

Mueller Report Gets the Trump Tower Meeting Wrong; Promotes Browder Hoax

Natalia Veselnitskaya didn't have "dirt" on Hillary Clinton and when the Russian lawyer met with Trump's people her focus was not on the 2016 campaign, writes Lucy Komisar.

By **Lucy Komisar**

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A "key event" described in the [Mueller Report](#) is the Trump Tower meeting where a Russian lawyer met with the president's son Donald Trump Jr, his son-in-law Jared Kushner and his campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

Russiagaters have been obsessed with the meeting saying it was the smoking gun to prove collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign to steal the 2016 election. Months after Mueller concluded that there was no collusion at all, the obsession has switched to "obstruction of justice," which is like someone being apprehended for resisting arrest without committing any other crime.

The Mueller report thus focuses instead on "efforts to prevent disclosure of information about the June 9, 2016 Trump Tower meeting between Russians and senior campaign officials."

But the report on this topic is deceptive. Ironically, as it attacks Donald Trump and top campaign officials for lying, the report itself lies about the issue the meeting addressed.

It wasn't to provide dirt on Hillary Clinton, which the Russian lawyer did not have and never produced. That was a ploy by Robert Goldstone, a British music publicist whose job is to get what his clients want, in this case, a meeting. So, recklessly, he invented the idea of Clinton dirt as a bait-and-switch to get Trump's people to come to it. He got the lawyer the meeting for her to lobby a potentially incoming administration against the Magnitsky Act, which is why she was in the United States in the first place.

The Magnitsky Act is a 2012 U.S. law that was promoted by William Browder, an American-born British citizen and hedge fund investor, who claimed his "lawyer" Sergei Magnitsky had been imprisoned and murdered because he uncovered a scheme by Russian officials to steal \$230 million from the Russian Treasury. It sanctioned Russians he said were involved or benefitted from Magnitsky's death. It has since been used by the U.S. to put sanctions on other Russians and nationals from other countries.

The lawyer lobbying against the act, Natalia Veselnitskaya, told Trump Jr., Kushner and Manafort that Browder's story was fake, a smokescreen to block the Russians from going after him for multi-millions in tax evasion. She argued the Magnitsky Act was built on this fraud. Manafort's notes, included in the Mueller Report, trace what she said.

Nothing Illegal

The Trump people did nothing illegal to meet with her. Their problem was the exaggerating communications Goldstone sent them about Veselnitskaya having "dirt" on Clinton. (While

U.S. election laws says it's illegal for a campaign to receive "a thing of value" from a foreign source, it's never been established by a court that opposition research fits that description, the Mueller Report admits.) Veselnitskaya testified to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in November 2017 that Browder's major American client, the Ziff brothers, had cheated on American and Russian taxes and contributed the "dirty money" to the Democrats.

The Mueller investigators appear not to have looked into her charges. The report promotes Browder's fabrications, citing "the Magnitsky Act, which imposed financial sanctions and travel restrictions on Russian officials and which was named for a Russian tax specialist who exposed a fraud and later died in a Russian prison."

But instead of his "lawyer" Magnitsky exposing Russian fraud, for which he was jailed and killed in prison, Magnitsky was actually Browder's accountant who was detained under investigation for his part in Browder's tax evasion and died of natural causes in prison, as Magnitsky's own mother admits to filmmaker Andrei Nekrasov in the film "The Magnitsky Act: Behind the Scenes."

Mueller's investigators might have started with documents filed in U.S. federal court in the case of Veselnitskaya's client, Prevezon, a Russian holding company that settled a civil-forfeiture claim by the U.S. government that linked it, without proof, to the tax fraud.

The documents include a deposition where Browder admits that the alleged "lawyer" Magnitsky did not go to law school nor have a law degree. Magnitsky's own testimony file identifies

him as an “auditor.”

Why does that matter? Because it was Browder’s red herring. Magnitsky had worked as Browder’s accountant since 1997, fiddling on Browder’s taxes on profits from sales of shares held by Russian shell companies run by his Hermitage Fund. He was not an attorney hired in 2007 to investigate and then expose a tax fraud against the Russian Treasury.

That fraud was exposed by Rimma Starova, the Russian nominee director of a British Virgin Islands shell company that held Hermitage’s reregistered companies and who gave testimony to Russian police on [April 9](#) and [July 10, 2008](#). It was [reported](#) by *The New York Times* and [Vedomosti](#) on July 24, 2008, months before Magnitsky mentioned it in an Oct. 7 interrogation.

Kremlin-connected?

The Mueller Report says Veselnitskaya promised dirt on Hillary Clinton as “part of Russia and its government support for Trump.” Two days before the meeting, Goldstone emailed Trump Jr. and said “the Russian government attorney” was flying in from Moscow. She had not been a government attorney since 2001, 15 years earlier.

I interviewed Veselnitskaya in New York in November 2016. She explained what she later told the Trump group, that Browder’s clients the Ziff Brothers had invested in Russian shares in a way that routed the money through loans so that they could evade U.S. taxes. [“Not invest – loans” in Manafort’s notes.]

The report says, “Natalia Veselnitskaya had previously

worked for the Russian government and maintained a relationship with that government throughout this period of time.” Later it says that from 1998 to 2001, she had worked as a prosecutor for the “Central Administrative District” of the Russian Prosecutor’s office. “And continued to perform government-related work and maintain ties to the Russian government following her departure.” We are meant to presume, with no evidence, as the media does – that means “a Kremlin-connected lawyer.”

When Trump Jr asked for evidence, how the payments could be tied to the Clinton campaign, she said she couldn’t trace them, according to the Mueller Report.

Then she turned to the Magnitsky Act. The report repeats earlier fakery: “She lobbied and testified about the Magnitsky Act, which imposed financial sanctions and travel restrictions on Russian officials and which was named for a Russian tax specialist who exposed a fraud and later died in a Russian prison.” Magnitsky did *not* expose a fraud. Rimma Starova did.

A footnote in the report said: “Browder hired Magnitsky to investigate tax fraud by Russian officials, and Magnitsky was charged with helping Browder embezzle money.” Browder did not hire Magnitsky to investigate the fraud. Magnitsky had been the accountant in charge of Hermitage since 1997, 10 years before the fraud. Embezzlement refers to Browder shifting assets out of Russia without paying taxes.

But the investigation’s focus was not on Browder’s fakery – the substance of the Trump Tower meeting – but on the communications organizing the event. The section on

obstruction says Trump became aware of “emails setting up the June 9, 2016 meeting between senior campaign officials and Russians who offered derogatory information on Hillary Clinton as ‘part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.’”

That would have been inflated Goldstone’s promises.

The report says “at the meeting the Russian attorney claimed that funds derived from illegal activities in Russia were provided to Hillary Clinton and other Democrats.” Trump Jr. told a White House press officer that “they started with some Hillary thing, which was bs and some other nonsense, which we shot down fast.”

As Veselnitskaya told me, she knew the Ziffs made contributions to Democrats. She probably started with that. Manafort’s notes don’t report a “Hillary thing,” but are about Browder and the Ziffs.

On the issue of Browder, the Magnitsky story and the essence of the Trump Tower meeting, the Mueller Report is a deception intended to keep the myth of collusion in the air while dismissing that any collusion took place.

Lucy Komisar is an investigative reporter who writes about financial corruption and won a Gerald Loeb award, the most important prize in financial journalism, for breaking the story about how Ponzi schemer Allen Stanford got the Florida Banking Dept to allow him to move money offshore with no regulation. Her stories about William Browder focus on tax evasion. Find out more on [The Komisar Scoop](#) and on Twitter, [@lucykomisar](#).

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