

Soon afterward, the lawyers suing the Justice Department interviewed Ms. [REDACTED] and asked her if any of Mr. Epstein's friends might have information about his exploitation of girls. When they mentioned Mr. Dershowitz, she replied, "Yes," according to a transcript of the 2011 call.

But last December, Mr. Dershowitz was drawn into the Justice Department lawsuit in an entirely different way. In a motion filed that month, Ms. [REDACTED] claimed that she and Mr. Dershowitz had sex when she was a minor aboard Mr. Epstein's plane and at the money manager's homes in New York, New Mexico and the Virgin Islands. She also asserted that Mr. Epstein had "sexually trafficked" her to other powerful friends, including Prince Andrew, the Duke of York. Buckingham Palace rejected the claims against the prince.

The judge later struck Ms. [REDACTED] motion from the court filing, but by then, the accusations were being widely reported and broadcast. Mr. Dershowitz's phone was ringing with calls from reporters seeking comment. At every opportunity, he called Ms. [REDACTED] claims "outrageous falsehoods" and called the lawyers who had made the filing, Mr. Edwards and Mr. Cassell, "villains" who helped fabricate the claims against him.

Mr. Dershowitz said he would seek to have them disbarred, adding he had diary records and other information to show he was not at locations where Ms. [REDACTED] claimed they had met. "They're prepared to lie, cheat and steal," Mr. Dershowitz said in an interview on CNN in January.

The two lawyers, who declined to be interviewed for this article, filed a defamation lawsuit against Mr. Dershowitz, who responded with his own counterclaim.

Mr. Boies's firm soon entered the fray. In late 2014, a lawyer at the firm, Boies, Schiller and Flexner, agreed to represent Ms. [REDACTED] in legal matters not directly related to the Justice Department lawsuit. When Mr. Dershowitz's name surfaced in that lawsuit, another lawyer at the firm agreed to represent him before realizing that Ms. [REDACTED] was already a client. After the lawyer withdrew, Mr. Dershowitz expressed anger, saying that he had already told the firm his legal strategy before he was made aware of the conflict.

Mr. Boies called the claim frivolous. "This idea of going to the press and asserting there is a conflict when you are not willing to make that claim in court is irresponsible," said the lawyer, who is perhaps best known for representing the Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore against George W. Bush in his challenge to the 2000 election results.

That incident, however, was only the start of an escalating battle in which each man has accused the other of twisting words and spewing falsehoods. In October, during a deposition in the defamation case against him, Mr. Dershowitz testified that he had received a confidential phone call from a female friend of Ms. [REDACTED], who provided him with troubling information.

According to Mr. Dershowitz's testimony, the woman said that Ms. [REDACTED] had told her that she had been pressured to level sexual charges at Mr. Dershowitz. She also described a plan to accuse Mr. Wexner of having sex with Ms. [REDACTED] when she was underage.

"Virginia and her lawyers hoped to get \$1 billion, B-I-L-L-I-O-N, \$1 billion or half of his net worth," Mr. Dershowitz testified he was told, calling the plan an "extortion" attempt.

A lawyer for Mr. Wexner, John W. Zeiger, did not respond to telephone calls. But a person briefed on the matter but who was not authorized to speak publicly about it said that Mr. Wexner had never met Ms. [REDACTED] and no extortion attempt was made.

Mr. Dershowitz says he wants nothing more than for Ms. [REDACTED] to publicly retract her claims. He insists that Mr. Boies privately told him that he believed Mr. Dershowitz was innocent and that Ms. [REDACTED], while believing the allegations, was mistaken or confused.

Mr. Boies says Mr. Dershowitz's claims are ludicrous. "I never said to him that I concluded that my clients' assertions were incorrect," he said. "I didn't say that. I didn't say anything like that."

On Friday, Mr. Dershowitz filed an affidavit in a Florida state court, containing notes of his conversations with Mr. Boies that he says support his account. In it, he described Mr. Boies as telling him that if his client refused to withdraw her claim, "he could not ethically continue to represent her."

Hours later, Mr. Boies's firm asked the Florida judge to seal Mr. Dershowitz's affidavit, and in a related filing, Mr. Boies described some of Mr. Dershowitz's assertions as "misleading" or "flatly untrue."

In this intensifying game of legal chicken, it is not clear who will flinch first. Ms. [REDACTED] seems unwilling to yield and used a recent court filing to fire back at Mr. Dershowitz.

"He is lying by denying that he had sex with me," said Ms. [REDACTED], who declined to be interviewed for this article.

Mr. Dershowitz says he is no longer friendly with Mr. Epstein, who lives once again in his lavish Upper East side mansion. Still, like it or not, the lawyer remains tethered to him. Having defended Mr. Epstein, he said that he could not express his feelings about him.

Several well-known criminal defense lawyers said that personal attacks were an occupational hazard. "Alan has never shied away from a fight in his life," said Abbe D. Lowell, a lawyer in Washington whose clients have included the lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who was convicted of corruption in 2006. "He has been that kind of lightning rod."