

Democrats, media revive anti-Russia campaign after Trump-Putin meeting

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In the wake of President Trump's two-hour meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin Friday, leading Democrats and their media allies have sought to revive their campaign over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections and collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government.

The effort came despite substantial concessions by Trump to the foreign policy concerns that are the principal motivation behind the anti-Russia agitation and attack on the White House by Trump's opponents within the ruling class and the state. Trump traveled to Warsaw to deliver an anti-Russian (and anti-German) broadside before a friendly right-wing Polish audience. In his speech on Thursday, he explicitly declared his support for Article Five of the NATO charter, which obligates the US to go to war with Russia in the event of border clashes between Russia and the Baltic States.

The *New York Times* led the way, as usual, with a lengthy front-page report on Sunday, timed to dominate the Sunday television talk shows. The substance of the report did nothing to substantiate the claims that Trump election campaign officials colluded with the Russian government in the hacking of Democratic Party emails and leaking of their contents for the purpose of damaging Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and boosting Trump.

Sunday's *Times* reported that Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., had a half-hour meeting with a Russian lawyer and lobbyist more than a year ago, on June 9, 2016, at Trump Tower, at which the lawyer raised her objections to the Magnitsky Act, a US law passed after the prison death of Sergei Magnitsky that imposed sanctions on several dozen Russian government officials and businessmen allegedly linked to Magnitsky's death.

Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to

passage of the law by sharply curtailing US adoptions of Russian children left orphaned or abandoned.

The Russian attorney, Natalia Veselnitskaya, has been a prominent critic of the Magnitsky Act, defending the Putin government against charges that it was complicit in the death of Magnitsky, an attorney who had accused several top officials and businessmen of corruption.

The younger Trump readily confirmed having had the meeting with Veselnitskaya, while explaining that he had initially agreed to the meeting because an "acquaintance" had requested it, saying that the Russian lawyer had information on financial connections between Russian oligarchs and Clinton.

When he discovered that Veselnitskaya had no such information, but had apparently employed a bait and switch to gain an audience for her concerns about the Magnitsky Act, he brought the meeting to a quick end. Two other top Trump aides, campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, were also present at the meeting in Trump Tower.

Later on Sunday, the *Times* posted a second front-page report based on Trump Jr.'s confirmation of the meeting and his description of his own motivation for agreeing to it, claiming that the meeting "points to the central question in federal investigations of the Kremlin's meddling in the presidential election: whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Russians. The accounts of the meeting represent the first public indication that at least some in the campaign were willing to accept Russian help."

Seeking to imply a much greater significance than the story appears to have, the *Times* report went on to say that "while President Trump has been dogged by revelations of undisclosed meetings between his associates and the Russians, the episode at Trump

Tower is the first such confirmed private meeting involving members of his inner circle during the campaign—as well as the first one known to have included his eldest son.”

The report is not the result of any investigative journalism on the newspaper’s part, but a leak from within the federal government. The newspaper noted, “The fact of the Trump Tower meeting was disclosed to government officials in recent days, when Mr. Kushner, who is also a senior White House aide, filed a revised version of a form required to obtain a security clearance.”

In other words, Kushner filed a revised statement of all his calls and meetings with foreigners during the campaign and the postelection transition, as required for his White House security clearance, adding the meeting with the Russian lawyer that occurred some 13 months ago. This information was then relayed by unnamed sources within the intelligence agencies to the *New York Times*, which promptly put this intelligence bulletin on its front page.

The insubstantial nature of this “revelation” was no barrier to sensationalized reporting on many of the Sunday television programs, particularly NBC’s “Meet the Press,” where former CIA Director John Brennan had been lined up as a principal interviewee.

Brennan denounced the Trump-Putin meeting, held Friday on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany. The ex-CIA chief seized on Trump’s opening words, in which he declared it “an honor” to meet with Putin. “An honor to meet the individual who carried out the assault against our election?” Brennan asked. “To me, it was a dishonorable thing to say.”

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Brennan embraced the *New York Times* report on Donald Trump Jr., declaring that the Russian lawyer with whom he met should be considered a representative of the Russian government. Interviewer Chuck Todd responded with the suggestion that such meetings were what Brennan was talking about in congressional testimony earlier this year when he warned about US citizens being induced to take the road of “treason” by Russian manipulation.

Todd and Brennan then traded insults directed at Putin, accusing him of murdering journalists and supporting a “butcher” in Syrian President Bashar al-

Assad. Todd was diplomatically silent on the number of murders Brennan has on his rap sheet, which is undoubtedly longer and bloodier than Putin’s.

Suffice it to say that besides a three-decade career with the CIA, the premier instrument of US assassination, torture, coup plotting and secret warfare, Brennan also worked as President Obama’s counterterrorism coordinator, directly supervising drone missile strikes that killed thousands in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and other countries.

One of the leading Democrats in the anti-Russian campaign, Representative Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, denounced the Trump-Putin meeting in an appearance Sunday on the CNN program “State of the Union.”

He sarcastically attacked Trump’s claim that the US and Russia could collaborate against cyber terrorism and, more generally, on cyber security. “If that’s our best election defense, we might as well just mail our ballot boxes to Moscow,” he said.

Schiff said he did not believe claims by Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the only US officials at the meeting with Putin, that Trump had pressed Putin repeatedly on alleged Russian interference in the US election.

He also cited the *Times* article, published a few hours before, on the meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and the Russian lawyer. “There’s no reason for this Russian government advocate to be meeting with Paul Manafort or with Mr. Kushner or the president’s son if it wasn’t about the campaign and Russia policy,” he said. “Obviously, they were trying to influence one of the candidates, the leading candidate at that time on the Republican ticket.”



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