

CNN claims FBI wiretapped former Trump campaign chairman

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19 September 2017

CNN has broadcast “breaking news” alleging that former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was wiretapped by the FBI over alleged “Russian links” for substantial periods of time between 2014 and 2017.

The claims have been made public just days after Jason Maloni, a representative of Manafort, testified before a grand jury at the US District Court in Washington last Friday. Maloni was subpoenaed to appear by special counsel Robert Mueller, who heads the Justice Department investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

CNN’s sources claim the FBI sought a court order to monitor Manafort in 2014, over multi-million-dollar work performed by his consultancy firm for Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian president of Ukraine.

Yanukovich’s government was ousted in a US- and European Union-backed coup in February 2014. The new regime charged the former president with the “murder” of civilian protestors and later issued additional arrest warrants for him and other figures in his administration on a variety of corruption charges. Yanukovich fled to exile in Russia.

Surveillance of Manafort reportedly continued until sometime in early 2016. According to CNN, it was ended only after Justice Department prosecutors concluded that “there wasn’t enough evidence to bring charges against Manafort or anyone of the other US subjects” being investigated over their dealings with Yanukovich.

In March 2016, Manafort joined the presidential campaign of Donald Trump. In June, he took over as the campaign chairman. He resigned in August and was replaced by right-wing demagogue Stephen Bannon.

The CNN sources asserted that he was not being wiretapped by the FBI at that point. However, a new court order to monitor Manafort was reportedly sought

by the police agency at an unspecified date during this period. This time, the pretext was allegations by the CIA of relations between the Trump camp and the Russian government of President Vladimir Putin.

It is unclear from the CNN report whether the wiretapping had resumed before Manafort was dismissed by the Trump campaign in August 2016, or exactly when it ended this year. A storage facility belonging to Manafort was reportedly searched by the FBI in early 2017.

On July 26, Manafort’s home in Virginia was raided by FBI agents who reportedly picked the locks on his doors, copied files from his computers and seized binders of documents. According to the *New York Times*, prosecutors working with Special Counsel Mueller told Manafort they planned to indict him on unspecified charges.

The question raised by CNN is whether conversations involving Manafort and Trump were monitored by the FBI—including after Trump had been sworn in as president. Contact between the men continued long after Manafort had ceased working for the campaign. Discussions reportedly ended only after both were advised to do so by their legal teams.

Trump’s claim on Twitter in March that Trump Tower had been “wire-tapped” during the election was publicly denied by both the FBI and the Justice Department. Manafort owns an apartment in the New York skyscraper.

The timing of the first alleged period of wiretapping serves to underscore that suspicion toward any figure in the American establishment who had relations with Russia or its allies long predates the furore that has developed over the 2016 election. The Putin administration was viewed with complete hostility in Washington due to its efforts to assert Russian interests

against the US.

Tensions escalated after Moscow undermined the regime-change operation in Ukraine by annexing Crimea and launched a military intervention in 2015 to disrupt the US-led efforts to overthrow the pro-Russian Syrian regime.

The CIA-driven push for a second round of surveillance targeting Manafort coincided with the repeated statements by Trump during the election campaign that he would shift away from a hostile attitude toward Moscow and pursue closer ties. Trump's emphasis was instead on bellicose denunciations of China, threats of trade war, and vows to increase American war preparations against Beijing.

These foreign policy conflicts—not any concern over the “subversion” of American democracy—lie at the heart of the frenzy over alleged Russian interference. The anti-Russia hysteria is being used to pressure the Trump administration to fall into line with the insistence of powerful sections of the intelligence, military and political establishment on a continued confrontational stance against Russia.



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