

Documents show media reports on Russia led FBI to investigate Trump

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The FBI opened a criminal investigation into President Trump in May 2017 based on information from the liberal news media and the Democratic Party funded dossier, according to an analysis by The Washington Times of newly declassified documents.

The FBI's May 19 memo opening the probe was originally released in 2023 based on an open records request. But it was highly censored, virtually deleting all five pages of information on which the bureau justified the extraordinary action against a new president just five months on the job.

That May, the FBI was full-speed ahead in a counterintelligence investigation to find a 2016 election conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia, which had hacked into Democratic Party computers.

The Washington liberal establishment desperately searched for any Trump action to tie to the Russia narrative. The press, Democrats, intelligence agencies and the FBI all fell in love with the 35-page dossier compiled by British former intelligence agent Christopher Steele. His main source was Russian Igor Danchenko, whom the FBI suspected at one time of being a Moscow intelligence source.

A subsequent investigation by special counsel John Durham concluded in 2023 that the FBI, despite three years of trying and paying Mr. Danchenko hundreds of thousands of dollars, never proved any of the Steele-Democrats' allegations.

Mr. Steele, for example, said Mr.

Analysis

Trump oversaw and financed the Russian hacking. The FBI never found any proof, and Mr. Danchenko acknowledged the dossier was rumor and gossip.

Last week, the Trump White House declassified the FBI's case-opening memo. The previously classified opening paragraph said the FBI was starting "a full investigation based on an articulable factual basis that reasonably indicates that President Donald J. Trump may be involved in activities for or on behalf of [Russia]."

The FBI could have also included a statement that, as of May 2017, there was no evidence — outside of the dossier — that any Trump ally colluded with Russia. But it didn't.

The memo cited “open source reports,” which means the news media and dossier, and listed four events as the “factual basis” to put Mr. Trump under a “full investigation.”

Here are the FBI's four events:

- Amending platform language at the 2016 Republican National Convention.

Proposed language called for “providing lethal defensive weapons” to Ukraine. A Trump campaign staffer changed it to “provide appropriate assistance.”

The change could easily be interpreted as a presidential candidate, Mr. Trump, not wanting to be locked into such a major decision before taking office.

But the press and FBI saw otherwise. Mr. Steele wrote of an amazing conspiracy: Mr. Trump approved Russia using WikiLeaks to distribute hacked Democratic emails. In return, Mr. Trump “agreed to sideline Russian intervention in Ukraine as a campaign issue.....”

None of this was true. In 2019, special counsel Robert Mueller released his investigation into the alleged Trump-Russia conspiracy. He did not find one.

Concerning the Ukraine platform language change, he wrote: “The investigation did not establish that one Campaign official's efforts to dilute a portion of the Republican Party platform on providing assistance to Ukraine were undertaken at the behest of candidate Trump or Russia.”

- Mr. Trump maintained numerous business ties with Russians.

The FBI memo states: “Open source information indicates that President Trump has had long-standing business and real estate ties in Russia and former Soviet states.”

Mr. Steele's dossier quoted “two well-placed sources” in St. Petersburg saying Mr. Trump had visited the Russian city “on several occasions” and “had been interested in doing business deals there involving real estate [and] that Trump had paid bribes there to further his interests.”

Mr. Trump, as a private citizen and global real estate developer, visited Russia four times over four decades, beginning in 1987 with his first and only trip to St. Petersburg. Although Mr. Trump wrote in his book “The Art of the Deal” that he was interested in building a luxury hotel in Moscow, he has never bought or developed any property in Russia.

You would not know that by reading the FBI memo.

- In Mr. Trump's private conversations with then-FBI Director James B. Comey, he urged that a probe into one of his associates be dropped. He also asked Mr. Comey to publicly state that he, the president, was not under investigation.

Given the fact that Mr. Trump knew the dossier — published in January 2017 and promoted by the FBI, Democrats and the press — was a giant hoax, is it unreasonable to make such a request while trying to focus on being president?

- The fact that Mr. Trump fired Mr. Comey on May 9 and later cited the Russia probe as a reason. The FBI memo quotes him as saying, "I said to myself, I said you know this Russian thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story."

The president was right. The FBI wanted to send him to prison for being correct.

We know more today about Mr. Comey's role. He was one of Washington's biggest dossier-boosters. The FBI took the document as evidence to federal judges to convince them to authorize four wiretaps in 2016-17 on campaign adviser Carter Page.

Mr. Comey also took the dossier to President Obama; to intelligence agencies who used it to issue a parting-shot intelligence assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin worked to get Mr. Trump elected; and to President-elect Trump himself in New York as part of the FBI's Russia investigation.

Regarding the Ukraine platform language: In December 2017, Mr. Trump authorized providing Ukraine with lethal weapons — 210 Javelins, the Army's state-of-the-art anti-tank missile. A second shipment came in 2019. Mr. Trump was the first president to supply the country with lethal weapons.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, after President Biden tried to mollify Mr. Putin by overruling Mr. Trump's tough stances on sanctions and arms control.

Fortunately, the Javelins provided by Mr. Trump helped Ukraine blunt the Russia armored strike that sought to quickly capture the capital of Kyiv.