



By: Alexander Price

The transnational dimension of the Epstein case—a hybrid warfare against the West



Recent months have seen a series of international developments related to the late American financier and child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

In response to a summons from the U.S. House Oversight Committee, Epstein's estate turned over a highly revealing gift book made by Epstein's closest friends for the occasion of his fiftieth birthday.

Lord Peter Mandelson was **removed** from his post as British Ambassador to the United States after his letters and photos in the book and his leaked emails to Epstein demonstrated a much closer relationship to the convicted child sex trafficker than Lord Mandelson had previously acknowledged.

Meanwhile, Democratic lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives continued to campaign for their **proposed** Epstein Files Transparency Act, which would force the public release of all unclassified U.S. Department of Justice files on Epstein.

With the U.S. government in shutdown and a significant Republican effort underway to suppress the files, it seems increasingly unlikely the bill will succeed.

While many in the public have hoped that the release of the DOJ files would expose Epstein's criminal network once and for all, this is not only unlikely, it is also unnecessary.

There is already sufficient information available about the networks Epstein was part of to see what they looked like, who was involved, and a good part of what they were doing.

While there has been a notable amount of reporting on aspects of the case in the US, UK, and France, it is rarer for reporting to take a transnational perspective.

United Kingdom

The story does not begin with Jeffrey Epstein but with his co-conspirator Ghislaine

Maxwell's father, Robert Maxwell.

Born Jan Ludvik Hoch to an Orthodox Jewish family in Czechoslovakia in 1923, Maxwell fled from the Nazis to France in 1939, where he joined the French Foreign Legion and then served as an intelligence officer with the British Army in World War Two.

After the war, Maxwell worked for the British military police in Berlin, which was divided into four occupied zones.

British journalist Tom Bower, in his **biography** Maxwell: The Outsider, reported that Maxwell frequently drank and made merry with Soviet soldiers in occupied Berlin, and on one such occasion he signed an agreement to cooperate with the KGB whenever he was needed.

Maxwell soon moved to England and launched various publishing businesses. By 1950 he had come to the attention of British authorities, who suspected him of being a Soviet agent.



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One official noted that "Capt. Maxwell's questionable activities have been brought to the notice of the Foreign Office on several occasions over the past 10 years" and speculated that Maxwell's Pergamon Press could be a front for Soviet scientific espionage.

Having grown increasingly wealthy, Maxwell established a residence in Oxford in 1960 while also spending time in France, where his daughter Ghislaine was born in 1961.

The family made Oxford their primary residence. They became known for their lavish parties, which were attended by government officials, industry leaders, socialites, and celebrities. Robert was elected a Member of Parliament for the Labour Party in 1964 and served in that role until 1970.

Prince Andrew, Duke of York, was roughly the same age as Ghislaine Maxwell. According to his own account, he first met Ghislaine in the 1980's while she was a student at Oxford.

Ghislaine Maxwell was a student at Balliol College, Oxford, from 1980 to 1985. In his **book** *Hunting Ghislaine*, British journalist John Sweeney described how he was once contacted by an Oxford graduate who had been at the university at the same time as Ghislaine.

This source suggested that when Ghislaine was at Oxford, “she would frequently disappear and return with beautiful posh, but dim slightly younger girls and take them to Headington Hill Hall to meet her father.” People found it odd at the time, Sweeney writes, but after the Epstein scandal broke, they began to wonder: “What if Ghislaine had become an enabler not first for Jeffrey Epstein, but for her father, long before?”

Rumors have circulated suggesting that Robert Maxwell's lavish parties in Oxford served as “honey traps” for espionage – meaning that he provided guests with compromising situations that he secretly filmed, creating opportunities for blackmail.

Epstein's criminal associate Steven Hoffenberg claimed that Robert Maxwell was assassinated in 1991 because he had come under investigation for financial fraud and was a liability to his criminal network. Maxwell's death also coincided with the collapse of the USSR, which left the Soviets' global espionage network out in the cold.

Canada

Canadian journalist Ian Halperin spoke with a French source based in Marseilles for his **book** *Controversy: Sex, Lies and Dirty Money by the World's Powerful Elite*.

“Pepe” (not his real name) had lived in Montreal in his youth and claimed he was Epstein's “right-hand man” – an epithet widely associated with French modeling agent and serial rapist Jean-Luc Brunel.

“Pepe” told Halperin that Epstein had traveled to Montreal in 1971 when he was 18 years old and that he had a group sex experience there that changed his life.

If Epstein had not previously connected with organized crime in New York, he appears to have come in contact with sex traffickers in Montreal in 1971

Epstein began to hire prostitutes – some of them underage -- and returned to Montreal frequently over the next few years.

Montreal was known at the time for its lively cabaret and nightclub scene, from which mafia groups ran prostitution rings.

If Epstein had not previously connected with organized crime in New York, he appears to have come in contact with sex traffickers in Montreal in 1971, the same year he dropped out of Cooper Union and changed career paths.

Europe

While much of Epstein's trip to Europe as a 22-year-old man remains unknown, his friends' and family's reminiscences in his 50th birthday book have provided some new insights.

Epstein's mother contributed a letter to the book in which she mentioned how she and his father had disapproved of Epstein's decision to

travel to Europe after graduation, explaining, “We pictured you coming home tired, undernourished, sickly. To our surprise, you looked great and had a great time. Your experiences in Europe helped you get the job at Dalton.”

This last remark sheds light on one of the enduring mysteries in Epstein’s biography, of why former OSS officer Donald Barr hired Epstein for a teaching job at the prestigious Dalton School, for which Epstein was unqualified. His mother’s comment suggests that the contacts Epstein made during his trips to Europe helped him get this job.

Leese had introduced Epstein not only to aristocratic Europeans but to all sorts of people in the arms business – Steven Hoffenberg

As The Sunday Times has **reported** “Epstein was ‘mentored’ in the early 1980s by Douglas Leese, a British former arms dealer, and eased into establishment circles by members of Oxford’s infamous Bullingdon Club, including his eldest son, Nick.”

This corroborates what Epstein’s business partner Steven Hoffenberg—who served 18 years in U.S. prison for securities fraud—**told** a reporter for Rolling Stone, indicating that “[Douglas] Leese had introduced [Jeffrey Epstein] not only to aristocratic Europeans (who Epstein subsequently fleeced) but to all sorts of people in the arms business—including the late Turkish-born businessman Adnan Kashoggi” as well as Robert Maxwell.

France

Epstein’s most significant known criminal associate in France was French modeling agent, alleged human trafficker, and serial rapist Jean-Luc Brunel.

Brunel worked as a model scout for Paris-based Karin Management in the 1970’s and soon rose to head of the agency. His

reputation for sexual assault was first brought to public attention in 1988 in a 60 Minutes news **segment** titled “American Girls in Paris.”

Two of his former models described how Brunel had drugged and raped women at his parties

The report featured interviews with former models who described his parties, where they were expected to have sex with clients as a condition of working for Brunel’s agency.

Two of his former models described how Brunel had drugged and raped women at his parties, which was something he was widely known for.

USA

One of Epstein’s closest associates and most significant clients was Les Wexner, the owner of Victoria’s Secret and Abercrombie & Fitch.

Epstein used his relationship with the Victoria’s Secret owner as a cover to recruit young women for sex trafficking. He would introduce himself to them as a modeling scout for Victoria’s Secret and suggest he could help them obtain work.

When they arrived at the meetings, they discovered that they had been misled about Epstein’s true intentions.

In October 2024, former Abercrombie & Fitch CEO Mike Jeffries was **arrested** for running a sex trafficking and prostitution ring. Victims claimed that Jeffries invited them to sex parties with the promise of modeling jobs, and then at the parties they were drugged and raped.

Trump allegedly offered girls as party favors to wealthy business associates

Donald Trump, whom Epstein once described as his “closest friend,” was the owner of Trump Model Management from 1999 to 2017.

Scrutiny of the agency following Trump’s conviction for sexual assault and his 2016 election to the U.S. presidency indicated that Trump Model Management was widely understood throughout the industry to be a front for human trafficking.

What’s more, **according** to journalist Michael Gross, in the 1990’s Trump frequently hosted parties at his Plaza Hotel where girls as young as 15 were invited with the promise that they would meet rich men who could help them in their careers.

Trump allegedly offered girls as party favors to wealthy business associates. The parties were known to feature lots of drugs and lots of sex.

A fashion photographer who attended the parties remarked, “It’s a small community... [The men] exchanged information, facilitated each other.” He himself had posed as a modeling agent for Trump in order to recruit girls to attend the parties.

When a BBC investigative report in 1999 returned Jean-Luc Brunel to the spotlight for his ongoing sex crimes, he fled from Europe to the United States, where he joined Jeffrey Epstein’s inner circle.

Flight logs indicate that Brunel was a frequent flier on Epstein’s private plane. Around 2004 Brunel founded a new modeling agency with locations in the US, Eastern Europe, and Asia, which Epstein financed. This agency was reportedly a front for human trafficking.

Russia

In autumn 2009 Microsoft co-founder and former CEO Bill Gates met a Russian software designer and bridge player named Mila Antonova at a bridge tournament in Washington, DC, and they soon began having an **affair**.

An advisor to Gates, Serbian-born Boris Nikolic, introduced Antonova to Jeffrey Epstein in 2013 (while Nikolic later denied any connection to Epstein, he was named as an executor in Epstein’s will).

In 2017 Epstein sent an email to Gates attempting to blackmail him with his knowledge of the affair.

Rather than capitulate to the threat, Gates went to the press, effectively ending his marriage. In doing so, he provided some of the clearest evidence available that Epstein engaged in blackmail operations, this one specifically involving Russians.

American journalist Craig Unger has documented Epstein’s close connection to several Russian women in the United States with ties to the FSB, at least one of them a former model.

As Unger described in his **book** *American Kompromat*, Svetlana Pozhidaeva grew up in an apartment complex in Moscow originally built for the Russian NKVD intelligence service.

She graduated from the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations, which trains Russia’s diplomats and intelligence officials.

Despite this auspicious start to a promising career, she proceeded to France to work as a model for Jean-Luc Brunel’s MC2 modeling agency.

She then relocated to the United States, where she joined Jeffrey Epstein’s entourage. Epstein provided her with significant sums of money to launch business ventures, in one of which she partnered with Russian Victoria Drokova, who had graduated from the same intelligence-related university in Moscow as herself.

Victoria’s sister Masha was a prominent member of the pro-Putin youth group Nashi and went on to relocate to the United States, where she took a job as a publicist.



The St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, as the Dossier Center report explains, is a notorious hotbed for prostitution and blackmail

According to a **report** published by the London-based Dossier Center, Epstein had a close relationship with Russian FSB officer Sergei Belyakov in Moscow.

Epstein advised Belyakov on the Russian economy, and Belyakov connected Epstein with influential officials in Russia. The Dossier Center was able to document at least five known meetings between Epstein and Belyakov.

In July 2015, Epstein reached out to Belyakov to ask for help with a problem involving “a russian girl from moscow. Guzel Ganieva. She is attempting to blackmail a group of powerful biznessman in New York... Suggestions?”

His spelling of the word businessman may have suggested that these men were involved in mafia businesses. One can only speculate what Epstein was hoping the FSB might do.

Belyakov supplied Epstein with an intelligence dossier on Ganieva. In exchange for the dossier—which normally might have cost money—Epstein provided guidance to Belyakov on ways to circumvent Western sanctions, and he offered to put him in touch with prominent Western businessmen who could be invited to Belyakov’s upcoming International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg (SPIEF).

The St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, as the Dossier Center report explains, is a notorious hotbed for prostitution and

blackmail.

The forum’s organizers collaborate with modeling agencies to send beautiful women to the event. The Dossier Center noted that it is common for sex workers to film their encounters with rich businessmen and politicians secretly in order to blackmail them later.

This might help explain why the FSB would want to have an agent running the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg.

A Transnational Network

The above overview is far from comprehensive—it passes over important parts of the story, such as Epstein’s relationships with Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi and former Israeli PM Ehud Barak, as well as Epstein’s global travels and networks ranging far beyond Europe and the United States, and his involvement in financial crime.

The point here was to place certain pieces of the story side by side to show the presence of a pattern that is clear when one takes a broader, global perspective.



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The pattern is one that involved modeling agencies around the world serving as fronts for human trafficking. Russian and Eastern European models, Russian dirty money, and Russian intelligence operatives played an

oversized and unmistakable role.

This may very well be what Trump is trying desperately to keep quiet in the DOJ's Epstein files.

The U.S.'s Epstein Files Transparency Act will fail to produce the coup de grâce that many have been hoping for.

The Trump administration is never going to release any evidence that could expose him to further prosecution.

But a more important issue may be why the American government seems to have such a monopoly over the investigation of what was a transnational criminal network.

Only the tip of the iceberg came out in the U.S. prosecutions of Epstein's sex crimes. Jeffrey Epstein was involved in human, arms, and narcotics trafficking, financial crime, and hostile foreign espionage networks that spanned dozens of countries, including multiple EU members and the UK.

Why has the U.S. President been allowed to exercise so much control over a transnational criminal investigation in which he is implicated and in which his personal ties to the Kremlin may well be relevant?

The Epstein case is ultimately not an issue about Donald Trump and the United States but rather about all the Donald Trumps of the Western world —right-wing, nationalist, illiberal, populist political leaders with ties to Russia who are threatening the security and integrity of Western democracy.

It's about Russia's hybrid warfare against the West. As the rule of law capsizes in the United States and a pro-Kremlin authoritarian regime entrenches itself, Europe must heed the warning.

European democracy and Western values are facing their greatest existential threat since the Second World War.

Just as Europe is pivoting to contribute more

to its own military defense against Russian aggression, so must European states take the lead on investigating and prosecuting the transnational criminal networks connected with the Russian state.

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*The views expressed are entirely those of the author