

## POTOMAC WATCH

# The Fusion Collusion

Democrats are trying to protect the firm's secrets—so the GOP should keep digging.



House Intelligence Committee ranking Democrat Adam Schiff at a news conference on Capitol Hill, March 22. PHOTO: JIM BOURG/REUTERS



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Washington is obsessed with the word “collusion” but has little understanding of its true meaning. The confusion might explain why D.C. has missed the big story of collusion between Fusion GPS and the Democratic Party.

To read the headlines, a poor, beleaguered opposition-research firm was humiliated and constitutionally abused this week by partisan Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee. Fusion’s lawyers sent a 17-page letter to the committee’s chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes, accusing him of misdeeds, declaring his subpoenas invalid, and invoking a supposed First Amendment right to silence. Yet the firm’s founders, the story went,

were hauled in nonetheless and forced to plead the Fifth. “No American should experience the indignity that occurred today,” Fusion’s lawyer, Joshua Levy, declared.

Fusion is known as a ruthless firm that excels in smear jobs, but few have noticed the operation it’s conducting against the lawmakers investigating it. The false accusations against Mr. Nunes—that he’s acting unethically and extralegally, that he’s sabotaging the Russia probe—are classic.

This is a firm that in 2012 was paid to dig through the divorce records of a Mitt Romney donor. It’s a firm that human-rights activist Thor Halvorssen testified was hired to spread malicious rumors about him. It’s a firm that financier Bill Browder testified worked to delegitimize his efforts to get justice for Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer beaten to death in a Russian prison.

It’s the firm behind the infamous “dossier” accusing Donald Trump of not just unbecoming behavior but also colluding with Russia. Republicans are investigating whether the Fusion dossier was influenced by Russians, and whether American law enforcement relied on that disinformation for its own probe.

But Fusion’s secret weapon in its latest operation is the Democratic Party, whose most powerful members have made protecting Fusion’s secrets their highest priority. Senate Democrats invoked a parliamentary maneuver in July to block temporarily Mr. Browder’s public testimony. Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic ranking member on the Intelligence Committee, has been engineering flaps to undercut and obstruct Mr. Nunes’s investigation. Democrats on the House Ethics Committee have deep-sixed what was meant to be a brief inquiry to clear Mr. Nunes so as to keep him sidelined.

Then there is the intel committee’s meeting this week. Despite the spin, forcing Fusion to appear was Republicans’ only recourse after months of stonewalling. Fusion’s letter ludicrously claimed that Mr. Nunes’s subpoenas were invalid, which essentially forced the committee to show otherwise. It was a question of authority.

Florida Rep. Tom Rooney put the Fusion attendees through a series of questions not out of spite but to clarify finally just what topics the firm is refusing to talk about. The Fifth Amendment doesn’t provide protection against answering all questions. It only protects

against providing *self-incriminating* evidence. It is therefore revealing that Fusion took the Fifth on every topic—from its relationship with British spook Christopher Steele, to the history of its work, to its role in the dossier.

The untold story is the Democrats’ unprecedented behavior. Mr. Rooney had barely started when committee staffers for Mr. Schiff interrupted, accused him of badgering witnesses, and suggested he was acting unethically. Jaws dropped. Staff do not interrupt congressmen. They do not accuse them of misbehavior. And they certainly do not act as defense attorneys for witnesses. No Democratic lawmakers had bothered to come to the hearing to police this circus, and Mr. Rooney told me that he “won’t be doing any more interviews without a member from the minority present.”

Private-sector lawyers also tend not to accuse congressmen of unethical behavior, as Mr. Levy did in his letter to Mr. Nunes. But Fusion’s legal eagle must feel safe. He’s former general counsel to the Senate’s minority leader, Chuck Schumer. He has also, I’m told by people familiar with the committee’s activities, more than once possessed information that he would have had no earthly means of knowing, since it was secret committee business. Consider that: Democratic members of Congress or their staff providing sensitive details of an investigation to a company to which the committee has given subpoenas.

The Washington narrative is focused on special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe. But the ferocious pushback and unseemly tactics from Democrats suggest they are growing worried. Maybe the real story is that Democrats worked with an opposition-research firm that has some alarming ties to Russia and potentially facilitated a disinformation campaign during a presidential election.

The media has its own conflict of interest, since it would prefer nobody find out about its years of, ahem, colluding with Fusion. Don’t expect any investigative reporting. But also don’t believe the stories about GOP harassment. The ferocity of the Fusion-Democrat campaign is proof Republicans are looking in the right place.

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