



Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton pause during their presidential town hall debate at Washington University in St. Louis, Mo., October 9, 2016. *(Rick Wilking/Reuters)*

We learn from special counsel John Durham’s [indictment of Igor Danchenko](#) that “the FBI ultimately devoted substantial resources attempting to investigate and corroborate the allegations” in the now-infamous Steele dossier. “Ultimately” is right — but not before it relied on the shoddy document to surveil an American citizen in an investigation that produced the Mueller probe and a two-year-long obsession with Trump and Russian [built on a preposterous foundation](#).

The web of deceit is a tangled one, but while the indictment details a shocking story of transnational dirty tricks weaponized at the highest level of American politics, the most significant moral failure was on the part of the FBI itself.

Durham, who is investigating the origins of the FBI’s Trump-Russia investigation, indicted Danchenko on five counts of lying to the Bureau’s investigators regarding the compilation of the information in the dossier. The document was a collection of political opposition research posing as intelligence reports, generated at the behest of the Hillary Clinton campaign, which portrayed Donald Trump and his 2016

campaign as clandestine agents of the Kremlin.

It is worth relating the background in detail.

These reports were crafted by a former British spy, Christopher Steele, in partnership with Glenn Simpson, co-founder of the political research firm Fusion GPS. Perkins Coie, the sharp-elbowed Democratic law firm that represented the Clinton campaign, retained Simpson for the project. Simpson, in turn, recruited Steele, who brought in Danchenko, his business associate.

Danchenko's background, which is worthy of a second-rate spy novel, came to light in late 2020, when a Justice Department inspector-general investigation was unsealed. A Russian citizen transplanted to Washington as a geopolitics scholar, he landed at the Brookings Institution, a prominent Clinton-friendly think-tank. In 2009, the FBI opened a counterintelligence investigation of Danchenko. He had allegedly suggested to two Brookings staffers, who appeared to be headed for jobs in the Obama administration, that he could make it worth their while if they passed along classified information. The staffers (one of whom believed Danchenko must be a Russian agent – imagine that!) instead passed along word of Danchenko's entreaty to the FBI. The Bureau learned that Danchenko appeared to be tied to two Russian agents who were also under investigation.

Agents prepared to seek national-security surveillance of Danchenko under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). But, in what would become an alarming theme, the FBI did not follow through and closed the investigation in March 2011, apparently believing that Danchenko had gone back to Russia.

In fact, he had begun working with Steele. Danchenko was introduced to Steele in 2010 by Fiona Hill, another Brookings Russia scholar. Hill, you may recall, was a Trump White House National Security Council member who provided key testimony in the House's impeachment of then-President Trump in the Ukraine kerfuffle. (Hill appears not to have been knowingly complicit in the unrelated Trump-Russia hype.)

When Steele was recruited for the Clinton campaign's anti-Trump project in spring 2016, he relied on Danchenko to supply most of the information. Contrary to Steele's later claims, Danchenko did not have a network of useful contacts. But here again, Hill appears inadvertently to have advanced the plot. In 2016, she introduced Danchenko to Charles Dolan, a Russia-focused businessman and Democratic Party activist.

Dolan is identified in the indictment as "PR Executive-1" because he helped run a public-relations firm. He is a longtime Clinton insider, having worked on Bill Clinton's successful 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns, as well as Hillary's failed 2008 and 2016 bids. In the interim, he was appointed by President Clinton to a State Department advisory committee. From 2006 until 2014, the Kremlin retained Dolan to be its global public-relations agent. For much of that time, conveniently, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was the Obama administration point-person on the "Russia Reset," in which the State Department promoted Russian economic development.

As the indictment details, Dolan hired Danchenko to consult on a conference he planned for October 2016 in Moscow. In the preceding months, Dolan had constant communication with Danchenko and made a

preparatory trip to Moscow, meeting with Danchenko. Dolan would pass information to Danchenko, which Danchenko would embellish, sometimes beyond recognition, in passing it on to Steele, who dutifully included it in the dossier without disclosing its origins.

In the most notorious example, Dolan had meetings in a Moscow hotel and was given a tour of the presidential suite, in which he was told Donald Trump had once stayed. Danchenko was not present for these meetings, and the indictment says there was no discussion of any sexual hijinks. Dolan then communicated some of the details to Danchenko who, within days, flew to London to meet with Steele. By the time Steele finished writing up what Danchenko told him, the episode had been spun into the now infamous “pee tape” claim – i.e., that Trump had cavorted with prostitutes in the presidential suite, which they defiled because Trump hated the Obamas (who had supposedly stayed there earlier), and Putin thus had a recording of the whole sordid affair. In reality, Danchenko is Steele’s source, has no first-hand knowledge, and appears to have made the whole thing up.

According to the indictment, Danchenko lied to the FBI about getting information from Dolan. He also lied about having learned directly from a close Trump associate that Trump’s campaign was in a “well-developed conspiracy of cooperation” with the Kremlin. Danchenko claimed that this information came from the president of the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce — identified in the indictment as “Chamber President-1,” and in public reporting as Sergei Millian.

A minor real-estate developer, Millian did some business with the Trump organization and started this obscure “chamber” in order to raise his profile. In reality, Danchenko never spoke or met with Millian. He continued to cling to his incredible story in several interviews by the FBI throughout 2017. As a result, four of the five false statement counts relate to this alleged fabrication. The other concerns Danchenko’s alleged concealment of Dolan’s role.

The spotlight on Danchenko, and on the seminal role of the Hillary Clinton campaign in creating and disseminating the Trump-Russia “collusion” tale, is understandable. It should not, however, divert attention from the FBI’s stunningly inept performance. On its face, the dossier is a screed full of blatant nonsense. The Danchenko indictment shows that if a modicum of fair-minded investigation had been done, a borderline competent FBI agent would quickly have spotted its glaring weaknesses. Yet, the Bureau took no meaningful action to corroborate the Steele/Danchenko claims before seeking FISA warrants under oath. Agents did not even interview Danchenko, *the main source*, until four months later.

Too good to check is an impulse that never serves journalists well, and it’s even worse when it is the policy of a law-enforcement agency wielding awesome powers. At best, the FBI allowed itself to get duped into playing along with a political hit against, first, a presidential candidate and, then, the duly elected president of the United States. May John Durham continue to expose the details of this sorry scheme, and hold accountable anyone who broke the law in the course of advancing it.

Source: [The Dossier Deceit](#)