
TRUMP'S COMPANY HAD MORE CONTACT WITH RUSSIA DURING CAMPAIGN, ACCORDING TO DOCUMENTS TURNED OVER TO INVESTIGATORS

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Associates of President Trump and his company have turned over documents to federal investigators that reveal two previously unreported contacts from Russia during the 2016 campaign, according to people familiar with the matter.

In one case, Trumps personal attorney and a business associate exchanged emails weeks before the Republican National Convention about the lawyer possibly traveling to an economic conference in Russia that would be attended by top Russian financial and government leaders, including President Vladi-mir Putin, according to people familiar with the correspondence.

In the other case, the same Trump attorney, Michael Cohen, received a proposal in late 2015 for a Moscow residential project from a company founded by a billionaire who once served in the upper house of the Russian parliament, these people said. The previously unreported inquiry marks the second proposal for a Trump-branded Moscow project that was delivered to the company during the presidential campaign and has since come to light.

Cohen declined the invitation to the economic conference, citing the difficulty of attending so close to the GOP convention, according to people familiar with the matter. And Cohen rejected the Moscow building plan.

Nonetheless, the information about the interactions has been provided to congressional committees as well as special counsel Robert S. Mueller III as they investigate whether Trump associates coordinated with Russian efforts to interfere in the U.S. election, according to people familiar with the inquiries who, like others cited in this story, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the inquiry.

Details of the communications were turned over by the Trump Organization in August to the White House, defense lawyers and government investigators and described to The Washington Post.

Though there is no evidence that these Russia-related entreaties resulted in further action, the email communications about them show that Trumps inner circle continued receiving requests from Russians deep into the presidential campaign.

After WikiLeaks began to publish emails from the Democratic National Committee that were widely believed to have been hacked at the direction of Moscow, Trump said on several occasions that he had no financial ties to Russia. In July 2016, he tweeted, For the record, I have ZERO investments in Russia.

But the new disclosures add to an emerging picture in which Trumps business and campaign were repeatedly contacted by Russians with interests in business and politics. Trumps son, his son-in-law, his campaign chairman, low-level foreign policy advisers and, now, Cohen, one of his closest business confidants, all fielded such inquiries in the weeks before or after Trump accepted the nomination.

The documents also underscore the Trump companys long-standing interest in doing business in Moscow.

In a statement Monday, Cohen stressed that he did not attend the economic forum. I did not accept this invitation, he said. I have never been to Russia.

Cohen has said he will cooperate with authorities.

Alan Garten, general counsel for the Trump Organization, said in a statement that the newly disclosed Moscow proposal needed to be understood in context.

Like any other international real estate brand, it is not uncommon for third party developers to submit proposals for potential real estate projects all over the world, he said, adding that only a very small percentage of these proposals are ever pursued.

White House lawyer Ty Cobb declined to comment, saying he was not familiar with the documents.

The June 2016 email to Cohen about the economic conference came from Felix Sater, a Russian-born real estate developer and former Trump business associate. Sater encouraged Cohen to attend the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, with Sater telling Cohen that he could be introduced to Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, top financial leaders and perhaps Putin, according to people familiar with the correspondence. At one point, Sater told Cohen that Putins spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, could help arrange the discussions, according to a person familiar with the exchange.

Robert Wolf, an attorney for Sater, declined to comment.

The correspondence included a formal invitation to the conference from the Russian leader of the event, according to people familiar with the Trump Organization documents. The invitation included a letter signed by a conference official designed to help Cohen get a visa from the Russian government.

The St. Petersburg forum is a premiere government-hosted economic conference held annually under Putins auspices. Business leaders from Russia and other countries convene in what is designed to allow high-level conversation similar to the international business conference held each year in Davos, Switzerland, and at the same time to show off Russian investment opportunities. Following Russias incursion into Ukraine in 2014, the Obama administration actively discouraged American businesses from attending the event.

Cohen, Sater and Trump had earlier in 2016 been working on a deal to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. The June 2016 email exchange did not directly address that Moscow tower plan, according to people familiar with the correspondence.

But Sater was eager to rekindle interest in the project, which had been canceled five months earlier, according to a person familiar with his thinking.

The project had begun in the fall of 2015, when Trump was competing for the GOP nomination. Trump signed a letter of intent in October 2015 to license his name to the Moscow developer working with Sater to construct what they hoped would be one of the tallest buildings in the world.

In January 2016, Cohen emailed Peskov, Putins spokesman, saying the project had stalled and asking for assistance in pushing it forward. Cohen has said he received no response from Peskov and canceled the deal shortly thereafter.

Peskov has said he received the email but did not reply. He said Sunday that he did not remember any discussions about Cohen attending the St. Petersburg economic forum. But he noted that the annual conference is designed to allow attendees to meet with government and business leaders.

My job [is] to assist in that! he wrote in a text message.

Cohen rebuffed the invitation, and the project was not restarted.

Sater, who emigrated from Russia to the United States as a youngster, served time in jail as a young man following a bar fight and then was convicted in 1998 for his role in a Mafia-linked stock fraud. He has also been hailed for cooperating in the past with Justice Department probes in undisclosed national security matters.

Sater has had a long relationship with Cohen, whom he knew in high school, and with Trump. A firm in which Sater played a principal role, Bayrock, partnered in building the Trump Soho tower in New York City. And Sater and Cohen met with a Ukrainian legislator in 2017 to discuss how to promote a Ukrainian peace plan to the new Trump White House team.

The newly disclosed documents show publicly for the first time that, in addition to Saters efforts, the Trump Organization fielded another inquiry for a Moscow project during the presidential campaign.

That proposal originated with Russian billionaire Sergei Gordeev, a Moscow real estate mogul who served through 2010 as a Russian legislator.

The discussions about working with Gordeev took place via email between Cohen and an international financier he had worked with in the past, Giorgi Rtskhiladze, according to people familiar with the correspondence.

A spokesman for Rtskhiladze, Melanie A. Bonvicino, confirmed the proposal for a Trump-branded residential development, saying a 13-page document with pictures was delivered in October 2015.

But, Bonvicino said, Cohen informed Rtskhiladze in 2015 that the Trump company could not pursue the project because it was already committed to another developer in Russia — a reference to the proposal being guided by Sater.

No letter of intent was ever signed, according to people familiar with the interaction. Cohen and Rtskhiladze did not speak of the project again, Bonvicino said.

Rtskhiladze has had a long-standing interest in working with Trump in the region and pursued a project to build a Trump Tower in Batumi, Georgia, overlooking the Black Sea. Trump traveled to Georgia in 2012 to promote the Batumi deal and was paid nearly \$1 million in upfront cash, but the project was never built and was formally canceled by the Trump Organization in December as Trump prepared to take office.

In an interview in 2016, Rtskhiladze told The Post he was encouraging Trump to build a tower in Moscow.

Everyone wants to build a magnificent tower, Rtskhiladze said. Its challenging, but I think achievable, with that name.

Kaynak/Source: