

The KGB cultivated Donald Trump as an asset for 40 years, and he proved a highly valuable asset in repeating anti-Western Russian propaganda in the United States, a former KGB operative told The Guardian.

Yuri Shvets is a key source in "American Kompromat," a new book detailing the decades-long relationship between Trump and Russia by the journalist Craig Unger.

The book, which is based on interviews with former Russian and US operatives, details the KGB's attempts in the 1980s to cultivate dozens of unwitting businesspeople in the United States as useful Russian assets.

Shvets told The Guardian that the KGB had identified Trump, then an up-and-coming property developer, as a potential asset in the 1980s.

"This is an example where people were recruited when they were just students and then they rose to important positions; something like that was happening with Trump," Shvets told the paper.

The book's author said Trump became a target for the Russians in 1977 when he married his first wife, the Czech model Ivana Zelnickova.

"He was an asset. It was not this grand, ingenious plan that we're going to develop this guy and 40 years later he'll be president," Unger told The Guardian.

Unger added: "Trump was the perfect target in a lot of ways: his vanity, narcissism made him a natural target to recruit. He was cultivated over a 40-year period, right up through his election."

Trump's 1987 book, "The Art of the Deal," described a visit to Moscow to discuss building "a large luxury hotel across the street from the Kremlin in partnership with the Soviet government."

In fact, Shvets said, Russian operatives used the trip to flatter Trump and told him he should go into politics. Shvets told The Guardian that KGB operatives were then stunned to discover that Trump had returned to the United States, mulled a run for office, and taken out a full-page ad in several newspapers that echoed anti-Western Russian talking points.

The ad, which ran in The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Boston Globe, was titled "There's nothing wrong with America's Foreign Defense Policy that a little backbone can't cure."

The ad accused Japan and other countries of "taking advantage" of the United States and said the US should stop paying to defend other rich countries — arguments that would become the backbone of his foreign policy when he became president decades later.

Shvets said the ad was considered an "unprecedented" success in Russia's attempts to promote anti-Western talking points in American media.

Trump has long denied that he has any financial connections to Russia. "Russia has never tried to use leverage over me," he tweeted in 2017. "I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA - NO DEALS, NO LOANS, NO NOTHING!"

The special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US election ultimately found that Trump's campaign did not coordinate with Russia to influence the election.

Several senior members of Trump's campaign, including his national security advisor Michael Flynn and his campaign advisor George Papadopoulos, pleaded guilty to lying to prosecutors about their contacts with people linked to the Russian government.

Michael Cohen, Trump's personal lawyer, also pleaded guilty in 2018 to lying to a Senate committee about plans to build a Trump Tower in Moscow.

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