

With respect to Lisa Page, witnesses told us that she did not work with the team on a regular basis or make any decisions that impacted the investigation. Priestap told us that Lisa Page was “not in charge of anything” and that he never witnessed her attempt to steer the investigation or dictate investigative actions. Baker said that Lisa Page attended high-level meetings and knew the facts of the case, but was not in a “decision making position” and had no “decision making authority.” Lisa Page told us that she did not have a formal role in the Crossfire Hurricane investigation but may have participated in team meetings to keep McCabe aware of the status of the investigation. McCabe also told us that she was the “facilitation point” between CD and his office during the investigation. As with Strzok, when we learned in this review of Lisa Page’s presence at meetings or involvement in any investigative activity, we include that information in this report.

## **B. The Role of Senior FBI and Department Leadership in the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation**

As part of our review, we examined the role that senior FBI and Department leaders played in Crossfire Hurricane, as well as their knowledge of critical events in the case, including its opening, the use of CHSs to gather information, and the decision to seek authority to conduct electronic surveillance. Throughout the chapters of this report, we highlight and describe this involvement and knowledge, where relevant. In this section, we summarize the role of FBI leadership and Department officials in the early stages of the investigation until May 2017 when the Papadopoulos, Carter Page, Manafort, and Flynn cases were transferred to the Special Counsel’s Office.

### **1. FBI Leadership**

We learned that CD officials briefed the Crossfire Hurricane investigation to FBI senior leadership throughout the investigation. Comey told the OIG that the FBI had “hundreds of thousands” of counterintelligence cases opened while he was Director, and he would not be involved in a counterintelligence case unless the chain of command made a judgment call about whether the nature of the case required the Director’s involvement. He said the decision to brief the Director was based on several things, including whether the case required engagement with Department leadership or whether it was of interest to Congress. Comey said his level of involvement in Crossfire Hurricane was similar to some cases and dissimilar to others. He said:

I would put [cases in] three buckets. One, cases they’d never tell me about because of a judgment by the leadership chain that it wasn’t for the Director to know. Cases that I would be told about, simply to be aware of. And then cases, the third category would be cases that I was told about and, in some detail, and kept informed of as the investigation went on. Crossfire Hurricane was in that third bucket.

According to records reviewed by the OIG, Comey received his first, formal briefing on August 15, 2016, though, as described previously, McCabe’s contemporaneous notes suggest Comey may have been told about the FFG

information on July 29. Comey told us that he was updated on the status of the investigation every 2 to 4 weeks. These status updates were provided at the end of his regularly scheduled morning national security briefings conducted by, among others, McCabe, Steinbach, Priestap, and Strzok. According to Comey, these briefings did not typically include discussions about investigative strategy, but he was often briefed on specific investigative actions the Crossfire Hurricane team had taken or planned to take. Comey said that he did not recall playing a role in making any significant investigative decisions and did not have any concerns or disagreements with the investigative actions described by senior CD officials during briefings.

Comey told us that he recalled a discussion with the briefers about taking precautions to keep the case close-hold. Comey said he was mindful that the investigation involved a political campaign, and he advised the team to keep in mind that, “[although] it’s smoke that we see, we don’t know whether there’s fire there.” McCabe also told us the FBI wanted “to keep our inquiry as quiet as we could.” He said that it was important to keep the investigation covert to avoid alerting the subjects of the investigation or others, and, specifically in this case, it was important due to the pending election.

McCabe told us he received regular briefings on the progress of Crossfire Hurricane and discussed the investigation with Comey at regular briefings. Strzok told us the team briefed McCabe approximately 5-10 times during the investigation, and the OGC Unit Chief told us McCabe was briefed every few weeks until the election in November and less frequently thereafter. According to both Strzok and the OGC Unit Chief, these briefings provided updates on the team’s investigative activities and typically were not discussions about what steps to take. The OGC Unit Chief also said that McCabe directed the team to “get to the bottom of this as quickly as possible, but with a light footprint.”

Priestap told us that Strzok, the Intel Section Chief, and the OGC Unit Chief frequently briefed him on the investigation and kept him apprised of significant developments. In addition to approving the opening of the Crossfire Hurricane cases, Priestap told us that he was involved in discussions as to whether to seek authority under FISA to conduct electronic surveillance [REDACTED] targeting Carter Page, a subject we describe in detail in Chapter Five. Priestap said he briefed Steinbach nearly every day on the case and provided Comey or McCabe with updates on an as-needed basis.

## **2. Department of Justice**

### **a. National Security Division**

The Department was first notified about the opening of Crossfire Hurricane on August 2, 2016, when Priestap and the Intel Section Chief briefed several representatives from NSD, including Deputy Assistant Attorney General (Deputy AAG) George Toscas, Deputy AAG Adam Hickey, and David Laufman, who as

described previously was the CES Section Chief.<sup>186</sup> According to Laufman and his contemporaneous notes of the briefing, FBI officials described the FFG information and the four individuals the FBI had identified through its initial investigative work who were members of the campaign and had ties to Russia. Laufman told us that his impression was that the information from the FFG had “raised obvious alarm bells in the FBI” and he said the information “resonated” with him. He also said that the information the FBI provided at the briefing presented the question of whether someone in the Russian government was working with the campaign of a major party candidate to influence the U.S. elections. Laufman told us that “we certainly understood the significance of the matter and the need for further investigation” and that it would have been “a dereliction of duty and responsibility of the highest order not to commit the appropriate resources as urgently as possible to run these facts to the ground, and find out what was going on.”

After this initial briefing, Toscas contacted Deputy AAG Stuart Evans who oversaw NSD’s Office of Intelligence (OI), which prepares and files FISA applications. Evans told us that he met with Toscas, Hickey, and FBI representatives on or about August 11, 2016, concerning the opening of Crossfire Hurricane. Evans said he believed the FBI described the information from the FFG that led to the opening of the case and the FBI’s preliminary assessment that led the team to focus on the four individuals associated with the Trump campaign. He said the basis for the investigation did not strike him as “thin” at the time of this briefing or in retrospect, and the steps the FBI had taken up to that point were not dissimilar to how he had seen the FBI handle other counterintelligence cases involving insider threat information reported by a credible source. Evans told the OIG that he did not recall anyone raising the issue of seeking FISA authority targeting Carter Page at this August briefing.

Following these initial briefings, the FBI invited NSD to attend weekly meetings with the Crossfire Hurricane team. According to Evans, he and Toscas attended some of the meetings, as did representatives from CES, including Laufman, and OI. Laufman’s notes reflect that Hickey attended some of the meetings as well. According to Evans, CES and OI maintained “loose involvement and knowledge” of the status of the investigation in case the FBI requested assistance from CES on criminal legal process or from OI on a FISA application. However, Evans told us that his reaction to these meetings was that the investigation seemed “pretty slow moving,” with not much changing week-to-week in terms of the updates the FBI was providing to NSD.

According to Laufman and his deputy, the FBI did not ask CES to assist with criminal legal process at any time before the 2016 U.S. elections. In December 2016, the FBI briefed NSD officials on the status of the Crossfire Hurricane cases, and, according to Laufman’s notes, advised NSD of CD’s reorganization of the investigation. According to his notes, the FBI decided that it would be establishing a new unit or team to focus on Russian influence activities and that none of the

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<sup>186</sup> Lisa Page was the other FBI representative who attended this briefing. As described earlier, Strzok was meeting with the FFG officials about their conversations with Papadopoulos on this date.

Crossfire cases had been closed “so far.” Laufman told us that he advised the FBI that CES wanted to be in a position to provide input should the FBI decide to close any of the Crossfire Hurricane cases, just to be sure the FBI had exhausted all investigative steps, but he did not recall this ever arising.

Mary McCord was NSD’s Principal Deputy AAG when Crossfire Hurricane was opened. She told us that she received a comprehensive briefing from the FBI on the investigation in January 2017, by which time she was the Acting AAG of NSD.<sup>187</sup> She said that prior to that time, she was involved in certain aspects of the investigation through OI’s assistance with the first Carter Page FISA application in September and October 2016, as well as through meetings she attended in November and December 2016 about aspects of the Manafort and Flynn cases. She said that she neither attended nor received long debriefs about the weekly Crossfire Hurricane meetings attended by other NSD officials before the election. According to McCord, as a general matter, it was typical for Department attorneys not to become directly involved in a counterintelligence investigation until the case required legal guidance or legal process.

According to McCord, by January 2017, developments in some of the cases, particularly the Flynn and Manafort cases, led to the need for a comprehensive briefing for Department officials on the different cases the FBI was pursuing, as well as for the greater involvement of prosecutors moving forward. In late February 2017, Laufman assigned a CES trial attorney (CES Trial Attorney) to assist the FBI’s Crossfire Hurricane team by providing legal guidance as needed on any of the cases. Laufman told us, and his notes reflect, that CES did not receive regular briefings on the investigation from the FBI between December 2016 and March 2017.<sup>188</sup> As we described earlier in this chapter, during this period of time, the Crossfire Hurricane investigation was decentralized, with the individual cases being handled by three different FBI field offices. Witnesses from NYFO who worked on the Carter Page investigation told us that as a result of this, there were no regular team meetings with officials at FBI Headquarters.

#### **b. Office of the Deputy Attorney General**

Sally Yates was the Deputy Attorney General (DAG) when Crossfire Hurricane was opened on July 31, 2016. Yates told the OIG that she did not specifically recall receiving a formal briefing from the FBI in the summer of 2016 about the case, or at any time before she left the Department on January 30, 2017, though she left open the possibility that such a briefing could have occurred. According to Yates, her office was typically less involved in counterintelligence investigations than criminal investigations.<sup>189</sup> Yates said that although she and others in the Office of

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<sup>187</sup> McCord became the acting AAG in mid-October 2016 and continued in both roles until Dana Boente became the Acting AAG for NSD in April 2017.

<sup>188</sup> Laufman did not attend the meetings in January, February, and March 2017 that were attended by Boente, McCord, and other senior Department officials.

<sup>189</sup> Matthew Axelrod, then Principal Assistant Deputy Attorney General, told us that ODAG had less involvement in counterintelligence investigations than criminal investigations because most

the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) attended Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning threat intelligence briefings with the FBI Director on national security issues, typically those briefings focused on matters involving imminent national security threats and criminal cases. According to Yates, the primary counterintelligence issue for ODAG in the summer of 2016 was the broader issue of Russian interference in the elections and the possible infiltration of voting machines.

Yates told us that she did recall that following one of the morning threat intelligence briefings, Comey pulled her aside to discuss the FFG information the FBI had received regarding Papadopoulos. Yates did not recall specifically when this conversation took place, except that it was some time before she received the first Carter Page FISA application for approval.<sup>190</sup> Yates told us that she did not recall the specific details Comey provided, but did recall that they discussed why the FFG had not notified U.S. officials sooner. She said she recalled learning during that conversation that the FFG did not determine the significance of the information about Papadopoulos until the WikiLeaks release of DNC emails in July 2016. She also said that she did not recall whether Comey told her the FBI had opened an investigation in response to the FFG information. However, she said that an investigation “would be the natural consequence of that,” and “[i]t would be strange not to” open an investigation given that what Papadopoulos said in May 2016 would happen, *i.e.*, the release of information damaging to then candidate Clinton, did, in fact, happen in July 2016.

We asked Comey and McCabe about any discussions they had with Yates about the FFG information. Comey told us that he did not recall providing any briefing to Yates, but that the topic was likely discussed at one of the threat intelligence briefings. Comey also told us that the FBI generally tried to keep Department leadership informed about all significant activities to include important public corruption or espionage cases concerning Russian efforts to interfere with the 2016 U.S. elections. McCabe told us that he did not recall briefing Crossfire Hurricane to Yates; however, his contemporaneous notes of a regularly scheduled meeting with the DAG on August 10 reflect that Yates was briefed on the FFG information at that time. According to McCabe, the FBI did not provide regular briefings to Yates on Crossfire Hurricane after this meeting, but the FBI provided updates on developments in the investigation to ODAG following the Attorney General’s morning briefings, which Yates typically attended.

Yates told us that she did not recall specific discussions about any of the Crossfire Hurricane cases after her initial conversation with Comey, though she said she was confident that such discussions took place and thought that Tashina Gauhar, the Associate Deputy Attorney General responsible for ODAG’s national security portfolio, likely had such discussions with NSD or the FBI. Yates did recall

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counterintelligence investigations do not lead to prosecution and can last for years while agents gather intelligence.

<sup>190</sup> As described in Chapter Five, ODAG received the first FISA application on or about October 14, 2016.

having a conversation with McCabe regarding the ongoing money laundering investigation of Manafort (described in more detail in Chapter Nine) and about not taking any overt investigative steps before the election. She told us that even though Manafort was no longer chair of the Trump campaign at the time of this conversation, she and McCabe agreed that they did not want to do anything that could potentially impact candidate Trump. She said she did not recall having a similar conversation with McCabe or Comey about the Crossfire Hurricane cases and thought that this was because, to her knowledge, the FBI was not contemplating any overt steps in those cases before the election.

Gauhar told the OIG that she was sure she attended discussions about the Crossfire Hurricane cases, likely during regularly scheduled meetings ODAG held with NSD officials, or possibly during the regularly scheduled morning threat intelligence briefings, but she did not recall any discussions specifically. According to Gauhar, discussions she attended before the election about Russia tended to focus on the broader topic of what Russia was trying to do to influence the upcoming election. She said she did not recall the Crossfire Hurricane cases being an ongoing topic of conversation from her vantage point, until issues came up in the Flynn case in early January 2017. Gauhar also told us that she learned more about the individual Crossfire Hurricane cases and the investigation after Boente requested regular briefings in February 2017.

On January 30, 2017, Boente became the Acting Attorney General after Yates was removed, and ten days later became the Acting DAG after Jefferson Sessions was confirmed and sworn in as Attorney General. Boente simultaneously served as the Acting Attorney General on the FBI's Russia related investigations after Sessions recused himself from overseeing matters "arising from the campaigns for President of the United States." Boente told the OIG that after reading the January 2017 Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) report on Russia's election influence efforts (described in Chapter Six), he requested a briefing on Crossfire Hurricane. That briefing took place on February 16, and Boente said that he sought regular briefings on the case thereafter because he believed that it was extraordinarily important to the Department and its reputation that the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections were investigated. Boente told us that he also was concerned that the investigation lacked cohesion because the individual Crossfire Hurricane cases had been assigned to multiple field offices. In addition, he said that he had the impression that the investigation had not been moving with a sense of urgency—an impression that was based, at least in part, on "not a lot" of criminal legal process being used. To gain more visibility into Crossfire Hurricane, improve coordination, and speed up the investigation, Boente directed ODAG staff to attend weekly or bi-weekly meetings with NSD for Crossfire Hurricane case updates.

Boente's calendar entries and handwritten notes reflect multiple briefings in March and April 2017. Boente's handwritten notes of the March meetings reflect that he was briefed on the predication for opening Crossfire Hurricane, the four individual cases, and the status of certain aspects of the Flynn case. Boente told us that when he was briefed on the predication for the investigation, he did not question it and did not have any concerns about the decision to open Crossfire

Hurricane. Boente's handwritten notes of the meetings focused on the Flynn investigation and potential criminal violations of the Logan Act, the FBI's efforts to corroborate information contained in the source reporting that we describe in Chapters Four and Six, and the FBI's investigative efforts in the Carter Page and Manafort cases.<sup>191</sup> According to Boente's handwritten notes, he was last briefed on Crossfire Hurricane the day after Rod Rosenstein was sworn in as DAG on April 26, 2017.

Rosenstein told us that he recalled being briefed three times during his initial two weeks as DAG on aspects of the investigation and Russian efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. elections. The first briefing occurred within a day or two of being sworn in and was provided by Boente and then Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General James Crowell. That briefing was followed by a meeting with Comey, McCord, and several others from the FBI and NSD. Rosenstein said he also received a briefing from representatives of the USIC that included an overview of Russian interference with the U.S. elections.

Rosenstein told us that during the initial Department briefings he was most focused on information that had developed into criminal investigations, which he believed were going to be more immediately relevant to his work as DAG. Rosenstein said he did not recall the details provided during the briefings regarding Carter Page other than Page was suspected of being a foreign agent. Rosenstein said he also did not recall the details of what was explained to him about the predication for opening the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.<sup>192</sup> He said he would have been focused on the status and direction of the cases at the time of the briefings, and not as much on any historical information concerning their initiation.

In Chapters Five and Seven, we describe ODAG's role in the four Carter Page FISA applications. As described in Chapter Seven, Yates approved the first Carter Page FISA application on October [REDACTED], 2016 and FISA Renewal Application No. 1 on January [REDACTED], 2017, Boente approved FISA Renewal Application No. 2 on April [REDACTED], 2017, and Rosenstein approved the FISA Renewal Application No. 3 on June [REDACTED], 2017.

### **c. Office of the Attorney General**

Loretta Lynch was sworn in as Attorney General on April 27, 2015. Lynch told the OIG that she did not recall receiving a briefing on the Crossfire Hurricane investigation. Lynch's National Security Counselor told us that she did not receive any briefing on the case and did not know if Lynch received a briefing. Lynch said

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<sup>191</sup> The Logan Act, Title 18 U.S.C. § 953, makes it a crime for a citizen to confer with foreign governments against the interest of the United States. Specifically, it prohibits citizens from negotiating with other nations on behalf of the United States without authorization.

<sup>192</sup> Rosenstein told us that at some later point—most likely in 2018—FBI officials represented to him that the basis for opening Crossfire Hurricane was the FFG information concerning Papadopoulos, and nothing else. He told us that he did not receive any information from the FBI indicating otherwise. He also told us that he did not have an opinion about whether the FFG information provided a sufficient basis to open the case.

she did not recall providing any guidance or direction to the FBI on the investigation, or having any awareness of the Carter Page FISA applications before she left the Department on January 20, 2017. She told us that her office generally did not oversee counterintelligence investigations, but that sometimes counterintelligence issues were raised during morning threat intelligence briefings. She said that she remembered knowing that Papadopoulos was a concern for the FBI, but she did not recall learning the specific information that came from the FFG relating to him.

Office of the Attorney General (OAG) officials told us that they did not read the Carter Page FISA applications or provide any feedback to OI, but email communications reflect that they were aware the FBI was seeking FISA authority targeting Carter Page before the first application was filed. These officials included Lynch's Chief of Staff and her National Security Counselor. The Chief of Staff told us she had no recollection of the email that referenced the FISA application. The National Security Counselor told us that she believed she would have advised the Attorney General of the application, but she did not have any specific recollection of having done so.

Lynch told the OIG that after one of her weekly security meetings at FBI Headquarters in the spring of 2016, Comey and McCabe pulled her aside and provided information about Carter Page, which Lynch believed they learned from another member of the Intelligence Community. According to Lynch, Comey and McCabe provided her with information indicating that Russian intelligence reportedly planned to use Page for information and to develop other contacts in the United States, and that they were interested in his affiliation with the campaign. Lynch told us that her understanding was that this information from Comey and McCabe was "preliminary" in that they did not state that any decisions or actions needed to be taken that day. She said that they discussed the possibility of providing a defensive briefing to the Trump campaign, but she believed it was "preliminary" and "something that might happen down the road." According to Lynch, she did not recall receiving any further updates on this issue following this conversation. Lynch's recollection of what Comey and McCabe told her is consistent with information referenced in connection with the 2015 SDNY indictment and subsequent conviction of a Russian intelligence officer referenced earlier in this chapter.

Comey told the OIG that he did not recall having such a conversation with Lynch, and that he did not think it was possible for such conversation to have occurred in the spring of 2016 because the FBI did not receive the FFG information concerning Papadopoulos until late July (as we described earlier in this chapter). He also said that he did not recall himself having any knowledge of Carter Page's existence until the middle of 2016.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, McCabe told us that he did not

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<sup>193</sup> The OIG was unable to question Comey further using classified details Lynch described to us because, as noted in Chapter One, Comey chose not to have his security clearances reinstated for our interview. Internal email communications reflect that in April 2016 NYFO prepared summaries of the information that ultimately led NYFO to open a counterintelligence investigation on Carter Page on



recall having any knowledge of Carter Page at this time. He told us he had no recollection of briefing Lynch in the spring of 2016 about Carter Page and did not know Carter Page was the subject of an open investigation in NYFO.

### **3. White House Briefings**

Lynch told us that in her interactions with the White House in 2016, she did not recall substantive discussions about the Crossfire Hurricane investigations but did recall discussions about the broader topic of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections. Lynch said that the FBI, and not the Attorney General, would brief the White House on the investigation if the FBI was able to share information it received, but she did not recall that occurring. Yates also told us she did not attend any White House briefings where Crossfire Hurricane or the Carter Page FISA application was briefed or discussed, and she had no knowledge of whether any such meetings occurred.

Priestap told the OIG that the FBI does not routinely brief ongoing cases to the White House with the exception of mass shootings, major terrorist attacks, or intelligence that suggests an imminent attack on the United States. Priestap said that due to certain national security considerations, information from ongoing investigations may also need to be briefed to the White House by the Director.

Comey told us that he received no requests from the White House to investigate members of the Trump campaign or inquiries about whether the campaign was involved with the efforts by the Russians to interfere in the 2016 U.S. elections. Comey said that he recalled generally the administration's interest in what the FBI was doing as a member of the USIC to understand and defeat Russia's efforts to interfere with the elections. In fact, according to Strzok, the White House requested a briefing from the USIC in the fall of 2016 about actions the Russians were taking to interfere in the elections. On September 2, 2016, Lisa Page and Strzok exchanged the following text:

9:41 a.m., Strzok to Lisa Page: "Checkout my 9:30 mtg on the 7th"  
9:42 a.m., Lisa Page to Strzok: "I can tell you why you're having that meeting."  
9:42 a.m., Lisa Page to Strzok: "It's not what you think."  
9:49 a.m., Strzok to Lisa Page: "TPs [Talking Points] for D [Director]?"  
9:50 a.m., Lisa Page to Strzok: "Yes bc POTUS wants to know everything we are doing."

Strzok told us that these texts referred to the request by the White House to know everything the USIC knew about what Russia was doing to interfere in the 2016 U.S. elections and did not refer to the Crossfire Hurricane cases investigating

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April 6, 2016 (described previously), and provided them to CD officials at Headquarters to be used for a "Director's note" and a separate "Director's Brief" to be held on April 27, 2016.

U.S. subjects. Strzok told us that he never attended any White House briefings about Crossfire Hurricane.

McCabe's notes from a morning meeting with Comey and others in late July 2016 reflect that McCabe learned from Comey during the meeting that another U.S. government agency had briefed President Obama on intelligence that agency had suggesting that a RIS was engaged in covert actions to influence the U.S. presidential election in favor of Trump. McCabe told us he did not attend this White House briefing; however, based on his notes, he said he did not believe the FFG information would have been discussed during this meeting, and our review of his notes did not indicate otherwise. According to McCabe's notes of what he had been told by Comey, President Obama stated that the FBI should think about doing "defensive briefs." The notes do not provide any further details about what Obama said regarding defensive briefings, and McCabe told us he did not recall that any further details were provided to him. However, McCabe said he surmised from his notes that the briefings under discussion were to be given to the Trump campaign. As more fully described in Chapter Ten, the FBI participated in ODNI strategic intelligence briefings that were provided to members of both the Trump campaign and the Clinton campaign, including the candidates, in August and September 2016. However, those were not defensive briefings and did not address the allegations contained in the FFG information.

When we asked Comey about meetings with the White House concerning Crossfire Hurricane, he said that although he did not brief the White House about the investigation, he did mention to President Obama and others at a meeting in the Situation Room that the FBI was trying to determine whether any U.S. person had worked with the Russians in their efforts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. election.<sup>194</sup> Comey said he thought it was important that the President know the nature of the FBI's efforts without providing any specifics. Comey said although he did not recall exactly what he said, he may have said there were four individuals with "some association or connection to the Trump campaign." Comey stated that after he provided this information, no one at the meeting responded or followed up with any questions. Comey did not recall specifically when this meeting took place, but believed it may have been in August 2016. We were unable to determine whether this meeting was part of the same meeting reflected in McCabe's notes discussed above.

#### **IV. Investigative Steps in Crossfire Hurricane Prior to Receipt of Christopher Steele Reporting on September 19**

According to FBI officials, the early investigative steps taken in Crossfire Hurricane were structured to maintain a close-hold on the investigation and avoid any impact on the 2016 U.S. elections. FBI officials told us that no steps were

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<sup>194</sup> Comey told us that this meeting was attended by then Chief of Staff Dennis McDonough, then National Security Advisor Susan Rice, then Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper, then CIA Director John Brennan, and then Director of the National Security Agency Michael Rogers.

taken to investigate anyone associated with the Trump campaign prior to the opening of Crossfire Hurricane on July 31.<sup>195</sup> Department officials including Rosenstein, Evans, Laufman, and Gauhar said they did not learn anything at any time suggesting otherwise. We reviewed emails of senior CD officials from the 2 months prior to the opening of Crossfire Hurricane and did not find any communications suggesting any investigative actions relating to Trump campaign personnel were taken prior to July 31, 2016, with the exception of the pre-existing Page and Manafort cases discussed previously.

Anderson told us that the investigation began on July 31 with covert investigative techniques to be "very quiet" prior to the election. We were told that the team's concern was that if the information about the investigation became public, it would disrupt the investigative efforts and could potentially impact the 2016 U.S. elections. Anderson also told us that counterintelligence investigations are typically "conducted in the dark" because any public confirmation of the existence of the investigation "might alert the hostile foreign power...that we were onto them." She also said that early on in the investigation, FBI managers overseeing the Crossfire Hurricane team "took off the table any idea of legal process" in conducting the investigation, because the FBI was "trying to move very quietly." The FBI did not use national security letters or compulsory process prior to obtaining the first FISA orders.

At the outset of the investigation, as described earlier in this chapter, Strzok and SSA 1 traveled to verify the FFG information while analysts conducted open source and database research on the Crossfire Hurricane subjects and monitored their travel. Analysts also developed profiles on each of the four subjects and reviewed FBI files for information and to identify potential FBI CHSs with useful contacts for the investigation.<sup>196</sup> Additionally, almost immediately after opening the Page, Papadopoulos, and Manafort investigations on August 10, the case agent assigned to the Carter Page investigation, Case Agent 1, contacted OGC about the possibility of seeking FISA authority for Carter Page. As we discuss in Chapter Five, FBI documents indicate that by late August, Case Agent 1 had been told that he had not yet presented enough information to support a FISA application targeting Carter Page.

The FBI also sent names of individuals associated with the Trump campaign to other U.S. government agencies and a foreign intelligence agency and requested any information about those individuals. McCabe said that requesting a name trace from other U.S. government agencies is a standard step in counterterrorism and counterintelligence cases that assists investigators by providing information on the

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<sup>195</sup> As referenced in Chapter Nine, prior to his involvement with the Trump campaign, Manafort was the subject of a federal criminal investigation by the Department for alleged white collar offenses. Further, as referenced earlier in this chapter, prior to his involvement with the Trump campaign, Carter Page was the subject of a NYFO counterintelligence investigation for his contacts with Russian intelligence officers.

<sup>196</sup> As described in Chapter Ten, early in the investigation, the Crossfire Hurricane team discovered that they had an existing FBI CHS who had previously interacted with three of the named subjects of the investigation.

kind of network surrounding a person in whom the FBI is interested. He told us that the FBI requests a name check on an individual who is the subject of an investigation, or who the FBI is considering as a subject, but is not certain that an investigation is warranted. McCabe said that the FBI also uses the information received from such name checks to eliminate individuals as subjects. The FBI received information from the name trace requests and serialized that information to the Crossfire Hurricane case file.

As we describe in Chapter Five, on or about August 17, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received information from another U.S. government agency advising the team that Carter Page had been approved as an operational contact for the other agency from 2008 to 2013 and detailing information that Page had provided to the other agency regarding Page's past contacts with certain Russian intelligence officers. However, this information was not provided to NSD attorneys and was not included in any of the FISA applications. We also found no evidence that the Crossfire Hurricane team requested additional information from the other agency prior to submission of the first FISA application in order to deconflict on issues that were relevant to the FISA application.

FBI officials told us that the early steps in the investigation focused on developing information about the four subjects and conducting CHS operations to obtain relevant subject specific information. According to McCabe, using sources is a logical first step in an investigation to learn what information the FBI may have access to that could be of value in the investigation. Agents told us that CHS operations can be an effective tool for quickly obtaining information, including, for example, the telephone numbers and email addresses of the named subjects. In determining how to use CHSs in the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, SSA 1 and the case agents told the OIG that they focused their CHS operations on the predicated information and the four named subjects. Case Agent 1 told the OIG that the team "had a very narrow mandate" and that was "a mandate to look at these four individuals...and see if there's any potential cooperation between themselves and the Russian government...that was our goal in that investigation." He added that they were focused on the information provided by the FFG and "we wanted to prove or disprove it, [as] best we could" but also "wanted to make sure that it didn't get broadcast out and we didn't harm the electoral process." Case Agent 2 stated that the core of the investigation was "literally looking at the predication and saying, okay, who reasonably could have had been in a position to receive suggestions from the Russians?"

As summarized in Chapter Ten, the Crossfire Hurricane team conducted three CHS operations prior to the team's initial receipt of Steele's reporting on September 19, 2016. All three CHS operations were with individuals who were still with the Trump campaign. The first was a consensually recorded meeting in August 2016 between Carter Page and an FBI CHS. During the meeting, Page discussed his recent trip to Moscow, a pending "October Surprise" discussed further in Chapters Five, Seven, and Ten, and his involvement with the Russian energy company Gazprom. Page also told the CHS that he had "literally never met" Paul Manafort, had "never said one word to him," and that Manafort had not responded to any of

Carter Page's emails.<sup>197</sup> SSA 1 and Case Agent 1 told the OIG that this meeting was important for the investigation as it helped the team determine where Page lived and what he was currently working on as well as developing a successful contact between an established FBI source and one of the Crossfire Hurricane targets.

The second CHS operation took place in September 2016, between an FBI CHS and a high-level official in the Trump campaign who was not a subject of the investigation. Case Agent 1 told the OIG that the plan for this operation was for the CHS to ask the high-level official about Papadopoulos and Carter Page "because they were...unknowns" and the Crossfire Hurricane team was trying to find out how "these two individuals who are not known in political circles...[got] introduced to the campaign," including whether the person responsible for those introductions had ties to RIS. During the consensually recorded meeting, the CHS raised a number of issues that were pertinent to the investigation, but received little information from the high-level official in response.<sup>198</sup>

The third CHS operation took place in September 2016, and involved Papadopoulos. The Crossfire Hurricane case agents told the OIG that, during this CHS operation, they were trying to recreate the conditions that resulted in Papadopoulos's comments to the FFG official about the suggestion from Russia that it could assist the Trump campaign by anonymously releasing derogatory information about then candidate Clinton, which we described earlier in this chapter. Among other things, when the CHS asked Papadopoulos whether help "from a third party like WikiLeaks for example or some other third party like the Russians, could be incredibly helpful" in securing a campaign victory, Papadopoulos responded that the "campaign, of course, [does not] advocate for this type of activity because at the end of the day it's...illegal." Papadopoulos also stated that the campaign is not "reaching out to WikiLeaks or to whoever it is to tell them please work with us, collaborate because we don't, no one does that...."<sup>199</sup>

Thereafter, on September 19, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received information from an FBI source (Christopher Steele) on election matters that became an important part of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation and the FBI seeking FISA authority targeting one of the Crossfire Hurricane subjects, Carter Page. The information the Crossfire Hurricane team received from Steele and the team's use of the information is described in the next chapter.

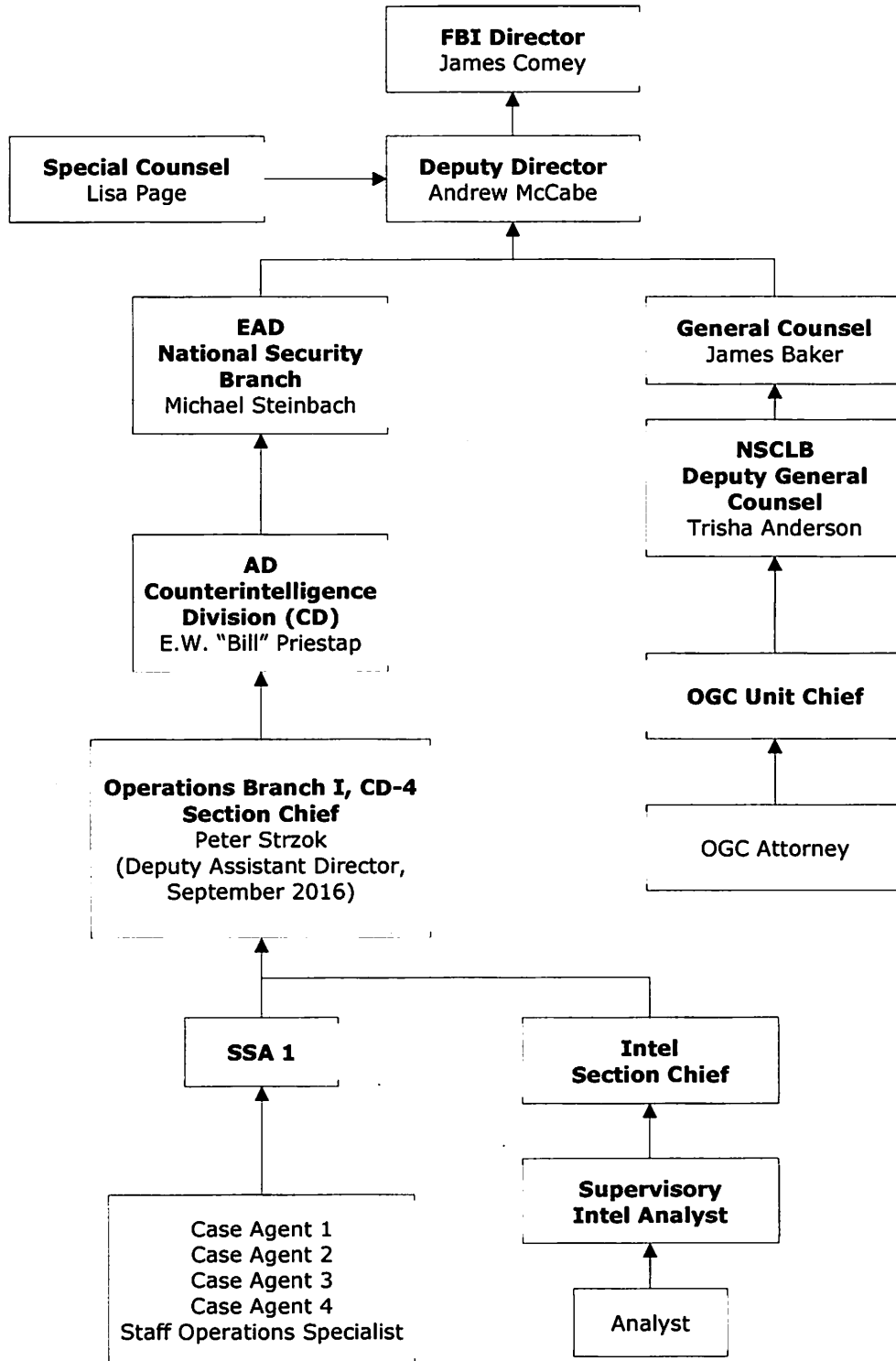
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<sup>197</sup> As we discuss later in this report, Carter Page's comment about his lack of a relationship with Manafort was relevant to one of the allegations in the Steele reporting that was relied upon in the Carter Page FISA applications, but information about the August 2016 CHS meeting was not shared with the OI attorneys handling the FISA applications until June 2017.

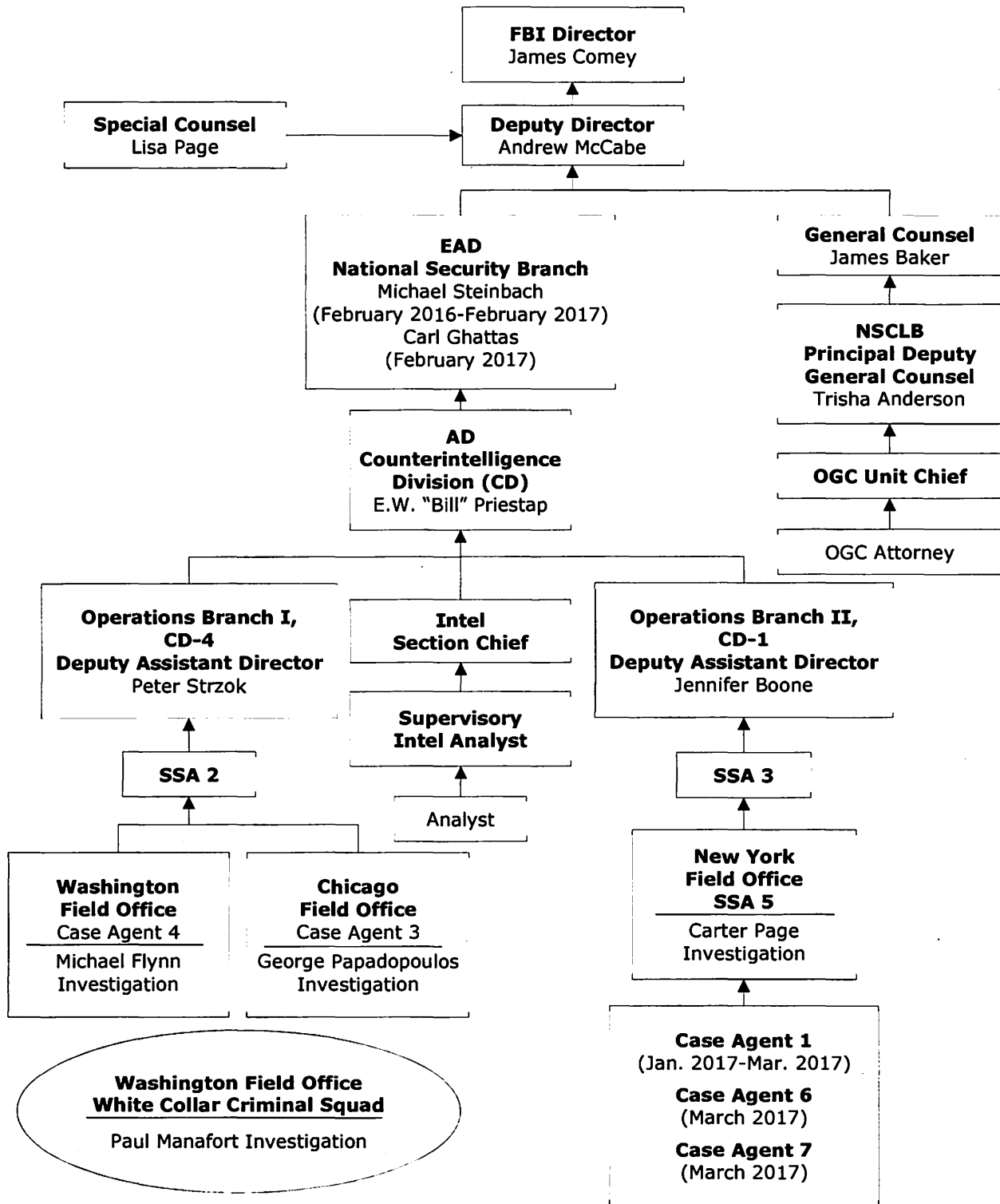
<sup>198</sup> We found no evidence that the information learned at this meeting was put to use by the Crossfire Hurricane team or disclosed to the OI attorneys handling the Carter Page FISA applications.

<sup>199</sup> The Crossfire Hurricane team did not provide information about this meeting to OI attorneys handling the Carter Page FISA applications. As described in Chapter Eight, OI learned of the information from ODAG in May 2018.

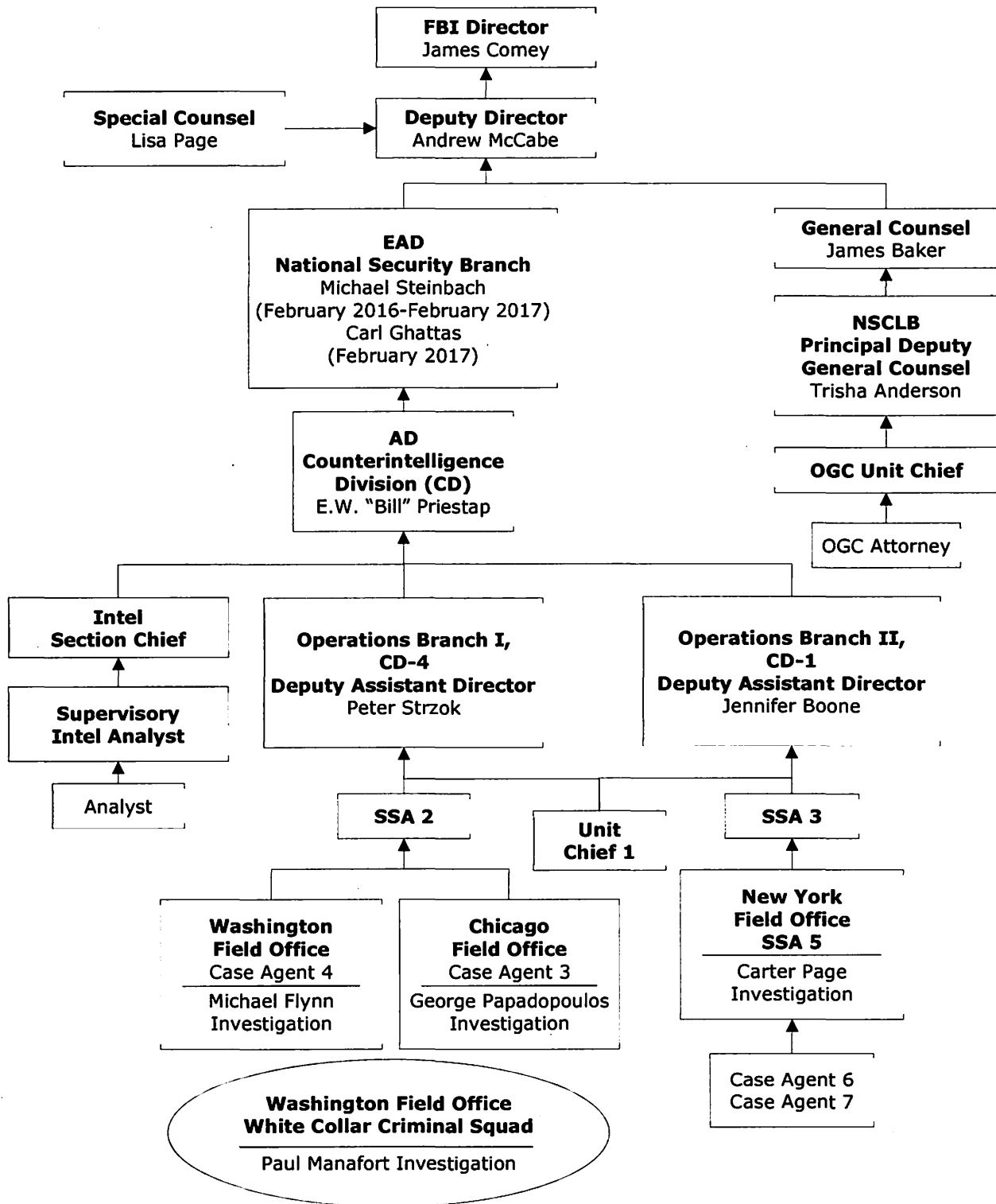
**Figure 3.1**  
**FBI Chain of Command and Legal Support**  
**for the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation**  
**July 31, 2016 to December 2016**



**Figure 3.2**  
**FBI Chain of Command and Legal Support**  
**for the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation**  
**January 2017 to April 2017**



**Figure 3.3**  
**FBI Chain of Command and Legal Support**  
**for the Crossfire Hurricane Investigation**  
**April 2017 to May 17, 2017**





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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE FBI'S RECEIPT AND EVALUATION OF INFORMATION FROM CHRISTOPHER STEELE PRIOR TO THE FIRST FISA APPLICATION**

In this chapter, we describe the FBI's relationship with Christopher Steele, who furnished information that was used in the Carter Page FISA applications (Steele is referred to in those applications as "Source #1"). Steele is a former intelligence officer [REDACTED] who, following his retirement, opened a consulting firm and furnished information to the FBI beginning in 2010, primarily on matters concerning organized crime and corruption in Russia and Eastern Europe. In 2013, the FBI prepared paperwork to enable it to open Steele as an FBI CHS.<sup>200</sup> We examine the considerations that led the FBI to conclude that Steele was a reliable CHS before submitting the first FISA application. According to FBI personnel we interviewed, these considerations included Steele's past record of furnishing information to the FBI; recommendations from persons familiar with his work; Steele's extensive experience with matters involving Russia; and the assessment by Steele's FBI handling agent. We also examine Steele's development of reporting concerning the 2016 U.S. elections, his initial production of that information to the FBI, the FBI's early efforts to assess the reporting, and Steele's contacts with the media prior to the first FISA application.

#### **I. Steele and His Assistance to the FBI Prior to June 2016**

##### **A. Introduction to Handling Agent 1 and Early Assistance**

Steele is a former intelligence officer of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who, following his retirement, was enrolled by the FBI as a CHS furnishing information to the FBI primarily on matters concerning organized crime and corruption in Russia and Eastern Europe. Steele told the OIG that during his service as an intelligence officer [REDACTED], he developed a particular expertise on Russia and was stationed for a period in Moscow. Steele stated that, after he stopped [REDACTED], he formed a consulting firm specializing in corporate intelligence and investigative services.

Steele's introduction in 2010 to the FBI agent who later became Steele's primary handling agent (Handling Agent 1) was facilitated by Department attorney Bruce Ohr, who was then Chief of the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section in the Department's Criminal Division in Washington, D.C. Ohr told the OIG that he first met Steele in 2007 when he attended a meeting hosted by a foreign government during which Steele addressed the threat posed by Russian organized crime. Ohr said that, after this first meeting with Steele, he probably met with him less than once a year, and after Steele opened his consulting firm, Orbis Business Intelligence, he furnished Ohr with reports produced by Orbis for its commercial clients that he thought may be of interest to the U.S. government. Ohr said that he

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<sup>200</sup> As we describe below, Steele contends that he was never a CHS for the FBI but rather that his consulting firm had a contractual relationship with the FBI.

eventually put Steele in contact with Handling Agent 1, with whom Ohr had previously worked.

Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he first met Steele in the spring of 2010 during a trip abroad with Ohr.<sup>201</sup> He recalled that prior to the meeting, Ohr described Steele's background, including his work as an intelligence officer, assignment to Moscow, and Russia expertise. Based on his past experiences working with Ohr, Handling Agent 1 said he respected Ohr's judgment and had no reason to doubt his representations about Steele. Handling Agent 1 told us that Steele had relationships with reputable clients, and this fact bolstered Handling Agent 1's view of Steele's credibility. He also said that he had met with some of Steele's clients and knew of others, and that a representative of one of Steele's clients informed him that Steele "was solid and that his reporting was very interesting and good." Handling Agent 1 stated, however, that with the exception of Steele's work for Fusion GPS, a Washington, D.C. investigative firm, he did not request information from Steele about his firm's clients.<sup>202</sup>

Handling Agent 1 said he came away from his first meeting with Steele favorably impressed. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that Steele was very professional and knowledgeable and "clearly an expert on Russia," including the activities of Russian oligarchs and Russian criminal networks. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that although he was interested in the information from Steele, as of 2010 he was not yet prepared to enter into a formal CHS relationship with Steele. Handling Agent 1 explained that it is administratively burdensome to open a CHS who resides overseas and that prior to 2013 he was not receiving a "steady stream" of information from Steele. Handling Agent 1 said that following their initial meeting, Steele would provide information only every couple of months and that he met with him only infrequently, such as when Steele visited the United States. Steele was not compensated by the FBI during this period. Steele told us that this information originated from work performed for Orbis's private clients.

Handling Agent 1 stated that in the summer of 2010 Steele introduced him to a contact who had allegedly obtained information about corruption in the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA). According to Handling Agent 1, but for Steele's assistance in arranging this meeting, the FBI would not have had the impetus to open the FIFA investigation in 2010. The lead FBI agent assigned to the FIFA matter told us that after Russia won the right to host the 2018 World Cup in September 2012, he approached Handling Agent 1 to request permission to examine possible corruption in the bidding process. According to the agent, Handling Agent 1 recalled his earlier interview with the contact that he met through Steele, retrieved a copy of the FBI FD-302 form memorializing the interview, and instructed the agent to open a case. The agent said that Steele's

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<sup>201</sup> Steele told us that he believed he met Handling Agent 1 and Ohr together at a conference in Europe before he left government service. Handling Agent 1 stated that his first meeting with Steele did not occur at a conference.

<sup>202</sup> Handling Agent 1 said he expected Steele to alert him if any of the clients were "bad actors," such as organized crime figures or others that would be of concern to the FBI. Handling Agent 1 stated that Steele never provided any such notification to him.

role in the FIFA investigation was limited to recommending to Handling Agent 1 that the FBI talk to the contact, whose information eventually proved valuable and helped predicate the opening of the investigation. The agent said he did not recall having any communication with Steele after the investigation's opening.

Additionally, Handling Agent 1 told us that Steele provided two other investigative leads to the FBI in connection with the FIFA investigation. First, in July 2011, Steele provided a report that summarized an alleged conversation between then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in which, according to the report, Putin acknowledged that a Russian oligarch had bribed the President of FIFA so that Russia could win the right to host the World Cup tournament in 2018. Second, in 2012, Steele introduced the FBI to two British officials with information concerning Russia's alleged efforts to bribe FIFA executives. Our review of Steele's Delta file also revealed that Steele furnished the FBI with a report dated June 2015 that quoted a Kremlin official as having admitted that the Kremlin bribed FIFA executives in order to secure rights to host the 2018 World Cup.<sup>203</sup>

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York, as of December 2019, the FIFA investigation has resulted in 26 individual guilty pleas, 2 trial convictions, 4 corporate guilty pleas, and one corporate deferred prosecution agreement. Total forfeitures in the matter exceed \$120 million. The OIG interviewed a prosecutor on the FIFA case who told us that Steele did not provide testimony in any court proceeding. Handling Agent 1 also told the OIG that Steele's information was not used to obtain any compulsory legal process in the FIFA case.

In addition to leads provided for the FIFA investigation, we were advised by the FBI that Steele furnished information about Russian oligarchs, some of whom were under investigation by the FBI. For example, we learned that, in October 2013, Steele provided lengthy and detailed reports to the FBI on three Russian oligarchs, one of whom was among the FBI's most wanted fugitives. According to an FBI document, an analyst who reviewed Steele's reporting on this fugitive found the reporting "extremely valuable and informative" and determined it was corroborated by other information that the FBI had obtained.

## **B. The FBI Opens Steele as a CHS in October 2013**

Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that in late October 2013, he concluded that the FBI needed to enroll Steele as a CHS. By that time, Steele had been providing information to the FBI intermittently for 3 years without compensation. According to Handling Agent 1, the volume of Steele's reporting had increased and involved persons of interest to the FBI, such as the oligarchs noted above, and Handling Agent 1 wanted to task Steele to collect additional information. Handling Agent 1

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<sup>203</sup> As described in Chapter Two, the FBI maintains an automated case management system for all CHS records, which the FBI refers to as "Delta." The Delta file for each CHS contains all of the personal and administrative information about the CHS, as well as sub-files for unclassified reporting, classified reporting, validation documentation, and payment records.

said that he also wanted to compensate Steele for his fruitful lead in the FIFA investigation. Another consideration for Handling Agent 1 was Handling Agent 1's pending transfer in late spring 2014 to an FBI office in a European city to serve as the Legal Attaché (Legat). Handling Agent 1 said that the logistics of obtaining and using information from Steele while Handling Agent 1 was stationed abroad would be easier if Steele was formally opened as a CHS.

Steele told us that after Handling Agent 1 indicated he wanted to begin tasking Steele to collect information and provide compensation, Steele explained to Handling Agent 1 that [REDACTED] and that any relationship would need to be between the FBI and Steele's consulting firm. Steele said that Handling Agent 1 contacted [REDACTED] and obtained a "green light" to proceed. Prior to opening Steele as a CHS, Handling Agent 1 contributed information to a memorandum from the FBI's Legal Attaché (Legat) in Steele's home country notifying [REDACTED] of Steele's proposed relationship with the FBI. The memorandum to [REDACTED] included the following:

Our New York Office is currently working with Christopher Steele, [REDACTED]. Mr. Steele is providing the FBI with information to support several ongoing criminal investigations involving transnational organized crime organizations. This information, provided primarily through Mr. Steele's privately owned company, Orbis Business Intelligence, is necessary to support our efforts to fully identify subjects with ties to European, Eurasian and Asian organized crime organizations and whose activities directly impact the United States.

In order to properly protect this information and Mr. Steele's relationship with the FBI, our New York Office will treat any material provided as information obtained through a Confidential Human Source.

Handling Agent 1 told us that he did not recall seeing a draft of the memorandum before it was sent by the Legat. The author of the memorandum, an FBI Assistant Legal Attaché (ALAT 1), told us that Handling Agent 1 probably provided him with the text of the memorandum because he was not familiar with the FBI's use of Steele.

In addition, Steele made available for our review a letter on his consulting firm's letterhead from Steele [REDACTED] dated approximately around the same time as the FBI's memorandum [REDACTED]. The letter explained that Steele's consulting firm is expected to enter into "a proposed commercial relationship" with the FBI. A substantial portion of the letter described the consulting firm and its work, and the letter stated that information furnished to the U.S. government would come from the firm.

On October 30, 2013, Handling Agent 1 and another agent completed the paperwork to open Steele as an FBI CHS. As required by FBI policy, Handling Agent 1 provided the FBI's standard "admonishments" to Steele at the outset of

Steele's enrollment as a CHS and on an annual basis thereafter. The admonishments advised Steele, for example, that he was not authorized to commit illegal acts, that he must provide truthful information to the FBI, and that he must follow the instructions of the FBI. According to FBI records, Steele signed paperwork captioned "CHS admonishments" acknowledging his receipt of the admonishments for the period covering Crossfire Hurricane, and signed CHS payment receipts using an FBI assigned payment codename.<sup>204</sup>

Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he instructed Steele not to divulge his relationship with the FBI to others, although the FBI's standard written CHS admonishments do not include such an instruction. According to Handling Agent 1, he told Steele not to share the information he was providing to the FBI with others, with one caveat. Handling Agent 1 explained that Steele would sometimes share with the FBI reports he had generated for his consulting firm's clients, and in that circumstance the clients would also be privy to the information that the FBI had obtained. Handling Agent 1 said he did not provide a specific instruction to Steele that he was not to disclose information that he was sharing with the FBI to the media. According to Handling Agent 1, he did not need to give that specific instruction because that prohibition was addressed by instructing Steele not to share the information he was providing to the FBI with others except for clients.

Steele told us, however, that he was never a CHS for the FBI, and that he advised Handling Agent 1 that he could not be a "clandestine source" due to his prior service as an intelligence officer of another country. Steele made available for the OIG's review documentation referring to such a prohibition. Steele stated that he never recalled being told that he was a CHS and that he never would have accepted such an arrangement, despite the fact that he signed FBI admonishment and payment paperwork indicating that he was an FBI CHS.<sup>205</sup> He also said that his relationship with the FBI was not that of a "confidential human source" because he would meet with Handling Agent 1 at Steele's office as well as in the presence of third parties, which included at times his Orbis business partner. Instead, he explained that the relationship with the FBI was "contractual" with his firm and that he was paid by the FBI "on a results basis" for information his firm furnished in response to taskings.<sup>206</sup> Steele said that he was told by Handling Agent 1 that such a relationship with the FBI was "unorthodox and groundbreaking," and that Handling Agent 1 was interested in similar relationships with others. Steele told us that he discussed with Handling Agent 1 how the FBI could be a client of his firm.

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<sup>204</sup> The FBI-1057 memorializing Steele's receipt of admonishments in 2016 states that Handling Agent 1 "verbally admonished the CHS with CHS admonishments, which the CHS fully acknowledged, signed and dated." The FBI could not locate the signed admonishment form, however.

<sup>205</sup> During his time as an FBI CHS, Steele received a total of \$95,000 from the FBI. We reviewed the FBI paperwork for those payments, each of which required Steele's signed acknowledgment. On each document, of which there were eight, was the caption "CHS's Payment" and "CHS's [REDACTED]" A signature page was missing for one of the payments.

<sup>206</sup> FBI records that we reviewed included an invoice dated January 25, 2016, from Steele's consulting firm requesting payment "[f]or consultancy services, including 7 meetings with contact, briefing, and reports" as well as for travel and accommodations. The FBI paid Steele (not the consulting firm) \$15,000 in May 2016 for services rendered from July 2015 through February 2016.

According to Steele, the issue of the nature of his relationship with the FBI "was never really resolved and both sides turned a blind eye to it. It was not really ideal." However, he said that because the FBI "was keen to stay in touch and draw upon our work" the relationship continued without fully resolving the question of his status.

Among the material that Steele made available to the OIG for review prior to and after his OIG interview were three memoranda written by Steele, that Steele said he maintained in his firm's files, which summarized meetings in 2010 involving Steele, Handling Agent 1, and Ohr. The memoranda reflect that Steele indicated during those meetings that he was not amenable to becoming a CHS and that he wanted the FBI to enter into a consulting agreement with his firm. However, also included in the materials was an undated draft letter from Steele to Handling Agent 1 describing events that post-dated the three earlier memoranda, and stating that although Steele preferred that the FBI enter into a contract with his firm, he was prepared to sign a contract with the FBI as an individual. According to Steele, he did not recall sending the letter but the letter reflected his willingness to accommodate the FBI's administrative requirements. He stated that his firm would not handle the FBI's work as anything other than as an account with the firm. We did not find a copy of these memoranda or the letter in Steele's Delta file. Handling Agent 1 told us that Steele never presented him with copies of these materials.

In light of Steele's assertions, we asked Handling Agent 1 whether Steele ever advised him that he was prohibited from working for the FBI as a CHS and whether the FBI ever had a contract with Steele's firm. Handling Agent 1 responded "no" to both questions. We also asked Handling Agent 1 about the memorandum described above that was sent by ALAT 1 in 2013 to [REDACTED], especially its description that information from Steele would be "provided primarily through [Steele's] privately owned company," and that the FBI would "treat any material provided as information obtained through a Confidential Human Source." We wanted to know the rationale for including these statements if in fact the purpose of the memorandum was to alert [REDACTED] that Steele was going to be working as a CHS for the FBI. Handling Agent 1 told us that he believed the FBI was trying to be as inclusive as possible in its description of Steele and therefore referenced information about Steele's firm, even though the FBI never had a relationship with the firm. Handling Agent 1 said that he did not know why the memorandum stated that material obtained from Steele would be "treated as information from a CHS" if in fact Steele was an FBI CHS. According to Handling Agent 1, there was no ambiguity in Steele's status as a CHS by late 2013. Handling Agent 1 said that he expressly informed Steele that he was a CHS, he provided Steele with CHS admonishments each year, and that Steele signed CHS payment paperwork using his CHS codename on multiple occasions. In the view of Handling Agent 1, Steele's contention that he was not a CHS is not credible.

We also asked ALAT 1 about the memorandum from the FBI to [REDACTED]. He said that the purpose of the memorandum was to notify [REDACTED] that Steele would be a CHS for the FBI, and that the memorandum's reference to the FBI's "working with [Steele]" and explanation that material from him would be handled as information from a CHS were sufficient to

notify [REDACTED] of Steele's status as a CHS. He further stated, however, that the memorandum alerted [REDACTED] that the FBI was going to have "some interaction with [Steele's] firm as well as [Steele]" given that the memorandum states that information from Steele would be furnished primarily through his firm. ALAT 1 said that this language was included in the memorandum to make clear that the information obtained from the firm would be treated as information from a CHS. ALAT 1 did not believe that he received any response to the memorandum from [REDACTED], and we did not find any such response in Steele's Delta file.

### **C. Steele's Work for the FBI During 2014-2015**

Handling Agent 1 said that during 2014 and 2015 he communicated with Steele more regularly and met with him several times in Steele's home country and in a city in Europe. Steele furnished intelligence information that the FBI disseminated, including in four Intelligence Information Reports (IIRs) sent throughout the U.S. Intelligence Community (USIC) concerning the activities of Russian oligarchs.<sup>207</sup> Handling Agent 1 recalled receiving positive feedback from the USIC in response to some of the IIRs containing Steele's information before Steele began delivering election related information in 2016. Handling Agent 1 said that the response to the IIRs was that the information was "really good" and there were requests for additional reporting from Steele. By the time Steele was closed by the FBI as a CHS in November 2016, the FBI had disseminated 10 IIRs based on Steele's reporting.

Ohr told us that, during this time period, he and Handling Agent 1 asked Steele to inquire whether Russian oligarchs would be interested in entering into discussions with them. Handling Agent 1 stated that he did not recall tasking Steele to contact Russian oligarchs though he [REDACTED]. According to Handling Agent 1, Steele originally proposed the idea of having him approach Russian oligarchs for the purpose of arranging meetings between the oligarchs and representatives of the U.S. government. In our review of Steele's CHS file, other pertinent documents, and interviews with Handling Agent 1, Ohr, and Steele, we observed that Steele had multiple contacts with representatives of Russian oligarchs with connections to Russian Intelligence Services (RIS) and senior Kremlin officials.<sup>208</sup> For example, in

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<sup>207</sup> Each of the IIRs noted the limitations on the reporting and included the following standard warning: "WARNING: This is a raw information report, not finally evaluated intelligence. It is being shared for informational purposes, but has not been fully evaluated, integrated with other information, interpreted or analyzed."

<sup>208</sup> [REDACTED] written by the FBI's Transnational Organized Crime Intelligence Unit (TOCIU) [REDACTED] Steele. [REDACTED] Steele's [REDACTED] recommended that a validation review be completed on Steele [REDACTED]. The FBI's Validation Management Unit did not perform such an assessment on Steele until early 2017 after, as described in Chapter Six, the Crossfire Hurricane team requested an assessment in the context of Steele's election reporting. Handling Agent 1 told us he had seen the TOCIU report and was not concerned about its findings concerning Steele because he was aware of Steele's [REDACTED]. We found



late November 2014, Handling Agent 1 met with Steele who advised Handling Agent 1 that he had received overtures from "interlocutors" for several Russian oligarchs seeking to arrange FBI interviews of the oligarchs.

Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that Steele facilitated meetings in a European city that included Handling Agent 1, Ohr, an attorney of Russian Oligarch 1, and a representative of another Russian oligarch.<sup>209</sup> Russian Oligarch 1 subsequently met with Ohr as well as other representatives of the U.S. government at a different location. Ohr told the OIG that, based on information that Steele told him about Russian Oligarch 1, such as when Russian Oligarch 1 would be visiting the United States or applying for a visa, and based on Steele at times seeming to be speaking on Russian Oligarch 1's behalf, Ohr said he had the impression that Russian Oligarch 1 was a client of Steele.<sup>210</sup>

We asked Steele about whether he had a relationship with Russian Oligarch 1. Steele stated that he did not have a relationship and indicated that he had met Russian Oligarch 1 one time. He explained that he worked for Russian Oligarch 1's attorney on litigation matters that involved Russian Oligarch 1 but that he could not provide "specifics" about them for confidentiality reasons. Steele stated that Russian Oligarch 1 had no influence on the substance of his election reporting and no contact with any of his sources. He also stated that he was not aware of any information indicating that Russian Oligarch 1 knew of his investigation relating to the 2016 U.S. elections.<sup>211</sup>

Steele's prior reporting to the FBI addressed issues other than Russian oligarchs. For example, we reviewed FBI records reflecting that he provided information on the hack of computer systems of an international corporation, and corruption involving former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. In addition, Steele told us he introduced Handling Agent 1 to sources with knowledge of Russian athletic doping and obtained samples of material for the FBI to analyze. Handling Agent 1 could not recall meeting with these sources or obtaining samples for analysis, though he did remember obtaining information from Steele concerning Russian athletic doping. Handling Agent 1 said he forwarded the information to the FBI New York Field Office (NYFO) which had an open investigation concerning doping.

Handling Agent 1 also recounted for us a situation involving Steele that reinforced his view that Steele was "very professional" and primarily motivated by a

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that the TOCIU report was not included in Steele's Delta file. Handling Agent 1 said that he found preparation of the TOCIU report "curious" because he believed that TOCIU was aware of Steele's [REDACTED] and fully supported them.

<sup>209</sup> Handling Agent 1 told us that he was aware that Steele had a relationship with Russian Oligarch 1's attorney and assumed it may have been a business relationship.

<sup>210</sup> As we discuss in Chapter Six, members of the Crossfire Hurricane team were unaware of Steele's connections to Russian Oligarch 1. [REDACTED]

<sup>211</sup> [REDACTED]

desire to counter threats posed by Russia. According to Handling Agent 1, on two occasions Steele made arrangements for a meeting between the FBI and a [REDACTED] individual who had potentially important information. In both instances the meetings did not occur due to the FBI's failure to attend. According to Handling Agent 1, the FBI's failure to meet with the individual was the FBI's fault, cost Steele financially in the short term, and likely caused a loss of reputation with the intermediaries who arranged the individual's attendance at the meeting. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that Steele's professionalism in seeking to arrange the meeting and then not seeking to "nickel and dime" the FBI in the process impressed him. Steele was eventually reimbursed by the FBI for his expenses, but it was over a year later.

We asked Handling Agent 1 about what information the FBI had corroborated from Steele's reporting prior to spring 2016 and whether Steele had been proven to be a reliable source. Handling Agent 1 said that Steele provided reliable information to the FBI in the past, but that not all of the information Steele furnished had been corroborated and verified. Handling Agent 1 cited several examples of information from Steele that the FBI had been able to corroborate prior to the spring of 2016, such as corruption in FIFA's bid selection process, information regarding [REDACTED] Russian oligarchs, and corruption involving Yanukovych, but could not recall more. He also told the OIG that he was not aware of any information Steele provided prior to 2016 that had been shown to be false, inaccurate, or problematic. Handling Agent 1 said that the FBI found Steele's information to be valuable and that it warranted compensation. As a result, in 2014 and 2015, the FBI made five payments to Steele totaling \$64,000. By the time the FBI closed Steele in November 2016, his cumulative compensation totaled \$95,000, including reimbursement for expenses. Steele was not compensated by the FBI for the election reporting we discuss below.

We asked Steele how he would characterize his relationship with the FBI prior to furnishing reports on the 2016 election. He told us it was "good" except for the tardiness of the FBI's payments to him. He stated that he had confidence in Handling Agent 1.

We also inquired whether Steele's work for the FBI intruded on his work for his private clients. Steele told us that overall his work could be categorized in one of two ways. The first was work he performed for other clients of his consulting firm. He called this work "Pipeline 1." Steele stated however that he sometimes provided his work product from these engagements to the FBI at no cost, which he said he did because he believed the information possibly could be helpful to the U.S. government. The second category was work Steele performed for the FBI in response to taskings and for which the FBI provided compensation. Steele referred to this work as "Pipeline 2." According to Steele, Pipeline 1 and Pipeline 2 were mutually exclusive and did not overlap. Steele explained that his Pipeline 1 work for his clients was not affected by his Pipeline 2 work for the FBI, and he therefore was at liberty to discuss his work for his clients with his clients and with third parties, as necessary, without gaining permission from the FBI. He stated that any promises or commitments he made to the FBI did not affect the work of his

consulting firm for its clients and that his FBI commitments only applied to work where the FBI was the client (*i.e.*, Pipeline 2).

## **II. Steele Provides the FBI with Election Reporting in 2016**

### **A. Steele's Engagement by Fusion GPS in June 2016**

Steele said that in approximately June 2016, he was hired for a short-term assignment by Fusion GPS, a Washington, D.C., investigative firm founded by former journalist Glenn Simpson and a partner.<sup>212</sup> Steele told us that he first met Simpson in 2010 and had completed a number of projects for him, some of which related to Russia. In May 2016, Simpson met Steele at a European airport and inquired whether Steele could assist in determining Russia's actions related to the 2016 U.S. elections, whether Russia was trying to achieve a particular election outcome, whether candidate Donald Trump had any personal and business ties in Russia, and whether there were any ties between the Russian government and Trump and his campaign.<sup>213</sup> Steele stated that he began work for Fusion GPS on the 2016 election assignment after Fusion GPS had completed a similar Trump related assignment for an entity connected to the Republican Party.

Steele told us he had a source network in place with a proven "track record" that could deliver on Fusion GPS's requirements. Steele added that this source network previously had furnished intelligence on Russian interference in European affairs.<sup>214</sup> Steele said he understood from Simpson that his assignment would end with the election in November 2016. He also stated that, prior to this request, he had not conducted any research on Trump.

We asked Steele when he learned who had retained Fusion GPS to obtain information concerning Trump and the Trump campaign. He told us he could not recall when he first learned that it was the law firm Perkins Coie and the Democratic National Committee (DNC), though he was certain that it was not at the outset of the engagement with Fusion GPS. Steele further stated that, by late July 2016, Steele had met with Simpson and an attorney from Perkins Coie, which

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<sup>212</sup> Simpson declined the OIG's request to be interviewed. According to testimony that Simpson provided to Congress, the *Washington Free Beacon* retained Fusion GPS from approximately September or October 2015 to April/May 2016 to take "an open-ended look at Donald Trump's business career and his litigation history and his relationships with questionable people, how much he was really worth, how he ran his casinos, [and] what kind of performance he had in other lines of work." See *Testimony of Glenn Simpson before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. House of Representatives* (November 8, 2017) (hereinafter *Simpson House Testimony*) at 7, 12.

<sup>213</sup> According to interrogatory responses Steele provided in foreign litigation, Fusion GPS retained Steele "to investigate and report, by way of preparing confidential Intelligence Memorandum, on Russian efforts to influence the U.S. Presidential election process in 2016 and on links between Russia and the then Republican candidate and now President Donald Trump."

<sup>214</sup> Steele told us that this source network did not involve sources from his time as a [REDACTED] and was developed entirely in the period after he retired from government service.

represented the DNC, and Steele said that by that time he was aware of the DNC's role. He stated that he could not remember whether he provided Perkins Coie's name to the FBI but believed it was probable that he did so, but not in July 2016.

Steele stated that he finalized arrangements with Simpson over the terms of his engagement a few weeks after their meeting at the European airport and that he started to collect information in June 2016. According to FBI records, Steele thereafter produced ■ reports related to the 2016 U.S. elections, ■ of which he provided to the FBI and ■ others that were provided to the FBI by third parties, as described in Chapter Six.<sup>215</sup> The FBI obtained reports directly from Steele during the time period of July through October 2016.

Steele told us that the reports he generated were not designed to be "finished products" and instead were "to be briefed off of orally versus consumed as a written product." He said that the reports were "mostly single source reporting" and were uncorroborated intelligence "up to a point," but were informed by background research and his judgment as an intelligence professional. Steele explained that it was his firm's practice to faithfully report everything a reliable source provided and not to withhold information because it was controversial. He denied "tailoring" his reporting to meet the needs of his clients and explained that doing so ultimately was not a good business practice because it would result in loss of reputation. We also asked Steele whether his research was "opposition research" and biased. He provided a similar response and explained that his firm would not be in business if it provided biased information.<sup>216</sup> Steele called the allegation that he was biased against Trump from the start "ridiculous."<sup>217</sup> He stated that if anything he was "favorably disposed" toward the Trump family before he began his research because he had visited a Trump family member at Trump Tower and "been friendly" with [the family member] for some years. He described their relationship as "personal" and said that he once gifted a family tartan from Scotland to the family member.

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<sup>215</sup> One report that was not provided to the FBI directly or via third parties was published by *BuzzFeed*. One of the reports provided to the FBI by third parties was a near duplicate of a report that Steele previously had furnished to the FBI. Steele also provided the FBI, from July through October 2016, with several reports that addressed Russian activities but were not election related.

<sup>216</sup> We also asked about obvious errors in the reporting, such as misspellings and the reference to a Russian consulate in Miami which did not exist. Steele told us that such errors are typical in intelligence work and were a function, in part, of the fast turnaround between his receipt of information from his sources and the dissemination of the reporting. He explained that he was accountable for any errors as the election reporting was "his baby."

<sup>217</sup> As we describe in Chapter Six, however, according to an FBI FD-302, when the FBI interviewed Steele in September 2017, he and a colleague from his firm described Trump as their "main opponent." Ohr also advised SSA 1 that Steele was "desperate that Donald Trump not get elected and was passionate about him not being the U.S. President." As we describe in Chapter Nine, SSA 1 met with Ohr on November 21, 2016, and memorialized Ohr's statements in a FBI FD-302 report. When we interviewed Steele, he told us that he did not state that he was "desperate" that Trump not be elected and thought Ohr might have been paraphrasing his sentiments. Steele told us that he was concerned that Trump was a national security risk, and he had no particular animus against Trump otherwise.

The first election report that Steele provided to the FBI, which, as described in Chapters Five and Seven, was one of four of Steele's reports that the FBI relied upon to support probable cause in the Carter Page FISA applications, is captioned "Company Intelligence Report 2016/080—U.S. Presidential Election: Republican Candidate Donald Trump's Activities in Russia and Compromising Relationship with the Kremlin," and is dated June 20, 2016 (Report 80). It was provided to Handling Agent 1 on July 5, 2016, and contains numerous allegations about the presidential candidates, including that: (1) the "Russian regime has been cultivating, supporting, and assisting [Trump] for at least 5 years;" (2) "[Trump] and his inner circle have accepted a regular flow of intelligence from the Kremlin, including on his Democratic and other political rivals;" (3) Trump's activities in Moscow, including "perverted sexual acts," make him vulnerable to blackmail; (4) Russian Intelligence Services have collected "compromising material" on Hillary Clinton; and (5) the Kremlin has been "feeding" information to Trump's campaign for an extended period of time. Steele said that he debated with his business colleague whether to include the sexual material in Report 80 but refused to omit it because he felt that as a matter of professional practice, when reporting information from a source, "we have to be faithful to all of the information the source provided" and not avoid material because it is controversial. Then Director James Comey later described this aspect of Steele's reporting as "salacious and unverified."<sup>218</sup>

Steele explained that shortly after drafting Report 80 he had discussions with his business partner and Simpson about what to do with the information. He said that he and his partner considered the contents of the report to have national security implications and that the report therefore needed to be shared with the FBI. He said that Simpson agreed to Steele's proposal, and thereafter, Steele contacted the FBI.<sup>219</sup>

#### **B. Steele Informs Handling Agent 1 in July 2016 about his Election Reporting Work**

Shortly before the Fourth of July 2016, Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he received a call from Steele requesting an in-person meeting as soon as possible. Handling Agent 1 said he departed his duty station in Europe on July 5 and met with Steele in Steele's office that day. During their meeting, Steele provided Handling Agent 1 with a copy of Report 80 and explained that he had been hired by Fusion GPS to collect information on the relationship between candidate Trump's businesses and Russia. Handling Agent 1 said Steele had become concerned about the possibility of the Russians compromising Trump in the event Trump became

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<sup>218</sup> We further discuss Comey's views of this information in Chapter Six.

<sup>219</sup> Simpson has testified before Congress that he assented to Steele's request to provide the information to the FBI, and that he viewed the situation as "potentially a crime in progress" that needed to be reported. *Simpson House Testimony* at 61; *Testimony of Glenn Simpson before the Senate Judiciary Committee*, United States Senate (August 22, 2017) (hereinafter *Simpson Senate Testimony*) at 160.

President.<sup>220</sup> According to Handling Agent 1, Steele informed him that Fusion GPS had been hired by a law firm to conduct research, though Steele stated that he did not know the law firm's name or its political affiliation.<sup>221</sup> Handling Agent 1 told the OIG, however, that he did not have to ask Steele to know that the request for the research was politically motivated as the connection to politics was obvious to Handling Agent 1 from the circumstances. Handling Agent 1 also told us that he asked Steele to try to identify the law firm. However, Handling Agent 1 said that he did not "continually ask" Steele about the firm's identity as his work with Steele progressed. When asked by the OIG about an October 2016 email from a member of the Crossfire Hurricane team stating that Handling Agent 1 had avoided tasking Steele to obtain the name of the law firm, Handling Agent 1 told us that information was incorrect and that he would never avoid asking a material question. When we asked the email's author about the email, he stated that it accurately represented what Handling Agent 1 had told him during a telephone call in October 2016.

We reviewed what Steele represented were his contemporaneous notes of his July 5 meeting with Handling Agent 1. Steele told us these notes were written within a day or two of the meeting. The notes reflect that Steele told Handling Agent 1 that Steele was aware that "Democratic Party associates" were paying for Fusion GPS's research, the "ultimate client" was the leadership of the Clinton presidential campaign, and "the candidate" was aware of Steele's reporting. Steele told us that he was "pretty candid" with Handling Agent 1. He also said it was clear that Fusion GPS was backed by Clinton supporters and senior Democrats who were supporting her. When we asked Handling Agent 1 about the information contained in Steele's notes, Handling Agent 1 told us that he did not recall Steele mentioning these facts to him during their meeting.

After being provided with a copy of Report 80 at the July 5 meeting, Handling Agent 1 said he asked Steele whether he was still collecting information for Fusion GPS. Handling Agent 1 said Steele responded that he was working on another report for Simpson. Handling Agent 1 said that, at that point, he advised Steele that Steele was not working on behalf of the FBI to collect the information Fusion GPS was seeking: "I said we are not asking you to do it and I'm not tasking you to do it." Steele provided the OIG with a similar interpretation of these events. He told us that Report 80, as well as all his other election reports, was "Pipeline 1" information and not subject to FBI controls. Handling Agent 1 said that he also advised Steele that because a law firm was involved there could be privilege issues that Handling Agent 1 would need to evaluate. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he returned to his duty station the same day with a copy of the reports Steele provided him, only one of which was election related.

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<sup>220</sup> Handling Agent 1's records indicate that, during this meeting, Steele also provided Handling Agent 1 with reporting on Russian doping in athletics, Russian cyber activities, and Russian interference in European political affairs.

<sup>221</sup> As described earlier, Steele told us that by late July 2016, he had met with Simpson and an attorney from Perkins Coie, which represented the DNC, and by that time he was aware of the DNC's role.

Steele told us that Handling Agent 1 was "taken aback" by the contents of Report 80, and that Handling Agent 1 said he needed to send the Report back to the U.S. and would contact Steele at a later time after Handling Agent 1 had conferred with others about how to handle it. Steele said that he waited approximately one week and then contacted Handling Agent 1 to inquire whether he wanted to receive additional reports. According to Steele, Handling Agent 1 responded, "[N]ot yet. I'm still dealing with this. I'll get back to you." Steele said it was not until mid-August that he heard back from Handling Agent 1 and that Handling Agent 1 told him at that time that he wanted to receive additional reports.

Handling Agent 1 said he discussed Steele's reporting with his supervisor, the Legat, and both agreed that Handling Agent 1 should try to determine where to send the information in FBI Headquarters. However, due to the sensitivity of the reporting, Handling Agent 1 said that he wanted to be discrete and avoid a situation where he was "broadcasting" the information. Handling Agent 1 said that he informed his supervisor that he wanted to consult with NYFO (where Handling Agent 1 previously had worked) before taking further action, and that his goal was to put the information directly in the hands of people who needed to see it. According to Handling Agent 1, his supervisor approved, stating "Good idea. Call whoever you have to call. Do whatever you have to do."<sup>222</sup>

The Legat told us that he recalled Handling Agent 1's proposal to contact NYFO, which he concurred with, but that his expectation was that Handling Agent 1 would provide Steele's reporting to the Counterintelligence Division (CD) at FBI Headquarters within a matter of days. The Legat stated that he recalled inquiring about the handling of the reporting when Handling Agent 1 obtained another report from Steele, Report 94 described below, on July 19, 2016, as well as prior to a meeting members of the Crossfire Hurricane team had with Steele in October 2016. The Legat said that during this time, "I just assumed [Handling Agent 1] was handling it...[and] had sent it off."

Approximately 1 week after his July 5 meeting with Steele, Handling Agent 1 contacted an Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC 1) in NYFO, whom Handling Agent 1 had known for many years and described as having experience with "sensitive matters." Handling Agent 1 said that he described the "gist" of the situation to ASAC 1, who responded that he would assess what to do and contact Handling Agent 1 later. ASAC 1 told us that the information that Handling Agent 1 explained to him "[c]learly [was] something that needs to be handled immediately" and "definitely of interest to the Counterintelligence folks." ASAC 1 said that after hearing from Handling Agent 1, he spoke with his Special Agent in Charge (SAC 1) the same day. ASAC 1's notes from his July 13 call with Handling Agent 1 closely track the contents of Report 80, identify Simpson as a client of a law firm, and include the following: "law firm works for the Republican party or Hillary and will

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<sup>222</sup> Handling Agent 1 said that he did not contact the International Operations Division (IOD) at FBI Headquarters, which supports the Legats, about the reporting.

use [the information described in Report 80] at some point.”<sup>223</sup> ASAC 1 told us that he would not have made this notation if Handling Agent 1 had not stated it to him.

On July 19, 2016, Steele sent an email to Handling Agent 1 that included another report, Report 94, which was captioned “Company Intelligence Report 2016/94—Russia: Secret Kremlin Meetings Attended by Trump Advisor Carter Page in Moscow (July 2016).” Report 94, which as described in Chapters Five and Seven was one of 4 reports the FBI relied upon to support the probable cause in the Carter Page FISA applications, alleged that during a visit to Moscow in July 2016, Page met with: (1) Igor Sechin, Chairman of Russian energy conglomerate Rosneft, and discussed the “lifting of western sanctions against Russia over Ukraine;” and (2) Igor Divyekin, a staff member in the Russian Presidential Administration, who informed Page of compromising information the Kremlin possessed on Hillary Clinton and its possible release to the Republican campaign. Report 94 further alleged that Divyekin advised Page that the Russians had derogatory information on Trump, which the candidate should bear in mind in future dealings with Russian leadership. Report 94 described conversations involving a limited number of persons (e.g., Sechin confided the details of a secret meeting with Page; Sergei Ivanov confided in a compatriot that Divyekin had met secretly with Page).

Handling Agent 1 said that when he read Report 94 for the first time he recognized Sechin’s name from intelligence reporting but did not recognize the other names, including Carter Page. He told the OIG that he was in no position to assess the reliability of the reporting and for that reason he was eager to forward the reporting to persons who could evaluate it. Steele’s reporting, however, did not reach investigators at FBI Headquarters until 2 months later, a circumstance we describe further below.

### **C. The Crossfire Hurricane Team Receives Steele’s Reports on September 19**

On July 28, 2016, three days prior to the opening of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, Handling Agent 1 sent Reports 80 and 94 to ASAC 1 in NYFO, who forwarded them to SAC 1.<sup>224</sup> Handling Agent 1’s sharing of the reports with ASAC 1 resulted in a meeting in NYFO on August 3 among ASAC 1, the Chief Division Counsel (CDC), an Associate Division Counsel (ADC), and a Supervisory Special Agent (SSA). Notes taken by the ADC show that the meeting participants discussed

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<sup>223</sup> As we summarize in Chapter Ten, at approximately the same time that Handling Agent 1 was reporting information about Simpson to ASAC 1, an FBI agent from another FBI field office sent an email to his supervisor stating that he had been contacted by a former CHS who “was contacted recently by a colleague who runs an investigative firm. The firm had been hired by two entities (the Democratic National Committee as well as another individual...not name[d]) to explore Donald J. Trump’s longstanding ties to Russian entities.” On or about August 2, 2016, this information was shared by a CD supervisor with the Section Chief of CD’s Counterintelligence Analysis Section I (Intel Section Chief), who provided it that day to members of the Crossfire Hurricane team (then Section Chief Peter Strzok, SSA 1, and the Supervisory Intel Analyst).

<sup>224</sup> ASAC 1 told us that he was not sure why nothing happened with the reports between July 13, the date he first spoke with Handling Agent 1, and July 28.



in general terms the information contained in Reports 80 and 94 and the relationship between Steele, Simpson, and a "law firm."

The ADC told the OIG that he was assigned the responsibility of reading Steele's reports and determining whether they were pertinent to any crimes involving public corruption. The ADC said he spoke with Handling Agent 1 on August 4, and Handling Agent 1 emailed Reports 80 and 94 to him the next day. Handling Agent 1 stated that, prior to sending the reports, ASAC 1 had contacted him to explain that the reports would be placed in a sub-file in NYFO and thereby "walled off" from agents in NYFO, and that the Assistant Director in Charge of NYFO and the "Executive Assistant Director (EAD) level" at FBI Headquarters were aware of the reports' existence. Handling Agent 1 stated that the ADC informed him in August that he was conferring with management in NYFO about how to handle the reports and would notify him after a determination had been made. Handling Agent 1 also stated that the engagement of an EAD was significant to him because he believed that "appropriate people were communicating" about the reports as a result and that he therefore should wait for further guidance about how to handle the reports.

As we discuss in detail in Chapter Nine, Handling Agent 1 also told us that, in mid to late August, he heard from Ohr "out of the blue," who inquired whether Handling Agent 1 had seen Steele's reports. According to Handling Agent 1, Ohr contacted him to confirm that the FBI was aware of the reports and was "handling" them. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he advised Ohr that news of the reports had reached the "EAD level" at FBI Headquarters and that executive management at NYFO was aware of the reports and trying to determine where to forward them. Ohr stated that he recalled Handling Agent 1 telling him this, but that at some later date Ohr said he became concerned that the right people at FBI Headquarters did not know about the reporting.

On August 25, 2016, according to a Supervisory Special Agent 1 (SSA 1) who was assigned to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, during a briefing for then Deputy Director Andrew McCabe on the investigation, McCabe asked SSA 1 to contact NYFO about information that potentially could assist the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.<sup>225</sup> SSA 1 said he reached out to counterintelligence agents and analysts in NYFO within approximately 24 hours following the meeting. Instant messages show that on September 1, SSA 1 spoke with a NYFO counterintelligence supervisor, and that the counterintelligence supervisor was attempting to set up a call between SSA 1 and the ADC.

On September 2, 2016, Handling Agent 1, who had been waiting for NYFO to inform him where to forward Steele's reports, sent the following email to the ADC and counterintelligence supervisor: "Do we have a name yet? The stuff is burning a hole." The ADC responded the same day explaining that SSA 1 had created an electronic sub-file for Handling Agent 1 in the Crossfire Hurricane case and that he

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<sup>225</sup> During his interview with the OIG, McCabe told us that he did not remember asking SSA 1 to contact NYFO, and he said he did not remember knowing in August 2016 that NYFO had information relevant to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.

should forward the Steele reports to it. However, SSA 1 told us that there was a problem with his attempt to send an email to Handling Agent 1 in early September. SSA 1 said he did not recognize the problem until September 13 and emailed Handling Agent 1 that day with the case information necessary to upload the reports.

On September 19, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received the Steele reporting for the first time when Handling Agent 1 emailed SSA 1 six reports for SSA 1 to upload himself to the sub-file: Reports 80 and 94, and four additional reports (Reports 95, 100, 101, and 102) that Handling Agent 1 had since received from Steele.<sup>226</sup> FBI officials we interviewed told us that the length of time it took for Steele's election reporting to reach FBI Headquarters was excessive and that the reports should have been sent promptly after their receipt by the Legat. Members of the Crossfire Hurricane team told us that their assessment of the Steele election reporting could have started much earlier if the reporting had been made available to them.

As described in Chapters Five and Seven, the FBI relied upon Report 95 to support probable cause in the Carter Page FISA applications. Report 95 was entitled "Russia/US Presidential Election: Further Indications of Extensive Conspiracy Between Trump's Campaign Team and the Kremlin" and cited repeatedly to information provided by "Source E." Report 95 alleged the existence of "a well-developed conspiracy of co-operation" between the Trump campaign and Russian leadership, and claimed that the campaign's manager, Manafort, used Carter Page and others as "intermediaries" to further the conspiracy. According to Source E, the "Russian regime" was behind the leak of DNC emails to WikiLeaks with the "full knowledge and support" of Trump and his campaign team, and the WikiLeaks platform was used by Russia to afford it "plausible deniability" of its involvement in the leak. Also, as we describe in Chapter Eight, Report 95 included an allegation that Page and possibly others agreed to sideline Russian intervention in Ukraine as a campaign issue in exchange for Russia's disclosure of hacked DNC emails to WikiLeaks. The FBI used this information in all of the Carter Page FISA applications to support its assessment that Page helped influence the Republican Party to change its platform to be more sympathetic to Russia's interests by eliminating language from the Republican platform about providing weapons to Ukraine.

Report 102, as described in Chapters Five and Seven, was also one of the 4 reports relied upon to support probable cause in the Carter Page FISA applications. The Report was titled, "Russia/US Presidential Election: Reaction in Trump Camp to Recent Negative Publicity About Russian Interference and Likely Resulting Tactics Going Forward." Report 102 alleged that the purpose of the recent DNC email leaks was to shift votes from Bernie Sanders to Trump following Clinton's nomination.

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<sup>226</sup> Additional reports included the following information: Report 100 (Premier Medvedev's office was furious over DNC hacking and associated anti-Russian publicity) and Report 101 (The Kremlin is supporting various U.S. political figures and indirectly funding their travel to Moscow). Reports 95 and 102 are described below.

Report 102 also alleged that Carter Page conceived of and promoted the idea that the release of the DNC emails would shift voter support to Trump.

**D. The Crossfire Hurricane Team's Initial Handling of the Steele Reporting in September 2016**

As described in Chapter Three, by the date the Crossfire Hurricane team received the six Steele reports on September 19, the investigation had been underway for approximately 6 weeks and the team had opened investigations on four individuals: Carter Page, George Papadopoulos, Paul Manafort, and Michael Flynn. In addition, during the prior 6 weeks, the team had used CHSs to conduct operations against Page, Papadopoulos, and a high-level Trump campaign official, although those operations had not resulted in the collection of any inculpatory information. Further, as described in Chapter Five, the team had discussions about the possibility of obtaining FISAs targeting Page and Papadopoulos, but it was determined that there was insufficient information at the time to proceed with an application to the court.

As also described in Chapter Three, the FBI had an ongoing cyber counterintelligence investigation into the Russian hacking of the DNC and was aware of other Russian efforts to interfere with the upcoming 2016 U.S. elections. We were told by several FBI witnesses that certain broad themes of the Steele reporting were consistent with information already known by the FBI and other U.S. government intelligence agencies. These themes included that the Russian government was seeking to sow discord and disunity within the United States and Trans-Atlantic alliance, that the Russian government was working to support Trump's election as President, and that Russian state-sponsored cyber operations were responsible for hacking activity focused on the Clinton campaign. Comey told the OIG that, in his view, the "heart of the [Steele] reporting was that there's a massive Russian effort to influence the American election and weaponize stolen information." Comey said he believed those themes from the Steele reporting were "entirely consistent with information developed by the [USIC] wholly separate and apart from the [Steele] reporting," as well as consistent with what "our eyes and ears could also see."

After obtaining the six Steele reports on September 19, analysts on the Crossfire Hurricane team immediately began to evaluate the information in the reports. By the next day, they had completed a draft Intelligence Memorandum that summarized key points from the reports and identified actions that needed to be taken to assess the information. For example, Report 95 stated that Russian diplomatic staff in the United States were rewarding assets (cooperators) using the émigré pension distribution system as cover, and the Intelligence Memorandum described [REDACTED]

The FBI's analytical efforts also included developing various diagrams, charts, and timelines to document relationships and events pertinent to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation. In order to analyze the Steele election reports, the FBI developed a spreadsheet of excerpts from the reports with analyst notes indicating

the source of the excerpt and verification information, such as whether information contained in the excerpt had been corroborated.<sup>227</sup> We discuss in Chapter Six these efforts by the FBI over time to assess the Steele election reporting.

Assistant Director (AD) E.W. "Bill" Priestap and then Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Peter Strzok told the OIG that the FBI's assessment of Steele's information was not different from the approach the FBI typically uses in evaluating CHS information. They explained that the assessment involved determining the credibility of Steele, including understanding his record of furnishing reliable information, motivation, and possible biases; and verifying the information he provided through independent sources. Priestap described the FBI's approach to the reporting in the following terms:

[W]e did not ever take the information he provided at face value.... We went to great lengths to try to independently verify the source's credibility and to prove or disprove every single assertion in the dossier.... We absolutely understood that the information in the so-called dossier could be inaccurate. We also understood that some parts could be true and other parts false. We understood that information could be embellished or exaggerated. We also understood that the information could have been provided by the Russians as part of a disinformation campaign.

The Supervisory Intelligence Analyst (Supervisory Intel Analyst) assigned to Crossfire Hurricane told the OIG that an early focus of the FBI's analytical effort to assess Steele's reporting was trying to identify Steele's sources. According to the Supervisory Intel Analyst, it was important to determine whether the reporting of those individuals matched their access to information. The Supervisory Intel Analyst said that, in order to evaluate that issue and fully assess the reporting, the FBI sought assistance from other USIC agencies by, for example, vetting Russian names identified in the reports.

We asked the Supervisory Intel Analyst whether the FBI sought to determine who was financing Steele's election related research. He said that the focus of the analysts was on Russian interference in the campaign and on any connections between Russia and the Trump campaign. He stated that he was aware of the potential for political influences on the reporting. He said that, because of that awareness, whether the reporting was "opposition research" that was politically motivated was not an issue that occupied his or his analysts' attention and that further research on the issue was nearly "immaterial." He explained that because "opposition research can be true, it can be false," his focus was on vetting the reporting to determine whether its contents were accurate.

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<sup>227</sup> The OIG was advised that the spreadsheet does not include highly classified material, and therefore its presentation of information known to the FBI about corroboration of the Steele election reporting is partial.

On September 23, 2016, Case Agent 1, the lead case agent for the Carter Page investigation, emailed Handling Agent 1 to inquire about Steele. Handling Agent 1 responded: “[CHS] has been signed up for 3 years and is reliable. [CHS] responds to taskings and obtains info from a network of sub sources. Some of the [CHS]’ info has been corroborated when possible.”<sup>228</sup> This outreach was followed shortly thereafter by a request to Handling Agent 1 from one of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation supervisors, SSA 1, to participate in a video conference call with members of the Crossfire Hurricane team on September 27. According to participants on the call, the purpose of the call was to set a meeting with Steele to discuss his reports, learn about his source network, and gain his cooperation to collect additional information in support of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.<sup>229</sup>

We asked Strzok who made the decision to use Steele as a source in the Crossfire Hurricane investigation. He said that McCabe and Comey were briefed on Steele’s reporting and “okayed” the Crossfire Hurricane team’s approach to use Steele in the investigation. Comey told us that he recalled being briefed about Steele but did not have a specific recollection beyond obtaining copies of Steele’s reports and learning about Steele’s background; his prior record of furnishing information to the FBI, including FIFA; and his work for political entities (first Republican, then Democratic).<sup>230</sup> McCabe told us that although he was sometimes present during discussions about the use of CHSs in Crossfire Hurricane, he left decisions about which sources to use and how to use them to the team.

As we describe below, in early October 2016 a meeting was held between members of the Crossfire Hurricane team and Steele in a European city. Unknown to the FBI at the time, Steele was working with his client, Fusion GPS, to alert select media outlets about his reporting concerning Russian interference with the 2016 U.S elections and allegations regarding the Trump campaign and candidate Trump. Additionally, the FBI was unaware at the time that Steele had not made available to the FBI all of the reports he prepared as of mid-September concerning Russia.<sup>231</sup> As described in Chapter Six, these and other reports were provided to

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<sup>228</sup> We did not find this communication in Steele’s Delta file.

<sup>229</sup> We found that the first time the Crossfire Hurricane team accessed Steele’s Delta file was in November 2016. The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that the team was in contact with Handling Agent 1 beginning in September and relied on him for information about Steele. Handling Agent 1 expressed surprise that the Crossfire Hurricane team did not access Steele’s Delta file earlier. He said that the team should have “turned the file upside down” looking for information 2 months earlier and that he assumed that some members of the team had thoroughly reviewed the file.

<sup>230</sup> As noted earlier, Steele told us that he began work for Fusion GPS on the 2016 election assignment after Fusion GPS had completed a similar Trump related assignment for a Republican Party connected entity.

<sup>231</sup> The following are reports with select highlights that Steele did not furnish to the FBI, which range in date from July 30 to September 14, 2016:

- Report 97 (the Kremlin is concerned that political fallout from the DNC hacking operation is spiraling out of control; a source close to the Trump campaign confirms that the regular exchange of intelligence between the Trump team and the Kremlin had existed for at least 8 years; the Kremlin had determined not to use compromising

the FBI in November and December 2016 by a journalist, Senator John McCain, and Ohr. When we asked Steele why he failed to provide all of his then-existing reports to the FBI, he could not provide us with an explanation and said that he should have given them to the FBI at the time.

#### **E. Steele Discusses His Reporting with Third Parties in Late September 2016 and the *Yahoo News* Article**

During late September 2016, with Fusion GPS's authorization, Steele met with numerous persons outside the FBI to discuss the intelligence he had obtained, as part of his paid work for Fusion GPS, concerning Russian interference with the 2016 U.S. elections and allegations regarding the Trump campaign and candidate Trump.<sup>232</sup> For example, as we discuss in Chapter Nine, emails exchanged between Steele and Ohr show that Steele visited Washington, D.C., beginning around September 21, 2016, and met with Ohr on September 23, at which time the two discussed multiple issues involving election related intelligence that Steele had collected. Steele told us that during this visit he also met with an attorney from Perkins Coie, who was general counsel to the Clinton campaign.<sup>233</sup>

Steele also met with journalists during his September trip to Washington, D.C. According to a filing that Steele made in 2017 in foreign litigation, at Fusion GPS's instruction, he briefed reporters from *The New York Times*, *The Washington*

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information against Trump given how cooperative his team had been over several years and of late);

- Report 105 (during a secret meeting between Putin and ex-Ukrainian President Yanukovich, Yanukovich confided to Putin that he did authorize and order substantial kick-back payments to Manafort but reassured Putin that no documentary trail was left behind; Putin and Russian leadership were skeptical of the ex-President's assurances that there were no traces of the payments; Manafort's departure from the Trump campaign was attributable to Ukrainian corruption revelations as well as infighting with campaign advisors);
- Report 112 (the leading figures of the Alpha group of businesses led by three Russian oligarchs are on very good terms with Putin; Alpha held compromising information on Putin and his corrupt business activities from the 1990s); and
- Report 113 (sources based in St. Petersburg reported that Trump has paid bribes and engaged in sexual activities in St. Petersburg, including participating in sex parties, but that witnesses had been "silenced," i.e., bribed or coerced to disappear).

<sup>232</sup> This was not the first time that information included in Steele's reports concerning the Trump campaign was known to individuals outside the FBI. For example, Handling Agent 1 emailed an FBI supervisor on July 28, 2016, explaining that Steele had advised him that information from Reports 80 and 94 "may already be circulating at a 'high level' in Washington, D.C." Two days earlier, according to a text between Carter Page and a *Wall Street Journal* reporter (that Page has since made public), the reporter contacted Page inquiring whether Page had met with Sechin and Divyekin. The FBI also received correspondence from Members of Congress in August 2016 that described information included in the Steele reports. Additionally, then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland publicly stated during an interview in 2018 that Steele's election reporting was first provided to the State Department in July 2016.

<sup>233</sup> Steele told us that he had a second meeting with this attorney in October 2016, and that he had met with another attorney from Perkins Coie in July 2016.

*Post*, *Yahoo News*, *The New Yorker*, and CNN. The filing states that the briefings were verbal, occurred at the end of September, and “involved the disclosure of limited intelligence regarding indications of Russian interference with the U.S. election process and the possible coordination of members of Trump’s campaign team and Russian government officials.”

Steele told us that the press briefings were taskings from his client, Fusion GPS, that his firm had to honor, and Simpson has testified that Simpson attended the briefings.<sup>234</sup> Steele said that they were “off-the-record” and, while he made mention of the reports, Steele did not distribute them to the journalists. Steele explained that he discussed “general themes” from his reporting that lacked sufficient specificity to identify his sources, and that he avoided answering questions about whether he had reported his findings to authorities.<sup>235</sup>

We asked Steele whether he believed his participation in the press briefings was contrary to any admonishments that he had received previously from Handling Agent 1. He said that he did not recall the FBI telling him he could not talk to journalists about work that he performed on behalf of his firm’s clients. According to Steele, the election reporting was a “Pipeline 1” assignment and therefore the FBI did not have a role in setting terms for his interactions with third parties, such as news organizations. He said that if the FBI had tried to interfere in his assignment for Fusion GPS, he would have objected and that such an attempt would have been a “showstopper.” Steele stated that Orbis’ client for the election reporting was Fusion GPS, which controlled and directed the terms for interactions with third parties.

Handling Agent 1 told us that he understood why Steele would believe in September 2016 that he did not have an obligation to discuss his press contacts with him given that: (1) Steele’s work resulted from a private client engagement; and (2) Handling Agent 1 told Steele on July 5 that he was not collecting his election reporting on behalf of the FBI. However, Handling Agent 1’s view was that while it was obvious that Fusion GPS would want to publicize Steele’s election information, it was not apparent that Steele would be conducting press briefings and otherwise interjecting himself into the media spotlight. Handling Agent 1 told us that he would have recommended that Steele be closed in September 2016 if he had known about the attention that Steele was attracting to himself. According to Handling Agent 1, Steele should have had the foresight to recognize this fact and the professionalism to afford Handling Agent 1 an opportunity to assess the situation. However, we are unaware of any FBI admonishments that Steele violated by speaking to third parties, including the press, about work that he had

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<sup>234</sup> *Simpson Senate Testimony*, at 207.

<sup>235</sup> According to a book co-authored by a *Yahoo News* reporter who was present for a Steele September 2016 press briefing, Steele told him at the meeting that he had provided his election reporting to the FBI and that there were “people in the [FBI] taking this very seriously.” See *Russian Roulette: The Inside Story of Putin’s War on America and the Election of Donald Trump* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2018), 226.

done solely for his firm's clients and where he made no mention of his relationship with the FBI.

On September 23, 2016, *Yahoo News* published an article entitled, "*U.S. Intel Officials Probe Ties Between Trump Advisor and Kremlin*." The September 23 article described efforts by U.S. government intelligence agencies to determine whether Carter Page had opened communication channels with Kremlin officials. Steele told us that because his briefing with *Yahoo News* was "off-the-record," he did not believe that he was the source for the article. He stated that it was his understanding based on discussions with Simpson that the sourcing for the article came from within the U.S. government.<sup>236</sup> However, portions of the article align with information contained in Steele's Report 94. For example, the article stated that U.S. officials had received intelligence reporting that Page had met with Igor Sechin, Chairman of Rosneft, and Igor Divyekin, Deputy Chief in the Russian Presidential Administration. The article cited "a well-placed Western intelligence source" for this information, and the article's author has confirmed that Steele contributed information for the article and that Steele was the "Western intelligence source."<sup>237</sup>

We asked FBI agents and analysts assigned to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation whether, following publication of the *Yahoo News* article, they had concerns that Steele was briefing the press about the reports that he had provided to the FBI, and they expressed varying points of view. The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that it was unclear to him in September 2016 whether Steele was briefing the press. He stated that because Steele was providing his reporting to Fusion GPS, the Supervisory Intel Analyst's view at the time was that it could have been Fusion GPS or its clients who were discussing the reporting with news outlets. The supervisory attorney from the FBI Office of the General Counsel assigned to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation (the OGC Unit Chief) stated that she and others assumed that Steele's clients, or others with whom the clients had shared the information, were responsible for the press stories, but that the Crossfire Hurricane team would not have been surprised if Steele's reporting was the basis for the *Yahoo News* article. In contrast, Case Agent 1 sent instant messages indicating his belief that Steele was the "Western intelligence source" mentioned in the *Yahoo News* article and Steele "was selling his stuff to others." Case Agent 1 told us that the Crossfire Hurricane team later assessed that Simpson or someone else who had the Steele information, rather than Steele himself, was responsible for furnishing the information to *Yahoo News*. However, as we describe below, the team had no factual basis to support this assessment.

SSA 1 told us that his first concern was that someone from inside the FBI had disclosed information to the media. He stated that there was a "paranoia with leaks" inside the FBI in light of recent problems with leaks, and that it seemed

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<sup>236</sup> *Yahoo News* has reported that the author of the September 23 article relied on a "senior U.S. law enforcement official" for information. See "*Yahoo News*' Michael Isikoff Describes Crucial Meeting Cited in Nunes Memo," *Yahoo News* (February 2, 2018).

<sup>237</sup> *Russian Roulette*, at 227.



“foreign” that Steele—as [REDACTED]—would be involved in such a breach. However, SSA 1’s notes from a meeting on September 30 contain the following notation: “control issues—reports acknowledged in *Yahoo News*.” We asked SSA 1 whether he was concerned at the time that there were control issues with Steele. He stated that he was concerned but that he was not sure that Steele was responsible for providing information to *Yahoo News*. In addition, he said he was focused on Steele’s discussions with the State Department about his work with the FBI.<sup>238</sup> SSA 1 stated that an important objective of the planned meeting with Steele in early October was to obtain “exclusivity” in Steele’s reporting relationship, meaning that Steele would provide his intelligence related to the election exclusively to the FBI.

As we describe in Chapter Five, drafts of the Carter Page FISA application stated, until October 14, 2016, that Steele was responsible for the leak that led to the September 23 *Yahoo News* article. One of the drafts specifically stated that Steele “was acting on his/her own volition and has since been admonished by the FBI.” In contrast, the final version of the first FISA application stated:

Given that the information contained in the September 23rd News Article generally matches the information about Page that Source #1 discovered during his/her research, the FBI assesses that Source #1’s business associate or the law firm that hired the business associate likely provided this information to the press. The FBI also assesses that whoever gave the information to the press stated that the information was provided by a ‘well-placed Western intelligence source.’ The FBI does not believe that Source #1 directly provided this information to the Press.

The OI Attorney told us that at some point during the drafting process, the FBI assured him that Steele had not spoken with *Yahoo News* because the source was “a professional.” As we discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five, no one at the FBI or the National Security Division (NSD) was able to explain to us the source of the information that resulted in, or supported, either the draft language that existed until October 14 or the final language regarding the *Yahoo News* article.

Steele told us that he did not recall the FBI ever asking him whether he was the source for the *Yahoo News* story, no one from the FBI recalled having asked Steele if he was the source of the *Yahoo News* story, and we found no documentary evidence to suggest that Steele had ever been asked this question by the FBI. As described in Chapters Seven and Eight, even after receiving additional information about Steele’s media contacts, the Crossfire Hurricane team did not change the language in any of the three renewal applications regarding the FBI’s assessment of Steele’s role in the September 23 article.

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<sup>238</sup> SSA 1 had been forwarded an email on September 30 from the State Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs indicating that senior staff there, including Assistant Secretary Nuland, were aware of a planned meeting between Steele and the FBI in early October in a European city, and that FBI officials from Headquarters were flying to Europe to participate in the meeting.

## **F. The FBI's Early October Meeting with Steele**

Handling Agent 1 told us that he took the lead in organizing the logistics for a meeting in early October between Steele and members of the Crossfire Hurricane team in a European city. An Acting Section Chief from CD (Acting Section Chief 1), Case Agent 2, and the Supervisory Intel Analyst, attended the meeting for the Crossfire Hurricane team. Case Agent 2 had extensive experience in counterintelligence and managing CHSs, including previously holding a supervisory training position where he provided instruction on those topics. The Supervisory Intel Analyst was one of the FBI's leading experts on Russia.

Case Agent 2 and SSA 1 told the OIG that the FBI had several objectives for the meeting, the most important of which were learning about Steele's source network; persuading Steele to work collaboratively with the Crossfire Hurricane team in the future; and, as noted above, obtaining assurances from Steele that he would provide the intelligence that the FBI was seeking exclusively to the FBI. According to Case Agent 2, the task for him was a difficult one because he was asking Steele—an experienced intelligence professional—to reveal how he gathered intelligence. Case Agent 2 stated that he needed to be careful to avoid use of heavy-handed tactics that would cause Steele to walk out. We also were told by Case Agent 2 that the team's primary objectives for the meeting came from discussions he had with Strzok and SSA 1. Strzok said that he discussed the goals of the early October meeting with the team and recalled attending meetings where taskings for Steele were discussed in anticipation of the meeting. However, Strzok said he was not involved in developing the taskings and left that effort to the Crossfire Hurricane team. He also stated that he was not asked to authorize the team's taskings for Steele. SSA 1 said that the team had specific objectives for the early October meeting with Steele and that he provided guidance to the team before they left, but he did not recall his specific instructions. SSA 1 stated that he trusted Case Agent 2, Acting Section Chief 1, and the Supervisory Intel Analyst to do their job when meeting with Steele.

The meeting was set for early October. According to Handling Agent 1, Steele contacted him three days prior to the meeting and advised Handling Agent 1 that Steele had previously shared the reports he had given to the FBI with then State Department official Jonathan Winer. Handling Agent 1 said that Steele also informed him that Winer was aware of the upcoming FBI meeting in October.

Handling Agent 1 stated that the Crossfire Hurricane team arrived in the European city the day before the meeting and that he conferred with them about Steele.<sup>239</sup> Handling Agent 1 said he recalled providing advice to the team to ask Steele "anything and everything.... Don't hold back." Handling Agent 1 also remembered that at least one member of the team asked Handling Agent 1 if Steele had said anything about the *Yahoo News* article. Handling Agent 1 said that he responded "no" and that he was not familiar with the article in question.

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<sup>239</sup> After reviewing this report, the Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that he believed that the Crossfire Hurricane team arrived in the European city the morning of the meeting with Steele.

Handling Agent 1 also recalled the team discussing that the State Department was aware of the Steele reporting and that the team would need to discuss that with Steele.<sup>240</sup> Handling Agent 1 told us that he advised the team that Steele had contacted Jonathan Winer at the State Department. Case Agent 2 said that Handling Agent 1 did not mention to him that Steele had possible connections to Russian Oligarch 1 and that he would have wanted to know that information because it could have indicated that Steele was being used in a Russian “controlled operation” to influence perceptions (*i.e.*, a disinformation campaign). Handling Agent 1 did not recall if he told the Crossfire Hurricane team about Steele’s connection to Russian Oligarch 1; however, he said he did inform the team that Steele collected intelligence on Russian oligarchs and had tried to arrange meetings between the FBI and Russian oligarchs.

The day of the meeting, Handling Agent 1 met with Steele prior to introducing him to the Crossfire Hurricane team and explained to Steele that he would be asked questions about his source network. Handling Agent 1 said that he encouraged Steele to be forthcoming with the Crossfire Hurricane team. Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he attended the meeting but that Case Agent 2 did the majority of the talking for the FBI with the Supervisory Intel Analyst asking questions primarily about the source network.

The meeting lasted approximately 2.5 to 3 hours, according to the Supervisory Intel Analyst. According to Case Agent 2’s written summary of the meeting, Case Agent 2 provided Steele with a “general overview” of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, which included a description of events involving Papadopoulos and the Friendly Foreign Government (FFG) information that furnished the predication for the investigation. Case Agent 2’s written summary also states that Case Agent 2 informed Steele that Papadopoulos’s actions had resulted in a “small analytical effort” that had expanded to include Manafort, Flynn, and Carter Page.

Case Agent 2 told the OIG that he informed Steele that the FBI was interested in obtaining information in “3 buckets.” According to Case Agent 2’s written summary of the meeting, as well as the Supervisory Intel Analyst’s notes, these 3 buckets were:

- (1) Additional intelligence/reporting on specific, named individuals (such as [Page] or [Flynn]) involved in facilitating the Trump campaign-Russian relationship;<sup>241</sup>
- (2) Physical evidence of specific individuals involved in facilitating the Trump campaign-Russian relationship (such as emails, photos, ledgers, memorandums etc);
- [and] (3) Any individuals or sub sources who [Steele] could identify

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<sup>240</sup> According to Case Agent 2’s written summary of the meeting with Steele in early October, Steele disclosed to the participants that he was furnishing information to the State Department “to ensure that the information was reaching the proper elements of the [U.S. government].”

<sup>241</sup> The written summary used codenames to identify Page and Flynn.

who could serve as cooperating witnesses to assist in identifying persons involved in the Trump campaign-Russian relationship.<sup>242</sup>

Case Agent 2's written summary of the meeting also indicates that Case Agent 2 explained that the FBI was willing to compensate Steele "significantly" for information concerning the "3 buckets" and that Steele would be paid \$15,000 for his trip to the European city for the early October meeting.<sup>243</sup>

Case Agent 2 told the OIG that Steele sat throughout the meeting with his arms folded and he could tell from Steele's body language that he was "going to be difficult to handle." According to Case Agent 2, Steele was not "excited" to hear what information the FBI was hoping to obtain, and Case Agent 2's notes indicate that Steele was "caught off guard" with the tasking request. Case Agent 2 stated that Steele was focused instead during the meeting on candidate Trump and recalled that Steele responded to the "3 buckets" by stating "maybe I can go back to the hotel [in Russia] and get the manager for you to meet to talk about the prostitutes being there."

Notes taken by Case Agent 2 and the Supervisory Intel Analyst show that Steele provided some information during the meeting about his source network and furnished several other names that could be of interest to the FBI. For example, Steele identified a sub-source (Person 1) who Steele said was in direct contact with Steele's primary source (Primary Sub-source).<sup>244</sup> The notes further reflect that Steele described some of Person 1's reporting but caveated this information by explaining that Person 1 is a "boaster" and "egotist" and "may engage in some embellishment." As described in Chapters Five and Eight, the FBI did not provide this description of Person 1 to NSD's Office of Intelligence (OI) for inclusion in the Carter Page FISA applications despite relying on Person 1's information to establish probable cause in the applications.

The Supervisory Intel Analyst's notes also indicate that Steele explained that the information he obtained about Carter Page resulted from research he had been retained to conduct related to a litigation matter concerning debts allegedly owed by Paul Manafort.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> The FBI advised the OIG that the Crossfire Hurricane investigation was a national security investigation, and these activities therefore involved national security [REDACTED] CHS operations [REDACTED].

<sup>243</sup> As we discuss below, after the FBI learned in November that Steele had disclosed information to *Mother Jones* in late October 2016, the FBI declined to make this payment.

<sup>244</sup> Person 1 [REDACTED]

<sup>245</sup> At the time, according to FBI records that we reviewed, Manafort was involved in litigation with Russian Oligarch 1, and Steele had a relationship with one or more of the attorneys representing Russian Oligarch 1. In his interview with the OIG, Steele denied that his reporting on Carter Page resulted from work he performed on Russian Oligarch 1's behalf. Steele described as "ridiculous" any claim that Russian Oligarch 1 was involved in his reporting or influenced it.

Lastly, Steele provided the name of a Russian national, who he said may have connections with a Russian energy company, and who Steele claimed may be acting as Carter Page's possible "handler" for Russian intelligence. As noted in Chapter Three, Carter Page previously had a relationship with another U.S. government agency; Page had provided that agency with information on the same Russian national that Steele reported was Page's possible handler. According to an Assistant Legal Attaché (ALAT 2), Steele's allegations about the Russian national were investigated [REDACTED], but no information was uncovered to substantiate the allegations.<sup>246</sup>

We were told by the Crossfire Hurricane team members that Steele refrained from providing the level of detail about his source network that the FBI had hoped to obtain. Steele told the team members that he did not want to identify his sources because he was concerned about their safety and security. He explained that he was [REDACTED] Primary Sub-source, and that due to leaks, his source network was "drying up." According to Case Agent 2, Steele complained to the FBI during the meeting about these leaks.

We were also told by Case Agent 2 that Steele did not disclose information about the identity of Fusion GPS's client, a law firm which was funding Steele's work due to a confidentiality agreement that prevented him from sharing that information.<sup>247</sup> We asked Steele what he told the FBI during the meeting about his client. He said that his notes from the meeting, which he told us he prepared two days after the meeting, and are dated that day, were the best source for that information. We reviewed Steele's notes, which show that Steele stated during the meeting that Simpson was an "intermediary" and that Simpson had been retained by "people seeking to prevent Trump becoming President." The notes did not reflect that any additional information had been provided by Steele during the meeting regarding the identity of Fusion GPS's client. Steele told us that the FBI did not press him to identify Fusion GPS's client.

During the meeting, Case Agent 2 said he advised Steele of the need to establish an exclusive reporting relationship with the FBI concerning the information that he was being tasked to collect. Case Agent 2 drafted an Electronic

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<sup>246</sup> Steele also reiterated some of the information in his election reporting identified other U.S. persons that he believed may be involved in or have knowledge of Russia and Trump connections. Additionally, he told the FBI that he was personal friends with a Trump family member and that the FBI may become aware of email communications concerning their friendship. Steele stated that he could not see the Trump family member being involved in any nefarious activities concerning the Trump-Russia matter.

<sup>247</sup> On October 14, 2016, Case Agent 2 wrote in an email to SSA 1, Case Agent 1, the Intel Section Chief, and Strzok, among others stating that Handling Agent 1 did not believe Steele knew the identity of the Fusion GPS client which was responsible for funding Steele's work. As we described in Section II.B. above, Steele told Handling Agent 1 in July that he did not know the precise identity of the client; however, it is unclear whether Handling Agent 1 subsequently asked Steele whether he had acquired that information. Handling Agent 1 told us that he did not "continually ask" Steele about the firm's identity after his meeting with Steele on July 5, 2016.

Communication (EC) following the early October meeting that was serialized into the Crossfire Hurricane case file and described the FBI request for exclusivity:

[T]he CHS was admonished that if the CHS and FBI were going to have a reporting relationship regarding specific items of interest to the CROSSFIRE HURRICANE team (*i.e.*, [Manafort] and [Page]), that the CHS must have an exclusive reporting relationship with the FBI, rather than providing that information to the clients that hired the CHS's firm to provide reporting on Trump and [Manafort].

Recollections of the Crossfire Hurricane team members who attended the meeting varied about Steele's response to this request, except all agreed that Steele did not affirmatively disagree with it. Handling Agent 1 told us that Steele was told at the meeting "you do not talk to anybody else including anybody else in the United States government" about information Steele collected for the three buckets and that Steele agreed. Handling Agent 1 said that Steele left him with the impression that he would assist the FBI following the meeting and would abide by the FBI's instruction on exclusivity, and that he "did not buy for one second" the notion that Steele was not a CHS at this time with an obligation to follow FBI instructions. The Supervisory Intel Analyst said he could not recall Steele's response, but said that by the end of the meeting he was left with the impression that Steele would abide by the FBI's request. He further stated that, if Steele had rejected the FBI's request, it would have been documented. Case Agent 2 said that Steele never committed to share information regarding the "3 buckets" exclusively with the FBI. According to Case Agent 2, Steele's response instead was that he would consider ways to help the FBI.

Steele told us that the FBI indicated at the meeting in early October that the FBI wanted to take over the "election project" and control it, alternatively describing the FBI's actions as an attempt to get Steele to convert a "Pipeline 1" project into a "Pipeline 2" project. Steele recalled that, in response, he made it clear that was not going to happen because he was obligated to his client and was "not dumping the client" in favor of the FBI. He stated, however, that he wanted to be as helpful to the FBI as he could. According to Steele, the FBI accepted his position though they requested that he not share his election intelligence with other U.S. government agencies or with third-party clients (other than the client that retained him initially). Steele said he did not know whether he agreed to this request and pointed out that his notes from the meeting do not reflect his response.<sup>248</sup> We asked whether he would have recorded a response in the notes if he had rejected the request. He responded "yes," and said the lack of a response in his notes suggested he did not agree or disagree.

We asked Handling Agent 1 and members of the Crossfire Hurricane team whether it was realistic for the FBI to expect that Steele would abide by the FBI's request given that his consulting firm had been retained by a paying client to perform this work. Handling Agent 1 told us that he thought it was realistic

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<sup>248</sup> The notes that Steele made available to the OIG to review, which Steele told us he prepared two days after the meeting, were consistent with his testimony to the OIG.

because Steele "was now being offered compensation to go forward from the United States government." Acting Section Chief 1 said he was not sure at the time how realistic the request was because he did not know how many clients Steele had, though he "rationalized" that given Steele's intelligence background his business probably "was wide to a lot of audiences" and he could afford to have an exclusive reporting relationship with the FBI on certain issues.

We also asked the FBI team members who attended whether there was any discussion during the meeting about the September 23 *Yahoo News* article. Case Agent 2 told the OIG that he could not remember asking Steele about the *Yahoo News* article during the meeting, and that he was more focused on getting Steele to "play ball." The Supervisory Intel Analyst also said he did not recall Steele being asked whether he was a source of the *Yahoo News* article. Handling Agent 1 stated that he could not recall if the article was raised during the meeting with Steele. According to Steele, he did not recall any discussion of the media during the early October meeting, and none was reflected in his notes. Steele further told us that if the issue of the media had been raised he would have recorded it in his notes given that he already had met with media groups in September.

According to the Crossfire Hurricane team members, the outcome of the early October meeting was less than desired. Case Agent 2 said he could not recall Steele agreeing to anything during the meeting. Both Case Agent 2 and the Supervisory Intel Analyst told the OIG that, although Steele continued to provide written reports to Handling Agent 1 after the meeting, Steele did not provide information specifically addressing the "3 buckets."<sup>249</sup> Case Agent 2 also expressed skepticism after the meeting as to whether Steele would abide by the FBI's request for exclusivity in his reporting. In response to an inquiry in mid-October from the OI Attorney who was drafting the first Carter Page FISA application, about whether Steele was refraining from providing information to Simpson that was relevant to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, Case Agent 2 responded in an email that "we need to be realistic about that." Case Agent 2 wrote:

We made a good faith effort and admonished the CHS [at the early October meeting] that any further information that s/he developed in regard to our subjects, Page[,], Manafort, Papadopoulos, Flynn should be exclusively provided to the FBI for further evaluation. Whether or not that happens remains to be seen.

Handling Agent 1 told us that after the early October meeting Steele failed to abide by the FBI's instructions when he continued to meet with the media and the State Department about issues over which the FBI had sought to establish an exclusive reporting relationship at the early October meeting. According to Handling Agent 1, while Steele appeared to follow the directions of Fusion GPS, he did not treat his other client – the FBI – fairly. According to Handling Agent 1, if Steele "had been straight with the FBI," he would not have been closed as a CHS. Handling Agent 1 added that it "blew his mind" that, given Steele's intelligence

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<sup>249</sup> As we describe below, Steele did provide some limited information in mid-October 2016 concerning Carter Page.

background, Steele was meeting with the press and taking actions that endangered the safety of those in his source network. Case Agent 2 told the OIG that he thought it was “terrible” for Steele to complain to the FBI about leaks during the early October meeting given that he had been meeting with media outlets in September and had provided information that was used in the *Yahoo News* article. According to Case Agent 2, in hindsight, “[c]learly he wasn’t truthful with us. Clearly.”

We asked Steele whether during the early October meeting he lied or otherwise misled the FBI. He responded “no” and that he did not believe he ever lied to the FBI.

#### **G. FBI Disclosures to Steele during the Early October Meeting**

In addition to inquiring about Steele’s conduct at the early October meeting, we also asked whether the Crossfire Hurricane team members provided too much information to Steele during the meeting, including classified information. According to Case Agent 2’s written summary of the meeting, Case Agent 2 provided Steele with a “general overview” of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, which included a description of events involving Papadopoulos and the FFG, which furnished the predication for the investigation. Case Agent 2’s written summary also states that Case Agent 2 informed Steele that Papadopoulos’s actions had resulted in a “small analytical effort” that had expanded to include Manafort, Flynn, and Page.<sup>250</sup> FBI attendees at the meeting confirmed that Case Agent 2 led the discussion on these points, though Case Agent 2 told us that his written summary does not present the actual words he used in his explanations to Steele. The contents of both the “analytical effort” and the FFG’s notice to the U.S. government are classified.

Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he agreed it was peculiar that Case Agent 2 gave Steele an overview of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, including providing names of persons related to the investigation. As an example, Handling Agent 1 explained that during the FIFA investigation he never informed Steele that the FBI was investigating FIFA. The Supervisory Intel Analyst told the OIG that he was concerned that Case Agent 2 had divulged too much information to Steele and that he notified his supervisor about his concern upon returning to Washington D.C.

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<sup>250</sup> The relevant text from Case Agent 2’s summary reads:

The CHS was then given a general overview of the FBI’s CROSSFIRE HURRICANE investigation and told that it was a small cell that was exploring a small piece of the overall problem of Russian interference in the U.S. Electoral process. CHS was advised that the CH team was made aware of [Papadopoulos’s] May 2016 comments in the U.K in late July by a friendly foreign service and that [Papadopoulos] had predicated a small analytical effort that eventually expanded to include [Manafort, Flynn, and Page]. CHS advised that he was not aware of [Papadopoulos].



The Supervisory Intel Analyst stated that he was concerned that Case Agent 2 had shared names as well as information related to the FFG information.<sup>251</sup>

Case Agent 2 said that he believed he had authority from CD to discuss classified information with Steele, though he agreed that in the “heat of the moment” he made a mistake and provided more information than he should have provided about the role of the FFG. He explained that his disclosure resulted from “trying in good faith to accomplish the mission.” He stated that he remembered telling Steele that the FBI was investigating possible Russian penetrations of the Trump campaign but did not recall telling Steele that Papadopoulos, Manafort, Flynn, and Page were being investigated by the FBI. Rather, he recalled asking for information about those persons in light of press coverage that they had received. Steele told us that he did not believe the Crossfire Hurricane team members told him whether there was an open investigation on those persons. Case Agent 2 further stated that there was no effort on his part to conceal what he had said to Steele from his supervisors. After the meeting concluded, Case Agent 2 circulated a written summary of the meeting that included a description of the information he provided to Steele. Acting Section Chief 1 also attended the meeting in the European city and did not object at the time or afterwards to Case Agent 2’s conduct.

We asked Case Agent 2’s supervisors—Strzok and Priestap—about the information that the Crossfire Hurricane team communicated to Steele and whether Case Agent 2 had been authorized to disclose classified information during the early October meeting.<sup>252</sup> Priestap said that he did not recall being briefed beforehand about what information the team intended to convey to Steele. He explained, however, that given Steele’s background in intelligence work, it was necessary to provide him with sufficient contextual information to understand the taskings. Priestap also said that there is an “art” to deciding how much information to convey to a CHS so that the CHS can be effective without divulging the sensitive details of an investigation. Strzok stated that he did not recall authorizing Case Agent 2 to disclose the specific information presented in Case Agent 2’s written summary though Strzok said he recalled general discussions with the Crossfire Hurricane team members who were meeting with Steele about how much information to share with Steele. Strzok explained that “[y]ou provide as much information as needed to give effective direction, and as little as possible to compartment and protect what we’re doing.” After reading Case Agent 2’s written summary of the information he presented to Steele, both Priestap and Strzok said that it appeared that Case Agent 2 provided more information than was necessary to Steele.

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<sup>251</sup> Steele informed Simpson about the content of the discussions during the early October meeting, including that the FBI had information from “an internal Trump campaign source” that corroborated Steele’s reporting, according to Simpson’s testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee. *Simpson Senate Testimony*, at 175.

<sup>252</sup> FBI Security staff told us that the Assistant Director for CD can authorize the disclosure of classified information. We found that the CHS Policy Guide (CHSPG) does not address the disclosure of sensitive or classified information to CHSs and that the FBI has not otherwise developed guidance on the issue.

#### **H. Steele's Reporting to the FBI Following the Early October Meeting and Continuing Media Contacts**

Steele continued to furnish the FBI with written reports following the early October meeting. Handling Agent 1 told us that he became a "middleman" between Steele and the Crossfire Hurricane team and forwarded Steele's reports to the team. According to Handling Agent 1's records, during October 2016, Steele communicated with him four times and provided seven written reports, one of which concerned Carter Page and thus was responsive to the FBI's request for information concerning Page's activities.<sup>253</sup>

On October 19, 2016, Steele also forwarded to Handling Agent 1 a report that Steele said he had obtained from State Department official Jonathan Winer. Steele included a notation on the report explaining that Winer had been given the report by a friend of a well-known Clinton supporter, and that the friend had obtained the report from a Turkish businessman with strong links to Russia, including the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB).<sup>254</sup> The report included numerous allegations attributed to an FSB source, including that (1) a "'pervasive' and 'sophisticated' intelligence operation" was focused in part on

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<sup>253</sup> These seven reports, with selected highlights, were:

- Report 130 (Putin and his colleagues were surprised and disappointed that leaks of Clinton's emails had not had a greater impact on the campaign; a stream of hacked Clinton material had been injected by the Kremlin into compliant western media outlets like WikiLeaks and the stream would continue until the election);
- Report [REDACTED];
- Report 134 (a close associate of Rosneft President Sechin confirmed a secret meeting with Carter Page in July; Sechin was keen to have sanctions on the company lifted and offered up to a 19 percent stake in return);
- Report 135 (Trump attorney Michael Cohen was heavily engaged in a cover up and damage control in an attempt to prevent the full details of Trump's relationship with Russia being exposed; Cohen had met secretly with several Russian Presidential Administration Legal Department officials; immediate issues were efforts to contain further scandals involving Manafort's commercial and political role in Russia/Ukraine and to limit damage from the exposure of Carter Page's secret meetings with Russian leadership figures in Moscow the previous month);
- Report 136 (Kremlin insider reports that Cohen's secret meeting/s with Kremlin officials in August 2016 was/were held in Prague);
- Report [REDACTED];  
and
- Report [REDACTED].

<sup>254</sup> According to open source reporting, the FSB serves as Russia's domestic intelligence and security service that retains a broad mission of counterintelligence, counterterrorism, cyber defense, border security, and economic security, in addition to overseeing Russia's vast technical monitoring system known as SORM.

Trump and was an “open secret” in Putin’s government; (2) sex videos existed of Trump; and (3) the FSB funneled payments to Trump through an Azerbaijani family. According to Steele’s notation to the report, Steele did not have a way to verify the source(s) or the information but noted that, even though the reporting originated from a different source network, some of it was “remarkably similar” to Steele’s reporting, especially with regard to the alleged 2013 Ritz Carlton incident involving Trump and prostitutes, Trump’s compromise by the FSB, and the Kremlin’s funding of the Trump campaign by way of the Azerbaijani family. The Supervisory Intel Analyst characterized the report as “yet another report that would need to be evaluated.”

In addition to continuing to provide reporting to the FBI, Steele also was, unbeknownst to the FBI at the time, continuing his outreach to the media concerning alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. According to information from the foreign litigation noted above, Steele returned to Washington, D.C., in mid-October and provided additional briefings to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Yahoo News*. We asked Steele why he did not advise the FBI of his engagements with the media. He stated that he did not alert the FBI because the media briefings were part of his contract with Fusion GPS and were set up and attended by Simpson. As noted above, Steele did not believe that the FBI had raised the issue of media contacts with him at the early October meeting, and his contemporaneous notes from that meeting do not mention the issue.

Further, Steele met on October 11 at the State Department with Winer and Deputy Assistant Secretary Kathleen Kavalec, who was a deputy to then Assistant Secretary Victoria Nuland. Steele told us that Winer had originally contacted him to request that he meet with Nuland, who ultimately did not attend.<sup>255</sup> Notes of the meeting taken by State Department staff reflect that Steele addressed a wide array of topics during the meeting, including:

- Derogatory information on Trump;
- Manafort’s role as a “go-between” with the campaign and Kremlin;
- The role of Alfa Bank, one of Russia’s largest privately owned banks, as a conduit for secret communications between Manafort and the Kremlin;
- Manafort’s debts to the Russians;
- Carter Page’s meeting with Sechin;
- The Russian Embassy’s management of a network of Russian émigrés in the United States who carry out hacking and recruiting operations; and

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<sup>255</sup> Steele told us that he was delayed from the airport and arrived late for the meeting, by which time Nuland had departed.

- The Russian cyber penetration of the DNC.<sup>256</sup>

The notes also indicate that Steele explained that the information his firm collected on the connection between Trump and Russia came from [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] According to the notes, Steele stated that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The notes also state that Steele's firm had [REDACTED]

We asked Kavalec about the meeting with Steele. She stated that Nuland did not ask to meet with Steele and that Nuland requested she attend the meeting because Nuland did not want to devote time to it. It was Kavalec's understanding that Steele sought the meeting with Nuland as part of a wider effort to disseminate his election report findings to persons in Washington, D.C. She stated that during the meeting Steele expressed frustration that the FBI had not acted on his reporting and explained that when he first offered information to the FBI he found a lack of interest.

Kavalec told us that shortly after the meeting with Steele, she encountered the FBI's liaison to the State Department and mentioned the meeting to him. According to Kavalec, she explained to the liaison that she was willing to be interviewed by the FBI regarding her meeting with Steele, though Steele had informed her that he had already been in contact with the FBI to share his reporting. The FBI liaison told us that Kavalec also informed him that a particular piece of information in Steele's reporting appeared to be incorrect. She explained to the FBI liaison that Russia did not have a consulate in Miami as indicated by Steele's reporting, which claimed that a cyber-hacking operation was being run, in part, out of the Russian consulate in Miami.<sup>257</sup> The FBI liaison informed SSA 1 and Case Agent 1 via email on November 18 that Kavalec had met with Steele, she had taken notes of their meeting, the liaison could obtain information from Kavalec about the meeting, and, according to Kavalec, the information from Steele's reporting about a Russian consulate being located in Miami was inaccurate.<sup>258</sup> The

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<sup>256</sup> Much of the information presented by Steele at the State Department briefing can be found in Reports 130 and 132, both of which Steele provided to the FBI in October.

<sup>257</sup> Kavalec's typed notes from Steele's October 11, 2016 briefing stated that Steele told her that a Russian cyber hacking operation targeting the 2016 U.S. elections was making payments to involved persons from "the Russian [c]onsulate in Miami." Steele's election Report 95 contained similar, but not fully consistent, information. Report 95 did not explicitly state that there was a Russian consulate in Miami. Instead, Report 95 stated that Russian consular officials and diplomatic staff in Miami were making payments in order to facilitate a secret exchange of intelligence between persons affiliated with Trump and the Russian government.

<sup>258</sup> After reviewing a portion of our draft report and his November 18, 2016 email to SSA 1 and Case Agent 1, the FBI liaison told us that he believes that he first learned about Kavalec's meeting with Steele on or about November 18, 2016.

FBI liaison told us that he received no directives from the Crossfire Hurricane team to gather information from Kavalec regarding her contact with Steele.

In anticipation of an FBI interview, Kavalec said she prepared a typewritten summary of the meeting within 1 to 2 weeks after talking with the liaison. The typed summary began by noting that Steele said at the meeting that he had undertaken the investigation "at the behest of an institution he declined to identify that had been hacked." The summary also noted that Steele told the attendees that the "institution...is keen to see this information come to light prior to November 8." However, the FBI did not interview Kavalec nor did they seek her notes.

Two days after the meeting with Steele, Kavalec emailed an FBI CD Section Chief a document that Kavalec received from Winer discussing allegations about a linkage between Alfa Bank and the Trump campaign, a topic that was discussed at the October 11 meeting.<sup>259</sup> Kavalec advised the FBI Section Chief in the email that the information related to an investigation that Steele's firm had been conducting. The Section Chief forwarded the document to SSA 1 the same day.

We asked Steele why he did not inform the FBI of the meeting at the State Department and why he did not abide by the FBI's request for exclusivity. He said he did not think it was appropriate to turn down a meeting request from an Assistant Secretary of State, which he said he received on short notice. He also stated that, at the time he received the meeting request, the meeting agenda was unclear, and he was uncertain what topics he would be asked to discuss. He said it was his understanding that the FBI did not object to his discussing general themes with other agencies as opposed to "details" about his intelligence and source network.

Handling Agent 1 told us that he believed Steele should have alerted him to both his media contacts in September and October and his meeting with State Department staff in October. As noted above, the Crossfire Hurricane team first learned of Steele's October meeting with the State Department from the FBI liaison on November 18, by which date the FBI had already closed Steele as a CHS because of his *Mother Jones* disclosure, which we discuss in Chapter Six. Handling Agent 1 explained that Steele should have recognized the need to provide this notice to the FBI, especially given the discussions that took place with the Crossfire Hurricane team in early October.

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<sup>259</sup> Steele separately wrote in Report 112, dated September 14, 2016, that Alfa Bank allegedly had close ties to Putin. The Crossfire Hurricane team received Report 112 on or about November 6, 2016, from a *Mother Jones* journalist through then FBI General Counsel James Baker. Additionally, Ohr advised the FBI on November 21, 2016, according to an FBI FD-302, that Steele had told Ohr that the Alfa Bank server was a link to the Trump campaign and that Person 1's Russia/American organization in the U.S. had used the Alfa Bank server two weeks prior. Steele told us that the information about Alfa Bank was not generated by Orbis. The FBI investigated whether there were cyber links between the Trump Organization and Alfa Bank, but had concluded by early February 2017 that there were no such links. The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that he factored the Alfa Bank/Trump server allegations into his assessment of Steele's reporting.

In the next chapter we describe the first Carter Page FISA application, filed on October ■, 2016, which relied significantly on Steele's reporting.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE FIRST APPLICATION FOR FISA AUTHORITY ON CARTER PAGE**

At the request of the FBI, the Department filed four applications with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) seeking FISA authority to conduct electronic surveillance [REDACTED] targeting Carter Page: the first application on October [REDACTED], 2016, and three renewal applications on January [REDACTED], April [REDACTED], and June [REDACTED], 2017. A different FISC judge considered each application and issued the requested orders, collectively resulting in approximately 11 months of FISA coverage targeting Carter Page from October [REDACTED], 2016, to September [REDACTED], 2017.

In this chapter, we describe the first of the four FISA applications, beginning with the early consideration of a potential FISA targeting Carter Page in August 2016, shortly after the FBI opened the Crossfire Hurricane investigation, and the FBI's eventual submission of a FISA request to the Office of Intelligence (OI) in the National Security Division (NSD) in September 2016, a few days after the Crossfire Hurricane team received Christopher Steele's reporting. We discuss the significance of the Steele reporting to the decision of FBI attorneys to proceed with the FISA request. We also describe the development of the first FISA application and the attention it received during the review and approval process from the FBI, OI, NSD management, and the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG). We further describe the filing of the read copy with the FISC, the feedback OI received from the court, revisions made to the application to address that feedback, and the last steps taken before the final application was filed and the orders were issued. These last steps included the completion of the Woods Procedures described in Chapter Two, then FBI Director James Comey's certification of the application, and the oral briefing provided to, and final approval given by, then Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Sally Yates. Finally, we describe the most significant instances in which information in the FISA application was inaccurately stated, incomplete at the time the application was filed, or unsupported by documentation in the Woods File.

#### **I. Decision to Seek FISA Authority**

##### **A. Early Consideration of a Potential FISA**

As described in Chapter Three, on August 10, 2016, under the umbrella of Crossfire Hurricane, FBI Headquarters opened a new full counterintelligence investigation on Carter Page. The pre-existing counterintelligence case on Page was then transferred from the FBI's New York Field Office (NYFO) to FBI Headquarters and merged into the new case. At about the same time, the Crossfire Hurricane team began planning for Confidential Human Source (CHS) operations (discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Ten) targeting Carter Page and George Papadopoulos. Also at about the same time, the case agent assigned to the Carter Page investigation, Case Agent 1, contacted FBI's Office of the General Counsel (OGC) about the possibility of seeking FISA authority targeting Carter Page



to conduct electronic surveillance [REDACTED]. This was the first potential use of FISA authority considered by the Crossfire Hurricane team.

The Crossfire Hurricane team told us that the proposal for FISA coverage targeting Carter Page originated from the team, not an instruction from management. The team also told us that its interest in obtaining a FISA was based upon Page's prior contacts with known Russian intelligence officers, which the team believed made him most receptive to receiving the offer of assistance from the Russians reported in the FFG information (described in Chapter Three) provided to the FBI in late July 2016. Case Agent 1 said that he had hoped that emails and other communications obtained through FISA electronic surveillance would help provide valuable information about what Page did while in Moscow in July 2016 and the Russian officials with whom he may have spoken.

For these reasons, on August 15, 2016, Case Agent 1 emailed a written summary on Carter Page to the OGC Unit Chief, stating that he thought the information provided "a pretty solid basis" for requesting FISA authority. This summary, which a Staff Operations Specialist (SOS) prepared, briefly described Page's Russian business and financial ties, his prior contacts with Russian intelligence officers, and his recent travel to Russia. According to Case Agent 1, both he and the SOS believed that they had enough information to establish the probable cause necessary to request FISA authority on Carter Page. Case Agent 1 told us that Page's contacts with known Russian intelligence officers (described in Chapter Three) provided a "pretty good link" for a FISA.

Later the same day, the OGC Unit Chief responded to Case Agent 1 with requests for additional information about what Page had previously told the FBI regarding his relationship with Russian intelligence officers in order to compare it with information the FBI had from other reporting sources. She said that this information would be helpful to determine whether Page had a clandestine relationship with Russia. The OGC Unit Chief added that she would reach out to her OI counterparts to get their thoughts, "but I think we'll need more for PC," meaning probable cause.

The next day, on August 16, the OGC Unit Chief contacted Stuart Evans, then NSD's Deputy Assistant Attorney General with oversight responsibility over OI, stating:

We have some facts which may lead to a FISA on one of our subjects—mostly past contacts and connections to [Russian Intelligence Services] and a financial interest in [a] Russian-government controlled gas business. I don't think we're quite there yet, but given the sensitivity and urgency of this matter, I would like to get OI involved as early as possible.

The OGC Unit Chief told Evans he had permission to brief a small group of OI attorneys into Crossfire Hurricane, including the Operations Section Chief, Gabriel

Sanz-Rexach; the Deputy Section Chief; the Counterintelligence Unit Chief (OI Unit Chief); and one line attorney.<sup>260</sup>

The OGC Unit Chief and OGC Attorney assigned to assist the Crossfire Hurricane team met with the OI Unit Chief the same day to brief him on Crossfire Hurricane and the four individual subjects. During his OIG interview, the OI Unit Chief recalled that the OGC attorneys mentioned the possibility of seeking FISA authority targeting Carter Page, but he did not recall a decision being made at the meeting about whether to do so.<sup>261</sup> The OI Unit Chief said that, at the request of Evans, he advised OGC that the FBI would need to submit a formal FISA request before OI would begin the back-and-forth process with the FBI on a potential application. He told us that it was over a month later when OGC told him for the first time that the FBI was ready to move forward with the request.

While FISA discussions were ongoing, on or about August 17, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received information from another U.S. government agency relating to Page's prior relationship with that agency and prior contacts with Russian intelligence officers about which the agency was aware. We found that, although this information was highly relevant to the potential FISA application, the Crossfire Hurricane team did not engage with the other agency regarding this information until June 2017, just prior to the final Carter Page FISA renewal application.<sup>262</sup> As we discuss later in this chapter, when Case Agent 1 was explicitly asked in late September 2016 by the OI Attorney assisting on the FISA application about Page's prior relationship with this other agency, Case Agent 1 did not accurately describe the nature and extent of the information the FBI received from the other agency.

Also in August, while FISA discussions were ongoing, the Crossfire Hurricane team conducted a consensually monitored meeting between an FBI CHS and Carter Page in an attempt to obtain information from Page about links between the Donald J. Trump for President Campaign and Russia. During the operation, which we describe in greater detail below, Page made statements to the CHS that would have, if true, contradicted the notion that Page was conspiring with Russia. Page

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<sup>260</sup> OI's Operations Section is divided into three units: Counterintelligence, Counterterrorism, and Special Operations. Among other responsibilities, all three units prepare and file FISA applications with the FISC. Because the Carter Page investigation was a counterintelligence matter, the Counterintelligence Unit handled the Carter Page FISA applications.

<sup>261</sup> The OI Unit Chief did not recall providing specific feedback concerning a potential Carter Page FISA application during or in response to this meeting. He said they did not discuss at that time the specific information the Crossfire Hurricane team had to support a FISA application. He recalled only a general discussion about the case that included a heads up that they believed that at some later point they would want to move forward on a FISA request targeting Carter Page. The OGC Unit Chief and OGC Attorney told us they also did not recall the feedback from OI, if any, at this time. The OGC Attorney did not recall attending the meeting at all, even though the OI Unit Chief's meeting notes indicate he was present.

<sup>262</sup> We describe in Chapter Eight the circumstances surrounding the FBI's engagement with the other agency in June 2017 and the FBI's failure to include the information in the final FISA renewal application.

also made statements that contradicted the Steele reporting received by the team in September, in particular the assertion that Manafort was using Page as an intermediary with Russia. However, as we detail later in this chapter, we found no evidence the FBI made Page's statements from this CHS meeting available to OI or NSD until mid-June 2017.

FBI documents reviewed by the OIG indicate that by late August 2016, Case Agent 1 had been told that he had not yet presented enough information to support a FISA application targeting Carter Page. Case Agent 1's handwritten notes dated August 22, 2016 state: "Not there yet: OI" below a reference to a FISA request targeting Carter Page.<sup>263</sup> Case Agent 1 told us that he remembered being told that he had not yet presented enough information to support probable cause, but he could not recall whether OGC or OI, or both, had made that assessment.

Handwritten notes taken by David Laufman, then Chief of NSD's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section (CES), indicate that on August 25, 2016, FBI and NSD officials discussed the status of FISA coverage targeting Carter Page during a weekly Crossfire Hurricane meeting and that someone at the meeting conveyed that there was "[n]o FISA up on Page; currently no PC." Laufman told us that he did not remember who conveyed this information, but he thought it was probably one of the FBI officials in attendance, which included the OGC Unit Chief, the Section Chief of CD's Counterintelligence Analysis Section I (Intel Section Chief), and Assistant Director E.W. "Bill" Priestap.

As discussed below, the FBI OGC Unit Chief contacted the NSD OI Unit Chief on September 21, 2016, two days after the Crossfire Hurricane team received six of Steele's reports, to advise that the FBI believed it was ready to submit a formal FISA request to OI. As the OGC Unit Chief stated in an October 19, 2016 email to members of the Crossfire Hurricane team, "we first raised the issue of [a] potential FISA [targeting Carter Page] early on—maybe the 2nd or 3rd week of the case. But we didn't have serious discussions until we got the actual [Steele] reports (maybe the day after?)."

## **B. The FBI's Submission of a FISA Request Following Receipt of the Steele Reporting**

As described in Chapter Four, the Crossfire Hurricane team received the first set of Steele's reports on September 19, 2016. Upon receipt of these reports, the team immediately began the process of evaluating Steele and the information he provided. For example, that same day, SSA 1 sent an email to Handling Agent 1 and others, stating, "Our team is very interested in obtaining a source symbol number/source characterization statement and specifics on veracity of past reporting, motivations, last validation, how long on the books, how much paid to

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<sup>263</sup> It is unclear whether Case Agent 1 took this note during a meeting or at some other time. Case Agent 1 told us that the team had regular discussions during this time period, but did not specifically recall this particular discussion.

date, etc.” SSA 1 told us that he did not receive a response from Handling Agent 1 to this email, and we did not find one during the course of our review.

Also on September 19, the team began discussions with OGC to consider Steele’s reporting as part of a FISA application targeting Carter Page. In an email to the OGC Unit Chief and OGC Attorney, the Supervisory Intelligence Analyst (Supervisory Intel Analyst) forwarded an excerpt from Steele’s Report 94 (described in more detail below) concerning Page’s alleged secret meeting with Igor Divyekin in July 2016 and asked, “Does this put us at least **\*that\*** much closer to a full FISA on [Carter Page]?” (Emphasis in original). The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that, earlier that day, he had researched information on Divyekin that “elevated” the significance of this particular allegation. He said that he wondered whether OGC would find that this information, along with the totality of the other information on Carter Page, brought them closer to probable cause on Page. Similarly, Case Agent 1 told us that the team’s receipt of the reporting from Steele supplied missing information in terms of what Page may have been doing during his July 2016 visit to Moscow and provided enough information on Page’s recent activities that Case Agent 1 thought would satisfy OI.

Two days later, on September 21, the OGC Attorney and OGC Unit Chief requested a meeting with the OI Unit Chief to discuss, among other things, a potential FISA application targeting Carter Page. The OGC Unit Chief told the OIG that the receipt of the Steele reporting changed her mind on whether they could establish probable cause. She said that although there could be differing opinions, she thought it was a “close call” when they first discussed a FISA targeting Page in August, and that the Steele reporting in September “pushed it over” the line in terms of establishing probable cause. She explained that the Steele reporting presented information that Page had recent contact with the Russians and that this contact was consistent with the information received from the FFG that someone on the campaign had received an offer or suggestion of assistance from the Russians. She said that before the Steele reporting, the FBI did not have information concerning what Page’s current activities with the Russians might have been or information suggesting a connection between Page and the FFG information. Similarly, the OGC Attorney told us that he thought probable cause was “probably 50/50” before the Steele reporting; however, in his view, it was a combination of the Steele reporting, Carter Page’s historical contacts with Russian intelligence officers, and statements Page made in October 2016 during a consensually monitored meeting with an FBI CHS (described later in this chapter and in Chapter Ten) just before the FISA application was filed with the court, that made the OGC Attorney comfortable about establishing probable cause.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> We asked then Deputy Director Andrew McCabe about the testimony attributed to him in the January 18, 2018 House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Memorandum from Majority Staff on *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Abuses at the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation* (HPSCI Majority Memorandum) that “Deputy Director McCabe testified before the Committee in December 2017 that no surveillance warrant would have been sought from the FISC without the Steele dossier information.” See HPSCI Majority Memorandum at 3, declassified on February 2, 2018, and available at <https://republicans->

On September 21, the OGC attorneys met with the OI Unit Chief and described the reporting from Steele concerning Carter Page that the team had recently received. According to notes of the meeting, the OGC Attorney and OGC Unit Chief told the OI Unit Chief about the allegations contained in the Steele reporting that Page had a secret meeting with a high-level Russian official in July 2016, that Page may have received a Russian dossier on Hillary Clinton, and that there was a “well-developed conspiracy” between associates of the Trump campaign and Russian leadership being managed, in part, by Carter Page. The OI Unit Chief told us that he recalled that the Steele reporting was “what kind of pushed it over the line” in terms of the FBI being ready to pursue FISA authority targeting Page. He recalled thinking that if the information bears out during the drafting process, there would probably be sufficient information to support a FISA application targeting Page. Conversely, he said that without the Steele reporting concerning Page, he would not have thought they could establish probable cause based on the other information the FBI presented at that time (Page’s historical contacts with Russia).

On September 22, the OI Unit Chief assigned a line attorney (OI Attorney) to work on the Carter Page FISA, and he and the OI Attorney met with the OGC Unit Chief to brief the OI Attorney into the case and discuss the essential points for the FISA. The same day, OGC submitted a FISA request form to OI providing, among other things, a description of the factual information to establish probable cause to believe that Carter Page was an agent of a foreign power, the “facilities” to be targeted under the proposed FISA coverage, and the FBI’s investigative plan.<sup>265</sup> Case Agent 1 said he prepared the FISA request form, and the OGC Attorney said he may have provided a “very quick review” before sending it to OI. The OGC Attorney told us that the FISA request form was not as “robust” as it could have been because the FBI wanted to submit it to OI as soon as possible.

The FISA request form drew almost entirely from Steele’s reporting in describing the factual basis to establish probable cause to believe that Page was an agent of a foreign power, including the secret meeting between Carter Page and Divyekin alleged in Steele’s Report 94 and the role of Page as an intermediary between Russia and the Trump campaign’s then manager, Paul Manafort, in the “well-developed conspiracy” alleged in Steele’s Report 95. The only additional information cited in the FISA request form to support a probable cause finding as to Page was (1) a statement that Page was a senior foreign policy advisor for the

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[intelligence.house.gov/uploadedfiles/memo\\_and\\_white\\_house\\_letter.pdf](https://intelligence.house.gov/uploadedfiles/memo_and_white_house_letter.pdf) (last accessed December 2, 2019). McCabe told us that he did not recall his exact testimony, but that his view was that the FBI would have “absolutely” sought FISA authority on Carter Page, even without the Steele reporting, based upon Page’s historical interactions with known Russian intelligence officers and the fact that Page told known Russian intelligence officers about the FBI’s knowledge of those interactions. However, McCabe also told us that he was not privy to the discussions that took place between attorneys in FBI OGC and Case Agent 1 on the sufficiency of the evidence to establish probable cause before the Crossfire Hurricane team received Steele’s election reports. McCabe said he could not speculate as to whether the FBI would have been successful in obtaining FISA authority from the FISC without the inclusion of the Steele reporting.

<sup>265</sup> “Facilities” are [REDACTED]

Trump campaign and had extensive ties to various state-owned or affiliated entities of the Russian Federation, (2) Papadopoulos's statement to the FFG in May 2016, and (3) open source articles discussing Trump campaign policy positions sympathetic to Russia, including that the campaign's tone changed after it began to receive advice from, among others, Manafort and Page.

The FISA request form submitted to OI did not include information that the FBI obtained as a result of CHS meetings in August and September referenced in Chapter Three and summarized in Chapter Ten. These meetings were an attempt by the FBI to better understand what Papadopoulos meant when he advised the FFG about the alleged offer of assistance from the Russians, to probe Page and Papadopoulos about links between the campaign and Russia and to determine whatever Page and Papadopoulos may have known about Russia's use of emails to benefit the Trump campaign. The first meeting involved a consensually monitored conversation between an FBI CHS and Page in August 2016, and the second involved consensually monitored conversations between an FBI CHS [REDACTED] and Papadopoulos in September 2016.

During the meeting in August, Carter Page stated, among other things, that he had "literally never met" or "said one word to" Paul Manafort, and that Manafort had not responded to any of Page's emails. Page made other statements that did not add support to the notion that Page was conspiring with Russia. During the meetings in September, Papadopoulos stated, among other things, that to his knowledge no one associated with the Trump campaign was collaborating with Russia or with outside groups like WikiLeaks in the release of emails. As described in Chapter Eight, the OI Attorney told us that he did not think the FBI told him about these meetings before the FISA application was filed with the court. We found no information suggesting otherwise.

The FISA request form also did not include information the Crossfire Hurricane team received from another U.S. government agency on August 17, 2016, relating to Page's prior relationship with that agency and prior contacts with Russian intelligence officers.

Finally, the FISA request form referred to Steele as a "reliable source, whose previous reporting to the FBI has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings." As noted later in this chapter, while Steele had previously provided information to the FBI that helped the FBI further criminal investigations, his reporting had never been used in a criminal proceeding.

After receiving clarifying questions from OI in response to the FISA request form, the FBI submitted a revised, formal request for an expedited FISA application on September 30. As described in Chapter Two, an expedited FISA application seeks to have the FISC waive the requirement in its Rules of Procedure that the government submit a proposed application no later than 7 days before it seeks to have the matter considered by the FISC. Requests by the FBI that OI seek an expedited FISA application require the approval of a Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) or higher. In this instance, the expedited request was approved by DAD Strzok. Strzok told the OIG that he approved the request to expedite the FISA

because there was a sense of urgency to complete the investigation as quickly and thoroughly as possible. According to Strzok, the team was not given an explicit instruction to finish the investigation before Election Day or Inauguration Day, but everyone involved understood the importance of moving quickly.

At the same time the Crossfire Hurricane team moved forward with a FISA request targeting Carter Page, FBI documents reflect that the team was also interested in a FISA request targeting George Papadopoulos to further the investigation. However, FBI OGC was not supportive. Instant messages between the OGC Attorney and the OGC Unit Chief indicate that they, the Intel Section Chief and Strzok, agreed that there was not a sufficient basis for FISA surveillance targeting Papadopoulos. The instant messages also show that the Intel Section Chief and Strzok were much more interested in pursuing the request for FISA coverage targeting Page.

The OGC Unit Chief told the OIG that she recalled that the difference between these two subjects with respect to a potential FISA application was that Carter Page had previous connections with Russian intelligence officers as well as the recent allegations in the Steele reporting that Page was an intermediary between Russia and the Trump campaign. With respect to Papadopoulos, the Crossfire Hurricane team had the information from the FFG that mentioned him, but no specific information that Papadopoulos was a person being directed by the Russians. Ultimately, the Crossfire Hurricane team did not seek FISA authority targeting Papadopoulos.

## **II. Preparation and Approval of the First FISA Application**

Following receipt of the FISA request form on September 22, the OI Attorney immediately began work on the FISA application, preparing the initial drafts with information provided by the FBI. The preparation and approval process for the application took four weeks to complete. We were told that the application received more attention and scrutiny than the typical FISA application in terms of additional layers of review and the number of high-level officials who read the application. We describe this process in detail below.

### **A. Initial Drafts**

On or about September 23, the OI Attorney began work on the initial draft FISA application. At this early stage of the drafting process, Evans told us that he instructed the OI Attorney and OI Unit Chief to handle the Carter Page FISA application as they would any other FISA application—to make sure the work was as thorough as possible so that NSD could answer the legal question of whether the facts meet the probable cause standard—and leave any policy questions to the decision makers down the road.

As described in Chapter Two, the read copy of a FISA application is prepared by an OI attorney using information provided by the FBI, primarily the case agent. The OI attorney relies heavily on the case agent to supply the necessary

information and identify significant issues. NSD officials told us that the nature of FISA practice requires that OI rely on the FBI agents who are familiar with the investigation to provide accurate and complete information. Unlike federal prosecutors, OI attorneys are usually not involved in an investigation, or even aware of a case's existence, unless and until OI receives a request to initiate a FISA application. Once they receive a request, OI attorneys generally interact with field offices remotely and do not have broad access to FBI case files or sensitive source files. According to NSD officials, even if OI received broader access to FBI case files, the number of FISA requests that OI attorneys are responsible for handling makes it impracticable for an OI attorney to become intimately familiar with an FBI case file, particular one about which they have had little to no prior awareness.<sup>266</sup> In addition, NSD told us that OI attorneys are not in the best position to sift through a voluminous FBI case file because they do not have the background knowledge and context to meaningfully assess all the information.

In this case, based upon the information the FBI initially provided in the September 22 draft FISA request, the OI Attorney sent his first questions to the OGC Attorney on September 23. Case Agent 1 sent back responses the same day. Over the course of the next two weeks, the OI Attorney exchanged various emails and telephone calls with the FBI and prepared initial drafts using information principally provided by Case Agent 1 and, in a few instances, by the OGC Attorney or other Crossfire Hurricane team members. The culmination of this process led to the first drafts of the FISA application being shared with OI and NSD management on October 5 and 6, 2016.

In these initial drafts, the statement of facts in support of probable cause asserted that the Russians were attempting to undermine and influence the upcoming U.S. presidential election, and that the FBI believed Carter Page was acting in conjunction with the Russians in those efforts. The statement of facts supporting probable cause was broken down into four main elements:

- (1) The efforts of Russian Intelligence Services (RIS) to influence the upcoming 2016 U.S. presidential election;
- (2) The Russian government's attempted coordination with members of the Trump campaign, which was based on the FFG information concerning the alleged offer or suggestion of assistance from the Russians to someone associated with the Trump campaign;
- (3) Page's historical connections to Russia and RIS, which included his business dealings with the Russian energy company Gazprom, his professional relationships with known Russian intelligence officers, and his disclosure to the FBI and a Russian Minister that he was Male-1 in an indictment against Russian intelligence officers; and

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<sup>266</sup> NSD officials cautioned further that it is not unusual for OI to receive requests for emergency authorizations with only a few hours to evaluate the request.



(4) Page's alleged coordination with the Russian government on 2016 U.S. presidential election activities, based on some of the reporting from Steele.

In addition, the statement of facts described Page's denials of coordination with the Russian government as reported in two news articles and as asserted by Page in a September 25 letter to the FBI Director. Except for the addition of new information from an October 2016 CHS operation discussed later, the read copy and final application submitted to the FISC were organized in the same way.

In support of the fourth element concerning Carter Page's alleged coordination with the Russian government on 2016 U.S. presidential election activities, the drafts of the application—and later the read copy and final application—relied entirely on information from Steele that Steele said was provided to him by his Primary Sub-source. Specifically, the following aspects of Steele's Reports 80, 94, 95, and 102 were used to support the application:

- Compromising information about Hillary Clinton had been compiled for many years, was controlled by the Kremlin, and the Kremlin had been feeding information to the Trump campaign for an extended period of time (Report 80);
- During his July 2016 trip to Moscow, Carter Page attended a secret meeting with Igor Sechin, Chairman of Rosneft and close associate of Putin, to discuss future cooperation and the lifting of Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia; and a secret meeting with Igor Divyekin, another highly placed Russian official, to discuss sharing compromising information about Clinton with the Trump campaign (Report 94);
- Page was an intermediary between Russia and the Trump campaign's then manager (Manafort) in a "well-developed conspiracy" of cooperation, which led, with at least Page's knowledge and agreement, to Russia's disclosure of hacked DNC emails to WikiLeaks in exchange for the Trump campaign's agreement to sideline Russian intervention in Ukraine as a campaign issue (Report 95);<sup>267</sup> and
- Russia released the DNC emails to WikiLeaks in an attempt to swing voters to Trump, an objective conceived and promoted by Carter Page and others (Report 102).

The development of the statement of facts concerning Steele's reporting resulted from the back-and-forth exchange described above between the OI Attorney and the FBI, during which the OI Attorney asked many questions about

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<sup>267</sup> In further support of this allegation from Report 95, the FISA application described two news articles from July and August 2016 reporting that the Trump campaign had worked behind the scenes to change the Republican Party's platform on providing weapons to Ukraine to fight Russian and rebel forces and that candidate Trump appeared to have adopted a "milder" tone on Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Page, as well as about Steele's reporting and the structure and access of his source network.

Among the questions regarding Carter Page, on September 29, the OI Attorney asked the Crossfire Hurricane team, "do we know if there is any truth to Page's claim that he has provided information to [another U.S. government agency]—was he considered a source/asset/whatever?" According to the OI Attorney, it would have been a significant fact to disclose to OI if Page had interactions with the other U.S. government agency that overlapped in time with his interactions with known Russian intelligence officers described in the FISA applications because it would raise the issue of whether Page interacted with the Russian intelligence officers at the behest of the other U.S. government agency or with the intent to assist the U.S. government. In response to the OI Attorney's question, Case Agent 1 advised him that Page did meet with the other U.S. government agency, but that the interactions took place while Page was in Moscow (which was between 2004 and 2007) and were "outside scope." Based upon this response, the OI Attorney did not include information about Page's prior interactions with the other U.S. government agency in the application. However, as fully described later in this chapter, the information Case Agent 1 provided to the OI Attorney was incomplete, inaccurate, and in certain respects contrary to the information the other agency provided to the Crossfire Hurricane team on August 17, 2016 and that Carter Page had provided to the FBI in 2009 and 2013. This information indicated that Page had a prior relationship with the other U.S. government agency and that his interactions with the other agency occurred more recently than the 2004-2007 time period and actually overlapped with information alleged in the FISA application concerning his alleged ties to Russian intelligence officers.

With respect to Steele, when the drafting process began, the Crossfire Hurricane team had only just begun the process of conducting the evaluation process (described in Chapters Four and Six) to assess Steele, his source network, and the information provided in his reports. That source evaluation process and the FISA drafting process were taking place simultaneously, and the FBI had not corroborated the Steele information being considered for the FISA application. Evans and other witnesses told us that the fact that the source information in the FISA application had not yet been corroborated was not unusual in the FISA context.<sup>268</sup> Officials told us that a significant fact in their consideration of the Steele information for the FISA application was that the Steele reporting on Carter Page appeared to be consistent with the information from the FFG that came from an independent reporting stream.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> As described in Chapter Two, corroboration of source information is not required by the FBI's Woods Procedures. Although the Woods Procedures require that every fact in a FISA application be "verified," when a particular fact is attributed to a source, an agent must only verify that the fact came from the source and the application accurately states what the source said. The Woods Procedures do not require that the FBI have a second source for the same information.

<sup>269</sup> The Crossfire Hurricane team had information available to it by early October 2016 that the two reporting streams could have connectivity because they had learned that Person 1, an

Evans and other witnesses also emphasized that in the absence of corroboration, it was particularly important for the FISA application to articulate to the court the reliability of the source as assessed by the FBI. As the OGC Unit Chief advised Case Agent 1 on September 22 during the drafting of the FISA request form, "One last thing—we probably need a little bit more on the source—[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Since this is essentially a single source FISA, we have to give a fulsome description of the source." Therefore, on September 29, during the early drafting phase, Case Agent 1 provided OI with the following characterization of Steele for inclusion in the FISA application:

This information comes from a sensitive FBI source whose reporting has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings, and who obtains information from a number of ostensibly well-positioned sub-sources. The scope of the source's reporting is from 20 June 2016 through 20 August 2016.

The OI Attorney incorporated this information with other information the case agent provided to draft the following in the application:

[Steele] has been an FBI source since in or about October 2013. [Steele's] reporting has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings and the FBI assesses [Steele] to be reliable. [Steele] has been compensated approximately \$95,000 and the FBI is unaware of any derogatory information pertaining to [Steele].

The final Carter Page application included this source characterization statement:

[Steele] is a former [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and has been an FBI source since in or about October 2013. [Steele's] reporting has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings and the FBI assesses [Steele] to be reliable. [Steele] has been compensated approximately \$95,000 by the FBI and the FBI is unaware of any derogatory information pertaining to [Steele].

The OI Attorney told us that he does not have access to the CHS files of FBI sources and, therefore, tries to adhere closely to what a case agent sends him when he drafts a source characterization statement for a FISA application. He stated that he also relies on the fact that the Woods Procedures require that the source handling agent approve the language. However, as described later in this chapter, the source characterization statement in the application overstated the significance of Steele's past reporting and was not approved by the FBI agent who served as Steele's handling agent.

To further address reliability, the OI Attorney sought information from the FBI to describe the source network in the FISA application. On multiple occasions, the OI Attorney asked the FBI questions about the sub-sources, including in a September 30, 2016 email in which he asked Case Agent 1 and the Crossfire

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important Steele election reporting sub-source, had been engaging in "sustained" contact with Papadopoulos since at least August 2016.

Hurricane team: "If the reporting is being made by a primary source, but based on sub-sources, why is it reliable—even though second/third hand?" The OIG did not find a written response to this specific question, and the OI Attorney did not recall a response. However, the OI Attorney told us that the Crossfire Hurricane team eventually briefed him on the sub-source information they learned from Steele after their early October meeting with him (described in Chapter Four). He also received a written summary of this information that the Supervisory Intel Analyst prepared shortly after the October meeting. The OI Attorney told us that based on the information the FBI provided, he thought at the time that some of the sub-sources were "definitely" in a position to have had access to the information Steele was reporting.

Ultimately, the initial drafts provided to OI management, the read copy, and the final application submitted to the FISC contained a description of the source network that included the fact that Steele relied upon a Primary Sub-source who used a network of sub-sources, and that neither Steele nor the Primary Sub-source had direct access to the information being reported. The drafts, read copy, and final application also contained a separate footnote on each sub-source with a brief description of his/her position or access to the information he/she was reporting. The Supervisory Intel Analyst assisted the case agent in providing information on the sub-sources and reviewed the footnotes for accuracy. According to the OI Attorney, the application contained more information about the sources than is typically provided to the court in FISA applications. According to Evans, the idea was to present the source network to the court so that the court would have as much information as possible.

## **B. Review and Approval Process**

As described in Chapter Two, once an FBI case agent affirms the accuracy of the information in the read copy of an application, an OI Unit Chief or Deputy Unit Chief is usually the final and only approver before a read copy is submitted to the FISC. The Unit Chief or Deputy is also usually the final approver that "signs out" the final application (cert copy) to the FBI for completion of the Woods Procedures and Director's certification before presentation to either the Assistant Attorney General (AAG) of NSD, the DAG, or Attorney General for final signature. The final signatory receives an oral briefing, the cert copy, and a cover memorandum (cert memo) describing each application. In most cases, the start of the oral briefing, or shortly beforehand, is the first time the application is presented to the final signatory. According to NSD, most FISA applications do not get singled out for additional review and, to place that in perspective, there are approximately 1,300 applications submitted to the FISC each year and roughly 25-40 final applications go to the AAG, DAG, or the Attorney General for signature in any given week.

However, in some cases, according to NSD, a FISA application will receive additional review and scrutiny, particularly if it presents a novel or complicated issue or otherwise has been flagged for further review. In this case, as described immediately below, documents and witness testimony reflect that the first Carter Page FISA application underwent a lengthy review and editing process within NSD, the FBI, and ODAG. According to Evans and other witnesses, this application had

heightened sensitivity and therefore received additional attention because of the apparent effort by a foreign power to influence the upcoming 2016 U.S. elections and the prior connection of the FISA target (Carter Page) to one of the presidential campaigns.

# **1. Initial Feedback and NSD Concerns over Steele's Potential Motivation and Bias**

Sanz-Rexach, Chief of OI's Operations Section, and his Deputy Section Chief were the first layers above the OI Unit Chief to receive a draft of the Carter Page application. After they provided feedback, the OI Attorney provided the draft on October 6, 2016 to Evans and, at the request of FBI OGC, to FBI General Counsel James Baker for concurrent review.

Baker told us that a review by the General Counsel was not a necessary step in the FBI's FISA approval process, but said that he would sometimes review an application when he thought it was warranted. Baker said that in this case, he asked to read the application because he recognized its sensitivities, including that the target had been associated with a presidential campaign and that the whole case was about Russian efforts to influence the presidential election and whether those efforts included any interactions with the Trump campaign. He said that he expected that the FBI would be called upon after-the-fact to justify its actions, and he wanted to ensure that his significant FISA experience was "brought to bear" on the application.<sup>270</sup>

For these reasons, Baker said he asked his Deputy General Counsel, Trisha Anderson, to give him the draft application before it was "too gelled" so that he could have influence over the drafting without disrupting the process. FBI documents indicate that Baker reviewed the draft on October 6 or 7. Baker told us that he read the probable cause section of the application, as well as the description in the Director's certification section of the foreign intelligence purpose of the requested FISA authority. He said that he thought it was important that the foreign intelligence purpose of the FISA authority was made clear in the application by focusing on the FBI's objective of learning the capabilities and tradecraft of Russia. He stated that he remembered being satisfied that the foreign intelligence purpose was properly articulated in the draft he reviewed.

Baker told us that he also remembered being satisfied at the time that there was probable cause articulated in the draft application to believe that Carter Page was an agent of a foreign power. He said that it was difficult for him to fully explain to us the basis for his assessment without reviewing the entire application again, but that he recalled Page's continuing relationships with Russian intelligence officers, even after the FBI made Page aware that they were Russian intelligence

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<sup>270</sup> In addition to serving as the FBI's General Counsel from 2014 to 2018, Baker had held positions in OI's predecessor office, the Department's Office of Intelligence Policy and Review, from 1996 to 2007, and later as an Associate Deputy Attorney General in ODAG responsible for national security matters from 2009 to 2011.

officers, being “key” facts in his mind.<sup>271</sup> Further, he said that, in retrospect, he thought that Page’s knowing interactions with Russian intelligence officers could have established probable cause even without reliance on the reporting from Steele. However, Baker did not recall being involved in the FISA discussions the team was having before the Steele reporting came in, and because of the redactions in the public version of the FISA application, he was unable to speak to how recent Page’s interactions with Russian intelligence officers had been at the time the application was filed.

Baker said that he did not recall his specific line edits to the draft, but that another theme of his comments was to ensure that the court was fully apprised of all material factual information regarding Steele and his reliability as well as any derogatory information about Steele, so that the court could make its own assessment of the Steele reporting. Questions attributed to Baker in an October 7 draft reflect that he, among other things, asked the FBI to provide more information about Steele’s prior employment to help establish his credibility and explain why he would have a source network. He also asked questions regarding Carter Page in an apparent attempt to clarify some of the facts regarding Page’s travel history and past relationships with Russian intelligence officers. According to Baker, he did not read the application a second time before it was submitted to the court, but Anderson told him that his comments were adequately addressed.

Anderson also reviewed a draft of the application; however, we could not determine the timing of her review. Documents indicate that Anderson requested the draft on October 5 and received it the next day, but Anderson told us she recalled reading the draft after Baker, and closer in time to ODAG’s review of the draft, which was almost 2 weeks later. Anderson said that she did not recall providing feedback on the draft and explained that Baker and the OGC Unit Chief were directly involved in the review process. Anderson did recall that she made sure the draft incorporated Baker’s previous edits in some fashion, but she did not recall what those edits were.<sup>272</sup>

Review or approval of the FISA application by senior Counterintelligence Division (CD) officials was not a required step in the FBI’s FISA procedures. Priestap, Strzok, and the Intel Section Chief told us that they did not play roles in the preparation or approval of the Carter Page FISA application. These officials told us that they were aware that FISA authority was being sought and, as described previously, Strzok provided DAD approval of the team’s request for an expedited FISA application, as required by FBI procedures. Further, as described later in this chapter, Strzok had conversations with Evans about the status of the application.

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<sup>271</sup> Because Baker requested not to have his security clearance reinstated for his OIG interview, Baker was unable to review the entire FISA application before or during the interview, and we were unable to ask questions that would reveal classified information.

<sup>272</sup> Similar to Baker, Anderson did not typically review FISA applications. The OGC Unit Chief said that she worked with the OGC Attorney and OI during the FISA process and was more involved in this FISA application than she was in some others. She told us that she did not recall providing or suggesting specific edits for this application.

However, we found no information suggesting that senior CD officials contributed to the substance of the application.

Evans shared his own feedback with the OI Unit Chief and OI Attorney, which included, among other issues, asking the Crossfire Hurricane team whether Steele "is affiliated with either campaign and/or has contributed to either campaign." On October 7, the OI Unit Chief emailed Evans's question to the team, and on October 10, Case Agent 1 addressed the second part of Evans's question, stating that Steele was most likely a foreign national and therefore unable to contribute to either campaign. Because Case Agent 1 did not fully address Evans's question, the OI Unit Chief asked the agent again, on October 11, whether Steele was affiliated with and/or had contributed to either presidential campaign. Again the case agent answered only the second part of the question, confirming that Steele had not contributed to any campaign and was not a U.S. person. Evans told us that he remembered being somewhat frustrated and annoyed by this answer and asked the question a third time to be sure that nothing was missed in terms of any potential political bias on the part of the source.

According to Evans, later in the day on October 11, after OI circulated a new draft application and, in response to his questions, he and OI learned for the first time from the FBI that Steele had been paid to develop political opposition research. He told us that he recalled that he, the OI Unit Chief, and the OI Attorney were all quite surprised by this new information and that it was frustrating that they had not been informed sooner. Evans said that the new information, coupled with the sensitive nature of the case, made him concerned that the source might have a bias that needed to be disclosed to the court. Consequently, Evans placed a temporary hold on the application so that OI could further explore and evaluate with the FBI the information OI had just learned.

Evans told the OIG, and emails and instant and text messages reflect, that over the next three days, he and OI asked additional questions about Steele to better understand his potential motivations, bias, and overall reliability. Before being asked these questions, the Crossfire Hurricane team had expected that the October 11 draft would be the final version submitted to the court as the read copy. However, on the evening of October 11, Evans had a telephone conversation with his counterpart at the FBI, DAD Strzok, to discuss Evans's concerns and let him know that OI needed more time to understand and evaluate the information it had just learned concerning Steele.<sup>273</sup> According to Evans, there was frustration expressed on both sides, with Strzok frustrated that the FISA process was not moving at the desired pace and Evans responding to the effect that "it doesn't help that just now, at the eleventh hour, I have for the first time learned that information about Steele." As detailed below, text messages between Strzok and the OGC Attorney reflect that Strzok believed the FBI had previously informed OI

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<sup>273</sup> Evans said he also contacted Baker to let him know that OI needed time to explore the new information. Baker told us that he did not specifically recall whether Evans told him that OI needed more time to explore the FBI's information regarding Steele. However, Baker said that he remembered having a telephone conversation with Evans about this particular application, the substance of which we describe in the next section.

about Steele's source of payment. The conversation ended with Strzok agreeing to allow the Crossfire Hurricane team to answer whatever questions about the source OI needed to ask. Similarly, during her OIG interview, then NSD Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mary McCord recalled that she had a telephone conversation with then Deputy Director Andrew McCabe during which she advised him that she believed the FISA application needed to include more information about who hired Steele, and that McCabe did not push back.<sup>274</sup> McCabe told us that he did not recall any specific conversations with McCord about this FISA application.

Internal FBI emails, as well as instant messages and text messages, reflect the FBI's discussions with Evans and reactions to his concerns. For example, following his telephone call with Evans on the evening of October 11, Strzok reached out to Lisa Page and advised her that support from McCabe might be necessary to move the FISA application forward:

6:21 p.m., Strzok to Lisa Page: "Currently fighting with Stu [Evans] for this fisa."

6:50 p.m., Strzok to Page: "Hey—The FISA will probably not go forward without a call from the [Deputy Director]. Even as is, the court may not hear it this week."

At the same time, Strzok also had communications with the OGC Attorney:

6:56 p.m., Strzok to OGC Attorney: "Stu is nervous. Didn't help that he just found out today about [Steele's] source of payment/direction for this particular reporting. I thought we had told OI earlier?"

6:56 p.m., OGC Attorney to Strzok: "Yes, we absolutely informed [OI Unit Chief] and [OI Attorney] about the source." "Multiple meetings, actually, with [Case Agent 1] and [the SOS]."

6:57 p.m., Strzok to OGC Attorney: "Ok—including the named intermediary, with the unnamed client (presumed to be connected to the campaign in some way)? Well, they didn't tell Stu..."

6:59 p.m., OGC Attorney to Strzok: "Yes, we provided source descriptions for all of the sub-sources, sources, etc. That is confusing because that seemed to be what put [OI Unit Chief] and [OI Attorney] at ease."

6:59 p.m., OGC Attorney to Strzok: "Is he going to hold the FISA?"

7:06 p.m., Strzok to OGC Attorney: "no, but I'm concerned about how they preload the Court/court advisor"

7:06 p.m., Strzok to OGC Attorney: "I think he wants more words in there about it...."

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<sup>274</sup> McCord became the Acting AAG for NSD upon the departure of AAG John Carlin, which occurred in this timeframe.



7:07 p.m., OGC Attorney to Strzok: "Roger. I'll reach out to [OI Unit Chief] to see if he is in the office by chance.

Later the same evening, Strzok communicated with the OGC Unit Chief:

7:34 p.m., OGC Unit Chief to Strzok: "So Stu called you about his concerns about the [Page] FISA? Not sure why he didn't reach out to the [FBI General Counsel/Deputy General Counsel] or the [Deputy Director]/Director, as they've all approved moving forward with this. What was the point of his [sic]? Was he trying to get you to pull it?"

7:53 p.m., OGC Unit Chief to Strzok: "I got further clarification from [OI Unit Chief]. I think it's all good. We should have more from DOJ tomorrow."

7:53 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "Ok. Stu is very nervous."

7:54 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "He said he wasn't aware of the fact until a few hours ago that [Steele] was employed to find this information by a named client, in turn hired by an unnamed client presumably affiliated with the Clinton campaign in some manner."

Between 7:54 p.m. and 7:59 p.m., [Strzok and the OGC Unit Chief exchanged messages on an unrelated topic.]

7:59 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "Is OI still sending copy to FISC tomorrow?"

7:59 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "I'm worried about what Stu whispers in Court Advisors ear."

7:59 p.m., OGC Unit Chief to Strzok: "Yeah. I think so. Stu's going to think about it overnight. Not for attribution, but apparently he's the only one over there worried about it."

7:59 p.m., OGC Unit Chief to Strzok: "Yeah, me too."

8:00 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "Jim [Baker] or [Deputy Director] or someone may need to weigh in with [NSD Assistant Attorney General John] Carlin."

8:00 p.m., Strzok to OGC Unit Chief: "I'll bring it up at the prep SVTC tomorrow."

8:00 p.m., OGC Unit Chief to Strzok: "If it goes beyond noon, I would tend to agree."

The next morning, at 7:44 a.m., the OGC Attorney sent the following text message to Strzok:

Pete, I talked to [OI Unit Chief] last night. It doesn't sound like Stu is concerned about the FISA itself, but more of fleshing out the details of [Steele] (e.g., how he began his reporting). All of that information was obtained from [Case Agent 1]. We should be in good shape once OI bats it around a little more internally this AM.

Although the OGC Attorney stated in these text messages that the OI Unit Chief and the OI Attorney had been briefed before October 11 on who had commissioned Steele's reporting, the OI Unit Chief told the OIG that he believed they did not learn about the potential political connections to Steele's reporting until after Evans raised his questions. The OI Attorney told us that he did not recall exactly when he learned about them, but that it was later in the drafting process, and that Evans's inquiries led to a better understanding of the nature of Steele's research. The OI Attorney told us that he did not recall asking the agent any specific questions about who Steele's clients were. Case Agent 1 told us that he did not recall any conversations with the OI Attorney about the source reporting's connection to political opposition research before OI asked questions about it. He explained that the Crossfire Hurricane team only suspected, but did not know in mid-October 2016, that Steele's reporting was generated through political opposition research.

The OIG did not find any written communications indicating that anyone on the Crossfire Hurricane team advised OI about the potential or suspected political connections to Steele's reporting before Evans raised his questions on October 11, and nothing to that effect appeared in the October 11 draft FISA application. Further, the emails described above containing Evans's questions about Steele's campaign affiliation or contributions suggest that OI did not have prior knowledge.

## **2. FBI Leadership Supports Moving Forward with the FISA Application and OI Drafts Additional Disclosures Concerning Steele**

On October 12, 2016, Evans's concerns about Steele were briefed to Comey and McCabe in a meeting attended by at least Priestap, Strzok, Lisa Page, and the OGC Unit Chief. According to notes of the meeting, the group discussed that Evans was concerned Steele may have been hired by someone associated with Hillary Clinton or the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and that the read copy of the FISA application would not be filed with the court that day so that Evans could further assess the potential bias. The notes reflect that the group discussed that Evans was also concerned that the foreign intelligence to be collected through the FISA would not be "worth [the] risk." Following the meeting, the OGC Unit Chief emailed Anderson and the OGC Attorney on October 12 and advised them that the concerns Evans had raised were discussed with Comey and McCabe and that both were "supportive" of moving forward despite those concerns.

During his OIG interview, Evans told us that he thought he did not raise the concern about the potential value of the collection outweighing the risk until sometime after OI worked through the bias issue with the FBI. According to Evans, he raised on multiple occasions with the FBI, including with Strzok, Lisa Page, and later McCabe, whether seeking FISA authority targeting Carter Page was a good idea, even if the legal standard was met. He explained that he did not see a compelling "upside" to the FISA because Carter Page knew he was under FBI investigation (according to news reports) and was therefore not likely to say anything incriminating over the telephone or in email. On the other hand, Evans saw significant "downside" because the target of the FISA was politically sensitive

and the Department would be criticized later if this FISA was ever disclosed publicly. He told the OIG that he thought there was no right or wrong answer to this question, which he characterized as a prudential question of risk vs. reward, but he wanted to make sure he raised the issue for the decision makers to consider. According to Evans, the reactions he received from the FBI to this prudential question were some variations of—we understand your concerns, those are valid points, but if you are telling us it's legal, we cannot pull any punches just because there could be criticism afterward.

Baker told us that he recalled having a telephone conversation with Evans after learning about Evans's prudential concerns from Anderson and the OGC Unit Chief. According to Baker, he told Evans that he understood the matter was sensitive but that he (Baker) thought there was probable cause and that the FBI was seeking the FISA for a legitimate purpose and thought the application should go forward. Baker told us that he did not think he had persuaded Evans, and Baker said he was left with the impression that Evans planned to raise the issue with others in the Department.

Evans told us that he discussed this prudential question with Tashina Gauhar, the Associate Deputy Attorney General responsible for ODAG's national security portfolio, and McCord. According to Evans, Gauhar seemed to share his concern, but Gauhar said that she did not think anyone was going to tell the FBI not to pursue the FISA if the legal standard was met. Gauhar told us that ODAG's position was first to ensure that the legal standard for the FISA application was met, and that everyone, including NSD, thought that it was. She said that there was a separate question about the "policy decision to go forward," and on that question she understood that FBI leadership believed strongly that the application should go forward. She said that although it was possible, she did not remember stating ODAG's position in terms of deferring to the FBI or not being inclined to overrule the FBI if the FBI wanted to move forward.

According to Evans, McCord said that she would discuss the prudential issue with McCabe, but the discussion did not happen before Evans raised the issue directly with McCabe after a regularly scheduled meeting on October 19.<sup>275</sup> According to Evans, McCabe told Evans on October 19 something to the effect of, "I hear you. I understand. [B]ut we can't pull any punches and we've got to do it, and...let the chips fall where they may." McCabe told us that he did not recall the specific words he used with Evans, but he believed he conveyed to Evans that the FBI "felt strongly" that the FISA application should move forward. McCabe said that he understood at the time that the FBI would likely be criticized no matter what the

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<sup>275</sup> McCord told us that she spoke to McCabe almost every day on various matters and had more than one conversation with him about the Carter Page FISA application, but she did not specifically recall whether she had a conversation with McCabe on or about October 17, and if she did, what specific issue would have prompted a conversation at that time. She said that she believed her most significant conversation with McCabe about the first FISA occurred in October. She said it was the telephone call described earlier, before or during the drafting of the Steele footnote, in which she and McCabe discussed Steele and the need to include more information about the source in the application. McCabe told us that he did not specifically recall any conversations with McCord about this application.

team did or did not do, but he believed that the team had to get to the bottom of this potentially serious threat to national security. He said that if the FBI had not sought FISA authority under the circumstances presented here simply because the team was afraid of the "political nature" of the information, the FBI would have failed to do its job.

The email on October 12, referenced above, from the OGC Unit Chief to Anderson and the OGC Attorney following the meeting with Comey and McCabe, said that Lisa Page would inform Evans of the FBI's decision to move forward with the FISA application. Text messages from Lisa Page to McCabe indicate that Page communicated with Evans later that same day:

3:11 p.m., Lisa Page to McCabe: "OI now has a robust explanation re any possible bias of the chs in the package. Don't know what the holdup is now, other than Stu's continued concerns. Strong operational need to have in place before Monday if at all possible, which means ct tomorrow.<sup>276</sup> I communicated you and boss's green light to Stu earlier, and just sent an email to Stu asking where things stood. This might take a high-level push. Will keep you posted.

3:13 p.m., Page to McCabe: "If I have not heard back from Stu in an hour, I will invoke your name to say you want to know where things are, so long as okay with you."

Later the same day, Page sent a text message to McCabe stating that she "[s]poke to Stu. Let's talk in the morning." Available text message records are unclear as to whether McCabe responded directly to this text or to the previous text message at 3:13 p.m., but to one or the other, McCabe responded, "Ok."<sup>277</sup>

Shortly before Lisa Page's first text to McCabe above, the Crossfire Hurricane team provided to OI additional information regarding Steele that the OI Attorney had requested. In an email on October 12, OI asked the FBI team what Steele had been specifically hired to do, what the FBI knew about the motivation of the individual who hired Steele, including whether that individual was a supporter of Hillary Clinton or the Democratic Party, and if the FBI could "articulate why it deems [Steele's] reporting to be credible notwithstanding [Steele] did the investigation based on [a] private citizen's motivation to help [Hillary Clinton/Democratic Party]." Through SSA 1, the team advised OI that based on information from Steele, Steele was specifically hired by an individual to provide information on candidate Trump's business affairs and contacts in Russia, Steele was never advised of the motivation of the individual who hired him, the individual who hired him was hired by an unidentified law firm in Washington, D.C., and

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<sup>276</sup> As described below, it appears the desire to have FISA authority in place before [REDACTED], was due, at least in part, to the fact that [REDACTED], and the Crossfire Hurricane team wanted FISA coverage targeting Carter Page [REDACTED].

<sup>277</sup> We did not find evidence of any further involvement by Lisa Page in the FBI's efforts to file the FISA application, other than receiving a telephone call on October 18 from ODAG, described later in this chapter, to advise FBI leadership regarding the status of ODAG's review of the application.

"anything further would be speculation." In response to OI's final question about Steele's credibility, SSA 1 responded that: (1) the FBI has had an established relationship with the source since 2013; (2) the source was generating reporting well before the opening of Crossfire Hurricane and the leaks concerning the DNC emails, and therefore this was not a situation where a source was attempting to steer an ongoing investigation; and (3) Steele was not a U.S. citizen and therefore had no vested interest in the outcome of the election. The OI Attorney forwarded this information to the OI Unit Chief, noting that, "This creates more questions for me now...."

During further back and forth over a 3-day period, the Crossfire Hurricane team advised OI that Steele was hired by Glenn Simpson of Fusion GPS, they did not know Simpson's motivations, and they did not know the name of the law firm that retained Fusion GPS or its connections to Hillary Clinton or the Democratic Party because Steele did not believe asking Simpson about his client was appropriate. However, we found no evidence that Steele advised the FBI that he believed asking Simpson about the name of his client would be inappropriate. Rather, as described in Chapter Four, we obtained conflicting testimony as to whether Steele was even requested by the FBI to ask Simpson for the name of the law firm. Steele's FBI handler (Handling Agent 1) told us that he informed Steele during their July 5 meeting that the FBI would be interested in finding out the name of the law firm. SSA 2 told us that he understood Handling Agent 1 "stayed away from tasking [Steele] about the identity of the U.S. law firm." During his OIG interview, Steele told us that he did not know the identity of the law firm when he met with Handling Agent 1 on July 5. Steele said that he learned of it later in July and probably told the FBI the law firm's name at some later date, but he did not specifically recall.

The Crossfire Hurricane team further advised OI that Steele's Primary Sub-source recently provided unrelated information that was found by [REDACTED] to be consistent with other reporting on the same topic. OI asked the team what the FBI knew about the September 23, 2016 *Yahoo News* article that quoted a "well-placed Western intelligence source" for information ostensibly coming from Steele's reporting about Carter Page's alleged meetings with Sechin and Divyekin. The team responded that they did not have any additional details regarding the leak.

On October 14, the OI Attorney consolidated in writing for Evans and OI management the additional details concerning Steele, described above, that the FBI provided over the previous 3 days. According to Evans, at this point, he and the others in OI believed that they had received all the information the FBI had on Steele.<sup>278</sup> The OI Attorney and the OI Unit Chief then revised the footnote in the draft application on Steele to address the potential that Steele, or those who hired

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<sup>278</sup> This is consistent with an instant message from Strzok to Lisa Page on October 14, 2016, 11:45 a.m.: "I'm going to email Stu and let him know we've gotten all the info we're going to get re [Steele] and sourcing questions."

him, had a bias. Specifically, they added the following paragraph, which became part of Footnote 8 in the read copy and final application:

[Steele], who now owns a foreign business/financial intelligence firm, was approached by an identified U.S. person, who indicated to [Steele] that a U.S.-based law firm had hired the identified U.S. person to conduct research regarding Candidate #1's ties to Russia (the identified U.S. person and [Steele] have a long-standing business relationship). The identified U.S. person hired [Steele] to conduct this research. The identified U.S. person never advised [Steele] as to the motivation behind the research into Candidate #1's ties to Russia. The FBI speculates that the identified U.S. person was likely looking for information that could be used to discredit Candidate #1's campaign.<sup>279</sup>

According to Evans, the use of the term "speculates" in the footnote was intended to convey that even though the FBI did not know at the time who Simpson's and the U.S. law firm's ultimate client was, the FBI believed it was likely that it was someone who was seeking political opposition research against candidate Trump. The FBI represented to Evans and OI that the Crossfire Hurricane team assumed, but did not know, that someone associated with the Hillary Clinton campaign or the Democratic Party paid for the research.<sup>280</sup> According to Evans, the use of "speculates" in a FISA application was unusual, but, in this context, he believed it was necessary to fully advise the court of the potential for bias. Evans told us that this additional information made him comfortable with the way that Steele was described in the application, specifically by making clear to the court that Steele had conducted opposition research on behalf of someone who appeared to have the intention of discrediting the Trump campaign.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> The Carter Page FISA application did not identify by name Steele's clients or the presidential candidates, which is consistent with the Department's general practice of not disclosing the true identities of U.S. persons who are not the surveillance targets in FISA applications.

<sup>280</sup> McCabe told us that he thought he had heard by the time of the first FISA application that Simpson had been working first for a Republican client and then later for a Democratic client. However, McCabe also told us that his memory on the timing of events is not always reliable, and other FBI officials told us that the team did not know who hired Simpson until after the first FISA application. As described in Chapter Nine, documentation we reviewed indicates that FBI officials obtained greater clarity on who Glenn Simpson was working for through interviews with Bruce Ohr in November and December 2016. Documentation indicates that by February and March 2017 it was broadly known among FBI officials that Simpson was hired first by a candidate during the Republican primaries and then later by someone related to the Democratic Party. Further, at least some team members knew by early 2017 that Simpson was hired by the DNC and another unidentified entity to research candidate Trump's ties to Russia.

<sup>281</sup> As described in Chapter Ten, in early August 2016, before the Crossfire Hurricane team became aware of Steele's election reports, information from a former FBI CHS was shared with members of the Crossfire Hurricane team indicating that the former CHS was recently contacted "by a colleague who runs an investigative firm. The firm had been hired by two entities (the Democratic National Committee [DNC] as well as another individual he did not name) to explore Donald Trump's

Evans told us that sources often have “baggage” and can have a bias, but that does not necessarily make their information unreliable, especially if the FBI has a long history of assessing the source’s reporting as reliable. In his experience, the important thing is to make sure that enough information is presented to the court so that the judge understands the issue. His general approach with this particular footnote was to exceed “what was even legally required and just mak[e] sure there was nothing...left on the table about this source that we could be open to criticism on afterwards, based on what the FBI was giving us.”

After OI made this revision to the footnote, OI submitted an updated draft application to McCord for her review on October 14.<sup>282</sup> McCord remembered reading an early draft of the probable cause section and believed she probably read an updated probable cause section at least one more time before the read copy was filed focused on the questions OI asked the FBI and the revisions that were made to address those questions. Based upon our review of relevant emails, it appears that McCord provided comments on the October 14 draft. She said her strongest memory was asking about Steele’s fee arrangement with Fusion GPS, which is also reflected in an October 18 email from the OI Unit Chief to his supervisors. McCord also remembered discussions within NSD and with ODAG about the prudential question described earlier as to whether to file the application even if it was legally supportable. She said the collective thinking was that filing the application was a legitimate investigative step even though it may later be criticized unfairly.

### **3. Other Substantive Changes to the Application before ODAG Review**

In addition to the revisions made to the Steele footnote, the October 14 draft application contained another substantive change from earlier drafts, concerning the FBI’s assessment of whether Steele was the source for the September 23 *Yahoo News* article described earlier in this chapter.

The draft FISA applications, and later the read copy and final application, advised the court that the *Yahoo News* article reported that U.S. intelligence officials were investigating Carter Page’s involvement in suspected efforts by the Russian government to influence the U.S. presidential election and that a “well-placed Western intelligence source” told *Yahoo News* about Carter Page’s alleged secret meetings with Sechin and Divyekin. The applications stated that, based on statements made in the *Yahoo News* article and in other news articles, individuals affiliated with the Trump campaign made statements distancing the campaign from

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longstanding ties to Russian entities.” The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that he did not recall making a connection when the Steele reporting came in between this investigative firm hired by the DNC and the firm that hired Steele to conduct his election-related research. FBI emails reflect that he and SSA 1 made that connection by January 11, 2017, at the latest. We found no evidence that this information was shared with OI.

<sup>282</sup> As noted previously, on or about October 17, 2016, McCord became the Acting AAG for NSD. She replaced AAG John Carlin who left the Department on October 14, 2016. Evans told us that Carlin had very limited involvement in the Carter Page FISA prior to his departure and did not review a draft of the application. We found no information suggesting otherwise and therefore did not seek to interview Carlin.

Carter Page. Further, the applications noted that Page himself denied the accusations in the *Yahoo News* article and reiterated that denial in a September 25 letter to the FBI Director and in a September 26 media interview.

Evans told the OIG that OI included the reference to the September 23 *Yahoo News* article in the FISA application solely because it was favorable to Carter Page and not as corroboration for the Steele reporting in the application. According to Evans, the application's treatment of the article was favorable to Page in three respects: (1) the application described statements in the article that the campaign distanced itself from Page and minimized his role as an advisor; (2) the application stated that Page denied the allegations in the news article in a letter to the Director; and (3) as described below, the application made clear that the people who financed Steele's reporting were likely the same source for the information in the article.

The drafts of the FISA application that preceded the October 14 draft—including the October 11 draft that the FBI expected would be submitted to the FISC as the final read copy—stated that the FBI “believes that the ‘well-placed Western intelligence source’ is Steele.” After reviewing the initial drafts, Evans asked OI to “drill down” on why Steele disclosed information to the media. For example, in an October 11 email to OI staff, Evans asked “does the FBI know why the source provided this info to the press.... Is there anything about his decision to speak to the press that suggests he’s got a bias?”

The result of this effort culminated in new language in the October 14 draft stating that the FBI believed it was Glenn Simpson or the law firm who hired Simpson, and not Steele, who provided Steele's reporting to the media. With respect to the basis for the FBI's assessment, the language that appeared in Footnote 18 of the read copy and final application stated the following:

As discussed above, [Steele] was hired by a business associate to conduct research into Candidate #1's ties to Russia. [Steele] provided the results of his research to the business associate, and the FBI assesses that the business associate likely provided this information to the law firm that hired the business associate in the first place. [Steele] told the FBI that he/she only provided this information to the business associate and the FBI. Given that the information contained in the September 23rd News Article generally matches the information about Page that [Steele] discovered during his/her research, the FBI assesses that [Steele's] business associate or the law firm that hired the business associate likely provided this information to the press. The FBI also assesses that whoever gave the information to the press stated that the information was provided by a “well-placed Western intelligence source.” The FBI does not believe that [Steele] directly provided this information to the press.

Case Agent 1 told the OIG that he did not recall why the October 11 draft stated that Steele was the “well-placed Western intelligence source” or the reason the language was changed in the updated draft to state that the FBI did not believe



Steele directly provided the information in the article. He said he did not recall the details regarding what he was told, or what he told OI, about whether Steele was the source for the *Yahoo News* article leak. The OGC Attorney told us that he was not familiar with how the change between drafts occurred.

The OI Attorney said he could not recall the circumstances that led to the change in the drafts, including whether the Crossfire Hurricane team originally told him that Steele had disclosed the information to *Yahoo News*. The OI Attorney said that it was possible he had assumed that that was the case and wrote the initial drafts in that manner for the FBI's consideration. The OI Attorney told us that at some point during the drafting process, the FBI assured him that Steele had not spoken with *Yahoo News* because the source was "a professional."

We did not find any evidence that the FBI asked Steele whether he was a source for the information in the September 23 *Yahoo News* article. As described later in this chapter, the basis the FBI asserted in the application for its assessment that Steele was not a source was inaccurate and the documentation in the Woods File did not support it.

Another change from the early drafts of the first FISA application was the addition of particularized minimization procedures (PMPs) at the request of Evans. The final PMPs restricted access to the information collected through FISA authority to the individuals assigned to the Crossfire Hurricane team and required the approval of a DAD or higher before any FISA-derived information could be disseminated outside the FBI. In normal circumstances, the FBI is given more latitude to disseminate FISA-derived information that appears to be foreign intelligence information or evidence of a crime. Evans told us that he believed these added restrictions were warranted here because of the possibility that the FISA collection would include sensitive political campaign related information.

#### **4. October Meeting between Page and an FBI CHS**

As we summarize in Chapter Ten, in October 2016, before the FBI obtained the initial FISA authority targeting Carter Page, an FBI CHS had a consensually monitored meeting with Page. During the meeting, among other things, Page said that he wanted to develop a research institute and, in talking about how he would fund the institute, Page said, "I don't want to say there'd be an open checkbook, but the Russians would definitely...." According to the partial transcript, the sentence trailed off as Carter Page laughed. The CHS then stated "they would fund it—yeah you could do alright there" and Page responded "Yeah, but that has its pros and cons, right?" At another point in the conversation, Page noted that he had "a longstanding constructive relationship with the Russians going back throughout" his life. When asked about the link between the Russians and WikiLeaks, Page said that, "[as he has] made clear in a lot of...subsequent discussions/interviews...I know nothing about that—on a personal level, you know no one's ever said a word to me." With regard to the platform committee during the Republican National Convention, Page said that he "stayed clear of that—there was a lot of conspiracy theories that I was one of them...[but] totally off the record...members of our team

were working on that, and...in retrospect it's way better off that I...remained at arms length."

Carter Page also told the CHS during the meeting that the "core lie" against him in the media "is that [Page] met with these sanctioned Russian officials, several of which I've never met in my entire life." Page said that the "core lie" concerned "Sechin [who] is the main guy, the head of Rosneft...[and] there's another guy I had never even heard of, you know he's like, in the inner circle." When asked about that person's name, Page said "I can't even remember, it's just so outrageous."

The Crossfire Hurricane team provided to OI some, but not all, of the information obtained during this meeting for inclusion in the first FISA application. According to the description in the FISA application, Page met with the FBI CHS on a particular date in October and made statements that led the FBI to believe that Page continued to be closely tied to Russian officials, including the suggestion that "the Russians" would be giving him an "open checkbook" to fund a foreign policy think tank project. The description also stated that Page told the CHS that he may be appearing in a televised interview to discuss the potential for change in U.S. foreign policy toward Russia and Syria in the event Trump wins the presidential election. However, as discussed later in this chapter, the application filed with the court did not fully or accurately describe the information obtained by the FBI as a result of this meeting because the FBI did not advise OI that Page denied meeting with Sechin and Divyekin, as alleged in Report 94, or that Page denied knowing anything about the disclosure by WikiLeaks of hacked DNC emails, as alleged in Report 95.

In addition, the FBI did not advise OI that Carter Page denied having been involved with the Republican Platform Committee. Page's statements to the FBI CHS, if true, would have been inconsistent with the FBI's assessment in the FISA application that Page helped influence the Republican Party to change its platform to be more sympathetic to Russia's interests by eliminating language in the Republican platform about providing weapons to Ukraine. The FBI's assessment was based in part on Report 95's allegation that Page and possibly others agreed to sideline Russian intervention in Ukraine as a campaign issue in exchange for Russia's disclosure of hacked DNC emails to WikiLeaks. The assessment also drew upon news articles in July and August 2016 reporting that the Trump campaign influenced the Republican Party to change its platform to not call for giving Ukraine weapons to fight Russian and rebel forces.

## **5. Feedback from ODAG and Submission of the Read Copy**

At the time OI submitted the October 14 draft application to McCord, OI simultaneously sent the draft to ODAG for review. Over the next few days, the application was reviewed by Gauhar, an OI attorney on detail in ODAG, Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General Matthew Axelrod, and later Yates, who ultimately approved and signed the final application.

As noted previously, in instances where the DAG approves and signs FISA applications, OI typically submits the application package to ODAG as a finished product after the read copy has been filed with the court and shortly before or during the oral briefing on the final application. However, in cases with heightened sensitivity, which can occur for a variety of reasons, OI may proactively flag the application for ODAG earlier in the process for special attention, which OI did in this case. Further, although sometimes NSD will ask ODAG whether it wants to read a flagged application in advance, Evans told us that in this case NSD decided that it would not submit the read copy to the FISC until Yates had personally read it and said she was comfortable moving forward.

Gauhar and the OI attorney on detail, both of whom had prior FISA experience in OI before joining ODAG, were the first to review the draft Carter Page application.<sup>283</sup> On October 18, the two met with OI to discuss specific suggestions they had for the probable cause section, and later in the day, OI circulated an updated draft incorporating new edits to address ODAG's suggestions. According to Gauhar, and as reflected in the October 18 updated draft, her office had suggested edits to add more emphasis and focus on Carter Page in the probable cause section, while at the same time making changes in tone to characterize the Trump campaign in a more neutral manner.<sup>284</sup> She explained that ODAG wanted to make sure that the court was not left with the misimpression that the FBI had information indicating that there were current members of the Trump campaign who were wittingly conspiring with Russia. Gauhar said she did not think that OI intentionally drafted the application in that direction, and she thought that some additional changes would help ensure that there was no misimpression.

Axelrod said he read the October 18 draft the next morning and had some suggested edits to further address the theme of the edits from the day before. ODAG sent NSD the additional suggested changes, and NSD and the FBI accepted the changes and incorporated them into the read copy.

ODAG's edits did not suggest significant changes to the Steele information in the application. Gauhar said that she was in communication with Evans when he

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<sup>283</sup> Immediately before Gauhar joined ODAG, from 2009 to 2014, she was the Deputy Assistant Attorney General in NSD with responsibility over OI (the position Evans held at the time of the Page FISA applications). Gauhar joined the Department in 2001 as an attorney in OIPR, which, as described previously, was OI's predecessor office. In OIPR, she was responsible for preparing FISA applications and later oversaw the FISA process as a supervisor and Deputy Chief of OI's Operations Section. The OI attorney on detail had served as an attorney in OIPR starting in late 2006 where she prepared FISA applications and then later oversaw the FISA process when she became the Deputy Chief and then Chief of the Counterterrorism Unit in OI's Operations Section.

<sup>284</sup> Examples of the edits addressing tone included describing Carter Page as *an individual associated with* the Trump campaign, rather than as a member of the Trump campaign, and describing the conspiracy alleged in Steele's Report 95 as between Russia and *individuals involved in* the Trump campaign, rather than the campaign itself.

was asking his questions about Steele and by the time that she reviewed the draft, she knew that Evans and others had drilled down on the source.<sup>285</sup>

On October 18, Gauhar reached out to Lisa Page, her contact in the Deputy Director's office, to advise her that the Carter Page FISA application was under review in ODAG. According to Gauhar, she was aware at the time that the FBI had been pushing OI to complete the process on the application, and she wanted McCabe to know that the application was now with ODAG and they were working on it.<sup>286</sup> Page advised Gauhar that it was possible that McCabe might ask Yates about the status of application during a regularly scheduled meeting the following morning on October 19. We did not find any evidence reflecting that McCabe asked Yates during that morning meeting on October 19 about the status of the application, and McCabe told us that he did not have a specific recollection of having done so.

As noted earlier, Evans told the OIG that he discussed the issue of whether this FISA application was a good idea with McCabe after a regularly scheduled meeting on October 19. Gauhar told us that sometime around this date, she believes that Yates may have had a similar discussion with McCabe. According to Gauhar, she advised Axelrod that Evans had raised his prudential question with the FBI, and she said she had a general recollection that Yates may have had direct conversations with McCabe to discuss FBI leadership's position on moving forward with the application. Gauhar said she was not present during any such conversations between Yates and FBI leadership and did not recall the details, but she believed Yates was told that FBI leadership felt strongly that the FISA was an important investigative step.

Yates told the OIG that she did not specifically recall any conversations with either McCabe or Comey about the Carter Page FISA application, but that such conversations could have happened. Yates said she had a general recollection that the FBI believed that they really needed to take this investigative step, but whether that understanding was the result of a specific conversation or just by virtue of the fact that Comey was prepared to sign off on the FISA application, she did not recall. Comey and McCabe told us that they did not recall a discussion with Yates about the FISA application.

On October 19, after incorporating Axelrod's edits, OI finalized the read copy of the Carter Page FISA application and sent it to the Crossfire Hurricane team for final review. Late in the evening, Strzok notified Evans that the FBI was

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<sup>285</sup> Emails indicate that on October 17, Gauhar asked a question about Steele, specifically how the FBI reconciled its belief that Steele did not disclose information in the September 23 *Yahoo News* article given the article's reference to a "well-placed Western intelligence source." OI advised that Steele told the FBI that he only provided information to his business associate and the FBI, and that the FBI believed that the business associate or the law firm disclosed the information to the media.

<sup>286</sup> For example, on October 17, Strzok had emailed Evans to advise him of upcoming operations in the investigation of Carter Page that would be assisted by the requested FISA coverage. Case Agent 1 told us that he became frustrated with the pace of the FISA application process and asked Strzok to do whatever he could to help move it along.

comfortable with its accuracy and content. Separately, Evans received notice from ODAG that, as he requested, Yates had read the application and had cleared NSD to file the read copy with the court. OI filed the read copy with the FISC the next day.

The OIG found no indication that then Attorney General Loretta Lynch or anyone in the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) was involved in the preparation, review, or approval of the Carter Page FISA application. Gauhar told us that she had brief conversations with Lynch's National Security Counselor and Chief of Staff to advise them for their situational awareness that a FISA application targeting Carter Page was expected to be filed. Neither the National Security Counselor nor the Chief of Staff read the application prior to its filing with the court. Lynch also said she did not read the application and did not recall any conversations about it.

### **III. Feedback from the FISC on the Read Copy, Completion of the Woods Procedures, and Final Briefing and Signatures**

#### **A. Feedback from the FISC and Revisions to the Application**

On October 20, 2016, the FISC legal advisor assigned to the Carter Page application provided OI with four comments and questions regarding the read copy. Two related to information in the footnote about Steele, and two related to certain facilities believed to be used by Carter Page:

- The FISC legal advisor inquired about a sentence in the footnote that stated, "In addition to the specific information pertaining to Page reported in this application, [Steele] has provided other information, which the FBI is currently investigating." To clarify, the final application was revised to state, "In addition to the specific information pertaining to Page reported in this application, [Steele] has provided other information relating to the Russian Government's efforts to influence the election that do not directly pertain to Page, including the possibility of the Russian's [sic] also possessing a dossier on Candidate #1, which the FBI is currently investigating."
- The legal advisor asked how it was that Steele had a network of sub-sources, and the OI Attorney provided additional information to him regarding Steele's past employment history. At the request of the legal advisor, OI included the additional information in the final application, including the identity of [REDACTED]
- The legal advisor asked OI for clarification regarding the information used to establish Carter Page's use of a particular email account, and OI corrected an error in the description of the supporting documentation.
- The legal advisor requested additional information to establish the [REDACTED] of Carter Page's [REDACTED]. The FBI provided the OI Attorney with some additional information; however, the information was somewhat stale, and the FBI elected instead to remove [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], rather than hold up the final application to investigate [REDACTED] further.

According to the OI Attorney, the FISC legal advisor raised no other issues and did not further question the application's reliance on Steele's reporting.

**B. The FBI's Completion of the Factual Accuracy Review ("Woods Procedures")**

On October 19, the OI Unit Chief "signed out" the cert copy of the application and cert memo, so that the FBI could complete the FISA verification process known as the Woods Procedures, described in Chapter Two. Case Agent 1 was the agent responsible for compiling the supporting documentation into a Woods File, performing the field office database checks on Carter Page, and completing the accuracy review of each fact asserted in the FISA application. His supervisor for the Carter Page investigation, SSA 1, was responsible for confirming that the Woods File was complete and for double checking the factual accuracy review to confirm that the file contained appropriate documentation for each of the factual assertions in the FISA application.

With respect to the factual accuracy review, Case Agent 1 told us that he personally compiled the supporting documentation in the Woods File and then went through the factual statements in the cert copy one-by-one and made sure that each factual assertion was verified by a corresponding document in the Woods File. After he completed his review of all the factual information, he said he turned the Woods File over to SSA 1, and SSA 1 and Case Agent 1 then performed a second factual accuracy review of the same information together. SSA 1 said he found that each factual assertion was supported by documentation in the Woods File, and he had no concerns with how the Woods Procedures were completed. SSA 1 told us that he relied on Case Agent 1 to highlight each relevant fact in the supporting document in the Woods File, and that once he verified that each highlighted fact corresponded to a factual assertion in the application, he would move on to the next fact, without necessarily reviewing the entire document.<sup>287</sup> On the evening of October 20, Case Agent 1 and SSA 1 signed the "FISA Verification Form" or "Woods Form" affirming the verification and documentation of each factual assertion in the application.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> We do not believe that this process, even when faithfully executed, is sufficient to ensure that all factual assertions in the application had adequate supporting documentation.

<sup>288</sup> As discussed in detail in Section IV below, we examined the completeness of the Woods File by comparing the facts asserted in the first FISA application to the documents maintained in the Woods File. Our comparison identified instances in which facts asserted in the application were not supported by documentation in the Woods File. Specifically, we found facts asserted in the FISA application that have no supporting documentation in the Woods File, facts that have purported supporting documentation in the Woods File but the documentation does not state the fact asserted in the FISA application, or facts that have purported supporting documentation in the Woods File but the documentation shows the fact asserted is inaccurate. The three most significant Woods errors, which are among the five problematic issues we describe later in Section IV, were: (1) the failure to seek and document Handling Agent 1's approval of the source characterization statement for Steele; (2)

After Case Agent 1 and SSA 1 signed the Woods Form, they passed the Woods Form, cert copy, and cert memo (collectively referred to as the FISA or application "package") to a Headquarters Program Manager assigned the responsibility of signing the final application under oath attesting that the factual information was true and correct. The Headquarters Program Manager was an SSA in the CD's Counterespionage Section. His official duties at the time did not include supervising the Carter Page investigation, contrary to what was stated in boilerplate language in the FISA application. Instead, he was briefed into the Crossfire Hurricane investigation on or about September 23 for the purpose of swearing out the Carter Page FISA.<sup>289</sup> The Headquarters Program Manager told us that after he was briefed, he attended some of the team meetings and had multiple conversations with Case Agent 1, SSA 1, and the OGC attorneys for updates on the status of and changes to the application. He said he read the entire application before it was final and, as changes were made to the application, he reviewed the changes. He said he had no specific memory of reviewing the Woods Form or Woods File (as described in Chapter Two, the Woods Procedures do not require the affiant to review the Woods File), but he believes that he would have done both since the Woods File was compiled at Headquarters, and thus he would have had access to it. However, he said he trusted that the case agent verified the accuracy of the factual assertions, as the case agent was required to do as part of the Woods Procedures. Further, the Headquarters Program Manager said that he was not independently aware of any information suggesting that the information in the application was inaccurate. After the Headquarters Program Manager signed the affidavit in the application declaring under penalty of perjury that the information in the application was true and correct, he submitted the application package to the OGC Attorney.

The OGC Attorney and Deputy General Counsel Anderson reviewed the application package on behalf of OGC's National Security and Cyber Law Branch. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, FBI procedures do not specify what steps must be taken during the final OGC legal review.<sup>290</sup> The OGC Attorney, who had participated in the drafting process and was familiar with the content of the application, told us that he reviewed the Woods Form with the Headquarters Program Manager. After the OGC Attorney confirmed that all of the Woods Procedures had been completed, he signed the cert memo below the OI Unit Chief's signature and submitted the package to Anderson.

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the fact that documentation in the Woods File used to support the FBI's statement that Steele only shared his election related information with Glenn Simpson actually stated that Steele also shared the information with the State Department; and (3) the fact that documentation in the Woods File used to support the FBI's assertion that Carter Page did not refute his alleged contacts with Sechin and Divyekin to an FBI CHS in actuality stated that Page specifically denied meeting with Sechin and Divyekin to the CHS. We provide examples of other Woods related errors in Appendix One.

<sup>289</sup> According to the Headquarters Program Manager, because the investigation was closely-held and being run out of Headquarters, it was initially not assigned to a specific unit in the Counterintelligence Division and therefore did not have an assigned program manager.

<sup>290</sup> We make a recommendation in Chapter Eleven that addresses this issue.

Anderson told us that she reviewed the cert memo and Woods Form and determined that the application package was complete, all the steps of the Woods Procedures were represented to have been taken, the probable cause standard was met, and there were no outstanding issues. She then signed the cert memo below the other signatures, signifying that the application was ready for certification, and she gave the application package to the OGC Unit Chief for submission to the FBI Director.<sup>291</sup>

### **C. FBI Director's Certification**

Comey certified the Carter Page application on behalf of the FBI. In Chapter Two, we described the elements of the certification required by the FBI Director or Deputy Director, including that the information sought through the requested FISA authority is foreign intelligence information that cannot reasonably be obtained by normal investigative techniques and is necessary to protect the United States against clandestine intelligence activities. In this regard, the Director's certification is different from the approval of the NSD AAG, DAG, or the Attorney General, which requires that the signatory find that the application satisfies the FISA's statutory requirements.

Comey told the OIG that when he was Director his practice varied in terms of whether he would read a FISA application itself before certifying an application, or whether he would rely solely on the description of the application in the cert memo. He said that he would read applications if they required special attention, but that from time to time he would also select others to read for quality control purposes. In this instance, Comey said he read the application because of its sensitivity. He further stated that he read the application once, after Baker presented the final package to him. He said he did not recall any conversations with Baker or with others about the application.

Baker told us that he presented the final package to Comey because he wanted to discuss the foreign intelligence purpose with Comey before Comey signed the certification. Baker said that in addition to explaining the foreign intelligence purpose to Comey, he wanted to make sure that Comey knew that he (Baker) had read the FISA and was satisfied that the probable cause standard was met. According to Baker, Comey told him that he understood, was satisfied with the foreign intelligence purpose, and was glad Baker read the application.

Comey told us that the application seemed factually and legally sufficient when he read it, and he had no questions or concerns before he signed. When we

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<sup>291</sup> Anderson told us that she did not read the FISA application at this stage in the process, which she said was not unusual. She said that her general practice was to rely upon the cert memo's description of the probable cause, unless there was a reason to dig deeper into the application based on her review of the cert memo or if she was familiar with the case from an earlier stage. As described previously, in this case, Anderson had read the Carter Page FISA application once before during the review process and she believed that both Baker and the OGC Unit Chief had also read and provided feedback on the application. As described previously, Baker provided comments on a draft of the application. The OGC Unit Chief told us that she read the application and was involved in discussions about it, but she said she did not recall requesting edits.



asked him why the FBI moved forward with an application on a target who was formerly connected to a presidential campaign, based in part on source reporting that may have been funded by the opposing political party and had not yet been corroborated, Comey said that the reason was because there was probable cause to believe that Page was an agent of a foreign power. He said that simply because the information regarding Page was uncorroborated at the time of the application did not mean that it was unreliable. He stated that in this case, he understood that the FBI assessed that Steele was a credible source, with a network of sub-sources in positions to receive information, and the core of the Steele reporting was consistent with other information the FBI had at the time.

Comey signed the application on October 20, and the application package was presented to Yates on October 21.

#### **D. DAG Oral Briefing and Approval**

Yates told the OIG that she did not recall the discussion that took place at the October 21 oral briefing when NSD presented the final application package to her. Evans said that he recalled that because Yates had already read the FISA application and was familiar with its contents, the OI Attorney used the oral briefing to advise her of the FISC legal advisor's questions and the changes made in the final application to address those questions. Evans said that he recalled little discussion during the oral briefing on this application before Yates signed the application.

The OIG asked Yates about her views on the application. Yates told us that, in her view, the application did not present a close call from a legal sufficiency standpoint, and she was comfortable that it was an appropriate investigative step to take. In terms of the specific reasons she approved the application, Yates stated:

Well, several things here. First, the context of the issue that we're talking about here, which is the Russian attempt to interfere in the 2016 presidential election, and the potential involvement of U.S. persons in that, is obviously a critically important topic. This is not some tangential run-of-the-mill crime. This is, to state the obvious here, critically important to the country. So we start sort of with the premise of, this is a topic that we need to get to the bottom of.

Secondly, Carter Page is not someone who just popped up out of the blue on the FBI's radar, with respect to his relationship with the Russian government. He is someone who had been on the radar for quite some time, both in terms of, and I think it's laid out in the FISA, the attempts to recruit him that had been laid out in a prior criminal case, and the FBI's knowledge of interaction that he had had in the past, and was continuing to have, with high-level people in the Russian government. So, it's not as if, just some guy who had never had any relationship with Russia has been alleged to be involved in the Russians' interference in the election.

[T]hat's also against the backdrop of the information that Papadopoulos had provided, and that then was corroborated to the extent that then WikiLeaks did do the email dump, as predicted there, and identified that a person in the campaign that was coordinating that.

Combined with [Steele], who had been someone with whom the FBI had worked for many years, both in an official capacity at [REDACTED], and then afterwards, whom they had found to be credible. I believe criminal cases had been made, or he had participated in criminal cases[.] So again, not just somebody out of the blue. And he was also very knowledgeable of Russia, which is not an easy place to break into, in terms of getting information.

...[I]t may have been, the information that [Steele] had acquired, may have been at the behest of the Clinton campaign or the DNC. I guess I would emphasize the word "may" there. That again, my understanding was that the FBI did not know who he was working for. In fact, and this is one of these things I have a hard time teasing out, what I knew then versus what I may know now, or have learned since, is that [Steele], my understanding is at one point, was actually working for someone connected with the Republican Party. I don't know, again, whether I knew that at the time, or not. I'm not at all sure about that. So, while certainly there was [an] implication that he was doing opposition research, it's gotta be for somebody. I mean, he's been hired by someone. My understanding was that the FBI didn't know who. And that is a factor to consider in this.<sup>292</sup>

But that was not the determinative factor, when you're talking about gathering foreign intelligence, not when it's against the backdrop of all of the other information there. And the FBI, who are experts in this, who have people who do this all day, every day, and the folks in DOJ who work with them on that, all believed that this was an important FISA to get, and to get now. So it's against the back-drop of that, of believing that it met the legal standards for a FISA, which appear to be borne out, given that it's been signed and reauthorized a number of times through the FISA court. It, I believed then and I believe now, it was the appropriate step to take. They're not all easy decisions that you make when you're DAG.

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<sup>292</sup> FBI officials told us that the Crossfire Hurricane team did not know who hired Fusion GPS (which hired Steele) until after the first FISA application was filed, though, as described previously, the Crossfire Hurricane team and Steele's handling agent suspected Steele had been hired to conduct political opposition research. Documents indicate that by February and March 2017 it was broadly known among FBI officials involved with the investigation, and shared with senior NSD and ODAG officials, that Fusion GPS was hired first by a candidate during the Republican primaries and then later by someone related to the Democratic Party. Yates was removed as Acting Attorney General on January 30, 2017.

Following OI's presentation, Yates signed the application, and OI submitted the application to the FISC the same day. By her signature, and as stated in the application, Yates found that the application satisfied the criteria and requirements of the FISA statute and approved its filing with the court.<sup>293</sup>

#### **E. Final Orders**

The final FISA application included proposed orders, which were signed by then Chief Judge of the FISC, Rosemary Collyer, on October [REDACTED], 2016. According to NSD, the Chief Judge signed the final orders as proposed by the government in their entirety, without holding a hearing.

The primary order and warrant stated that the court found, based upon the facts submitted in the verified application, that there was probable cause to believe that Russia is a foreign power and that Carter Page was an agent of Russia under 50 U.S.C. § 1801(b)(2)(E). The court also found that the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The court authorized the requested electronic surveillance [REDACTED] for 90 days [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to effectuate the electronic surveillance [REDACTED] authorized by the court. The authorization permitted the government to, among other things, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] by Carter Page. This included [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] during the 90-day period. The authorization also permitted the government to [REDACTED]

#### **IV. Inaccurate, Incomplete, or Undocumented Information in the First FISA Application**

Our review revealed instances in which factual assertions relied upon in the first FISA application targeting Carter Page were inaccurate, incomplete, or unsupported by appropriate documentation, based upon information the FBI had in its possession at the time the application was filed. We describe the most significant instances below and provide additional examples in a chart in Appendix One. We found no evidence that the OI Attorney, NSD supervisors, ODAG officials, or Yates were made aware of these issues by the FBI before the first FISA application was submitted to the court. Although we also found no evidence that Comey had been made aware of these issues at the time he certified the application, as more fully discussed in our analysis in Chapter Eleven, multiple factors made it difficult for us to precisely determine the extent of Comey's or

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<sup>293</sup> Her signature also specifically authorized [REDACTED]

McCabe's knowledge as to each fact that was not shared with OI and not included, or inaccurately stated, in the FISA applications. These factors included, among other things, limited recollections, the inability to question Comey about classified material because of his lack of a security clearance, and the absence of meeting minutes that would show the specific details shared with Comey and McCabe during briefings they received, beyond the more general investigative updates that we know they were provided.

**A. Information about Page's Prior Relationship with Another U.S. Government Agency and Information Page Provided to the Other Agency that Overlapped with Facts Asserted in the FISA Application**

The OI Attorney told us that it is relevant to know if the target of a FISA is or had been working on behalf of another U.S. government agency to "make sure that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing" when seeking FISA authority. As noted previously, according to the OI Attorney, it would have been a significant fact if Page had a relationship with the other U.S. government agency that overlapped in time with his interactions with known Russian intelligence officers described in the FISA applications because it would raise the issue of whether Page interacted with the Russian intelligence officers at the behest of the other agency or with the intent to assist the U.S. government. Evans told us that information about a FISA target's relationship with another U.S. government agency is typically included in a FISA application. Evans also stated that OI would work with the FBI to fully understand any such relationship and describe it accurately in the relevant application.

Toward that end, on September 28, 2016, the OI Attorney emailed Case Agent 1 a draft of the FISA application, copying other members of the Crossfire Hurricane team. In a comment in the draft application, the OI Attorney asked "do we know if there is any truth to Page's claim that he has provided information to [another U.S. government agency]—was he considered a source/asset/whatever?" In response to the OI Attorney's question, on September 29, Case Agent 1 inserted the following comment in the draft:

"He did meet with [the other U.S. government agency], however, it's dated and I would argue it was/is outside scope, I don't think we need it in. It was years ago, when he was in Moscow. If you want to keep it, I can get the language from the [August 17 Memorandum] we were provided [by the other U.S. government agency]."<sup>294</sup>

Based upon this response, the OI Attorney did not include information about Page's prior relationship with the other agency in the FISA application.

However, the information Case Agent 1 provided to the OI Attorney was inaccurate. As described in the August 17 Memorandum from the other U.S.

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<sup>294</sup> As noted previously, on or about August 17, 2016, the Crossfire Hurricane team received information from another U.S. government agency detailing Carter Page's relationship with that other agency.

government agency to the FBI, Page first met with the other agency in April 2008, after he left Moscow (Page had lived in Moscow from 2004 to 2007), and he had been approved as an operational contact for the other agency from 2008 to 2013. Additionally, rather than being outside the scope of the FISA application, the FISA application included allegations about meetings that Page had with Russian intelligence officers that Page had disclosed to the other agency. Specifically, according to the August 17 Memorandum, Page provided information to the other agency in October 2010 about contacts he had with a Russian intelligence officer (Intelligence Officer 1), which the other agency assessed likely began in 2008. Page's contacts with Intelligence Officer 1 in 2007 and 2008 were among the historical connections to Russian intelligence officers that the FBI relied upon in the first FISA application (and subsequent renewal applications) to help support probable cause.<sup>295</sup> The August 17 Memorandum stated that Page told the other agency that he met with Intelligence Officer 1 four times, characterized him as a "compelling, nice guy," and described Intelligence Officer 1's alleged interest in contacting an identified U.S. person. According to the August 17 Memorandum, the employee of the other U.S. government agency who met with Page assessed that Page "candidly described his contact with" Intelligence Officer 1. Page's relationship with the other agency was not mentioned in any of the four FISA applications.

Further, the FBI had information in its own files indicating that Page had told the FBI about meeting with the other U.S. government agency after the period he lived in Moscow and during the period alleged in the FISA application. For example, according to the FBI Electronic Communication (EC) documenting a June 18, 2009 FBI interview of Page, Page had informed the FBI agents that "due to his work and overseas experiences, he has been questioned by and provides information to representatives of the [other U.S. government agency] on an ongoing basis," and that the "interviewing agents acknowledged this fact, and stated to Page that no questions would be asked about Page's dealings with the other U.S. government agency during the interview." According to another FBI EC, Page told the FBI during a June 2013 interview that, although he had not spoken to the other U.S. government agency for "about a year or so" Page had spoken to them "since his last interview with the FBI."

The Woods File for the first FISA application, which was prepared by Case Agent 1, included the EC documenting the 2009 FBI interview of Page. Additionally, Case Agent 1 received an email on August 10, 2016, containing an attachment titled "Carter Page-Profile," which had been prepared by a Crossfire Hurricane Staff Operations Specialist (SOS). The profile, dated August 1, 2016, quoted the 2009 EC regarding Page's statements to the FBI about his contact with the other U.S. government agency. We did not find any electronic communications indicating that the FBI provided OI with this Carter Page profile.

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<sup>295</sup> The other agency did not provide the FBI with information indicating it had knowledge of Page's reported contacts with another particular intelligence officer. The FBI also relied on Page's contacts with this intelligence officer in the FISA application.

We asked Case Agent 1 about his knowledge in 2016 of Page's historical contacts with the other U.S. government agency and Case Agent 1's response to the OI Attorney's question on September 29, 2016, about any such contacts. Case Agent 1 told us that he did not recall his state of knowledge in 2016 regarding Page's history with the other U.S. government agency, but said he believed that he likely would have reviewed the August 17 Memorandum about Page sent to the Crossfire Hurricane team by the other U.S. government agency. He said he recalled believing that Page's involvement with the other U.S. government agency was "dated." After reviewing a synopsis of the information contained in the August 17 Memorandum during his OIG interview, Case Agent 1 reiterated to the OIG that he believed the information was dated, but also said that he "probably saw it." According to Case Agent 1, "I think I would have reviewed it with the team. I think that it would have been, you know, as we looked at it. It wasn't just me. But, we, you know, there was a determination made that it was dated." Case Agent 1 also said it was possible that he never reviewed the August 17 Memorandum from the other U.S. government agency.

The OI Attorney told us that he could not recall much about the issue of Page's historical contacts with the other U.S. government agency. After being shown his exchange with Case Agent 1 on September 29, 2016, the OI Attorney stated that if Case Agent 1 told him that Page's contacts with the other U.S. government agency were "out of scope" and dated, then he would have deferred to Case Agent 1's assessment on this issue. The OI Attorney also told us, after being informed about information in the August 17 Memorandum from the other U.S. government agency, that if OI had been aware of this information at the time the application was being prepared, OI would have discussed it internally and likely would have disclosed the information to the FISC to "err on the side of disclosure." When we discussed the information in the August 17 Memorandum with Evans, he responded similarly and told us "I think it would go in the application somewhere, be it in a footnote or elsewhere, if for no other reason than it also goes to the question of where the person's loyalties lie."

As described later in Chapters Seven and Eight, none of the three renewal applications described Page's prior historical contacts and relationship with the other U.S. government agency, even after the FBI received additional information from the other agency in June 2017. In April and May 2017, following news reports that the FBI had obtained a FISA targeting Carter Page, Page gave interviews to news outlets denying that he had collected intelligence for the Russian government and asserting instead that he had previously shared information that he had learned with the U.S. intelligence community. In mid-June 2017, in response to concerns expressed by members of the Crossfire Hurricane team, the OGC Attorney contacted the other U.S. government agency by email to seek clarification about Page's past status with that agency. The other U.S. government agency responded by email to the FBI OGC attorney by directing the attorney to memoranda previously sent to the FBI by the other U.S. government agency that informed the FBI that Page did previously have a relationship with that other agency and that the last contact occurred in July 2011. The email also stated, using the other agency's terminology, that Page had a relationship with that other agency. However, when

asked about Page's prior status with that other agency by a Crossfire Hurricane supervisor, SSA 2, who was going to be the affiant on the final FISA renewal application, the OGC Attorney told SSA 2 that Page had never had a relationship with the other U.S. government agency. In addition, the OGC Attorney altered the email that the other U.S. government agency had sent to the OGC Attorney so that the email stated that Page had not been a source for the other agency; the OGC Attorney then forwarded the altered email to SSA 2, who told us he relied on the email. Shortly thereafter, SSA 2 served as the affiant on the final renewal application, which was again silent on Page's prior relationship with the other U.S. government agency.

## **B. Source Characterization Statement**

As described earlier, because the FBI did not have information corroborating the Steele reporting relied upon in the Carter Page FISA application, it was particularly important for the application to articulate to the court the FBI's assessment of the reliability of the source. Toward that end, the final application included in a footnote the following source characterization statement regarding Steele:

[Steele] is a former [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and has been an FBI source since in or about October 2013. [Steele's] reporting has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings and the FBI assesses [Steele] to be reliable.<sup>296</sup> [Steele] has been compensated approximately \$95,000 by the FBI and the FBI is unaware of any derogatory information pertaining to [Steele].<sup>297</sup>

The OIG found no documentation in the Woods File indicating that Steele's handling agent, Handling Agent 1, approved this language, as required by Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and Standard Minimization Procedures Policy Guide (FISA SMP PG) discussed in Chapter Two. Case Agent 1, who as described earlier compiled the Woods File and completed the Woods Procedures, told us that he was not aware of this requirement.<sup>298</sup> Handling Agent 1 told the OIG that he did not approve this language, and that his OIG interview was the first time he ever saw it. Further, Handling Agent 1 said that although he found Steele to be reliable in the past, only "some" of Steele's past reporting had been corroborated and most of it

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<sup>296</sup> Although Case Agent 2's summary of the early October meeting with Steele states that Steele described his [REDACTED] in a manner consistent with the footnote in the FISA application, other documentation (discussed in Chapter Eight) indicates that Steele's [REDACTED] told the FBI in November 2016, after the first application was filed, that Steele had [REDACTED].

<sup>297</sup> As described later in Chapter Seven, after Steele admitted to a disclosure of information to *Mother Jones* in late October 2016, the renewal applications removed the reference to no derogatory information concerning Steele and stated that the FBI continued to assess that Steele was reliable "as previous reporting from Steele has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings."

<sup>298</sup> Case Agent 1 told us that his experience with previous FISA applications had always involved CHSs for whom he (Case Agent 1) was the handling agent, and that, therefore, he never had the need to seek approval from a separate handling agent.

had not. He also stated that Steele's reporting had never been used in a criminal proceeding.

Handling Agent 1 also told us, and FBI emails and instant messages reflect, that he had provided language on September 23 to Case Agent 1 for the source characterization statement that was substantively different from the final language used in the FISA application:

CHS has been signed up for 3 years and is reliable. CHS responds to taskings and obtains info from a network of sub sources. Some of the chs' info has been corroborated when possible.

Case Agent 1 provided this language from Handling Agent 1 to the OGC Unit Chief, who had requested that he reach out to the handling agent for a description of Steele's reliability and corroboration. However, the language Case Agent 1 provided to the OI Attorney on September 29, which was later used to draft the reliability footnote 8, differed from the language provided by Handling Agent 1 and instead stated the following:

This information comes from a sensitive FBI source whose reporting has been corroborated and used in criminal proceedings, and who obtains information from a number of ostensibly well-positioned sub-sources. The scope of the source's reporting is from 20 June 2016 through 20 August 2016.

Case Agent 1, the OGC Unit Chief, and the OGC Attorney told us that they did not recall or know the specific circumstances that led to the use of "corroborated and used in criminal proceedings" in the final application instead of language that more closely tracked what Handling Agent 1 had provided. Emails and other FBI documents reflect that Case Agent 1 borrowed the exact language used in the final application from an Intelligence Memorandum on the Steele reporting, which the Supervisory Intel Analyst and Staff Operations Specialist (SOS) had prepared in late September 2016.<sup>299</sup> Case Agent 1 told us that he most likely wanted to make sure that the language in the FISA application was consistent with how Steele was described in that document, which he believed had been vetted by analysts.

The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that the phrase "corroborated and used in criminal proceedings" was a reference to Steele's reporting in the FIFA investigation. He said that neither he nor anyone else on the team reviewed any of the documents or court filings in the FIFA case file, and he did not "dig into" exactly how Steele's reporting was used in the FIFA case. He said that his entire knowledge about Steele's role in and significance to the FIFA investigation came from Handling Agent 1, though he said he did not recall what he specifically learned from Handling Agent 1 regarding how Steele's information was used in the FIFA

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<sup>299</sup> The Supervisory Intel Analyst told us that he did not specifically recall developing this specific language for the Intelligence Memorandum, but he said that metadata on the document itself reflected that he personally added the information.



investigation. Handwritten notes documenting conversations with Handling Agent 1 indicate that the Crossfire Hurricane team was left with the understanding that Steele was the original source for the FIFA investigation. SSA 1 told the OIG that the team “speculated” that Steele’s information was corroborated and used in criminal proceedings because they knew Steele had been “a part of, if not predicated, the FIFA investigation” and was known to have an extensive source network into Russian organized crime. SSA 1 told us that the email he sent to Handling Agent 1 and others on September 19, requesting a “source characterization statement,” among other information on Steele, reflected his “intent” as the case supervisor to provide accurate information in the FISA application about Steele’s history with the FBI. As noted in Chapter Four, in connection with the FIFA matter, Steele had provided leads to the FBI, namely that the FBI should talk to a contact who had information on corruption in the FIFA organization. It was the contact’s information, in part, that led to the opening of the FIFA investigation. However, the FIFA case agent and a prosecutor on the case told us that, to their knowledge, Steele did not have any role in the investigation itself, he did not provide court testimony, and his information did not appear in any indictments, search warrants, or other court filings. According to Handling Agent 1, he was clear with the Crossfire Hurricane team concerning Steele’s role and that Steele had provided leads and not evidence in the FIFA case.

Witnesses gave us different understandings as to the meaning and scope of the phrase, “used in criminal proceedings.” Handling Agent 1 told us that he never told the Crossfire Hurricane team that Steele’s past reporting was “used in criminal proceedings,” and he was bothered that the team used that phrase. Other witnesses said that the phrase could include providing a lead that helped bring about a criminal investigation, such as Evans who told us that a tip that leads to evidence of criminal wrongdoing could meet the “spirit” of “used in criminal proceedings.” However, some witnesses, including attorneys who served in FBI OGC, NSD, and ODAG, interpreted the phrase to mean that the source information was used in some sort of formal court proceeding or legal process. In particular, Baker told us that, in his view, the phrase implies that the information “wasn’t just a tip,” but that it was used as evidence in a trial, in an affidavit, or in some other court filing or legal process.

Given the importance of a source’s bona fides to a court’s determination of credibility—particularly in cases where, as here, the source information supporting probable cause is uncorroborated—we believe the failure to comply with FBI policy requiring that Steele’s handling agent review and approve the language in the source characterization statement was an important one. This failure may have resulted in the court being left with the misimpression that Steele’s past reporting (or at least some of it) had been deemed worthy by prosecutors of being relied upon in court or that more of his information had been corroborated than was actually the case. Further, as we describe in Chapters Six and Eight, additional documentation became available to the Crossfire Hurricane team subsequent to the first FISA application that provided information contrary to the characterization of Steele in the first FISA application, including the finding of a formal FBI source validation review in March 2017 that Steele’s past reporting on criminal matters,

which included the FIFA case, was “minimally corroborated.” Despite this information, the description of Steele in the FISA renewal applications did not change.

### **C. Information about a Steele Sub-Source Relied Upon in the FISA Application (Person 1)**

As described earlier in this chapter, the information in the FISA application relied upon to establish probable cause to believe that Carter Page was coordinating with the Russian government on 2016 U.S. presidential election activities was based upon certain aspects of Steele’s reporting. This reporting included the alleged secret meetings between Page and Russian officials in July 2016 described in Steele’s Report 94. We found that the most descriptive information in the FISA application of alleged coordination between Page and Russia came from Steele’s Report 95, which attributed the information to “Source E.”

The FISA application stated that, according to this sub-source, Carter Page was an intermediary between Russian leadership and an individual associated with the Trump campaign (Manafort) in a “well-developed conspiracy of co-operation” that led to the disclosure of hacked DNC emails by WikiLeaks in exchange for the Trump campaign team’s agreement, which the FBI assessed included at least Carter Page, to sideline Russian intervention in Ukraine as a campaign issue. The application also stated that this same sub-source provided information contained in Steele’s Report 80 that the Kremlin had been feeding information to Trump’s campaign for an extended period of time and that the information had reportedly been “very helpful,” as well as information contained in Report 102 that the DNC email leak had been done, at least in part, to swing supporters from Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump.<sup>300</sup> Because the FBI had no independent corroboration for this information, as witnesses have mentioned, the reliability of Steele and his source network was important to the inclusion of these allegations in the FISA application.

Before the initial FISA application was filed, FBI documents and witness testimony indicate that the Crossfire Hurricane team had assessed, particularly following the information Steele provided in early October, that Source E was most likely a person previously known to the FBI, referred to hereinafter as Person 1.<sup>301</sup> The Supervisory Intel Analyst’s written summary of the early October meeting with Steele specifically attributed the information in Report 95 to Person 1 and also described information that Steele provided to the FBI team about Person 1, including that Person 1 “is a ‘boaster’ and an ‘egoist’ and may engage in some embellishment.” The day after the early October meeting, the Supervisory Intel Analyst emailed this written summary to the Crossfire Hurricane team, as well as Strzok and the Intel Section Chief. The OIG found no documents or written communications in which the Crossfire Hurricane team evaluated Steele’s statement characterizing Person 1 as a boaster or embellisher. SSA 1, who received the

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<sup>300</sup> In Report 80, this sub-source was referred to as “Source D” and in Report 102 as an “associate” of candidate Donald Trump.

<sup>301</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, Person 1 [REDACTED]

written summary from the Supervisory Intel Analyst, told us that he did not recall any such conversations.

The footnote describing this sub-source in the FISA application did not include any information about how Steele had described Person 1 as a boaster or embellisher. Documents reflect that, on or about October 12, the OI Attorney received the Supervisory Intel Analyst's written summary of the early October meeting that attributed the information in Report 95 to Person 1 and stated that Steele had described Person 1 as a boaster and embellisher. The OI Attorney made handwritten notes on the written summary when he met with members of the Crossfire Hurricane team to learn more about the source network. The OI Attorney told us that he did not recall the team flagging this issue for him or that he independently made the connection between the sub-source in the FISA application and Steele's characterization of Person 1. Case Agent 1 and the OI Attorney told the OIG that they did not recall any conversations about Steele's statement about Person 1 at the time of the FISA application. We found no evidence that Steele's characterization of Person 1 was shared with Evans or the OI managers involved in the FISA application, and they told us that they did not recall being made aware of it. Evans and the OI Attorney told us that they would have wanted to discuss the issue internally in NSD and with the FBI and likely would have, at a minimum, disclosed the information to the court.

In addition, we learned that Person 1 [REDACTED] [REDACTED].<sup>302</sup> We also were concerned that the FISA application did not disclose to the court the FBI's belief that this sub-source was, at the time of the application, [REDACTED]. We were told that the Department will usually share with the FISC the fact that [REDACTED]. The OI Attorney told us he did not recall knowing this information at the time of the first application, even though NYFO opened the case after consulting with and notifying Case Agent 1 and SSA 1 prior to October 12, 2016, nine days before the FISA application was filed. Case Agent 1 said that he may have mentioned the case to the OI Attorney "in passing," but he did not specifically recall doing so.<sup>303</sup>

We believe the FBI should have specifically and explicitly advised OI about the FBI's assessment that this particular sub-source relied upon in the FISA application was Person 1, that Steele had provided derogatory information

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<sup>302</sup> According to a document circulated among Crossfire Hurricane team members and supervisors in early October 2016, Person 1 had [REDACTED]. The document described reporting [REDACTED]. In addition, in late December 2016, Department Attorney Bruce Ohr told SSA 1 that he had met with Glenn Simpson and that Simpson had assessed that Person 1 was [REDACTED] who was central in connecting Trump to Russia.

<sup>303</sup> Although an email indicates that the OI Attorney learned in March 2017 that [REDACTED], the subsequent renewal applications did not include this fact. According to the OI Attorney, and as reflected in Renewal Application Nos. 2 and 3, the FBI expressed uncertainty about whether this sub-source was Person 1. However, other FBI documents in the same time period reflect that the ongoing assumption by the Crossfire Hurricane team was that this sub-source was Person 1.

regarding Person 1, and that [REDACTED]. Those facts were relevant to OI's assessment of the strength of the information in the FISA application and, based on what we were told was the Department's practice, likely would have been included by OI in the application so that the FISC could consider the information in deciding whether to grant the requested FISA authority.

#### **D. September 23 Media Disclosure**

As described earlier, the final FISA application included the FBI's assessment in Footnote 18 that the FBI "does not believe that [Steele] directly provided...to the press" the information in the September 23 *Yahoo News* article concerning the investigation of Carter Page and his alleged meetings with Sechin and Divyekin. The basis for this assessment, as asserted in the application, was that Steele told the FBI that he "only provided this information to the business associate and the FBI." However, this assertion of what Steele said was inaccurate, and the documentation in the Woods File did not support it.

The documentation in the Woods File relied upon for this assertion was a written summary of the meeting in early October with Steele. The summary was drafted by Case Agent 2 and, as noted above, was emailed to the Crossfire Hurricane team a day after the meeting. This Woods document, however, did not state or otherwise indicate that Steele only provided the information to his business associate and the FBI. Indeed, the Woods document noted that Steele told the team that he also had provided his election reports to his contacts at the State Department. Neither Case Agent 1 nor SSA 1, who performed the Woods Procedures on this application, noted this error, and it is not clear upon what basis they believed they had verified the factual assertion in the footnote about the FBI's assessment of who provided information to the media for the September 23 news article. Both Case Agent 1 and SSA 1 told the OIG that they may have mistakenly been thinking the footnote said Steele gave the information to the "U.S. government" rather than "the FBI."

As described in Chapter Six, during his OIG interview, Steele told us that in September he and Simpson gave an "off-the-record" briefing to a small number of journalists about his reporting. Steele said he did not have permission to disclose to the OIG who attended this briefing but acknowledged that *Yahoo News* was identified in one of the court filings in the foreign litigation as having been present.<sup>304</sup> The author of the *Yahoo News* article reported publicly in February 2018 that he received a briefing from Steele on the information discussed in the article

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<sup>304</sup> Steele told us that he did not know if the "Western intelligence source" cited in the September 23 *Yahoo News* article was a reference to him. He said he had understood that the media briefing he gave was "off-the-record." He said that he believed that *Yahoo News* had a source in the FBI or otherwise in the U.S. government who provided the information in the article. As we described in Chapter Four, the author of the *Yahoo News* article has written that Steele was the "Western intelligence source." See *Russian Roulette: The Inside Story of Putin's War on America and the Election of Donald Trump* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2018), 227.