

FOR THREE OF THE FOUR EARLY FBI SUBJECTS TIED TO THE TRUMP CAMPAIGN, THE CAMPAIGN AGREED WITH THE MUELLER REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Of the first four people tied to Trump's campaign who were investigated by the FBI – Carter Page, George Papadopoulos, and Paul Manafort – the Mueller Report came to remarkably similar conclusions as the campaign did when all three were fired in 2016. As I'll show in a follow-up post, the FBI's concerns about the fourth – Mike Flynn – have proven even better founded.

This shows how ridiculous it is for Bill Barr to go after the origins of the investigation. The Trump campaign itself, institutionally, agreed in real time with the conclusion of the investigation.

On August 19, 2016, Trump forced his campaign manager, Paul Manafort, to resign. Sources told the press he was ousted because of his “involvement with Russia” and the fact that “he hadn't been entirely forthright about his activities overseas.”

In recent days, Manafort had lost the confidence of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and one of his closest advisers, and other members of Trump's family, according to a source close to the campaign. Kushner had once been a major backer of Manafort and was instrumental in his elevation – and the downfall of Corey Lewandowski, Trump's former campaign manager.

The family was particularly troubled by reports of Manafort's involvement with Russia and felt he hadn't been entirely forthright about his activities overseas, the source said. Family members were also unhappy about changes made to the GOP platform that were seen as beneficial to Russia, which they felt Manafort played a role in, the source added.

On February 13, Judge Amy Berman Jackson ruled that Paul Manafort had lied – both to the FBI and to the grand jury – about his interactions and communications with Konstantin Kilimnik. Among the things Manafort lied about, according to the Mueller Report, was an August 2, 2016 meeting where Manafort told Kilimnik how the campaign planned to win Michigan and two other swing states, Kilimnik pitched Manafort on a plan to carve up Ukraine, and also told ways he could be paid by his Ukrainian and Russian paymasters. Mueller ultimately, “could not reliably determine Manafort’s purpose in sharing internal polling data with Kilimnik during the campaign period” and raised his lies to question whether he spoke to people on the campaign about the plan to carve up Ukraine.

In other words, the Trump family members who ousted Manafort came to precisely the same conclusion Mueller did: Manafort was lying about his suspicious ties to Russia.

On September 24, 2016, the Trump campaign severed all ties with unpaid foreign policy advisor Carter Page. The next day, Hope Hicks sent out an email instructing that, “Page was announced as an informal adviser in March. Since then he has had no role or official contact with the campaign. We have no knowledge of activities past or present and he now officially has been removed from all lists etc.”

It was untrue that the campaign had no knowledge of Page’s activities. After all, on July 9, 2016, he wrote Sam Clovis about his activities

in Moscow.

Russian Deputy Prime minister and NES board member Arkady Dvorkovich also spoke before the event. In a private conversation, Dvorkovich expressed strong support for Mr. Trump and a desire to work together toward devising better solutions in response to the vast range of current international problems. Based on feedback from a diverse array of other sources close to the Presidential Administration, it was readily apparent that this sentiment is widely held at all levels of government.⁵

That said, even after surveilling Page for at least a year, the Mueller investigation likewise only gained limited understanding of Page's activities. "Page's activities in Russia—as described in his emails with the Campaign—were not fully explained." And a redaction explaining why Page wasn't charged as a foreign agent suggests it had been a close call.

In other words, Mueller came to the same conclusion that the Trump campaign did when they severed all ties with Page.

The Mueller Report is more circumspect about why George Papadopoulos got fired.

Papadopoulos was dismissed from the Trump Campaign in early October 2016, after an interview he gave to the Russian news agency Interfax generated adverse publicity.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² George Papadopoulos: Sanctions Have Done Little More Than to Turn Russia Towards China, Interfax (Sept. 30, 2016).

But a recent profile reveals that Papadopoulos has been lying about the campaign response to his Interfax column.

The book claims that Trump headquarters informed him of an interview request from Russian news service Interfax and gave him instructions about what to say, complimenting him afterward. In reality, Interfax contacted Papadopoulos directly, and though the campaign okayed the interview, the feedback afterward apparently wasn't positive. Papadopoulos wrote to campaign official Michael Glassner to ask if he was, as others had told him, "off the campaign because of an interview I gave."

This is the column that Papadopoulos shared with Joseph Mifsud (though that is not discussed in the report), and then lied about to the FBI.

On or about October 1, 2016, PAPAPOULOS sent Foreign Contact 1 a private Facebook message with a link to an article from Interfax.com, a Russian news website. This evidence contradicts PAPAPOULOS's statement to the Agents when interviewed on or about January 27, 2017, that he had not been "messaging" with Foreign Contact 1 during the campaign while "with Trump."

It's unclear whether the campaign distanced itself from Papadopoulos because of the press coverage of this article or because of what he said (an earlier WaPo report on it reveals how enthusiastic the pre-approval for it was, including the promise that Trump would work with Russia on Syria). If they fired him because he misrepresented the campaign's friendliness with Russia, then it would support the Mueller Report's conclusion that there was evidence to investigate but not to charge.

In particular, the Office did not find evidence likely to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Campaign officials such as Paul Manafort, George Papadopoulos, and Carter Page acted as

agents of the Russian government-or at its direction, control, or request-during the relevant time period. 1282

If the campaign fired Papadopoulos because he said things that were inconvenient, it would support the worth of his obstruction charge, which he of course pled guilty to.

Given the seriousness of the lies and omissions and their effect on the FBI's investigation, the Office charged Papadopoulos with making false statements to the FBI, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1001. Information, United States v. George Papadopoulos, No. 1:17-cr-182 (D.D.C. Oct. 3, 2017), Doc. 8. On October 7, 2017, Papadopoulos pleaded guilty to that charge pursuant to a plea agreement.

In either case, the campaign didn't want to be associated with Papadopoulos' pro-Russian public comments.

Update, 5/27/19: Papadopoulos actually told HJC/OGR that he never left the campaign.

Mr. Ratcliffe. How did you leave the campaign? First of all, when did you leave the campaign?

Mr. Papadopoulos. I don't know if I ever really left the campaign. I think I was involved throughout the whole way in different ways. I mean, one – in one manner I'm helping edit the first foreign policy speech and I'm setting up, helping set up this meeting with the Egyptian President, and then I'm kind of just feeding information into the campaign from March until – all through the transition, quite frankly. So I don't think I really ever left the campaign, if that makes sense.

Mr. Ratcliffe. Okay.

Mr. Papadopoulos. I was considering leaving, but I don't think I ever submitted some sort of resignation to the campaign that would – that would suggest I would formally abdicate my duties on the campaign.

The Attorney General is carrying out an unprecedented investigation into a counterintelligence investigation targeting the suspected infiltration of a campaign by men working on behalf of Russia. In real time, the campaign acted to distance itself from all three men for precisely that reason.

In other words, Bill Barr is targeting the intelligence agencies for agreeing with the Trump campaign about the suspect ties of three of the initially predicated subjects of the investigation.

As I disclosed last July, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.