

Jailing of ex-Trump campaign manager signals new stage in Washington's political wars

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US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson in Washington revoked former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort's bail on Friday, sending him to jail while he awaits a September 17 trial on charges of money laundering, making false statements and failing to register as a lobbyist for ousted pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. He also faces a separate July 25 trial in Alexandria, Virginia on bank and tax fraud charges.

The charges in both cases were brought by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is heading up the Justice Department investigation into alleged Russian "meddling" in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion by the Trump election campaign. Mueller is also considering charges of obstruction of justice in connection with Trump's May, 2017 firing of then-FBI Director James Comey and other actions by the White House directed against the Russia investigation.

Mueller escalated the campaign against Trump by having his prosecutors file new charges last week against Manafort and a Russian associate, Konstantin Kilimnik, claiming they sought to obstruct justice by tampering with likely witnesses in the upcoming Washington trial. The prosecutors urged the judge to revoke or revise Manafort's bail, which has allowed him to remain at home with electronic monitoring on a \$10 million bond since his indictment in October of 2017.

The jailing of Manafort expresses the ferocious character of the struggle that is raging between rival factions in the US capitalist class and its state apparatus. Both factions are reactionary, the differences centering on questions of imperialist foreign policy and how best to confront and repress social opposition within the United States. The Democrats are opposing the fascistic real estate billionaire primarily on the grounds that he is insufficiently aggressive in pursuing US war aims in Syria and confronting Russia.

In alliance with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and most TV outlets, the Democrats are spearheading the

anti-Russia campaign that is centered around the Mueller probe. It is based on fabricated allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election and a supposed Kremlin master plan to sow divisions and undermine "American democracy." This witch hunt is being used not only to whip up sentiment for war, but also to justify a drive to censor the Internet and silence anti-war and progressive views on social media in the name of combating "fake news."

While Trump attacks the FBI and Mueller for his own reactionary purposes, the Democrats rush to defend the military-intelligence apparatus that is responsible for mass killing and repression around the world and illegal spying and attacks on democratic rights within the US.

The obvious purpose of jailing Manafort is to step up the pressure on him to make a plea deal and agree to cooperate with the Mueller investigation. Of the Trump campaign aides and officials indicted to date by Mueller—former National Security Adviser and retired general Michael Flynn, former campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos and campaign aide and longtime Manafort associate Rick Gates—only Manafort has thus far refused to plead guilty on lesser charges and cooperate with the Russia-Trump investigation.

The demonstration of ruthlessness in regard to Manafort is also aimed at Trump's former personal lawyer and longtime "fixer" Michael Cohen. Mueller engineered a raid last April by FBI agents working with New York prosecutors on Cohen's residences and office in which hundreds of thousands of documents, including correspondence with Trump, as well as computers and cell phones were seized. This suggested that Mueller may be considering filing criminal indictments against Trump for illegal business operations unrelated to the 2016 election.

No charges have as yet been laid against Cohen, but a review of the seized documents by a federal judge in New York is about to be completed and Cohen moved earlier this week to change his legal team, prompting a flurry of media

reports that he expected to be arrested at any time and was considering “flipping” against his former boss.

The jailing of Manafort followed by one day the release of a 568-page report by the Justice Department’s inspector general excoriating former FBI Director Comey for his role in the investigation into Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server to handle classified information while she was secretary of state in the Obama administration. The report rebuked Comey for “insubordination” and violating FBI protocols by making public statements about the Clinton probe.

It singled out Comey’s July 2016 press conference at which he announced that no criminal charges would be brought against Clinton while calling her treatment of classified information “extremely careless.” Comey called the news conference without the foreknowledge or approval of his superiors at the Justice Department.

Then, in late October, just 11 days before Election Day, Comey, against the advice of top Justice Department officials, sent a letter to Congress announcing that new emails had been found and the investigation had been reopened.

These actions clearly damaged Clinton and helped Trump. But the inspector general’s report also cited private emails between FBI officials who played leading roles in both the Clinton investigation and the initial stages of the Russia-Trump probe that expressed a sharp anti-Trump bias. The most significant was an exchange between the lead FBI agent in both investigations, Peter Strzok, and his girlfriend, Lisa Page, who was the legal counsel to Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe, who supervised the two probes.

Page wrote: Trump is “not ever going to become president, right? Right!” and Strzok replied, “No. No he won’t. We’ll stop it.”

Despite this evidence of systematic efforts to manipulate the elections on the part of the American political police, Inspector General Michael Horowitz concluded that the Clinton investigation was not tainted by political motivations.

The release of the report further stoked the political warfare in Washington. Trump and his supporters cited the rebuke to Comey and the statements by Strzok and Page as well as other evidence of anti-Trump bias of some FBI agents to claim that the report showed that the Mueller investigation was illegitimate. Democrats pointed to the sections on Comey’s public interventions to repeat their claim that Comey threw the election to Trump.

What neither side and none of the corporate media raise is the basic fact exposed by the report—that the FBI, the CIA and other police and intelligence agencies play an immense and even decisive role in US elections and political life in

general. These unelected state purveyors of death and destruction around the world and repression within the US played a far more malevolent and anti-democratic role in the 2016 election than anything the Kremlin could have conceived of.

Last month, the *Times* itself published a report revealing that in the summer of 2016, the FBI, working with the CIA, deployed a long-time US intelligence operative to contact Trump campaign aides and dig up information concerning any contacts between the campaign and Russian officials, i.e., to spy on the Trump campaign.

Following the release of the inspector general’s report, the Democrats rushed to the defense of the FBI. The *New York Times*, which functions as a de facto mouthpiece for the Democratic Party, published an editorial and a series of articles branding criticisms of FBI political interference as “conspiracy theories” about a supposedly non-existent “deep state.”

The *Times* editorial dismissed top agent Strzok’s assurance that the FBI would “stop” Trump as “mouthing off by a handful of officials,” and Comey’s anti-Clinton interventions as merely an example of “plenty of people” doing “plenty of breathtakingly stupid things.”

In a further indication of intensifying political warfare, the New York State attorney general on Thursday announced a civil suit charging the Trump Foundation and Trump’s three adult children—Donald Jr., Eric and Ivanka—with illegally using the non-profit charity’s funds to settle Trump business legal claims and boost Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign. The suit calls for the closure of the foundation and cash restitution of \$2.8 million.

The crisis and conflict within the American ruling class and state is being exacerbated by explosive geo-political, economic and social developments. This past week alone has seen the collapse of the G7 summit as a result of Trump’s trade war measures against Europe followed by the imposition of \$50 billion in US tariffs against China. In between was Trump’s summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, after which Trump announced a suspension of US-led war games in the region. This provoked denunciations from sections of the media and the Democratic Party, attacking Trump for making too many concessions and allowing himself to be “played” by Kim.



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