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Russian Spies Were in Touch With Trump Advisor Carter Page (And They Didn't Think Much of Him)

And they were working on more ambitious projects than turning an obscure energy analyst.

By Matthew Bodner

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Carter Page **Pavel Golovkin / AP**

A former advisor to President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign has admitted contact with a Russian spy, U.S. news site Buzzfeed reported Tuesday.

Carter Page brushed shoulders with the Russian spy in 2013, allegedly providing them with "documents about the energy business," according to a 2015 court filing.

The complaint was filed by the U.S. government in 2015 as part of a wider case against three

Russian nationals working in New York as undisclosed agents of Russia's foreign intelligence service, the SVR. Buzzfeed News confirmed that an unidentified man featured in the court document was Page, a U.S. oil industry advisor.

One of the Russians charged in the case, Viktor Podobny, met Page at a 2013 energy conference in New York. During the first six months of 2013, Podobny fostered a relationship with Page while working under the cover of a diplomat in Russia's UN office, Buzzfeed reported.

Yet instead of coveting their relationship with Page, court documents reveal that the spies did not hold the then-obscure analyst in high regard.

"I think [Page] is an idiot and forgot who I am," Podobny told his colleague Igor Sporyshev in one court transcript. "He got hooked on Gazprom thinking that if they have a project, he could rise up. I also promised him a lot. How else to work with foreigners?"

Far from focusing on Page, the spy ring instead worked on a number of different projects before they were busted by the FBI in 2015. Igor Sporyshev and another member of the group, Yevgeny Buryakov, appear to have influenced a $3 billion Canadian-Russian aerospace deal in 2013 by pressuring a labor union to drop its opposition to a proposed deal.

The pair formulated a recommendation to pursue "active measures" against an unidentified Western aerospace company related to the deal.

Related article: Russian Spies May Have Pressured Canadian Union to Get Aircraft Deal

Podobny's connection to the oil industry analyst comes amid ongoing efforts by the U.S. press to uncover alleged links between Trump's campaign and the Russian government. While Page's relationship with appears Podobny' to be the first clear-cut link between Trump aides and Russian officials, the contact was not related to Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.

Questions also remain regarding Page's relationship with Trump's campaign. Page styled himself as Trump's foreign policy advisor when he appeared in Moscow to give a lecture in mid-2016. His impact on campaign strategy or current policy remains unclear.

Page was cut loose from Trump's campaign in September 2016, after U.S. officials announced they were investigating him on suspicion of opening private back channels with Russian government officials for talks on relaxing anti-Kremlin sanctions if Trump took the Oval Office.

Despite the revelations, U.S. investigators interviewed by Buzzfeed have confirmed that Page will not be the center of their investigations. "There's so many people that are more relevant," one unidentified U.S. intelligence official told the site.

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