

# FROTHY REPUBLICANS CONFUSE OLEG DERIPASKA AND DONALD TRUMP

A letter from Elijah Cummings and Jerrold Nadler to Trey Gowdy and Bob Goodlatte answers two questions I've had since John Solomon and the rest of the propaganda mill started reporting on Christopher Steele's communications with Bruce Ohr.

First, the communications that frothy right propagandists all seem to have, have not been officially released. Indeed, Cummings and Nadler complain that in the questioning of Ohr last week, Democrats weren't even shown the communications that all the frothy right seems to have.

These documents were not included in the 800,000 pages of documents the Justice Department produced to our Committee during this investigation. During Mr. Ohr's interview, the Republican Members never introduced these documents into the official record, never marked them as exhibits, never explained how they obtained them, and never provided copies to Democratic staff participating in the interview.

More hilariously, the letter reveals that Republicans read a reference Steele made to "our favorite business tycoon" and assumed – premised on the notion that everything Steele was doing at the time had to have been a conspiracy against Trump – that that must be a reference to Trump.

First, by cherry-picking portions of these documents out of context—and withholding the full set of documents—Republican Members are

creating a highly misleading narrative with factually inaccurate interpretations and conjecture. For example, Republican Members read aloud a portion of one email in which Mr. Steele wrote to Mr. Ohr, "There is something I wanted to discuss with you informally and separately. It concerns our favorite business tycoon." When Republican Members accused Mr. Ohr of discussing President Donald Trump with Mr. Steele, Mr. Ohr explained that the Republican interpretation was false—and that the "business tycoon" they were referring to was actually Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

Cummings and Nadler point out that that interpretation has leaked to frothy right propagandists.

[S]elect portions of some of these same documents have no been leaked to the press to create similarly false and misleading narratives. For example, on August 7, 2018, John Solomon wrote in *The Hill* that he was given some of "Ohr's own notes, emails and text messages." In his piece, Mr. Solomon quoted the same email in which Mr. Ohr and Mr. Steele discussed "our favorite business tycoon." Then, like the Republican Members, Mr. Solomon asserted inaccurately that this statement was "an apparent reference to Trump."

Here's how Solomon spun it.

Some of the more tantalizing Ohr contacts occurred in the days when Steele made his first contacts with the FBI in summer 2016 about the Russia matter.

"There is something separate I wanted to discuss with you informally and

separately. It concerns our favourite business tycoon!" Steele wrote Ohr on July 1, 2016, in an apparent reference to Trump.

That overture came just four days before Steele walked into the FBI office in Rome with still-unproven allegations that Trump had an improper relationship with Russia, including possible efforts to hijack the presidential election.

And how Byron York repeated that "reasonable" supposition.

On March 17, Steele wrote a brief note asking if Ohr had any update on plans to visit Europe "in the near term where we could meet up." Ohr said he did not and asked if Steele would like to set up a call. It is not clear whether a call took place.

There are no emails for more than three months after March 17. Then, on July 1, came the first apparent reference to Donald Trump, then preparing to accept the Republican nomination for president. "I am seeing [redacted] in London next week to discuss ongoing business," Steele wrote to Ohr, "but there is something separate I wanted to discuss with you informally and separately. It concerns our favourite business tycoon!" Steele said he had planned to come to the U.S. soon, but now it looked like it would not be until August. He needed to talk in the next few days, he said, and suggested getting together by Skype before he left on holiday. Ohr suggested talking on July 7. Steele agreed.

Ohr's phone log for July 7 notes, "Call with Chris Steele" from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. eastern time.

(A caution here: It is possible the "favourite business tycoon" could be

Deripaska, or perhaps even someone else, and not Trump. But no one referred to Deripaska in that way anywhere else in the communications. Also, Steele made it clear the “tycoon” subject was separate from other business. And July 1 was just before Steele met with the FBI with the first installment of the Trump dossier. So it appears reasonable, given Steele’s well-known obsession with Trump, and unless information emerges otherwise, to see the “favourite business tycoon” as Trump.)

Followed, marginally more critically, by Chuck Ross.

On July 1, 2016, Steele reached out to Ohr in hopes of discussing “our favourite business tycoon!” It is unclear if Steele was referring to Deripaska or Donald Trump. Steele met with Ohr and his wife, a Russia expert named Nellie Ohr, on July 30, 2016, at a Washington, D.C., hotel.

When I wrote this up, I noted the problematic assumption.

But in their effort to make everything an expert on Russian organized crime touched into a conspiracy against Donald Trump, the frothy right has just confused Trump and a mobbed up Russian oligarch.

I mean, there’s a clear difference. Deripaska really is as rich as he claims.