such intuition."

Putin is absolutely right.  Not only would it have required profound knowledge of US politics - knowledge which the Russians almost certainly don't have - to see why the contents of the DNC and Podesta emails might be damaging to Hillary Clinton, but it is actually doubtful that the contents of the emails were in fact especially damaging to Hillary Clinton.  Certainly no polling evidence I have seen has proved conclusively that they were.

Given this uncertainty, it is very difficult to believe that the Russians would have taken on themselves the immense risk of meddling in the election by publishing the emails, and of course the people who actually did publish the emails - Julian Assange and Wikileaks, together with ambassador Craig Murray - categorically deny that they did.

The BBC article I discussed yesterday reports former Obama administration officials complaining that the FBI is "fumbling" its inquiry because "The FBI doesn't know about Russia" and cannot "see, let alone understand, the bigger picture".

On the contrary it is the "bigger picture" the Trump Dossier gets hopelessly wrong, and which immediately exposes it as a fake.

The Trump Dossier's baroque picture of the Russian decision making process bears some resemblance to the chaotic way the Russian government operated back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when sinister figures like the oligarch Boris Berezovsky and Boris Yeltsin's bodyguard General Korzhakov wielded vast power outside Russia's formal state structures.  That of course was the period when Christopher Steele, the Trump Dossier's compiler, was working in Moscow for MI6, and when he formed his ideas about Russia.

However the Trump Dossier bears no resemblance to the way Russia's government operates today.  Anyone who follows Russian affairs at all closely and whose opinions are not blinded by prejudice can see that immediately.  Unfortunately it seems that such people in the West are in short supply.