



By: John Sipher

Birds of a Feather: Epstein, Trump, and Russian Intelligence



The latest document dump related to **Jeffrey Epstein** has sparked a new round of speculation that he may have had ties to the Kremlin, an idea now being amplified in headlines and political commentary.

Across outlets, reporting based on the release highlights claims that Epstein sought access to Vladimir Putin and other Russian elites, with the most attention-grabbing “intelligence” thread centering on a released FBI report that quotes a confidential source alleging Epstein helped manage Putin’s wealth.

Politicians have publicly elevated the suspicion as a potential national security question, while a variety of commentators are questioning if Epstein was a Russian agent of influence.

The release reportedly included more than three million documents. Because many refer to Jeffrey Epstein’s contacts with Russia, speculation has grown that he may have acted as a Russian asset.

Britain’s Telegraph newspaper suggested that his alleged links to “Kremlin spies” raised fears he was a **Russian agent**, adding that the “pedophile financier” was suspected of involvement in the “world’s largest honey-trap operation.”

Poland has even established a team to examine possible links between Epstein’s operation and Russian intelligence services.

In a July 2025 article for the online journal Russian Desk, **French historian Françoise Thom** argues that Moscow sought both Epstein’s expertise in tax havens and money laundering and that his sex-trafficking and blackmail enterprise functioned as a ready-made “kompromat” marketplace, precisely the kind of reputational leverage Russian services value.

Even **Christopher Steele**, the former British intelligence officer behind the well-known dossier, has claimed that Epstein was a Russian spy.

Regime security vs. national security

There is no doubt that both the Kremlin and Epstein found each other useful. They had overlapping interests, and neither is exactly burdened by ethics.

But given how little we know, how confident can we be that Epstein was a formal intelligence source, tasked, handled, and operating on behalf of the Kremlin?

To assess the likelihood of any relationship, it helps to start with a basic difference in how Russian and Western intelligence services conceptualize their mission.

In the West, intelligence agencies primarily collect and analyze information to inform policymakers.

In Russia, intelligence is not merely an input to foreign policy; it is an instrument of foreign policy, sometimes even a weapon.

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Since the Bolshevik era, Russian security services have been oriented first and foremost toward regime security rather than “national security” in the Western sense.

In practical terms, the core mission is to keep the leadership in power at any cost.

Abroad, **Russian services** play an active, offensive role: conducting influence operations, spreading disinformation and subversion, amplifying propaganda, manipulating perceptions, and sowing discord.

At home, they reinforce political control by shaping the information environment and crushing dissent.

This posture reflects a political culture in which espionage and subversion are treated as routine tools of statecraft and internal governance, reinforced by a leadership class with deep roots in the Soviet security apparatus.

In recent months, European governments and security services have publicly attributed incidents ranging from arson and sabotage plots to cyberattacks and disruption targeting energy or other critical infrastructure.

An informal, corruption-based hierarchy

Even in agent-running, there are important differences. As I argued in an earlier article asking whether Donald Trump fit the mold of a **Russian agent**, public Western figures like Epstein and Trump don't map neatly onto the classic Western model of spy handling.

Western services seek covert, controlled sources who reliably follow tasking.

Russian services, by contrast, have long been willing to draw value from a wide range of individuals and groups who can benefit Kremlin interests, whether or not they operate as *witting*, undercover spies.

Stability—such as it is—rests on dependency and fear: everyone is complicit, and everyone is vulnerable

In the Russian system, where legal safeguards are weak and power is personalized, elites and intermediaries behave as if they are under constant threat of personal, political, or financial exposure.

The result is an informal, corruption-based hierarchy, structured around who holds *kompromat* on whom, that organizes behavior and constrains choice.

Even the perception that *kompromat* exists

can push people to accommodate state interests, hedge their relationships, and avoid confrontation.

Stability—such as it is—rests on dependency and fear: everyone is complicit, and everyone is vulnerable.

The U.S. model of clandestine intelligence

In the U.S. model of clandestine intelligence, the defining feature of agent handling is control.

Case officers prize sources who can deliver unique, sensitive information over time and who reliably follow direction, so the relationship stays covert, secure, and productive.

In that framework, an “agent” is not simply someone who is sympathetic or helpful, but someone who can be tasked, managed, protected, and counted on to operate within strict tradecraft.

Without control, the risks—exposure, misinformation, and blowback—rise sharply, and the intelligence value often drops.

The Russian approach overlaps but is more elastic. The CIA prefers to recruit and run fully vetted clandestine sources, but Russian services have historically been more comfortable drawing value from a broader ecosystem of relationships—especially if those connections advance Kremlin interests even when they don't meet the cloak-and-dagger definition of a controlled spy.

The Kremlin is satisfied cultivating propagandists, witting collaborators, sympathizers, hackers, students, oligarchs, and other loosely connected helpers

Throughout the Cold War, that meant leveraging everyone from recruited

penetrations to semi-witting intermediaries and ideological fellow travelers.

In practice, it can include extremists, fringe political actors, propagandists, sympathetic influencers, criminal facilitators, and technical operators such as hackers, alongside traditional recruited agents.

In this view, a journalist who accepts background material without taking direction, a sympathetic public figure who echoes preferred narratives, or an operator who enables influence and access can still be “useful,” even if they are not reliably controllable in the American sense.

Russians have a blunt term for some of these relationships: “useful idiots”.

The Kremlin is satisfied cultivating propagandists, witting collaborators, sympathizers, hackers, students, oligarchs, and other loosely connected helpers who amplify narratives, funnel resources, destabilize adversaries, or open doors.

Epstein's experience may parallel Trump's

This contrast matters for how Moscow might engage someone like Epstein. Under the U.S. paradigm, a relationship that can't be controlled, or can't safely be tasked for protected, unique intelligence, often looks like more trouble than it's worth.

In Russia, the threshold can be lower: if an individual can provide access, introductions, compromising leverage, narrative amplification, or occasional facilitation, that can be enough to sustain an informal, plausibly deniable relationship.



Epstein's experience may parallel Trump's: not necessarily a controlled agent, but a figure whose incentives and behavior could nonetheless align with, and advance, Russia's dirty objectives

In other words, Moscow may not need to “recruit and control” such a person as a classic agent if it can instead treat him as a periodic enabler, someone who helps move influence, money, or ideas in mutually beneficial ways.

I suspect Epstein served Moscow's interests in this way. Epstein was willing to engage with dirty money, prostitution, and kompromat.

He likely saw it as a way to make money, build contacts abroad, and obtain leverage over high-flyers at home. A win-win for history's losers.

Was he working directly or covertly for the Russians? Does it matter? He may not have been a spy in the Western sense, yet he still may have caused as much damage as any highly placed mole.

In that respect, Epstein's experience may parallel Trump's: not necessarily a controlled agent, but a figure whose incentives and behavior could nonetheless align with, and advance, Russia's dirty objectives.

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