

**POLITICS**

# Russian Spies Tried to Recruit Carter Page Before He Advised Trump

By ADAM GOLDMAN   APRIL 4, 2017

Russian intelligence operatives tried in 2013 to recruit an American businessman and eventual foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign who is now part of the F.B.I. investigation into Russia's interference into the American election, according to federal court documents and a statement issued by the businessman.

The businessman, **Carter Page**, met with one of three Russians who were eventually charged with being undeclared officers with Russia's foreign intelligence service, known as the S.V.R. The F.B.I. interviewed Mr. Page in 2013 as part of an investigation into the spy ring, but decided that he had not known the man was a spy, and the bureau never accused Mr. Page of wrongdoing.

The court documents say that Mr. Page, who founded an investment company in New York called Global Energy Capital, provided documents about the energy business to one of the Russians, Victor Podobnyy, thinking he was a businessman who could help with brokering deals in Russia.

In fact, Mr. Podobnyy was an S.V.R. officer posing as an attaché at the Russian mission to the United Nations.

Court documents do not identify Mr. Page, but the details in a statement he emailed to reporters on Tuesday match the individual described as “Male-1” in the court case. Mr. Page’s contact with the Russian spy was first reported on Monday by BuzzFeed News.

The disclosure is the latest to shed light on Mr. Page’s extensive contacts with Russian businessmen and government officials. A former Moscow-based investment banker for Merrill Lynch, Mr. Page joined the Trump campaign last year and traveled to Russia in July to deliver a speech to the New Economic School, a Moscow university.

The trip caught the attention of United States intelligence agencies. Later that month, the F.B.I. opened a counterintelligence investigation into Russian attempts to influence the presidential election and whether any of Mr. Trump’s associates were involved in that effort. American businessmen who visit Russia, even those who are not advising a presidential campaign, are frequently targeted by Russian operatives trying to collect information about the United States.

Mr. Page has given few specifics about whom he met with on that trip. In an interview with The New York Times last month, he said he had met with “mostly scholars.”

According to the court documents filed in 2015, the F.B.I. secretly recorded Mr. Podobnyy and another Russian operative named Igor Sporyshev discussing efforts to recruit Mr. Page, who was then working in New York as a consultant.

To record their conversations, the F.B.I. inserted a listening device into binders that were passed to the Russian intelligence operatives during an energy conference, according to a former United States intelligence official. The Russians then took the binders into a secure room where they thought they could evade American intelligence eavesdropping attempts.

In a transcript of the conversation included in the court documents, Mr. Podobnyy tells his Russian colleague that Mr. Page frequently flies to Moscow and is interested in earning large sums of money. Mr. Page was apparently interested in

striking a deal with Gazprom, the Russian state-run oil firm, according to the transcript. Mr. Podobnyy called Mr. Page an “idiot” but said he was enthusiastic.

Russian intelligence officers had been given the task of gathering information on potential United States sanctions against their country, according to the F.B.I., and the three men were focused on economic issues in particular. The third Russian spy, Evgeny Buryakov, posed as an employee of a Russian bank. Mr. Sporyshev worked as a trade representative of the Russian Federation in New York.

Mr. Podobnyy promised through his contacts with Russian trade officials to steer contracts to Mr. Page.

“I will feed him empty promises,” he was overheard saying, according to the transcript.

In June 2013, the F.B.I. interviewed Mr. Page, who said he had first met Mr. Podobnyy at an energy symposium in New York earlier that year. Mr. Page said that he had exchanged emails with Mr. Podobnyy about the energy business, that they had met in person once to talk about the energy industry, and that he had also given Mr. Podobnyy documents about the energy business.

In his emailed statement, Mr. Page said, “as I explained to federal authorities prior to the January 2015 filing of this case, I shared basic immaterial information and publicly available research documents with Podobnyy who then served as a junior attaché at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations.”

Mr. Page, who at the time was also teaching a course on energy and politics at New York University, said in his statement that he had given the Russian “nothing more than a few samples from the far more detailed lectures I was preparing at the time for the students.”

Though charged, Mr. Podobnyy and Mr. Sporyshev were protected by diplomatic immunity from arrest and prosecution while in the United States, but Mr. Buryakov, who was working under what is known as “non-official cover,” had entered the United States as a private citizen and did not have diplomatic immunity.

Mr. Buryakov was arrested in 2015 and later pleaded guilty to conspiring to act as an unregistered foreign agent. Last year, he was sentenced to 30 months in prison.

“Evgeny Buryakov, in the guise of being a legitimate banker, gathered intelligence as an agent of the Russian Federation in New York,” Preet Bharara, the United States attorney in Manhattan at the time, said in a statement after Mr. Buryakov’s sentencing.

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