

WITH MATT GAETZ, DONALD TRUMP'S MYTH CANNOT FAIL — IT CAN ONLY BE FAILED

Folks, I know this is bad timing, but in about 20 minutes, I'm going to temporarily shut down comments here, as we're going to do some planned maintenance. Hopefully it won't take too long.

I keep thinking back to this June 2023 exchange between Matt Gaetz and John Durham.

It came at the end of Durham's testimony after delivering his report, in which Durham said a lot of inflammatory things, but ultimately concluded that the allegations of Russian interference should have been investigated, but should have been opened at a lower level of investigation.

After four years, Durham blamed Hillary Clinton for things Russians (like those suspected of filling the Christopher Steele dossier with disinformation) had done. But he hadn't done the one thing Republicans needed him to do: assert that the Russian investigation was a hoax.

At the end of it, Jim Jordan adopted a tactic he has come to use in his hearings. He took a break for votes, giving staffers a half hour to prepare a rebuttal. And then three Republican members took turns, including Matt Gaetz for his second turn, unrebutted by any Democratic member.

He came prepared.

Gaetz cued up video from Robert Mueller's July 2019 testimony, showing Jim Jordan grilling Mueller about Joseph Mifsud. Jordan asserted that Bill Barr and John Durham were trying to find out what Mifsud was doing. After Durham responded that they *did* try to pursue that angle, Gaetz asserted that Durham's

investigation was “an op.”

You had years to find out the answer to what Mr. Jordan said was the seminal question, and you don't have it. It just begs the question whether or not you were really trying to find that out. Because it's one thing to criticize the FBI for their FISA violations, to write a report. They've been criticized in plenty of reports. Some have referred to your work as just a repackaging and regurgitation of what the Inspector General already told us. So if you weren't going to do what Mr. Jordan said you were going to do in that video, and give us the basis for all of it, what's this all been about?

Now, in point of fact, who Mifsud really was was never the seminal question. Or rather, he only ever became a question via conspiracy theories Jordan and Mark Meadows laundered through a sham Congressional appearance from George Papadopoulos. Under their direction, the Coffee Boy provided no primary documentation with which staffers could hold him to account. Instead, Papadopoulos laundered conspiracy theories first posted in right wing propaganda outlets.

Q Okay. So, and Mifsud, he presented himself as what? Who did he tell you he was?

A So looking back in my memory of this person, this is a mid-50's person, describes himself as a former diplomat who is connected to the world, essentially. I remember he was even telling me that, you know, the Vietnamese prime minister is a good friend of mine. I mean, you have to understand this is the type of personality he was portraying himself as.

And, you know, I guess I took the bait

because, you know, usually somebody who – at least in Washington, when somebody portrays themselves in a specific way and has credentials to back it, you believe them. But that's how he portrayed himself. And then I can't remember exactly the next thing that happened until he decided to introduce me to Putin's fake niece in London, which we later found out is some sort of student. But I could get into those details of how that all started.

Q And what's your – just to kind of jump way ahead, what's your current understanding of who Mifsud is?

A My current understanding?

Q Yeah. A You know, **I don't want to espouse conspiracy theories because, you know, it's horrifying to really think that they might be true, but just yesterday, there was a report in the Daily Caller from his own lawyer that he was working with the FBI when he approached me.** And when he was working me, I guess – I don't know if that's a fact, and I'm not saying it's a fact – I'm just relaying what the Daily Caller reported yesterday, with Chuck Ross, and it stated in a categorical fashion that Stephan Roh, who is Joseph Mifsud's, I believe his President's counsel, or PR person, said that Mifsud was never a Russian agent.

In fact, he's a tremendous friend of western intelligence, which makes sense considering I met him at a western spying school in Rome. And all his interactions – this is just me trying to repeat the report, these are not my words – and when he met with me, he was working as some sort of asset of the FBI. I don't know if that's true or not. I'm just reporting what my current understanding is of this individual

based on reports from journalists.

[snip]

Q And then at what point did you learn that, you know, he's not who he said he was?

A Like I said, I don't have the concrete proof of who this person is. **I'm just going with reports.** And all I can say is that I believe the day I was, my name was publicly released and Papadopoulos became this person that everyone now knows, Mifsud gave an interview to an Italian newspaper. And in this newspaper, he basically said, I'm not a Russian agent. I'm a Clinton supporter. I'm a Clinton Foundation donor, and that – something along those lines. I mean, **don't quote me exactly, you could look up the article yourself. It is in La Repubblica.** And then all of a sudden, after that, he disappears off the face of the planet, which I always found as odd.

[snip]

I guess the overwhelming evidence, **from what I've read, just in reports,** nothing classified, of course, because I'm not privy to anything like that, and considering his own lawyer is saying it, Stephan Roh, that Mifsud is a western intelligence source. And, I guess, **according to reports yesterday,** he was working with the FBI. [my emphasis]

And *that's* what led Barr and Durham to jump on a plane together and chase Papadopoulos' conspiracy theories – without ever interviewing Papadopoulos directly. Mifsud's own lawyer – the one who couldn't help Durham figure out how to subpoena him – who started the conspiracy theory that Mifsud worked for Western, not Russian, spies.

Durham and Barr did more than just chase Papadopoulos' conspiracy theories together. Durham fabricated a key part of the theory of his case. He ignored key events – most notably, Trump's invitation for Russia to hack his opponent – that made all the actions of Hillary's people make sense. He relied on a Twitter account as the foundation of his indictment against Igor Danchenko, then whined when such communications were deemed inadmissible without a witness to introduce them.

Yet ultimately, the rules of criminal procedure and some very very good defense attorneys (no doubt paid with life savings) managed to thwart Durham's efforts to spin from his own fevered imaginations a conspiracy implicating Hillary Clinton.

For that, Matt Gaetz accused Durham of "inoculating" the FBI.

Your report seems to be less an indictment of the FBI and more of an inoculation – lower case I, of course. And like many inoculations, it may have worse consequences down the road. It's just hard to pretend as though this was a sincere effort. When you don't get to the fundamental thing that started the whole deal.

Because reality ultimately debunked Durham's conspiracy theories, Gaetz deemed him to be part of the Deep State.

I get that Matt Gaetz' nomination is one of the most likely to be rejected by the Senate. I get that there's still a chance this guy – the guy who proclaims even a fellow conspiracist part of the Deep State if he permits himself to discover that reality doesn't back his fever dreams – won't be Attorney General.

But this is what it means that Trump wants to take a hammer to DOJ and FBI: not just that they'll avoid any investigations implicating

Trump or his allies, but they will find a way to meld reality to their own myth.

As it was, Bill Barr's DOJ added post-it notes to evidence in ways that happened to feed Trump's myth of grievance. They claimed travel records of the informant with something akin to a Let's go Brandon cap matched his claims about Joe Biden accepting a bribe when, purportedly, the opposite is true.

Bill Barr's DOJ already made shit up to feed Trump's myth.

Since then, a Trump judge admitted a laptop full of evidence at a criminal trial with little more validation than an access to an iCloud account to which multiple outsiders had access, and an email sent to a publicly available email address.

But whoever Trump installs atop DOJ will take all this one step further. No longer will it be a select crony US Attorneys who forget to remove post-it notes with erroneous but convenient dates or claim travel records say the opposite of what they actually say. It will be the litmus test from the top: Donald Trump's myths cannot fail, they can only be failed.

Update: Gaetz has withdrawn from consideration.