

ANOTHER MAGGIE HABERMAN NYT STORY COVERS UP OLEG DERIPASKA'S ROLE

The reason it matters that Trump brought in Paul Manafort to work on his campaign again for “free” this year is that in 2016, Manafort shared the campaign’s strategy with his long-time business associate Konstantin Kilimnik, who (according to the Treasury Department) is a “known Russian Intelligence Services agent” who “provided the Russian Intelligence Services with [that] sensitive information on polling and campaign strategy.”

The reason it matters that Manafort – as he did in 2016 – claims he has stepped aside from that “free” job to find other ways to help Donald Trump is that he continued to coach the campaign even after he lost, projecting Trump and Russia’s own voter fraud claims onto Hillary Clinton. It also matters because after Trump won, Manafort met with a key Oleg Deripaska deputy to “recreat[e] old friendship.” After that meeting, he advised Reince Priebus to discredit the Russian investigation by focusing on the Steele dossier (recall that Deripaska had paid Steele to collect intelligence about Manafort before Fusion asked Steele to collect more broadly). That strategy worked spectacularly well, with every Russigate conspiracy theorist both making false claims about dossier reporting and, at the same time, claiming that because the dossier turned out to be false, everything else must be too.

The reason it matters that – even as he threatens to abandon NATO much less Ukraine – Trump welcomed Manafort onto his campaign again is that both at the meeting where Trump’s former campaign manager shared campaign strategy and for several years after, Manafort and Kilimnik kept talking about plans to carve up Ukraine.

Kilimnik even told Manafort, in December 2016, that they could have peace in Ukraine within a few months with just a wink from Trump. Trump makes similar boasts all the time now.

You'll find none of that in the NYT story reporting on Manafort's announcement that he will help Trump in an unofficial role (or WaPo or CNN's story either).

Seven paragraphs in, Maggie (writing with Jonathan Swan) describes that Manafort went to prison, but doesn't bother to explain that he laundered money and violated FARA *to hide* that his influence peddling was backed by Russian-aligned oligarchs.

Mr. Manafort helped stave off efforts to thwart Mr. Trump's nomination at the 2016 convention, went to prison for various financial crimes and was pardoned by Mr. Trump.

Hell, even just the thought of letting a massive tax cheat play a role in his campaign should be a key focus; instead, NYT brushes that off as, "various financial crimes."

Three paragraphs later Maggie suggests some tie between those pro-Russian oligarchs and Manafort being "ensnared" by Mueller, but doesn't describe what Mueller found.

In August 2016, he was ousted in part over headlines about his work for a pro-Russian political party in Ukraine. Later, Mr. Manafort was ensnared in the investigation by Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel, into ties between Mr. Trump's campaign and Russian officials.

Two paragraphs latter, Maggie and Swan suggest that five advisors, most quite senior (George Papadoulous, Gates, Manafort, Michael Cohen, and Roger Stone) who were sentenced to prison equate to a "few,"

Mr. Manafort was one of only a few Trump advisers who were sentenced to prison, for crimes unrelated to the campaign.

That doesn't count the two other advisors from 2016 (Mike Flynn and Elliot Broidy) who were pardoned before they were sentenced, and the three (Allen Weisselberg, Steve Bannon, and Peter Navarro) who have more recently been sentenced to prison.

I mean, sure, compared to the dozens of senior GOP officials currently facing prosecution for allegedly trying to steal the 2020 election and the hundreds of Trump devotees already sentenced for 2020, five or seven or whatever is teeny, but "few"? Since when did having even a few – much less seven – advisors from one campaign get convicted merit the word, "only"?

Maggie (and Swan) never mention that Amy Berman Jackson found that Paul Manafort lied to cover up the details of his relations with Kilimnik in 2016, a lie about something directly related to the election, but that Mueller simply chose not to prosecute those lies.

The sole mention of Mueller's focus pertained to something that Mueller found Manafort *didn't* orchestrate: the change in the platform on Ukraine.

[I]n a controversy that received little attention at the time, language was inserted into the platform watering down language supporting Ukraine with military aid against Russian incursions. That language change was among the issues Mr. Mueller sought information about during his investigation.

In other words, Maggie and Swan buried the real reason why Manafort threatened – and still threatens, given past history – to discredit Trump's campaign or undermine US democracy: Wittingly or not – we don't know because of the lies and the pardon – he was at the center of a

key part of the Russian attack on American democracy.

Journalists should not simply bury that.

Worse, too, this is not the first time that a story bearing Maggie's byline has covered up Manafort's tie to Deripaska in all this. This story not only tried to shift the timing of the August 2 meeting Manafort had with Kilimnik, but it *took out* language describing Kilimnik sending Deripaska polling data as well as to Manafort's Ukrainian benefactors. (Since that story, a bunch of files liberated by Jason Leopold have shown Manafort's efforts to suck up to Deripaska.)

A correction was made on Jan. 9, 2019:

A previous version of this article misidentified the people to whom Paul Manafort wanted a Russian associate to send polling data. Mr. Manafort wanted the data sent to two Ukrainian oligarchs, Serhiy Lyovochkin and Rinat Akhmetov, not to Oleg V. Deripaska, a Russian oligarch close to the Kremlin.

The story remains a source of disinformation and confusion five years later.

As I showed in this post, that change was made in the same period that Rick Gates, immediately after Bill Barr's confirmation, started to revert his story to what it had been when he was still getting caught in false stories in interview after interview.

I get that outlets telling this story (WaPo and CNN were no better) want to avoid relitigating the Russian investigation. I get that Trump always complains when journalists report on *the actual facts* disclosed by the Russian investigation and the open questions his pardons guaranteed would never be answered.

That's not a reason to bury it all. Burying these facts is nothing more than capitulating to a bully.

Holding Trump accountable for his past documented abuses should be the easy part of journalism.