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Brits Warned Trump Against Releasing Carter Page Surveillance Docs

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The United Kingdom implored President Donald Trump not to release an unredacted surveillance warrant application on his former campaign adviser, The Daily Beast has confirmed.

In an interview with Sean Hannity on Thursday night and in a Friday morning tweet, Trump admitted that “key Allies” are alarmed that the release of the document could reveal highly sensitive information implicating their own intelligence networks, particularly those concerning Russia. Trump did not identify the allies.

The UK, far and away the U.S.’ closest intelligence collaborator, is one of them. London has particular equities in keeping the application for the surveillance, known as a FISA warrant, out of public view.

“We do not comment on intelligence and security matters,” a U.K. government spokesperson said. White House and FBI officials declined comment.

Christopher Steele, the author of a dossier that the political right has turned into a Da Vinci Code of Trump persecution, was for over 20 years an MI6 officer, with much of his tenure focused on Russia. James Clapper, the director of national intelligence at the time the FBI placed then-Trump adviser Carter Page under surveillance, has said the Steele dossier wasn’t the “primary source” and was “perhaps an input” for the FISA application. And a redacted version of the FISA application, released in July, explicitly states that Steele’s funders were “likely looking for information that could be used to discredit [Trump’s] campaign.”

All of that undermined the theory pushed by Trump and his allies that the Justice Department politicized the surveillance process, but their response is to demand release of the FISA application without any redactions.

The U.K. has other reasons to keep the surveillance application unseen. Another wellspring of the FBI investigation into Trump’s Russia ties, the predecessor to special counsel Robert Mueller’s inquiry, occurred on British soil.

George Papadopolous, another former Trump campaign adviser, met in London in March 2016 with a professor there, Joseph Mifsud, who was connected to the Russian ministry of foreign affairs. Mifsud, who has since disappeared, wanted to set up a meeting between Trump and

Vladimir Putin. The following month, at London's Andaz hotel, Mifsud told Papadopolous that Russia had "dirt" on Trump presidential rival Hillary Clinton through "thousands of emails." That was months before Russian military intelligence's penetration of the Democratic National Committee servers was public.

That wasn't all. In May 2016, Papadopolous would later confess, he told an Australian diplomat about the Russian "dirt" during a meet up at London's Kensington Wine Rooms. Downer did what Papadopolous wouldn't: he told the FBI what he had heard from a Trump campaign adviser about a Russian intelligence operation against a major American political figure.

Papadopolous has since pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his Russia connections and is cooperating with the Mueller probe. Earlier this month, Papadopolous was sentenced to serve 14 days in prison.

Despite the entreaty by the U.S.' closest intelligence ally, Trump is delaying but not foreclosing on the release, all in the hope of stoking misplaced outrage amongst his followers. The Justice Department has warned him of what he characterized as a "perceived negative impact on the Russia probe," which is his goal, as expressed by his attorney Rudy Giuliani. Trump announced on Twitter that he's asked the Justice Department inspector general to "review these documents on an expedited basis" and he can "declassify it if it proves necessary."

The New York Times first reported on Friday night that the British had registered objections to the declassification.

After the July release of the redacted Page surveillance application, the Cato Institute surveillance scholar Julian Sanchez, who has been a vociferous critic of the intelligence community's documented privacy abuses, wrote that "we are now witnessing an effort to gaslight the press and the public in support of a discredited narrative about politically motivated surveillance of the Trump campaign."

On Thursday, the former acting CIA director John McLaughlin argued that "sensitive sources, human and technical, would be exposed" by the unredacted application release. In a Washington Post op-ed, McLaughlin said that the release would send a "message to other intelligence services and to specific sources... that you can't trust the United States to protect secrets. Our own intelligence and law enforcement services would be demoralized by the president's political use of their hard-won intelligence."

But against the U.S.' closest intelligence ally, senior former U.S. intelligence officials and knowledgeable surveillance skeptics, Trump has a countervailing force: Fox News bloviators.

"I have been asked by so many people that I respect," Trump this week told The Hill TV's Buck Sexton, "the great Lou Dobbs, the great Sean Hannity, the wonderful, great Jeanine Pirro."