

Breaking Down the Mueller Report

Steve Bannon

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- **Steve Bannon was involved in or knew of multiple contacts between the Trump team and Russia, including during both the campaign and transition.**
- **During the administration, Bannon participated in Trump's efforts to cover up collusion and undermine the Russia investigation, including by spreading conspiracy theories obscuring the Kremlin's role in the attack on the 2016 election.**
- **Since leaving the White House, Bannon has become involved with several right-wing politicians and movements that have also been accused of working with Russia and Kremlin-linked actors in Europe.**

Key Facts From the Report

- While serving as the CEO of Trump's campaign, Steve Bannon appears to have been involved in the campaign's efforts to coordinate with WikiLeaks and capitalize on the release of emails stolen from Trump's political opponents, most notably by communicating with Roger Stone about their release.
- The sharing of polling data with an alleged Russian intelligence operative, a practice begun by Bannon's predecessor Paul Manafort, continued into the period while Bannon was running the Trump campaign. Manafort was also in contact with Bannon during the period.
- Bannon also played a key role in setting up the meeting in the Seychelles between Trump adviser Erik Prince and Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the sanctioned, state-run Russian Direct Investment Fund, and subsequently discussed the meeting with Prince.
- Bannon also received a "proposal for reconciliation between the United States and Russia," which Dmitriev drafted along with an affiliate of Jared Kushner.
- Bannon was one of several transition officials at Trump transition headquarters at Mar-a-Lago while Michael Flynn was discussing sanctions with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak.
- While serving in the White House as one of Trump's top advisers, Bannon helped propagate the conspiracy theory that the DNC emails were leaked not by the Kremlin but by a DNC staffer, disinformation that has since been traced back in part to Russian intelligence services.
- Since departing the Trump White House, Bannon has worked to advance the interests of pro-Kremlin politicians in Europe, multiple of whom are implicated in their own scandals involving collusion or coordination with the Russian government.

Key Facts from the Report

Despite his prominent role on the Trump campaign and transition team and in the Trump administration, Steve Bannon has largely escaped scrutiny for his role in the Russia scandal. However, a

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closer look reveals suggests he was a player in not only the collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin but also the subsequent efforts to cover up that collusion.

Bannon [became the Trump campaign's CEO](#) on August 17, 2016. That was the same day that the intelligence community [provided their first briefing to the campaign](#), which reportedly included warnings about efforts by hostile foreign powers to infiltrate Trump's campaign and advice to contact the FBI about any foreign contacts. He ran the campaign alongside Kellyanne Conway, who served as Trump's campaign manager. After the election, Bannon became Trump's chief strategist and senior counselor until he [left the White House](#) on August 18, 2017, amid controversy surrounding Trump's failure to unambiguously condemn white nationalists at the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally.

Bannon was initially appointed to replace Paul Manafort, who [departed](#) his role as Trump's campaign chairman amid the discovery of a "black ledger" containing his name in Ukraine and the resulting scandals regarding his alleged receipt of under-the-table payments from Ukraine's pro-Kremlin Party of Regions. According to the Mueller report, Manafort remained in contact with the campaign, including through Bannon (Volume 1, p. 141).

While Manafort was serving as campaign chairman, he and his deputy Rick Gates repeatedly shared internal polling data with their longtime business associate, the alleged Russian intelligence operative Konstantin Kilimnik, with whom they had previously worked in Ukraine. Manafort and Gates also shared with Kilimnik the Trump campaign's plans to target the upper Midwest. According to the report, they did so on the understanding that Kilimnik would pass the information along to Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs with whom they had worked in their previous political work, most notably Oleg Deripaska. According to the Mueller report, Gates continued to send Kilimnik polling data after Manafort left the campaign in August, which means he was doing so during the period in which Bannon served as Trump's campaign CEO (Volume 1, p. 132-134, 138-141). (For more on Manafort and Gates's communication with Kilimnik, see ["Breaking Down the Mueller Report: Konstantin Kilimnik's Campaign Work."](#))

Bannon was also involved in the campaign's efforts to establish backchannel communications with WikiLeaks to capitalize on upcoming releases of emails Russian hackers had stolen from Trump's opponents. According to the report, Bannon appears to have been present for or involved in the Trump campaign's July 2016 discussions about capitalizing on upcoming WikiLeaks releases after the initial dump of documents from the Democratic National Committee. Although Bannon's name does not appear in the unredacted text of the section of the report describing the conversations, which is significantly redacted, he is cited as a source of information regarding Trump's conversations with Gates and others about "planning a communications strategy based on the possible release of Clinton emails by WikiLeaks" (Volume 2, p. 18). This strongly implies that Bannon was involved in, or at the very least present for, the conversations and subsequently described them to the Special Counsel's Office.

Bannon also communicated with Roger Stone during the period where Roger Stone was acting as a backchannel between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks. Though it appears that most of what the

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Mueller report has to say about Stone is redacted because of Stone's ongoing federal court case, Stone's indictment and public reporting document [numerous conversations between Stone and Bannon](#) during the campaign. This includes [conversations](#), with a *Breitbart* editor as an intermediary, about potential future releases from WikiLeaks, in the few days before WikiLeaks began publishing emails stolen from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's inbox. Bannon is also reportedly the "high-ranking Trump campaign official" [mentioned in the indictment](#) who emailed Stone in early October 2016 "asking about the status of future releases," and who texted Stone to say "well done" on October 7 after WikiLeaks began publishing the emails. Both have denied any advance knowledge of WikiLeaks releases, but have not put forward an alternative explanation for the messages.

Another possible connection between Bannon and the hacked emails came through *Breitbart*, the far-right propaganda website Bannon ran prior to joining Trump's campaign. Though Bannon ostensibly ceded day-to-day control of the website while working for Trump, [leaked emails show](#) that he remained in contact with the site's Washington editor. During the election, *Breitbart* continually published pro-Trump content and [questioned reports](#) of Russian interference, including by [promoting conspiracy theories](#) that Seth Rich, a DNC staffer who was killed in Washington, D.C., in July 2016, leaked the DNC emails and was murdered because of it.

Bannon also may have been involved in efforts to illegally obtain emails believed to have been deleted from Hillary Clinton's private email server. According to the report, after WikiLeaks's initial release of documents stolen from the DNC, Trump tasked staff and advisors, including Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, with finding emails from Clinton's server. Flynn in turn communicated with the longtime Republican operative Peter Smith, who set out to do so. In a document he circulated to potential donors, Smith listed Steve Bannon as one of several campaign affiliates with whom Smith was "in coordination" (Volume 1, p. 63). However, "the Office [of Special Counsel] did not identify evidence that any of the listed individuals initiated or directed Smith's efforts" (Volume 1, p. 64).

During the transition, Bannon was involved in two of the Trump team's most notorious efforts to coordinate with Russia on foreign policy issues.

First, Bannon was involved in the conversations surrounding Michael Flynn's December 29, 2016, phone calls with the Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak during which the two coordinated to undermine the Obama administration's efforts to sanction Russia for its interference in the election. While the phone calls were taking place, Bannon was at Trump transition-team headquarters in Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. K.T. McFarland, Flynn's designated deputy with whom he spoke in between his conversations with Kislyak, says that she discussed sanctions with Bannon, who "remarked that the sanctions would hurt their ability to have good relations with Russia" (Volume 1, p. 170). McFarland "believed she told Bannon that Flynn was scheduled to talk to Kislyak later that night" (Volume 1, p. 170). Bannon was also present when McFarland briefed Trump on the sanctions, a meeting during which

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McFarland believes “someone may have mentioned to President-Elect Trump that Flynn was speaking to the Russian ambassador that evening” (Volume 1, p. 171).

Bannon was also one of several transition officials McFarland emailed about Flynn’s phone calls with Kislyak the next day (Volume 1, p. 172). Flynn told the Special Counsel’s Office that he “recalled discussing the sanctions with Bannon the next day and that Bannon appeared to know about Flynn’s conversation with Kislyak” (Volume 1, p. 172-173). According to Flynn, “he and Bannon agreed that they had ‘stopped the train on Russia’s response’ to the sanctions” (Volume 2, p. 26). Bannon “recalled meeting with Flynn that day, but said he did not remember discussing sanctions with him” (Volume 2, p. 26).

After Trump took office, Bannon was at the meeting where Trump first learned of the FBI investigation into Flynn and his conversations with Kislyak, where Trump “told [White House Counsel Don] McGahn, Bannon, and Priebus not to discuss the matter with anyone else in the White House” (Volume 2, p. 47).

Second, Bannon appears to have been involved in arranging the January 11, 2017, meeting between Erik Prince and Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the sanctioned, state-run Russian Direct Investment Fund, in the Seychelles. During the campaign, Bannon appears to have been the link between Prince and the campaign, periodically receiving “unsolicited policy papers on issues such as foreign policy, trade, and Russian election interference” from Prince (Volume 1, p. 149). Prince also periodically met with Bannon during the transition to discuss, “*inter alia*, foreign policy issues and Prince’s recommendations regarding who should be appointed to fill key national security positions” (Volume 1, p. 149).

Based on messages exchanged by attendees, Bannon also helped arrange the meeting in the Seychelles during the transition. George Nader, who scheduled the meeting, wrote to Dmitriev that Prince had been “designated by Steve [Bannon] to meet you” on behalf of the Trump campaign (Volume 1, p. 153). (Both Prince and Bannon claim not to recall discussing such an arrangement with Dmitriev or Nader.) According to the reports, at the meeting itself, Prince emphasized his connections to Bannon, telling Dmitriev that “Bannon was effective if not conventional, and that Prince provided policy papers to Bannon” (Volume 1, p. 153). Prince told Dmitriev that he would “inform Bannon about his meeting with Dmitriev, and that if there was interest in continuing the discussion, Bannon or someone else on the Transition Team would do so” (Volume 1, p. 154). (For more on the meeting between Prince and Dmitriev, see [“Breaking Down the Mueller Report: The Seychelles Meeting.”](#))

After the meeting, Prince reached out to Bannon via text message, a fact that lends credence to belief that Prince had attended as a representative of the Trump campaign. According to Prince, upon returning to the U.S., he scheduled a meeting with Bannon “at Bannon’s home,” where he “explained to Bannon that Dmitriev was the head of a Russian sovereign wealth fund and was interested in improving relations between the United States and Russia” and “provided Bannon with Dmitriev’s contact information. According to Prince, Bannon instructed Prince not to follow up with Dmitriev, and Prince had the impression that the issue was not a priority for Bannon” (Volume 1, p. 155-156). Bannon denies

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having discussed “with Prince anything regarding Dmitriev, RDIF, or any meetings with Russian individuals or people associated with Putin,” and says that he “would have objected to such a meeting having taken place” (Volume 1, p. 156). Although “provider records indicate that [Prince] and Bannon exchanged dozens of messages” in the timeframe, investigators were unable to obtain the messages, as neither person’s phone contained any text messages from the period. Both claimed not to know why the messages had disappeared and denied having deleted any messages (Volume 1, p. 156).

During the same period, Rick Gerson, a hedge-fund manager and friend of Jared Kushner, also had meetings with Dmitriev, who “told Gerson that Bannon had asked Prince to meet with Dmitriev” (Volume 1, p. 158). Gerson and Dmitriev developed a two-page proposal to improve relations between the U.S. and Russia, which Gerson provided to Kushner on January 18, 2017. Kushner “ultimately gave one copy of the document to Bannon and another to Rex Tillerson,” whom Trump had recently designated as his Secretary of State (Volume 1, p. 158). (For more information on Gerson and Dmitriev’s proposal, see [“Breaking Down the Mueller Report: Rick Gerson’s Russian Contacts.”](#))

Bannon was also invited to, but did not attend, Jared Kushner and Michael Flynn’s November 30, 2016, meeting with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak (Volume 1, p. 160). For more information on the meeting, see [“Breaking Down the Mueller Report: Jared Kushner’s Transition Meetings With Russian Individuals.”](#)

While Bannon was in the White House, he was involved in efforts to help cover up the Trump administration’s ties to Russia. This began during the transition, when he was one of several high-ranking campaign advisers with whom Hope Hicks consulted about releasing a statement denying that “any campaign representatives ... were in touch with any foreign entities” during the campaign (Volume 2, p. 21).

Bannon would later be present for multiple meetings Mueller describes as part of Trump’s efforts to obstruct the Russia investigation. He attended the meeting with Trump and McGahn where Trump disparaged Attorney General Jeff Sessions for having recused himself from the Russia investigation, negatively comparing Sessions to Roy Cohn and saying that Sessions was not doing enough to protect Trump (Volume 2, p. 50-51). He was also present at meetings where Trump discussed his plans to fire FBI Director James Comey (Volume 2, p. 64), considered whether to accept Sessions’s attempt to resign in May 2017 (Volume 2, p. 79), and floated arguments that Mueller had conflicts of interest and should not be allowed to oversee the Russia investigation (Volume 2, p. 80-81).

Bannon was also involved in the Trump team’s efforts to dissemble about whether the Kremlin had, in fact, stolen the DNC and Podesta emails, and pushed a conspiracy theory linked to Russian intelligence in the process. In March 2017, more than five months after the intelligence community officially accused Russia of interfering in the 2016 election and more than two months after they accused Russia of having done so to help Trump, Bannon [pushed Seth Rich conspiracy theories](#) in messages with representatives of news outlets. An investigation by Michael Isikoff of *Yahoo News* [found](#) that the SVR, one of Russia’s

three main intelligence agencies, played a key role in propagating the conspiracy theory by circulating a fake intelligence report that claimed Rich had been murdered for providing DNC emails to WikiLeaks. The Mueller report also confirms that WikiLeaks played a role in the conspiracy, despite knowing that it had received the emails from Guccifer 2.0.

Since Bannon left the White House in August 2017, Bannon has [dedicated himself](#) to advancing far-right interests in Europe. In the process, he has cultivated ties to several politicians embroiled in controversies involving support from the Russian government. For example, in March 2018, Bannon [traveled to France](#) to speak at an event with Marine Le Pen. Le Pen's political party, the National Rally party (formerly National Front), have [received significant funding](#) from a Kremlin-linked bank, and benefited from Russian efforts to hack and release her main opponent's emails shortly before the 2017 French presidential election. Le Pen also famously [traveled to Russia](#) during her campaign to meet with Putin. Bannon has also publicly [supported](#) Matteo Salvini, a Euro-skeptic Italian politician sometimes called the "[European Donald Trump](#)" whose aides were recently revealed to have [attended a meeting](#) with Kremlin-linked officials to discuss a business deal by which the Kremlin would secretly finance Salvini's campaign for the European Parliament. Prior to the revelation, Bannon had [met and done an interview with](#) the top aide present at the meeting. Other right-wing, Russia-linked politicians with whom Bannon has been linked include Hungary's [Viktor Orban](#) and the U.K.'s [Nigel Farage](#). Bannon has also been involved in a recently aborted [effort](#) to create an "academy" for far-right politicians in an abandoned Italian monastery, an endeavor that has [led him to work with](#), among others, Aleksey Komov, who works for the Kremlin-connected Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.

Outstanding questions

- Was Bannon aware that Gates was sharing polling data with Kilimnik while Bannon was running the Trump campaign?
- What role did Bannon play in the development of the Trump campaign's strategy around the release of WikiLeaks?
- Was Bannon present at the briefing about foreign interference the day he joined the Trump campaign? Was he present for any other intelligence briefings while he worked for Trump?
- What other communication did Bannon have with Stone during the election?
- Was Bannon aware of the role Russian intelligence operatives played in the propagation of the Seth Rich conspiracy theory?
- Has Bannon been aware of or directly involved in the Russia-related activities of the various European politicians he has supported or advised since leaving the White House?