

KAITLAN COLLINS IGNORES BILL BARR'S ROLE IN THE EFFORT THAT FRAMED JOE BIDEN

Kaitlan Collins did an interview with Bill Barr the other day, offering him a platform to make weakly-rebutted claims that Democrats were worse than a man who attempted to overthrow democracy.

The interview provided a remarkable opportunity to question Barr about his role in an important scandal that has become public since his last interview with Collins: the Scott Brady side channel to ingest dirt on Hunter Biden, a side channel that FBI informant Alexander Smirnov used to frame Joe Biden with false allegations of bribery. Not only didn't Collins even *ask* Barr about his role in setting up that opportunity, but she allowed Barr to lie to her face, falsely claiming that Trump never demanded that Barr intervene in particular investigations.

Days after one such instance documented in Barr's memoir, when Trump called Barr to yell about Hunter Biden, DOJ ordered prosecutors investigating Joe Biden's son to pursue Smirnov's allegations.

Since Barr's last appearance, we've learned more about the Brady side channel

Not long before Bill Barr's last appearance on Kaitlan Collins' show last August, he made a little noticed intervention in the House inquiry attempting to substantiate *something* against Joe Biden.

On June 7, 2023 – the same day David Weiss and Hunter Biden’s lawyers settled on language that should have resolved all criminal investigations of him – in an on-the-record interview with Margot Cleveland, Barr accused Jamie Raskin of lying about what members of Congress had been told about an FD-1023 informant report, now known to be a fabricated report from Alexander Smirnov.

Barr told Cleveland that the investigation into the FD-1023 – an investigation that the Smirnov indictment identifies as a bribery assessment – wasn’t shut down in August 2020 but instead was forwarded to David Weiss to investigate further.

“It’s not true. It wasn’t closed down,” William Barr told The Federalist on Tuesday in response to Democrat Rep. Jamie Raskin’s claim that the former attorney general and his “handpicked prosecutor” had ended an investigation into a confidential human source’s allegation that Joe Biden had agreed to a \$5 million bribe. “On the contrary,” Barr stressed, “it was sent to Delaware for further investigation.”

An anonymous source for the same article (often, reporters will give a source anonymity in an article where they are otherwise quoted) had knowledge that the lead to Smirnov didn’t come directly from Rudy Giuliani.

Not so, according to an individual familiar with the investigation who told The Federalist that the CHS and the FD-1023 summary of his statement were both “unrelated to Rudy Giuliani” and “not derived” from any information Giuliani provided.

Barr’s comments led House Republicans to pursue the FD-1023 even more aggressively. They pointed to it as yet another (subsequently debunked) claim that David Weiss had blown the

investigation into Hunter Biden. This was the smoking gun that was going to take down Joe Biden and his kid!

That effort appears to have contributed to Weiss' decision to renege on Hunter Biden's plea deal.

On July 10 – just weeks after David Weiss' office assured Chris Clark, on June 19, that there was no ongoing investigation into Joe Biden's kid – Weiss told Lindsey Graham that there was an ongoing investigation into the FD-1023 he had been ordered to investigate 32 months earlier.

Then, on July 23, just days before Hunter Biden's plea hearing was scheduled, Chuck Grassley released a leaked copy of the FD-1023 itself.

Three days later, in Hunter Biden's plea hearing, when Maryellen Noreika asked Leo Wise about the scope of the immunity offered to Hunter Biden, he stated there was an ongoing investigation, one in which FARA charges might still be on the table; that claim directly conflicted with the assurances offered to Hunter's attorney on June 19.

THE COURT: All right. So there are references to foreign companies, for example, in the facts section. Could the government bring a charge under the Foreign Agents Registration Act?

MR. WISE: Yes.

THE COURT: I'm trying to figure out if there is a meeting of the minds here and I'm not sure that this provision isn't part of the Plea Agreement and so that's why I'm asking.

MR. CLARK: Your Honor, the Plea Agreement –

THE COURT: I need you to answer my question if you can. Is there a meeting of the minds on that one?

MR. CLARK: As stated by the government just now, I don't agree with what the government said.

THE COURT: So I mean, these are contracts. To be enforceable, there has to be a meeting of the minds. So what do we do now?

MR. WISE: Then there is no deal.

As Judge Noreika described in an opinion rejecting Hunter Biden's claim that David Weiss had reneged on this deal, prosecutors "appeared to revoke the deal" at that moment. In the wake of the release of the FD-1023 and Barr's claims that Weiss had been ordered to pursue that lead, David Weiss "revoked" the deal in order to chase allegations that might substantiate a FARA charge. In spite of the fact that Judge Noreika described that Wise appeared to revoke a signed deal, in spite of the fact that she had an uncontested claim before her from Chris Clark that Weiss' office had told him on June 19 there was no ongoing investigation, Noreika did not conclude that Weiss had reneged on the terms of a deal.

On August 29, investigators working with newly-minted Special Counsel David Weiss interviewed Smirnov's handler. They learned that Smirnov's travel records were entirely inconsistent with the claims Smirnov had made. They should also have learned that a photo Smirnov shared with his handler in May 2020 was a long-debunked hoax first spread by Tucker Carlson in the same time period that Rudy Giuliani launched his 2020 disinformation campaign against Joe Biden.

Nevertheless, on August 29, the same day they should have realized they were chasing disinformation, Weiss' prosecutors told Abbe Lowell they were chasing felonies against Joe Biden's kid.

As they were doing so, more evidence about the side channel became public. On September 27, Gary Shapley released an email corroborating one

thing Barr told Cleveland: DOJ *had* sent that lead over to David Weiss for further investigation. Pittsburgh AUSAs briefed Weiss' team on October 23, 2020, just days before the election.

Two days later, on September 29, Weiss' investigators interviewed Smirnov, only to find him beginning to change parts of his story while claiming to know of another disinformation campaign, involving high level Russian spies, targeting Joe Biden in 2024. At this point, it wasn't just a hoax. It might be a Russian-backed hoax.

It should have been clear years earlier, but by that point, it was clear that Smirnov, someone who belatedly informed his FBI handler about ties with Russian spies, had exploited the Brady side channel set up to ingest dirt Rudy Giuliani solicited overseas, including from known Russian spies, to frame Joe Biden.

On October 23, Brady provided far more details about that side channel in testimony to Congress, testimony that was available almost immediately (but which few mainstream outlets chose to read).

Barr came up, by name, 33 times, such as when Brady described updating the Attorney General on his efforts, in person, twice. Or when describing not what Brady's *actual* instructions from Barr were, but what Barr had publicly said his instructions were (the logging of the assessment as a bribery assessment discredits Brady's claims about his task). Or when Brady got caught falsely claiming the effort wasn't secret until Lindsey Graham blew the secret after Trump was acquitted for demanding such bribery allegations from Ukraine. Or when questioned about whether Barr was included among the people who "Would feel more comfortable if [Brady] participated," in an interview of Rudy personally, "so we get a sense of what's coming out of it." Or when trying to explain why he reached out to the FBI's Legat in Ukraine to ask for help from Ukraine's Prosecutor General. Or

when Brady offered several of his never-plausible explanations of something that remains among the most important questions about this scheme: how his team came to focus on a single line in an informant report about Mykola Zlochevsky and, from that, decide they had to interview Smirnov directly.

Q According to public statements by Attorney General Barr, your office in vetting the information provided by the CHS for the FD-1023, you went back and developed more information that apparently had been overlooked by the FBI.

Is that an accurate statement?

A I can't say "overlooked." I don't know that I agree with that characterization because I don't know what – again, because this was referenced in a previous CHS report, I don't know what the focus of that investigation was. So it might have been ancillary information that wasn't directly related to what they were looking at in 2017. But it had not been developed. It's fair to say that it had not been looked into or developed any further.

[snip]

Chairman Jordan. Okay. January 3rd, 2020. And then what I am understanding is, right, throughout the winter and spring, you're asking the FBI for information they have regarding Ukraine and Hunter Biden, you're requesting that you get information they may have?

Mr. Brady. We're trying to identify investigative leads, and from the information we had received from the public, including information about Hunter Biden and Burisma, and then asking the FBI – and we were also tasked with coordinating this is public from Attorney General, Attorney General Barr,

how to coordinate also with intelligence services. And so we were interfacing with them relating to that tasking. It wasn't everything that they had because certainly Delaware with the grand jury investigation would have had a lot of information relating since it began in 2019.

Bill Barr was, according to the guy he tasked with it, Scott Brady, *all over* this side channel. Even Bill Barr claims he knew the circumstances of how Brady sought out an informant used in an investigation that had only weeks earlier been shut down by DOJ to shift the focus, away from Zlochevsky's suspected bribes, and onto the man he might have bribed, Joe Biden.

Bill Barr set up a side channel, *during* an impeachment of Donald Trump for demanding that Ukraine investigate the Bidens for corruption, that tried to find basis to investigate the Bidens for corruption.

Nothing about Brady's pursuit of Alexander Smirnov – digging to find a one-line mention of Joe Biden's kid and from that demanding to interview the informant – matches the public explanation of the side channel: accepting and vetting information from the public, first and foremost from Trump's personal lawyer. These are all things that Kaitlan Collins had a unique opportunity to query Barr on. Bill Barr claims to know that the Smirnov tip didn't come from Rudy. How does he know that? Where did it come from? How did Brady and Barr come to decide to interview the FBI informant who happened to be floating false claims of bribery based on already debunked hoaxes? Were Brady and Barr witting participants in the effort to frame Joe Biden, one made in 2020 and renewed for the 2024 campaign, or did they just get used? If they got used, do they owe Biden an apology?

That would have been a laudable use of CNN's exclusive interview with the former Attorney

General.

Bill Barr lies to Kaitlan Collins' face

Collins did none of that. Instead, among the other lies Barr told (a few of which CNN's panel debunked after Barr left), she let Barr tell this lie – that Trump never pressured him directly, but instead only pressured Barr by tweet – uncorrected.

Did Trump expect his A.G. to go easy on his friends?

BARR: I don't know. I don't know what he expected.

COLLINS: What was your experience?

BARR: My experience was by the time I came in, he did not – he did not push me to do one thing or another, on these criminal cases. Now, he tweeted, and made his public views on things known. But he never talked to me about them directly.

COLLINS: So, he did not have you in his pocket, you would argue?

BARR: It's not a question of arguing. I did what I thought was right.

COLLINS: And you never felt any direct pressure from him, on what investigations the DOJ was carrying out.

BARR: No. He did not directly pressure me. Yes, as I say, he was out there tweeting and doing things that were embarrassing, and made it hard for me to run the department.

COLLINS: That sounds like pressure. [my emphasis]

Barr's own memoir describes Trump pressuring him

directly, just days before Richard Donoghue, acting as PADAG, ordered David Weiss' team to accept a briefing from Scott Brady.

In mid-October I received a call from the President, which was the last time I spoke to him prior to the election. It was a very short conversation. The call came soon after Rudy Giuliani succeeded in making public information about Hunter Biden's laptop. I had walked over to my desk to take the call. These calls had become rare, so Will Levi stood nearby waiting expectantly to see what it was about. After brief pleasantries about his being out on the campaign trail, the President said, "You know this stuff from Hunter Biden's laptop?"

I cut the President off sharply. "Mr. President, I can't talk about that, and I am not going to."

President Trump hesitated, then continued in a plaintive tone, "You know, if that was one of my kids—"

I cut him off again, raising my voice, "Dammit, Mr. President, I am not going to talk to you about Hunter Biden. Period!"

He was silent for a moment, then quickly got off the line.

I looked up at Will, whose eyes were as big as saucers. "You yelled at the President?" he asked, confirming the obvious. I nodded. He shook his head in disbelief.

Barr's memoir is largely transparent CYA, especially for his efforts to protect Rudy's information operations (descriptions of which in the memoir do not match public records), so this may simply be an attempt to spin damning notes Levi took of the call. But it undoubtedly counts as direct pressure from Trump regarding the

Hunter Biden investigation.

Plus, Trump's pressure on DOJ to investigate Hunter Biden was not a one-off. According to contemporaneous notes from Donoghue, Trump harangued Jeffrey Rosen and Donoghue about the Hunter investigation in the December 27, 2020 call otherwise focused on demanding DOJ support for his false election claims, the call where Trump first floated replacing him with Jeffrey Clark.

Rather than hard questions about Barr's role in an effort that framed Joe Biden, then, this false claim went uncorrected.

Bill Barr is not a hypocrite; he fully backs criminalizing Democrats

The aftermath of all this was stunning.

Some of the panelists Anderson Cooper had on after the interview fact checked some of Barr's false claims. Both Cooper and Carl Bernstein noted, for example, that crime has gone down under Biden.

But they nevertheless fawned over what they claimed was Barr's moral compass.

Bernstein, citing a speech in which Barr used a right wing view of religion to attack progressives, hailed the former Attorney General as "a real moralist;" Cooper agreed.

Bernstein described that Barr was "dedicated to the rule of law" but exhibited hypocrisy for choosing Trump over someone who abides by it.

It's a kind of hypocrisy. Attorney General, dedicated to the rule of law, and then he talks about how Trump has no dedication to the rule of law.

Karen Friedman Agnifilo claimed that Barr's loyalty to the far right was a newfound thing, one that replaced care for law and order.

[H]e's really not thinking about things that really mattered to him before, like law and order.

This is not a new thing! Barr cares about authority – the kind of authority that sends federal agents across the country to police protests blocks removed from federal property. But Barr sees the law just as Trump does, as a means for partisan gain, a tool to use to defeat his hated “progressives.”

Bill Barr interfered in the Lev Parnas investigation to prevent it from incorporating Rudy's solicitation of known Russian spies for campaign dirt, then set up a way that Rudy could share that dirt in a way that might get funneled into the investigation into Joe Biden's kid. That effort ended up framing Joe Biden. And CNN doesn't seem to care, or perhaps even know that.

CNN has largely circumscribed the effort to frame Joe Biden

Ultimately, Kaitlan Collins is not entirely to blame that she let Bill Barr lie to her face rather than grilling him about his role in framing Trump's opponent.

I think she actually makes more of an effort to be personally informed than a number of her peers. But she's always reliant on the prep that CNN's own reporters do. And on this story, they've been remarkably incurious about the role that Barr's decision to set up a way to ingest Rudy's dirt led to the framing of Joe Biden.

For example, here's how CNN described the process months after these details were first

available, in the wake of Smirnov's arrest.

In June 2020, the Pittsburgh-based US attorney at the time, Scott Brady, was tasked by Justice Department officials with helping to review information from the public "that may be relevant to matters relating to Ukraine." As part of their review, FBI Pittsburgh opened an assessment into the document that memorialized Smirnov's 2017 discussion with Burisma executives.

It is at this point, prosecutors allege, that Smirnov first made the explosive allegations about the Bidens. Smirnov told the FBI that Burisma executives admitted to him in 2015 and 2016 that they hired Hunter Biden to "protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems," and that they had paid \$5 million to each Biden.

The FBI asked Smirnov to hand over documents to determine whether the information he provided was accurate. Prosecutors say that two months later, the FBI members and DOJ leadership concurred that their assessment of Smirnov's claims be closed.

But, according to his own private testimony last year to the House Judiciary Committee, Scott Brady claimed he was "able to corroborate certain information that was represented by the CHS and is memorialized in this 1023," including through some travel records that Smirnov had provided.

Prosecutors now say that Smirnov's travel records are going to be used as evidence against him in his criminal case, proving that he lied about his meetings with Burisma executives.

Brady said he believed that there was a "sufficient indicia of credibility" into aspects of the 1023, and briefed Weiss

on the document, according to the interview transcript. Brady said he asked the FBI to give the document to Weiss' office.

Weiss apparently kept that investigation open through July 2023, when the FBI approached his team about "allegations related to" Smirnov's claims. By then, Smirnov's allegations, though not publicly attributed to him, were thrust into the political spotlight by Republicans who relentlessly promoted his Biden bribery story. [my emphasis]

CNN pitches this as a problem inherent to using informants, and not a problem created when the Attorney General sets up a dedicated side channel to search for dirt on the son of his boss' rival.

Barr, Seth DuCharme, and Richard Donoghue are systematically excluded from this description, first by use of the passive voice to describe *who* tasked Brady, and then claiming that Brady *asked* to brief Weiss rather than that part of his tasking was making recommendations. It ignores how Jeffrey Rosen's office intervened to force this information onto David Weiss. And it ignores Barr's public dispute – which conflicts with the Smirnov indictment – that everyone concurred in the decision to close the investigation.

And by ignoring Barr's intervention, it ignores Barr's role in stoking the focus on the Smirnov allegation last year.

Likewise, while it describes Brady's claims to have used travel records to vet Smirnov's claims one paragraph before describing that prosecutors claim travel records prove Smirnov lies, CNN doesn't lay out the significance of that conflict. Days after this story, Jerry Nadler referred Brady's representations to (at least) DOJ IG for investigation.

And CNN simply punts on the problem with this

whole story: that Weiss was ordered to investigate Smirnov's tip in 2020, and then after pressure from Republicans (including Barr), reneged on a plea deal and obtained Special Counsel status so he could investigate it again. It ignores how that makes Weiss a witness in the effort to frame Biden, one whose conflicts prevent him from asking the questions that Collins didn't either: How did Brady find Smirnov and did anyone know he was spreading obvious disinformation?

CNN's coverage of Hunter Biden's claims of how it affected the plea deal likewise misses the 2020 orders to share the tip.

The most newsworthy thing Bill Barr has done since Collins' last interview with him was help someone claiming high level ties with Russian spies frame Joe Biden. But CNN, including Collins, has no interest in that. They even let him lie, uncorrected, about a directly relevant point!

Rather than explore whether Barr wittingly helped to frame Joe Biden or simply got used by a guy now claiming high level ties to Russian spies, CNN instead chose to portray Barr as a man of law and order who simply sold out purported values out of partisan gain.

And that's why it was so easy for Barr to use CNN to spin his false claim about caring about the rule of law.