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## Clinton Ally Says Smoke, But No Fire: No Russia-Trump Collusion

by KEN DILANIAN

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Former Acting CIA Director Michael Morell, who endorsed Hillary Clinton and called Donald Trump a dupe of Russia, cast doubt Wednesday night on allegations that members of the Trump campaign colluded with Russia.

Morell, who was in line to become CIA director if Clinton won, said he had seen no evidence that Trump associates cooperated with Russians. He also raised questions about the dossier written by a former British intelligence officer, which alleged a conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia.

His comments were in sharp contrast to those of many Clinton partisans — such as former communications director Jennifer Palmieri — who have stated publicly they believe the Trump campaign cooperated with Russia's efforts to interfere in the election against Clinton.

Morell said he had learned that the former officer, Christopher Steele, paid his key Russian sources, and interviewed them through intermediaries.

"On the question of the Trump campaign conspiring with the Russians here, there is smoke, but there is no fire, at all," Morell said at an event sponsored by the Cipher Brief, an intelligence web site.

"There's no little campfire, there's no little candle, there's no spark. And there's a lot of people looking for it."

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Morell pointed out that former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said on Meet the Press on March 5 that he had seen no evidence of a conspiracy when he left office January 20.

"That's a pretty strong statement by General Clapper," Morell said.

About the dossier, Morell said, "Unless you know the sources, and unless you know how a particular source acquired a particular piece of information, you can't judge the information — you just can't."

The dossier "doesn't take you anywhere, I don't think," he said.

He continued: "I had two questions when I first read it. One was, How did Chris talk to these sources? I have subsequently learned that he used intermediaries.

"And then I asked myself, why did these guys provide this information, what was their motivation? And I subsequently learned that he paid them. That the intermediaries paid the sources and the intermediaries got the money from Chris. And that kind of worries me a little bit because if you're paying somebody, particularly former FSB officers, they are going to tell you truth and innuendo and rumor, and they're going to call you up and say, 'hey, let's have another meeting, I have more information for you,' because they want to get paid some more.

"I think you've got to take all that into consideration when you consider the dossier."

Another former CIA officer in the room pointed out that the CIA also pays its sources.

"But we know who the source is and we know how they got the information," Morell responded.

In August, Morell accused Trump of being an "unwitting agent of the Russian Federation."

Morell said Wednesday that he continues to believe that the Russian campaign of hacking, leaking and fake news, which the CIA says was designed to hurt Clinton and help Trump, was a hugely consequential action to which the U.S. has not sufficiently responded.

Putin, he said, has suffered no consequence for his unprecedented interference in the U.S. election.

"This has never happened before in American history on this scale, never not even close. And Putin did not pay any price for this — nothing, zero."

 KEN DILANIAN  

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