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Trump's Kompromat

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AVON HILLS SALON

Thoughts from the Avon Hills

Nick Hayes on “Trump’s Kompromat”

FEBRUARY 22, 2017

Nick Hayes

We often say more by saying less. In a January interview, MPR’s Gary Eichten raised the question, “Do you think he (Trump) is being blackmailed?” Eichten asked. “Yes,” I answered. My one-word answer attracted more interest and comments from listeners than all my long-winded commentaries over the years on MPR combined.

Last week, MPR’s Tom Weber read the quote back to me from a transcript of the interview and asked if I still thought Putin was blackmailing Trump. My answer was and still is, “yes.” Allow me to expand a bit on my answer and address two questions: What might the Russians have on Trump? Why does Putin want or need anything on Trump?

Trump and *kompromat*

What do the Russians have on Trump? Obviously I cannot know for certain. However, I do know how the Kremlin operates. It has had ample opportunity to put together a dossier on Trump filled with what the Kremlin calls *kompromat*, evidence that ranges from the extremely embarrassing to the incriminating. Likely, *kompromat* in Trump’s file falls in three types.

Type A: The FSB, the Russian successor to the KGB, captured on video Trump's salacious sexual escapades with prostitutes while he was in Moscow for the Miss Universe 2013 Contest.

Type B: The file contains information on Trump's financial dealings with Russians. The revelation of Trump's presumably dubious Russian investors and creditors would probably also explain why Trump refuses to release his tax returns.

Type C: Obvious. Trump won the 2016 election with a lot of help from his Russian friends.

As we learned in the wake of the "Access Hollywood" interview, Trump is beyond embarrassment. Thus, Type A krompromat won't harm him but would provide plenty of material for SNL and Alec Baldwin. On the other hand, Types B and C would destroy both his presidency and his business empire.

What good is *kompromat*?

Although the President signals he intends to stay his course in foreign policy, key members of his staff suggest a shift into reverse. Secretary of Defense James Mattis dismisses the prospect for any U.S./Russian military collaboration and irks the Kremlin with his pledge to only approach Russia from "a position of strength." UN Ambassador Nikki Haley re-asserts the traditional and hardline approach to Russia. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson re-affirms Washington's commitment to NATO. The Putin-Trump Bromance may be unravelling. Don't be so sure of this. Take another look. Three examples come to my mind.

First of all, take a broader look at the implications of Trump's Super Bowl interview with Bill O'Reilly, especially Trump's infamous remarks on Putin. O'Reilly pressed Trump on his "respect" for Putin and described Putin as a "killer, a thug." Trump replied, "There's a lot of killers, we got a lot of killers, you think our country's so innocent?"

Putin presumably nodded in agreement, inferred Trump would not trouble him with pesky and meddling questions about the political assassinations of Russian opposition leaders, and used the occasion to attempt another political assassination. Check the dates. The O'Reilly interview was taped in the White House on Feb. 2. The next day, a Russian opposition leader, Vladimir Kara-Murza, was hospitalized due to mysterious poisoning. Although he has survived, it was the second time he had been poisoned and the poisoning of opponents has been a weapon of choice for a long time among the Russian FSB.

Secondly, Putin is tightening his control over the eastern region of Ukraine and declared that Russia will recognize documents issued by the separatists as legally valid. This throws more complications into efforts to resolve the Ukrainian conflict and probably represents a first step toward recognizing the separatists as Russian citizens. This week, as if on cue, the usual suspects for Russian mischief among Trump's entourage announced a "backdoor" peace plan for the Ukraine.

Third, and the most important point, is that things are going Putin's way. In the broader perspective, Putin has achieved his goals. His original motive for meddling in the U.S. presidential elections was to sow the seeds of suspicion and distrust in the fields of the U.S. elections. He succeeded. In this chapter of the Putin-Trump connection, Putin's Kremlin, not Trump's White House, has operated "like a finely tuned machine."

This is where *kompromat* returns. Putin hedges his bets. Russian sources this week leaked the news that the Kremlin is adding to Trump's file, compiling for Putin a psychological dossier on Trump. Maybe Putin watched Trump's news conference last week and knows that every once in a while, you need to keep your bros in line.