From: Edward Epstein [redacted]
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To: Jeff Epstein [jeevacation@gmail.com]
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Hi Jeff
I thought this might interest you

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Politics and law

The 2016 presidential campaign was marked by three disclosure operations, all of which appear to have had a single author. "Oppo research" is the euphemism commonly used in elections for such operations. The mechanism is fairly simple: dirt is obtained from wherever it can be found to discredit an opponent. It is then "leaked," usually either anonymously or on background, to targeted media channels. What makes the 2016 campaign particularly interesting from a counterintelligence perspective is not that both sides had their own disclosure operations, but that both sides were offered the dirt for them by a common source: Russian intelligence.

As we now know from the emails of Donald Trump Jr., a thinly veiled intermediary, Natalya Veselnitskaya, offered the Trump campaign documents that putatively would show that Hillary Clinton had received illegal donations from Russian financiers; in the event, no such documents were proffered. But it is a reasonable assumption that Veselnitskaya could not have made such an offer, especially in a meeting attended by three other Russians, unless the move was approved by the FSB, the Russian security service.

A second disclosure operation, this one involving supporters of the Clinton campaign, was more layered. The proximate intermediary was Fusion GPS, a research firm used by the law firm Baker Hostetler, and the secondary "cut-out" was the British firm Orbis, co-founded by former MI-6 officer Christopher Steele. We know something about this sub-contractor from the depositions Steele gave in defending a libel suit in London. According to Steele, Fusion GPS not only had him prepare the so-called "dossier" on Trump but also directed Steele to "leak" it to specified reporters at *Mother Jones*, *Yahoo*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The New Yorker*, and CNN. In some cases, Steele was directed to brief the selected journalists personally. The dirt in these "leaks" relied heavily on information supplied by two Russian government sources: Source A, whom Steele calls "a senior Russian Foreign Ministry figure"; and Source B, "a former top-level intelligence officer still active in the Kremlin." Sources A and B provided information supposedly exposing a long-time Russian FSB operation to get compromising information that could be used to control Trump. The idea that two Russian intelligence sources would reveal a long-time Kremlin-backed FSB operation bears further examination.

Michael Morell, a former acting CIA director, casts light on the sourcing of the dirt in the Steele dossier. "I had two questions when I first read [the dossier]," Morell said in an NBC interview. "One was, how did Chris [Steele] talk to these sources? I have subsequently learned that he used intermediaries. I asked myself, why did these guys provide this information, what was their motivation? And I subsequently learned that he paid them. That the intermediaries paid the sources and the intermediaries got the money from Chris."

Paying ex-FSB officers for sensitive information? As Steele is no doubt aware, there is no such thing as an *ex*-FSB officer. All Russian intelligence officers, whether currently or formerly employed, if in Russia, operate under the same tough security regime. The selling of secret information by them is espionage, pure and simple. Selling it to someone connected to an adversary intelligence service greatly compounds the crime. Sources A and B (through their intermediaries) knew that they were dealing with an ex-MI-6 man who could use their betrayal of secrets against them. The only safe way for A and B to provide the requested dirt would be to clear it with the security regime at the FSB. This precaution, a required step in such exchanges, would mean that the dirt in the dossier, whether true or false, was curated by the FSB and spoon-fed to Steele. If so, the FSB was the surreptitious provider of this part of the Steele dossier.

The third disclosure operation involved stolen emails from the DNC bearing on the unfair treatment by Democratic Party officials of Bernie Sanders, which were posted on the DC Leaks website. President Obama identified the Kremlin as the author of this operation, saying "These data theft and disclosure activities could only have been directed by the highest levels of the Russian government." If so, as in the previous cases, the FSB would have curated the dirt. To be sure, oppo-research operatives, because of their singular focus on getting usable slime, are highly vulnerable to shady offers, but why would Russia so blatantly feed the slime to all sides in a campaign?

The United States has a wide array of tools for monitoring Russian intelligence, including the world's most sophisticated sensors for intercepting signals, but discovering the Kremlin's motives remains an elusive enterprise because, unlike in a scientific inquiry, one cannot fully trust the observable data. While a scientist can safely assume that the microbes he observes through the lens of a microscope are not employing guile to mislead him, an intelligence analyst cannot make similar assumptions about the content of intercepted communications from Russia. If one assumes that the Russians do not know that the channel is being monitored—an assumption which, following the defection of Edward Snowden to Russia, is hard to make prudently—then the intelligence gleaned from that channel can reveal the Kremlin's activities and motive. If, however, it is understood that the Russians know that a channel is being monitored, the information conveyed over it can be considered a disclosure operation.

If, for example, a Mafia family finds out that the FBI is tapping its telephone lines, it can use those lines to burn its rivals. The Kremlin can also use a *known*tapped phone line to its advantage. Consider, for example, the tapped phone of Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak. On December 1, 2016, Kislyak went to Trump Tower to meet Jared Kushner and Michael Flynn. According to Kushner's version of that meeting, Kislyak suggested that Russian generals could supply information about Russian military operations in Syria on the condition that the Trump transition team provide a "secure line in the transition office." Of course, as Kislyak likely knew, transition teams don't have secure lines to Moscow. Kushner responded by asking if the Russian embassy

could supply such a "secure line." Kislyak then used an open phone line at his embassy to relay Kushner's response to his foreign ministry in Moscow. It is inconceivable that Kislyak did not know that the call would be monitored by the FBI, since the FBI had routinely listened in on these lines for the past 68 years, or that his discussion of Kushner's request would set off alarm bells in the intelligence community.

If Kislyak had wanted to hide this exchange from U.S. intelligence, he could have easily sent it under diplomatic cover directly to Moscow, used a secure line, or relayed it in a coded fashion. By communicating the message *en clair*, or in plaintext, Kislyak skillfully exposed Kushner's incredibly stupid response, which he himself had provoked, to stoke distrust about the incoming president within the U.S. intelligence community. Nor was this the only mistrust Kislyak cultivated: the conversations on the monitored phone led to the firing of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, and conversations that Kislyak had with Attorney General Jeff Sessions led to Sessions's recusing himself from the Russian investigation, which has now driven a wedge between President Trump and one of his most effective and popular cabinet members.

Kislyak's resume indicates that he is a well-regarded and competent player in the game of nations: he has served as Second Secretary of the Soviet UN mission in New York, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, Deputy Director of the Soviet Department of International Organizations in Moscow, Permanent Russian representative to NATO in Brussels, Deputy Foreign Minister, and Ambassador to the United States. Nothing in his 37-year career, either during or after the Cold War, suggests that his moves are not aligned with Kremlin strategy.

But when it comes to the various disclosures and interventions surrounding the 2016 election, what exactly was that strategy?

In a report issued on January 6, 2017, entitled "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections," the U.S. intelligence community concluded, based both on its sources and its analysis of stories on the Russian-controlled network RT, that Putin wanted to hurt Clinton, help Trump, and discredit the American election. These may well have been motives of the Russian president, but the narrowly focused assessment fails to explain, or even take into account, Kislyak's post-election ensnarement of Kushner, or the discrediting dirt against Trump. If Putin had really wanted to help Trump win the election, why did Russian sources provide damaging dirt to Steele, which could have cost Trump the election? Why did Kislyak provide the FBI with information, via a known tapped line, that could (and did) compromise key members of Trump's administration?

A wider focus can be found, of all places, in Oliver Stone's revealing, if fawning, four-hour interview with Putin, in which the Russian dictator makes clear that he views American hegemony, including America's standing and respect in the international community, as a threat that Russia must counter. One way to undermine America's standing is to provide disclosures that can be used by its own political factions, and the media, to sow distrust in America's reliability as a democracy founded on transparency. Putin tells the truth when he says that it doesn't matter particularly to Russia whether Clinton or Trump won the election: his goal was to install doubt in the legitimacy of the process, regardless of how it turned out.

Edward Jay Epstein's most recent book is* How America Lost Its Secrets: Edward Snowden, the Man and the Theft*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in January.