

THE MOSCOW PROJECT

Everything You Need To Know About Paul Manafort, Contextualized

By: Moscow Project Staff

At a Glance:

- **Background:**
 - Co-founded the lobbying firm Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly, which [became known as “The Torturers’ Lobby”](#) for its work on behalf of dictators like Ferdinand Marcos and Mobutu Sese Seko and rebel leader Jonas Savimbi
 - From 2004 to 2014, worked in Ukraine on behalf of the pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich and the Party of Regions and oligarchs Rinat Akhmetov and Dmytro Firtash
 - Longtime friend and business partner of Roger Stone, who informally advised Trump and [claimed to have back-channel communications](#) with Julian Assange and Guccifer 2.0 while working for the Trump campaign
- **The Russia Connection:**
 - Joined the Trump campaign as the campaign chairman after working for Russian interests in Ukraine
 - While serving as the top official on the campaign reportedly offered personal briefings about the campaign to the Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska
 - Attended the now infamous June 9 meeting at Trump Tower with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya; Russian lobbyist and alleged spy Rinat Akhmetshin; interpreter Anatoli Samachornov; an associate of the Agalarovs, Ike Kaveladze; publicist Rob Goldstone; Donald Trump, Jr.; and Jared Kushner

Introduction

Paul Manafort is a longtime American consultant and political operative working for several Republican presidential campaigns going back to Gerald Ford’s 1976 race. After serving in the Reagan administration Manafort began a long career as a consultant and lobbyist working for some of the world’s most brutal and oppressive dictators – including in Eastern Europe.

Manafort took the helm of the Trump campaign after Corey Lewandowski’s departure in June 2016 and managed it until the “off the book” payments to Manafort from Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions drew national attention.

The picture that emerges is one of a man with both the connections and motivation to collude with Russia to help Donald Trump get elected President of the United States.

The Russia Connection, Part One: Viktor Yanukovich and the Party of Regions

Prior to joining the Trump campaign in March 2016, Paul Manafort worked extensively for more than a decade to advance Russian interests in Ukraine and the United States.

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Manafort's association with Ukrainian and Russian politics began in 2004, when he started working for the pro-Russian Ukrainian politician Viktor Yanukovich. That year, Yanukovich and his Party of Regions, were involved in a disastrous and scandal-plagued election. According to public-opinion polls, Yanukovich, at the time Ukraine's prime minister, trailed by double digits going into November 21, election day. After [initial results](#) showed Yanukovich with a three-point victory, international watchdogs [identified numerous irregularities](#), raising allegations of ballot-box stuffing, intimidation at polling stations, and massive increases in voter rolls and turnout in eastern regions of the country that heavily favored Yanukovich. Additionally, Yanukovich's opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, [had been poisoned and nearly assassinated](#) in September. In response, the Ukrainian people took to the streets, and their widespread protests became known as [the Orange Revolution](#), the first of several pro-democracy "color" revolutions around the world. Amid these protests and in response to growing international pressure, Ukraine's Supreme Court voided the election results and [declared a re-vote](#), to take place on December 26.

Manafort's work with Yanukovich began when the Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov [recruited Manafort to assist with the second election](#). At the time, Manafort was known not only for his work as an American political operative with ties to the Republican establishment but also for his willingness to represent unsavory characters around the world. Through the lobbying firm Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly, which he cofounded in 1980, Manafort had previously [worked on behalf of dictators around the world](#), including notorious human rights abusers such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, and Jonas Savimbi of Angola; those contracts and others led to Manafort's firm receiving the nickname "The Torturers' Lobby."

Manafort was unable to help Yanukovich in time for the 2004 re-election: Yushchenko [won by more than seven percent](#), and Yanukovich [resigned from his post as prime minister](#). However, Akhmetov convinced Yanukovich and the Party of Regions to not only retain Manafort but bring in additional American political consultants in advance of the 2006 parliamentary elections. According to [a leaked U.S. State Department cable](#), Manafort and his team, which worked under the umbrella of his lobbying firm Davis, Manafort, and Freedman, were tasked with giving the party an "extreme makeover" and "change its image from that of a haven for mobsters into that of a legitimate political party." To that effect, Manafort [assisted the Party of Regions](#) in developing a new campaign slogan—"A Better Life Today"—and helped Yanukovich improve his speeches and interviews.

Both then and now, Manafort's work for Yanukovich and the Party of Regions stood out because it made him one of the few American consultants to work with pro-Russia politicians in Eastern Europe. Yanukovich and the Party of Regions derive much of their support from Ukraine's pro-Russian eastern regions through proposals like [adopting Russian as Ukraine's official language](#) and [opposing Ukraine's possible entrance into NATO](#). In 2005, the Party of Regions even [signed a collaboration agreement with United Russia](#), Vladimir Putin's political party.

In the leadup to the 2006 parliamentary elections, Manafort [encouraged Yanukovich to attempt](#) to bring in voters from both sides of the political divide by broadcasting skepticism about NATO to the east

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and support for the European Union to the west. With this approach, Yanukovych and the Party of Regions [made major strides in the 2006 parliamentary election](#), winning 32.1 percent of the vote and a plurality of seats in the Ukrainian parliament, making Yanukovych prime minister once again.

However, Yanukovych's posturing seems to contradict his actual political leanings. [According to a leaked State Department cable](#), the Party of Regions played a major role in stoking anti-NATO protests that led to an attack on U.S. marines in Crimea even as Yanukovych publicly stated that he was open to joining NATO. After Yanukovych again lost his seat as prime minister in 2007, he [tacked once more toward Russia](#), organizing the opposition against Yushchenko's pro-NATO rhetoric. In 2008, Yanukovych spoke at a congress for the aforementioned United Russia party. And when Yanukovych was elected president in 2010—on [a platform](#) calling to end Ukraine's bid to join NATO and "restore its relations with Russia"—he [appointed ethnically-Russian officials](#) to nearly all of the most important government positions, renounced his former support for Ukraine's entrance into NATO and the European Union, and prosecuted political rivals associated with the Orange Revolution, including former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Ultimately, Yanukovych was [ousted in February 2014](#) during the Euromaidan Revolution over his perceived corruption and ties to Putin, at which point the former president fled to Russia. The Russian government [seized on the ensuing chaos](#) to invade Crimea.

Throughout the period, Manafort remained part of Yanukovych's political team. [According to Taras Berezovets](#), who served as an advisor to Tymoshenko during her tenure as prime minister, Manafort actively encouraged Yanukovych to exploit wedge issues to shore up his support in eastern Ukraine. Berezovets [credits Manafort](#) with Yanukovych's support for adopting Russian as Ukraine's official state language and use of anti-NATO propaganda.

Though American political consultants working for and lobbying on behalf of foreign governments is relatively common, details that have since surfaced suggesting Manafort's work in Ukraine raise serious questions. Manafort continued to work with the Party of Regions after Yanukovych fled, reportedly [helping multiple members hold onto or take seats in parliament](#) and [advising a pro-Russian candidate for mayor of Kiev](#). On top of his official salary, in August 2016, anti-corruption investigators in Ukraine [discovered a "black ledger"](#) listing \$12.7 million in previously undisclosed cash payments to Manafort from the Party of Regions between 2007 and 2012. (Manafort's lawyer [has said](#) that Manafort did not receive "any such cash payments.") And for at least part of the time that Manafort worked with the Party of Regions, he did so as an unregistered foreign agent, only [properly registering for his work in Ukraine](#) between 2012 to 2014 in June of 2017.

Manafort allegedly also developed a track record of parlaying his work as a political consultant into lucrative business deals most notably with the Russian billionaire Dmitry Firtash. Firtash, whom [Bloomberg has described](#) as "Putin's handpicked surrogate" in the Ukrainian natural gas industry, reportedly also has extensive ties to organized crime and is under indictment in the U.S. for his alleged involvement in a bribery scheme to establish a \$500-million titanium business in India. (Firtash [denies the allegations](#), saying they are politically motivated; in a 45-page [motion to dismiss](#), his lawyers also dispute whether U.S. authorities have jurisdiction over the matter.) Additionally, in a civil court case

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filed in the U.S. in 2011, Tymoshenko [alleged](#) that Manafort and Firtash collaborated on a Manhattan real-estate project that doubled as a money-laundering operation. Meanwhile, according to the court filings, Manafort was helping Firtash set up a \$100-million investment fund for foreign investments. Firtash has [denied](#) the charges and accused Tymoshenko of lying, while Manafort has [said](#) that the deal with Firtash “never got off the ground;” the case was ultimately [rejected](#) on jurisdictional grounds. Manafort also reportedly did business with Akhmetov, who introduced Manafort to the Party of Regions in the first place, reportedly [advising Akhmetov](#) on strategy for one of his companies.

[According to CNN](#), the FBI has been investigating Manafort’s extensive unregistered work in Ukraine since at least 2014. That year, the FBI received a warrant from a secret federal court to surveil Manafort’s communications, including by wiretapping his phones, under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). *The Wall Street Journal* [has reported](#) that U.S. intelligence officials picked up conversations between Manafort and Russian operatives in 2015, although whether those conversations were picked up through surveillance of Manafort’s phones or those of the Russians remains unknown. After the initial FISA warrant expired in 2016, the FBI [received a second warrant](#) that extended at least into early 2017, although sources have said that the FBI was not listening to his communications in June 2016.

The Russia Connection, Part Two: Oleg Deripaska

Manafort also has a long track record of business with Oleg Deripaska, a Russian oligarch and aluminum magnate who [was described in a 2006 diplomatic cable](#) as “among the 2-3 oligarchs Putin turns to on a regular basis” and “a more-or-less permanent fixture on Putin’s trips abroad.”

Deripaska began his rise to fortune and prominence when he was appointed director of the Sayanks Aluminum Factory in Siberia. At the time, the Russian aluminum industry was in the throes of the so-called “Aluminum Wars,” an intra-industry power struggle during which business leaders allegedly allied with organized crime. Over the course of nearly a decade, it is believed that [roughly 100 aluminum executives were murdered](#) by hired killers; many more, [including Deripaska’s financial director](#), only narrowly escaped death. By the time the Aluminum Wars were resolved in 2000, Deripaska had [emerged as the undisputed leader of the industry](#) as the general manager of Russian Aluminum, or Rusal, the country’s largest and the world’s third-largest aluminum company. Though Deripaska has denied any involvement with, and was [never directly implicated](#) in, the violence of the Aluminum Wars, enough suspicion lingered that the U.S. State Department has repeatedly denied him a business visa, and [he has reportedly been interviewed by the FBI](#) on several occasions. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Deripaska “accused American authorities of trying to blackmail him by revoking his visa” and “denied providing sensitive information to the FBI,” while a spokesman said that “Deripaska has no travel restrictions to any country including the U.S.”

The conflict left Deripaska a billionaire with close ties to the Russian government. Though his net worth appears to have [peaked at \\$28 billion in 2008](#), just before global stock markets crashed, *Forbes* currently [estimates his net worth](#) at \$6.4 billion. [According to The New York Times](#), in 2001, Deripaska “established his political bona fides by marrying a woman who would soon become the

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step-granddaughter of former President Boris N. Yeltsin, a marriage that was Russia’s social event of the year;” the connection helped him gain access to Putin’s inner circle of advisers.

It is unclear when Manafort and Deripaska first met. However, by 2005 they had established enough of a relationship that, according to the Associated Press, Manafort [pitched to Deripaska](#) a plan to “greatly benefit the Putin Government,” ultimately signing a \$10-million annual contract based on that plan in 2006.^[1] Though the details of the contract remain unknown, its existence has fueled further speculation regarding Manafort’s failure to register as a foreign agent during his time working in Ukraine. Manafort has [denied](#) that his work with Deripaska “involve[d] representing Russia’s political interests.” Manafort is also believed to have [helped arrange a 2008 meeting between Deripaska and then-candidate John McCain](#); though the meeting was officially organized through Manafort’s business partner Rick Davis, who was serving as McCain’s campaign manager, Deripaska reportedly emailed both Manafort and Davis to thank them for setting it up.

As it relates to Manafort’s work for Trump, though, the crux of Manafort’s business dealings with Deripaska is a failed venture they undertook beginning in 2007. That year, the pair co-founded the private-equity firm Pericles Emerging Market Partners in the Cayman Islands with the intent of investing in the Eastern European telecommunications market. [According to *The New York Times*](#), Deripaska agreed to commit as much as \$100 million to the endeavor, which began with [an investment of nearly \\$18.9 million](#) to purchase the Yanukovych-linked Ukrainian company Black Sea Cable.

However, the deal failed, leading to a falling out that has played out in part through [a lawsuit in the Cayman Islands](#). In 2014, Deripaska [sued Manafort](#) seeking to recover his \$18.9-million investment and, according to the Associated Press, [alleging that](#), “after taking the money, Manafort and his associates stopped responding to Deripaska’s queries about how the funds had been used.” Though Manafort [claimed in August 2016](#) that the legal matter had been resolved, and his spokesman Jason Maloni has [said](#) the case “is dormant and will not be pursued further,” *The Washington Post* [has disputed this account](#), saying that “there are no signs in court documents that the case has been closed.”

Subsequent revelations have suggested that Manafort may be far deeper in debt to Deripaska than previously known. [According to NBC News](#), recently-uncovered documents appear to show that a company owned by Deripaska loaned at least \$33 million to companies owned by Manafort in Cyprus. According to NBC News, this brings Manafort’s total business with Deripaska to \$60 million.

Emails obtained by journalists at [The Washington Post](#) and [The Atlantic](#) seem to indicate that Manafort saw his involvement in the Trump campaign at least in part as a means of resolving his legal conflict with, and debt to, Deripaska. [In an April 11, 2016, email conversation](#) with his former business associate Konstantin Kilimnik, Manafort reportedly asked whether “our friends,” including “OVD”—initials believed to stand for Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska—had seen the media coverage surrounding his joining the Trump campaign two weeks prior. Manafort reportedly went on to ask Kilimnik, “How do we use to get whole?”

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Emails between Manafort and Kilimnik on July 7, 2016, seem to suggest how he and Manafort believed they could use the campaign “to get whole.” According to [The Atlantic](#), on that day, Manafort emailed Kilimnik with questions he had received from the *Kyiv Post* about Black Sea Cable and asked, “Is there any movement on this issue with our friend?” In response, Kilimnik reportedly first advised Manafort to ignore the reporter, then [told him](#), “I am carefully optimistic on the issue of our biggest interest. Our friend V”—believed to refer to Victor, an aide to Deripaska—“said there is lately significantly more attention to the campaign in his boss’s mind, and he will be most likely looking for ways to reach out to you pretty soon, understanding all the time sensitivity. I am more than sure that it will be resolved and we will get back to the original relationship with V.’s boss.” Manafort reportedly replied by [suggesting](#), “If he needs private briefings we can accommodate,” apparently offering Deripaska or one of his aides private briefings on the state of the Trump campaign.

Three weeks later, on July 29, Manafort reportedly had another email conversation with Kilimnik. According to *The Atlantic*, Kilimnik [wrote to Manafort](#) saying, “I met today with the guy who gave you your biggest black caviar jar several years ago. We spent about 5 hours talking about his story, and I have several important messages from him to you. He asked me to go and brief you on our conversation. I said I have to run it by you first, but in principle I am prepared to do it, provided that he buys me a ticket. It has to do about the future of his country, and is quite interesting. So if you are not absolutely against the concept, please let me know which dates/places will work, even next week, and I could come and see you.” Manafort reportedly [responded](#) by saying, “Tuesday is best.”

According to *The Atlantic* and *The Washington Post*, the conversation is a coded continuation of the pair’s efforts to “get whole.” “Black caviar,” [investigators believe](#), “is a veiled reference to payments Manafort hoped to receive from former clients,” in which case “the guy who gave you your biggest black caviar jar several years ago” would be a person with whom Manafort had a particularly lucrative relationship several years prior. Meanwhile, the reference to “his country” [seems to indicate](#) that the Ukrainian Kilimnik is referring to a different country. Though they no longer use the initials from their earlier conversations, these clues suggest the pair are again discussing private briefings for Deripaska.

Manafort’s spokesman Maloni has [denied this interpretation](#), calling the emails “innocuous” and characterizing them as an attempt by Manafort to collect on, rather than repay, debts. Deripaska’s spokeswoman in turn [denied Maloni’s characterization](#), saying, “The suggestion that Mr. Deripaska owes money to Mr. Manafort is absurd;” she [added](#) that “There is no evidence that these or any other emails were sent by either Mr. Manafort or Mr. Kilimnik to Mr. Deripaska and they were not. Mr. Deripaska had no communications, meetings, briefings, or other interactions with Mr. Manafort during, after, or in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election or for many years prior to that time.” Kilimnik has not yet publicly commented on the subject.

According to Kilimnik, he and Manafort also [had multiple phone conversations](#) during the campaign. Manafort [has said](#) both that their conversations focused on “the smear campaign against me coming out of Ukraine” and that they discussed “an array of subjects related to the presidential campaign, including the hacking of the DNC’s emails.”

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Based on what is known of these conversations, it appears that Manafort intended to leverage his association with the Trump campaign to resolve his longstanding debts by providing a business associate with private briefings. That would be a troubling development even without the Russia connection.

The Russia Connection, Part Three: The Trump Campaign

Though Manafort's official participation in the Trump campaign lasted just less than five months, he has nevertheless emerged as a key focus of Robert Mueller's investigation into the campaign's collusion with Russia because of the timing and substance of his involvement.

Manafort has been tangentially connected with Trump since the 1980s, although there is little reason to believe they had anything more than cursory interactions prior to the 2016 election. In the 1980s, the Trump Organization briefly contracted with Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly to lobby the government on gambling and real estate. According to [a memo](#) Manafort reportedly sent his and Trump's mutual acquaintance Thomas Barrack while trying to join the Trump campaign, Manafort personally managed "the Mar a Lago FAA problem Trump had." That business interaction appears to have been the source of Trump's long and close relationship with Manafort's partner Roger Stone, a notorious Republican operative [often described as](#) a "dirty trickster" who had been attempting to convince Trump to run for president since at least 2000 and served as an informal adviser early in his 2016 campaign. In 2006, 20 years after his initial interaction with Trump, Manafort purchased an apartment in Trump Tower. However, [as Manafort himself has said](#), there is no evidence of a lasting relationship between him and Trump stemming from either interaction.

Evidence has emerged, however, suggesting that the Russian operatives saw Manafort as a potential player in their plan to influence the American election prior to his joining the Trump campaign in March 2016. [According to *The Wall Street Journal*](#), in the spring of 2015, "U.S. spy agencies captured Russian government officials discussing associates of Mr. Trump, including Mr. Manafort ... In some cases, the Russians in the overheard conversations talked about meetings held outside the U.S. involving Russian government officials and Trump business associates or advisers."

Manafort ultimately joined the Trump campaign in March 2016. His method of doing so was itself unusual: [According to *The New York Times*](#), Manafort began writing unsolicited emails to Trump offering advice about how to run the campaign in late February. According to Thomas Barrack, a long-time Trump associate who has known Manafort for decades, Manafort at one point [told him](#), "I really need to get to" Trump.

Accounts differ regarding how Manafort became an official part of the Trump campaign. According to *The Daily Beast*, Roger Stone [was the one who convinced Trump](#) to hire Manafort. *The Washington Post*, however, has reported that Barrack [acted as the conduit](#) and persuaded Trump to hire Manafort. Either way, Manafort [officially joined the campaign](#) as an unpaid adviser on March 28 to help coordinate delegate-counting efforts in advance of the Republican National Convention. Manafort would go on to [become Trump's campaign chairman](#) on May 19—still unpaid—replacing Corey Lewandowski, [who was fired for allegedly assaulting a reporter](#), although Lewandowski (and, [according to leaked text](#)

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[messages](#), Manafort's daughter) [said](#) that Manafort had been effectively in charge of the campaign for at least a month. Manafort officially ran the campaign for three months before [resigning on August 19](#).

Though Manafort did not receive an official salary for his work on the Trump campaign, it appears that he [seized upon the opportunity](#) almost immediately to begin paying down his outstanding debts. His first emails with Kilimnik regarding using the press coverage around his new position to "get whole" came on April 11, only two weeks after he joined the Trump campaign.

Several of the most pivotal moments of convergence between the Trump campaign and Russian interests occurred during Manafort's tenure as campaign chairman. On April 27, Trump and then-Senator Jeff Sessions [met with the Russian ambassador to the United States Sergey Kislyak](#) at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., reportedly [discussing](#) "matters including Trump's positions on Russia-related issues and prospects for U.S.-Russia relations in a Trump administration." That evening, Trump [gave a foreign-policy speech](#) in which he called for "an easing of tensions and improved relations with Russia."

Perhaps the single most notable occurrence during Manafort's tenure was the June 9 meeting at Trump Tower between representatives of the Trump campaign and several Russian individuals claiming to represent the Russian government and offering damaging information on Hillary Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump. [As reported by The New York Times](#) in July 2017, Donald Jr. confirmed that Manafort would be in attendance on June 7; hours later, Trump [announced at a press conference](#) that he was "going to give a major speech on probably Monday ... discussing all of the things that have taken place with the Clintons." Donald Jr. [looped Manafort into his email chain](#) with the music producer Rob Goldstone on June 8.

The next day at Trump Tower, Donald Jr., Kushner, and Manafort [met](#) with Goldstone, [the lawyer](#) Natalia Veselnitskaya, [the Russian-American lobbyist and suspected Russian agent](#) Rinat Akhmetshin, [the suspected money launderer](#) and real-estate executive Irakly Kaveladze, and their translator Anatoli Samochornov. At the meeting, the group first briefly discussed the information that Veselnitskaya claimed to have on Clinton. The attendees claim that they next discussed adoptions, which is [believed to be a euphemistic reference](#) to the Magnitsky Act, which sanctioned several high-ranking Russian officials for human-rights abuses to which Russia responded by curtailing adoptions of Russian children by American citizens. [According to CNN](#), Manafort's notes from the meeting, obtained by the FBI in [a pre-dawn raid of his home](#) in July 2017, reinforce this notion, "portray[ing] a meeting largely focused on a Russian lawyer's complaints about investment fund manager William Browder and his role in pushing sanctions legislation to punish Russia."

Interactions between the Trump campaign and Russian operatives continued throughout the summer. The second known conversation between Manafort and Kilimnik, in which the pair discuss a journalist's questions regarding the Black Sea Cable deal and Manafort appears to have [suggested providing private briefings](#) to Deripaska's aide, occurred on July 7, four days before the Republican National Convention. That same day, one of Trump's foreign-policy advisors, Carter Page, gave a speech at the New Economic School in Moscow. While he was in Russia, Page also [reportedly met with](#) the former Russian Deputy

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Prime Minister Igor Sechin and Deputy Chief for Internal Policy Igor Diveykin, both of whom are considered close allies of Putin and the latter of whom U.S. officials reportedly [identified](#) as the person in charge of “intelligence collected by Russian agencies about the U.S. election.”

The next week, the Trump campaign took one of its most direct actions toward changing official U.S. policy toward Russia. Between July 11 and 15, the Trump campaign adviser J.D. Gordon participated in the Republican Platform Committee’s meetings to create an official party platform. Gordon reportedly [lobbied the committee for only one change](#), softening the party’s stance on military support for Ukraine’s fight against Russian incursion from a call for “providing lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine’s armed forces” to merely “providing appropriate assistance to the armed forces of Ukraine.” The shift marked a major departure from previous GOP rhetoric, which [often chastised](#) the Obama administration for not providing sufficient support to Ukraine’s military. In other words, despite Trump’s many divergences from Republican orthodoxy, under Manafort, the only change the Trump campaign made to the GOP platform was softening the U.S.’s stance toward Russian aggression. (Trump campaign officials denied playing a role in the change, but numerous officials have [averred](#) that the Trump campaign was behind the new language.)

July also marked the first instance of Russia strategically leaking hacked correspondence in its efforts to influence the election. On July 20, Sessions, Page, and Gordon [met with Kislyak over lunch the RNC](#), again [discussing](#) matters related to the presidential campaign and U.S. relations with Russia. Two days later, on July 22, WikiLeaks [released thousands of emails](#) stolen from Democratic National Committee servers, which led to [the resignation of Florida Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz](#) as chairwoman of the DNC. On July 25, the FBI [announced](#) it would be investigating the provenance of the hack; the next day, July 26, intelligence sources [stated with “high confidence”](#) that Russians were behind the DNC hack. Trump’s [responded at a press conference the next day](#), first calling on Russia to hack Hillary Clinton’s private email server and release the 33,000 emails she had allegedly deleted before suggesting that Russia was not behind the DNC hack, saying, “nobody even knows this, it’s probably China, or it could be somebody sitting in his bed.”

There were no more known meetings between official members of the Trump campaign and Russian operatives during August. Throughout the month, however, Roger Stone was reportedly in contact with both [Julian Assange of WikiLeaks](#) and [Guccifer 2.0](#), a Russian hacker who claimed credit for the DNC hack and is believed to have been a member of the group that hacked the emails of Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta. Stone not only [repeatedly claimed](#) to be in contact with Assange but also alluded on [multiple occasions](#) to the contents of emails that would not be released until months later.

Ultimately, Manafort’s past scandals caught up to him. On August 14, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that Ukrainian anti-corruption investigators had found handwritten ledgers listing \$12.7 million in previously undisclosed payments to Manafort from the Party of Regions. Though Manafort has denied any wrongdoing, on August 19, he [resigned](#) as Trump’s campaign chairman, and [was replaced](#) by Steve Bannon (who assumed the role of chief executive) and Kellyanne Conway (who became Trump’s campaign manager).

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Manafort's official involvement with the Trump campaign lasted less than six months; his tenure as campaign chairman lasted only three. Throughout that time, however, the Trump campaign became increasingly intertwined with the Russian effort to elect Trump.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the British former MI6 agent Christopher Steele reportedly began compiling his dossier during Manafort's tenure as Trump's campaign chairman. Steele names Manafort 18 times in the dossier—key portions of which remain unverified or are unverifiable—and on multiple occasions appears to refer to developments during Manafort's tenure as campaign chairman that only became known to the public much later. Most notable is his July 26, 2016 entry, in which Steele describes “further evidence of extensive conspiracy between campaign team and Kremlin, sanctioned at highest levels and involving Russian diplomatic staff based in the US;” days earlier, Sessions, Page, and Gordon met with Kislyak, the most prominent member of Russia's U.S.-based diplomatic staff. Steele goes on to say that the “well-developed conspiracy of co-operation between [the Trump campaign] and the Russian leadership ... was managed on the TRUMP side by the Republican candidate's campaign manager, Paul MANAFORT, who was using foreign policy advisor, Carter PAGE, and others as intermediaries.” After *Buzzfeed* published the dossier, Manafort reportedly [called](#) the incoming White House chief of staff Reince Priebus and called the allegations “garbage” and [told other associates](#) that errors in the dossier discredited not only it but the broader investigation.

Even amid intense scrutiny due to his ties to Russia, Manafort reportedly spent the first several months of the Trump administration continuing his business of lobbying on behalf of foreign governments. Manafort reportedly [worked on behalf of allies of Kurdish leaders in Iraq](#) in support of an referendum that could create an independent Kurdish state. As with many separatist movements around the world, Russia is a backer of the movement, albeit more quietly than usual: Russia is the only major power not to call upon the Kurds to cancel the referendum, and, [according to Reuters](#), “has swiftly become the top funder of Kurdish oil and gas deals, with as much as \$4 billion pledged in less than a year.”

Manafort also reportedly maintained contact with members of Trump's inner circle well into the administration's first year. As described above, Manafort reportedly called Priebus in January to [discuss the allegations](#) in the recently-leaked Steele dossier. *The Daily Beast* [reported](#) that Manafort advised the transition team on potential cabinet picks, while CNN [reported](#) that he had “a direct line to top decision-makers” on the transition team, including Vice President Mike Pence. According to *Politico*, Manafort bragged as late as summer 2017 that he had influence over Trump's decision-making, most notably with regards to China. According to [CNN](#), Trump and Manafort only ceased communicating when lawyers for both parties insisted they do so.

Since Trump took office, Manafort has emerged as a central focus of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian operatives, and became one of the first members of Trump's circle indicted in association with the case. On July 26, 2017, Mueller's team reportedly [conducted a pre-dawn, no-knock raid](#) of Manafort's home in Alexandria, Virginia, seizing documents, copying computer files, and, [according to The New York Times](#), even photographing the contents of his closet. On October 27, Mueller's team [indicted Manafort](#) and his long-time business

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associate Rick Gates on 12 counts, including conspiracy against the United States and money laundering. On October 30, Manafort and Gates [pled not guilty](#) to both charges. As of this writing, Manafort is [under house arrest](#), with bail set at \$10 million. The White House, meanwhile, has attempted to [distance itself from the charges](#), asserting that they stem from behavior prior to Manafort and Gates joining the campaign and are unconnected to allegations of collusion.

Further Reading:

- *Politico*: [“Mystery man: Ukraine’s U.S. fixer”](#)
- NBC: [“What Did Ex-Trump Aide Paul Manafort Really Do in Ukraine?”](#)
- *The New York Times*: [“How Paul Manafort Wielded Power in Ukraine Before Advising Donald Trump”](#)
- *The Daily Beast*: [“Top Trump Aide Led the ‘Torturers’ Lobby”](#)
- Associated Press: [“Before Trump job, Manafort worked to aid Putin”](#)
- *The Washington Post*: [“Manafort offered to give Russian billionaire ‘private briefings’ on 2016 campaign”](#)
- *The Atlantic*: [“Did Manafort Use Trump to Curry Favor With a Putin Ally?”](#)
- *The New York Times*: [“With a Picked Lock and a Threatened Indictment, Mueller’s Inquiry Sets a Tone”](#)
- *The New York Times*: [“Former Trump Aides Charged as Prosecutors Reveal New Campaign Ties With Russia”](#)
- [Full text of indictment](#)
- [Cayman Island court filings](#)

[1] Deripaska attempted to [sue the Associated Press for libel](#) in a D.C. District Court, claiming the outlet’s reporting falsely implied that Deripaska paid Manafort in exchange for working to advance the Russian government’s goals and that their relationship was related to Manafort’s work on the Trump campaign; however, the case was [dismissed](#).