

The Delray Democrat

How Trump's Criminal Network Set the Stage for Putin's Attack on Ukraine¹

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Vladimir Putin is solely responsible for the horror he has inflicted on Ukraine. But Republicans are responsible for Donald Trump, who aided and abetted Putin for many years to help the dictator in his attempt to seize control of the democratic Ukrainian government.

Long before the Republicans in Congress refused to convict a president who had betrayed his country, Trump had gathered a B-team of criminals with profitable ties to Putin and to pro-Russia officials in Ukraine. If there were an Olympics for governments, Trump's administration would be carrying the Russian flag.

It's not like we didn't know. In 2019, Robert Mueller finalized the investigation we thought would seal the deal against Trump, including his anti-Ukraine mafia. It might have if Mueller hadn't fallen asleep during the Senate hearings.

In 2020, the Senate Intelligence Committee released a 1,000-page tome which exposed Russia's interference in our 2016 elections and the attempts by Trump World and Russian officials to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty. Despite the heavy redacting, it is stunningly rich with proof of Trump's mob sleeping with the enemy. Nonetheless, the Republican-controlled Senate just couldn't find any "collusion."

The Art of the Russian Deal

The Trump-Russia connection goes back to at least 1986 when Trump met with Soviet Ambassador Yuri Dubinin to talk about building another monument to himself in Russia called the Moscow Project. It never materialized.

In 1997, back in Russia, Trump was working with Aleksandr Lbed, the former Minister of Defense of the Luhansk People's Republic, which is part of the Donbas, the area of Ukraine Putin wanted to control.

Jump ahead to 2014, with talk of Trump running for the presidency. Putin saw a gift that would keep on giving: a stupid, malleable narcissist in the White House who'd stay out of the way when he decided to attack Ukraine. Of course, Putin had already invaded Crimea and Georgia, but the world just clicked to another channel. But Ukraine, a huge country with a struggling new democracy, a major gas line, a telegenic president and a large diaspora that would react with deep emotion, well, that would have CNN camping out there 24/7.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, March 2022, page 5.

The Russian irredentist wanted Ukraine. The avaricious Trump wanted Putin's imprimatur for his tower. A partnership made in hell. For Trump, the smart money was on a gang of criminals who had been making millions working for Russian operatives.

Here are five of the gifts President Trump gave to Putin to help prepare Ukraine for the slaughter.

Gift Number One: A Deep Bench of Criminals

Long before Trump took office, many of the "made" men in his mafia were getting rich helping Russia. Paul Manafort, Trump's first campaign manager, had made tens of millions helping to elect a pro-Russia president in Ukraine. As Time reported, "A U.S. embassy cable sent from Kiev to Washington in 2006 described Manafort's job as giving an 'extreme makeover' to a presidential hopeful named Viktor Yanukovich, who had the backing of the Kremlin and most of Ukraine's wealthiest tycoons. His Party of Regions, the cable said, was "a haven" for "mobsters and oligarchs."

Then we have Michael Flynn, Rudy Giuliani, Rex Tillerson, Jeff Sessions and more. Kyiv was the true Trump campaign headquarters.

Gift Number Two: Donbas

A keystone of Putin's Ukrainian plan was Donbas. Since 2014, Russia and Ukraine have fought over this area in eastern Ukraine on the Russian border, made up of Luhansk and the Donetsk People's Republics and populated by Russians and pro-Russian separatists.

Ukraine wanted to keep control of the area to protect its territorial integrity and national security. Putin has long wanted the area declared "autonomous" so he can install a puppet ruler who would accede to him. Ukraine viewed it as the camel's nose in the tent. On March 6, The Kyiv Independent reported: "Many see it as an attempt to introduce a fully legalized, Russian-controlled Trojan horse into Ukraine that would continue draining the country's economic resources and block the country's path to NATO and the European Union. Ukraine might face the presence of a de-facto independent region within its borders fully controlled by the Kremlin, with its armed forces and foreign policy agenda decided by Moscow."

Manafort allied with another operative, Konstantin Kilimnik whom authorities claim, reported NBC, passed "Trump campaign strategy information to Russian intelligence services."

Ilya Marritz explained in ProPublica: "After Trump won the election, the Senate [Intelligence Committee] report says, Manafort and Kilimnik worked together on a proposed "plan" for Ukraine that would create an Autonomous Republic of Donbas in separatist-run southeast Ukraine, on the Russian border. The plan would need only a 'wink' from the new U.S. president, Kilimnik wrote to Manafort in an email." Just what Putin wanted.

Gift Number Three: Undermine Democracy in Ukraine—And Ivanka Can Sit in Putin's Private Chair!

Beyond Donbas, Putin was determined to stop any movement toward democracy in Ukraine.

Trump's former lapdog lawyer, Michael Cohen, now a convicted felon, hooked up with Felix Sater. The New York Times reported: "Mr. Sater, a Russian immigrant [and barroom brawler], said he had lined up financing for the Trump Tower deal with VTB Bank, a Russian bank that was under American sanctions for involvement in Moscow's efforts to undermine democracy in Ukraine.

The Russian operatives' interference in our 2016 election is sickening. The New York Times reprinted a portion of an email Sater sent to Cohen on November 3, 2015, bragging, "Michael I arranged for Ivanka to sit in Putins [sic] private chair at his desk and office in the Kremlin. I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected. Buddy our boy can become President of the USA and we can engineer it..."

Gift Number Four: Block American aid to Ukraine

Manafort collaborated with another "fixer," Konstantin Kilimnik. As ProPublica reported, a few months after Manafort became campaign manager "...the Trump campaign put the kibosh on proposed language in the Republican Party platform that expressed support for arming Ukraine with defensive weapons."

By 2018, Kilimnik was on the FBI's Most Wanted List, accused of a "multi-million dollar lobbying campaign in the United States which was allegedly conducted at the direction of the Ukrainian Government."

In the summer of 2019, Trump decided to withhold defense funds Congress had approved for Ukraine. A great blackmail tool for Trump. Sure enough, on July 25, 2019, when Zelensky asked to buy more Javelins. Trump answered, (paraphrased), "You want your missiles? Well, "do us a favor." Find negative information on Joe Biden's son.

Gift Number Five: Hire a Spy as National Security Advisor!

President Barak Obama had fired Ret. Army Lt. General Michael Flynn as Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency and warned Trump about him. Trump made him National Security Advisor anyway, then was forced to fire him after it was disclosed Flynn lied about his contacts with the Russian government. He later registered as a foreign agent, admitting he'd also been a lobbyist for the Turkish government.

Section C. iii of the Mueller report: Russian Government Outreach and Contacts

On December 29, 2016, Flynn called Sergey Kislyak and asked that Russia should keep its reactions to President Obama's sanctions down before Trump was inaugurated ...didn't want to make a fuss. At first, Flynn lied about the call and others. But he forgot about FBI wiretaps. In 2017, Flynn pleaded guilty. The Dept. of Justice, now under Trump's auspices, dropped the case against him.

And Trump's Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, had to recuse himself from the FBI's probe into Russia—because of his contacts with Kislyak that he "forgot" to disclose.

The highest-ranking link to Russian operatives was Trump. On May 15, 2017, The Washington Post reported, “President Trump revealed highly classified information to the Russian foreign minister and ambassador in a White House meeting last week, according to current and former U.S. officials, who said Trump’s disclosures jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State.” The information...was considered so sensitive that details have been withheld from allies and tightly restricted even within the U.S. government, officials said. “Trump revealed more information to the Russian ambassador than we have shared with our own allies.”

Guiliani, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee—Replace Pro-Ukrainian Officials

Trump hired Rudy Guiliani, now of Four Seasons Landscaping fame, as his personal lawyer. Guiliani made the cut because of his friendship with two wannabes in Moscow, Len Parnas and Igor Fruman. Along with Guiliani’s mission of finding “dirt” on Joe Biden’s son, their goal, as NPR reported, “...was to replace the head of Ukraine's state gas company. Another was to replace the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch. She had a history of fighting corruption in Ukraine.” In 2019, both were arrested on charges of conspiracy and campaign finance violations.

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On February 21, 2022, Russia seized Donbas. In the early morning hours of February 24, the Ukrainians hear the initial bomb blasts. President Biden is fighting as hard as he can to stop the horror. Now Republicans must decide if they will reelect Donald Trump or his surrogates, none of whom who will ever be able to wash the blood off their hands. The “adjustment” proposed by state representative Randy Fine and supported by the Governor will take \$200 million from the twelve public school districts that enforced a student mask policy during the pandemic. Fine says that money should be given as a reward to the districts that didn’t enforce masks. He claims that the \$200 million bonus for the 55 districts would come from the salaries of administrative workers earning more than \$100,000 per year from the 12 districts.