

BETWEEN

(1) ALEKSEJ GUBAREV
(2) WEBZILLA B.V.
(3) WEBZILLA LIMITED
(4) XBT HOLDING S.A

Claimants

and

(1) ORBIS BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE LIMITED
(2) CHRISTOPHER STEELE

Defendants

**DEFENDANTS' RESPONSE TO CLAIMANTS' REQUEST FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION PURSUANT TO CPR PART 18**

Under paragraphs 7 and 8

Of: "At all material times Fusion was subject to an obligation not to disclose to third parties confidential intelligence material provided to it by the Defendants in the course of that working relationship without the agreement of the Defendants."

REQUESTS

1. Whether the alleged duty of confidentiality is said to arise by contract or in equity.
2. If by contract, state whether the duty arose under (a) a general contract of retainer; or (b) specific contracts relating to the specific work.
3. In either event state whether any contract(s) relied on were written or oral; if oral, stating when and between whom they were made.

RESPONSE

The duty arose both by contract and in equity. A written non-disclosure agreement was concluded between the First Defendant and a representative of Fusion in January 2010 in relation to work conducted by Fusion for the First Defendant. Furthermore, Fusion was aware of the confidentiality of intelligence reports through the course of business with the Defendants and, in relation to the disclosure of the memoranda to Mr Kramer, the Second Defendant and Fusion had had specific discussions in which the confidentiality of the memoranda had been emphasised and Fusion was instructed to inform Mr Kramer of their confidentiality.

REQUEST

4. State whether the alleged duty not to disclose such intelligence to 'third parties' without the prior agreement of the Defendants in the course of the working relationship extended to disclosure by Fusion to their own clients (ie the clients who had commissioned the intelligence material: see paragraph 6 of the Defence).

RESPONSE

In relation to the pre-election memoranda the duty not to disclose intelligence to third parties without the prior agreement of the Defendants did not extend to disclosure by Fusion to its client(s), although the Defendants understand that copies of the memoranda were not disclosed by Fusion to its client(s).

In relation to the December memorandum, this was not prepared pursuant to any contract as stated at paragraph 18 of the Defence. The duty not to disclose this intelligence report to third parties without the prior agreement of the Defendants therefore did extend to disclosure by Fusion to its client(s).

REQUEST

5. State whether the Defendants owed any reciprocal duty of confidence to Fusion and/or Fusion's clients in relation to the intelligence they provided.

RESPONSE

Since it was not produced pursuant to the engagement with Fusion described at paragraph 9 of the Defence, the Defendants did not owe any obligation of confidence to Fusion and/or Fusion's client(s) in relation to the intelligence contained in the December memorandum.

REQUEST

6. State whether Fusion's clients, insofar as disclosure to them was permitted (see Request 4), were under any duty to the Defendants and/or Fusion not to (a) use and/or (b) disclose the intelligence, and, if so, give like particulars as to how that duty is alleged to arise.

RESPONSE

The response to question 4 above is repeated. The Defendants understood that the arrangement between Fusion and its client(s) was that intelligence would not be disclosed. As explained above, the December memorandum was not produced pursuant to the engagement referred to at paragraph 9 of the Defence and therefore disclosure of the December memorandum to their client(s) was not permitted.

Under paragraphs 9 and 10

Of "Between June and early November 2016 Orbis was engaged by Fusion to prepare a series of confidential memoranda based on intelligence concerning Russian efforts to influence the US Presidential election process and links between Russia and Donald Trump".

REQUEST

7. Please identify (see paragraph 6 of the Defence) Fusion's client(s) in relation to this particular engagement.

RESPONSE

This request is neither reasonably necessary nor proportionate to enable the Claimants to prepare their own case nor to understand the case they have to meet.

Of "The Defendants produced sixteen such memoranda. These will be referred to for convenience as 'the pre-election memoranda', having been prepared before the 2016 US Presidential election. The last one was produced in the latter part of October 2016. None were produced in November 2016. None of the pre-election memoranda contained any reference to, or intelligence about, the Claimants".

REQUEST

8. In view of the assertion that no memoranda were produced in November 2016, please state the nature of the engagement in early November 2016 as referred to in paragraph 9, and whether this engagement was performed and what intelligence it related to.

RESPONSE

The nature of the Defendants' engagement by Fusion did not change during the period between the preparation of the last pre-election memorandum on 20 October 2016 and the date of the US Presidential election. However since the Defendants did not receive any relevant intelligence concerning Russian efforts to influence the US Presidential election process and links between Russia and Donald Trump during this period, no memoranda were produced pursuant to the engagement after 20 October 2016.

Under paragraphs 12 and 13

Of "Senator John McCain is the Chair of the US Senate Armed Services Committee and a member of the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs" and "David Kramer is a former US State Department civil servant and was US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor from 2008 to 2009. He is the Senior Director for Human Rights and Human Freedoms at Senator McCain's Institute for International Leadership".

REQUEST

9. Please confirm (as paragraph 29b(i) of the Defence suggests) that Senator McCain and Mr Kramer are alleged (a) to have been acting in these official capacities; and (b) only in relation to those capacities in the course of the matters pleaded in paragraphs 14 to 17 and 21b; and, if not, identify any other capacity in which they were acting and when and for what purpose(s).

RESPONSE

The Defendants believed that Senator McCain and Mr Kramer were acting only in their official capacities and were not informed of any other capacity or purpose in which they were acting. There were no grounds that led the Defendants to suspect that Senator McCain and Mr Kramer were not acting in their official capacities at any time up to and including the publication of the December memorandum to Mr Kramer.

Under paragraph 14

Of "As a result of these discussions Sir Andrew arranged for the Second Defendant to meet Mr Kramer, as the representative of Senator McCain, in order to show him the pre-election memoranda on a confidential basis".

REQUEST

10. State what is meant by 'on a confidential basis', indicating precisely what use or uses Senator McCain was/were permitted to make of the pre-election memoranda and whether these uses were specified to Senator McCain and Mr Kramer.

RESPONSE

The Defendants understood that the contents of the memoranda would be treated in the strictest confidence and would only be used by Senator McCain in his official capacity for the sole purpose of analysing, investigating and verifying their contents to enable such action to be taken as necessary for the purposes of protecting US national security. The Second Defendant expressly informed Mr Kramer that the pre-election memoranda were only to be used for this exclusive purpose before he showed Mr Kramer any of the memoranda. Mr Kramer was not at this time provided with copies of the memoranda that had been prepared as at that date, but was shown copies.

Under paragraph 18

Of "The Defendants continued to receive unsolicited intelligence on the matters covered by the pre-election memoranda after the US Presidential election and the conclusion of the assignment for Fusion".

REQUEST

11. Please state whether such intelligence was actively sought by the Second Defendant or merely received (as presently pleaded).

RESPONSE

Such intelligence was not actively sought; it was merely received.

Under paragraph 19

Of "After receiving some such intelligence the Second Defendant prepared the confidential December memorandum, referred to at paragraph 8.1, on his own initiative on or around 13 December 2016".

REQUEST

12. Please state whether the words 'on his own initiative' mean that the December memorandum was not (a) created; or (b) provided to Fusion pursuant to any contract. If not, please specify the contract in question.

RESPONSE

The December memorandum was not created or provided to Fusion pursuant to any contract.

Under paragraph 20

Of "The Defendants considered, correctly, that the raw intelligence in the December memorandum: a. was of considerable importance in relation to alleged Russian interference in the US Presidential election; b. had implications for the national security of the US and the UK; and c. needed to be analysed and further investigated/verified".

REQUEST

13. Please state whether the Second Defendant only reached this conclusion on behalf of the First Defendant or whether Christopher Burrows and/or Sir Andrew were party to his assessment.

RESPONSE

The Defendants' assessment that the pre-election memoranda and any subsequent related intelligence which they received should be disclosed to the individuals referred to at paragraph 21 of the Defence was reached following separate discussions between the Second Defendant and (i) Christopher Burrows of the First Defendant; (ii) Sir Andrew Wood (who had spoken with Senator McCain); (iii) David Kramer (who was acting on behalf of Senator McCain) and (iv) the UK national security official referred to at paragraph 21(b) of the Defence. Mr Burrows shared the Second Defendant's assessment at the relevant time. The Defendants considered that the issues were self-evidently relevant to the national security of the US, UK and their allies and that subsequent intelligence relating to these issues ought to be disclosed to the individuals referred to at paragraph 21 of the Defence. Each of the individuals with whom the Second Defendant discussed the issue shared this view at the time and, to the Second Defendant's knowledge and belief, continue to hold that view.

Under paragraph 20c and 21

REQUEST

14. Please state whether the December memorandum was provided to (a) the UK national security official; and/or (b) Fusion; and/or (c) Mr Kramer and Senator McCain with the source of the allegations against the Claimants redacted or not.

RESPONSE

Information pertaining to the status of the source(s) of the intelligence contained within the December memorandum was not redacted when it was provided to either the UK national security official and/or Fusion and/or Mr Kramer and Senator McCain. The information contained within the intelligence reports pertaining to the status of the source(s) was consistent with the Defendants' conscious efforts to protect the identity of the source(s).

REQUEST

15. Please state whether the instruction to Fusion contained any express reference to confidentiality (contrast paragraph 21a which expressly refers to 'on a confidential basis').

RESPONSE

In the Second Defendant's communications with Fusion surrounding the provision of the instruction by enciphered email, it was explicitly stated that the memoranda were only to be provided to Mr Kramer for the purpose of passing them on to Senator McCain. Substantive conversations between the Second Defendant and Fusion relating to this matter were conducted using secure telephone communications. During those secure communications, the Second Defendant expressly emphasised that the December memorandum was subject to the same strict restrictions on disclosure to third parties as were contained in the written agreement described in the response to requests 1 to 3 above.

Under paragraph 21a and b

Of "Accordingly the Second Defendant provided a copy of the December memorandum to: a. a senior UK government national security official acting in his official capacity, on a confidential basis in hard copy form; and b. Fusion, by enciphered email with an instruction to Fusion to provide a hard copy to Sen. McCain via Mr Kramer".

REQUEST

16. Please state whether intelligence provided by the Defendants to Fusion was generally provided in enciphered form.

RESPONSE

Intelligence provided by the Defendants to Fusion was provided securely and where provided electronically it was provided in enciphered form.

Under paragraphs 23 and 24

Of "It is denied that in their natural and ordinary meaning, in their proper context, the words complained of bore or were capable of bearing the meaning pleaded at paragraph 7" and "Read in context the natural and ordinary meaning of the words complained of was that there were grounds to investigate whether the Claimants had been coerced by Russia into hacking the computers used by the US Democratic Party leadership, transmitting viruses, planting bugs, stealing data and conducting altering operations".

REQUEST

17. Please identify the context relied on and the reader(s) to whom it was allegedly known.

RESPONSE

The readers referred to are the readers of the December memorandum who accessed and read the words complained of via the article that was published on the BuzzFeed website on 10 January 2017.

The December memorandum was a raw intelligence report which contained information gathered from a confidential source(s) about various national security issues that warranted further investigation.

Further, the words complained of were published by BuzzFeed as part of an article which stressed that the contents of the dossier (which included the December memorandum) were "*unverified*", "*unconfirmed*" and contained "*unverified, and potentially unverifiable allegations*". The article added that, "*BuzzFeed News reporters in the US and Europe have been investigating the alleged facts in the dossier but have not verified or falsified them.*" The article reported that the President-elect's attorney, Michael Cohen, had said that allegations in the dossier "*were absolutely false*".

In these circumstances, readers of the words complained of were therefore aware that (i) the contents of the December memorandum did not represent (and did not purport to represent) verified facts, but were raw intelligence which had identified a range of allegations that warranted investigation given their potential national security implications; (ii) persons mentioned in the December memorandum were unlikely to have been approached for comment, and therefore many of those persons were likely to deny the allegations contained in the raw intelligence; and (iii) while the December memorandum was prepared in good faith, its content must be critically viewed in light of the purpose for and circumstances in which the information was collected.

Under paragraph 32

Of "Save that it is admitted that the Second Defendant gave off the record briefings to a small number of journalists about the pre-election memoranda in late summer/autumn 2016, sub-paragraph 8.2.6 is denied".

REQUEST

18. Please identify the journalists briefed by the Second Defendant and state when and how the briefing was done in each case and the gist of what was conveyed.

RESPONSE

The journalists initially briefed at the end of September 2016 by the Second Defendant and Fusion at Fusion's instruction were from the New York Times, the Washington Post, Yahoo News, the New Yorker and CNN. The Second Defendant subsequently participated in further meetings at Fusion's instruction with Fusion and the New York Times, the Washington Post and Yahoo News, which took place in mid-October 2016. In each of those cases the briefing was conducted verbally in person. In addition, and again at Fusion's instruction, in late October 2016 the Second Defendant briefed a journalist from Mother Jones by Skype. No copies of the pre-election memoranda were ever shown or provided to any journalists by, or with the authorisation of, the Defendants. The briefings involved the disclosure of limited intelligence regarding indications of Russian interference in the US election process and the possible co-ordination of members of Trump's campaign team and Russian government officials.

REQUEST

19. Please state what is meant by 'off the record' and, in particular whether it means:
- (a) The information provided was not to be published (but might be used);
 - (b) The information might be published but not attributed to the Defendants in any way;
 - (c) As (b), but the Defendants could be generically described, but not by name.

RESPONSE

The Second Defendant understood that the information provided might be used for the purpose of further research, but would not be published or attributed. The Defendants repeat that no off the record briefing ever took place concerning the December memorandum, and no copies of any of the pre-election memoranda or the December memorandum were ever provided to journalists by, or with the authorisation of, the Defendants.

REQUEST

20. Please state whether these terms were agreed to by the journalists concerned.

RESPONSE

The Second Defendant was told by Fusion that the terms had been explained to the relevant journalists in advance by them and the Second Defendant reinforced the basis on which he was speaking to each of the journalists he met in person. None of the journalists raised any objection.

Under paragraphs 36 to 39

REQUEST

21. Please state whether the defence of qualified privilege is relied on by the Defendants if they are held to be liable for publication to the world at large as distinct from the admitted publication to the individuals identified by the Defendants in the Defence.

RESPONSE

Yes.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

The Defendants believe that the facts stated in this Response are true.

Signed:



Nicola Cain

Position: Legal Director, RPC; Defendants' legal representative

Date: 18 May 2017

Claim No. HQ17D00413

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION**

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(2) CHRISTOPHER STEELE

Defendants

**DEFENDANTS' RESPONSE TO
PART 18 REQUEST**

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