Key figure that Mueller report linked to Russia was a State Department intel source

In a key finding of the Mueller report, Ukrainian businessman, who worked for Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, warned early and often that Manafort file might be fake. The FBI, inserted it anyway. Justice Department intervenes, keeps Manafort from being sent to Rikers Island. Report The Hill's 12:30 Report — Presented by MAPRx — Supreme Court double jeopardy ruling could impact Manafort MORE, is tied to Russian intelligence.

But hundreds of pages of government documents — which special counsel Robert Mueller would have 'no choice' but to prosecute Trump for obstruction. Dem committees win new powers to investigate Trump. Schiff says Intel panel will hold 'series' of hearings on Mueller report MORE possessed since 2018 — describe Kilimnik as a “sensitive” intelligence source for the U.S. State Department who informed on Ukrainian and Russian matters.

Why Mueller's team omitted that part of the Kilimnik narrative from its report and related court filings is not known. But the revelation of it comes as the accuracy of Mueller's Russia conclusions face increased scrutiny.

The incomplete portrayal of Kilimnik is so important to Mueller's overall narrative that it is raised in the opening of his report. “The FBI assesses” Kilimnik “to have ties to Russian intelligence,” Mueller's team wrote on Page 6, putting a sinister light on every contact Kilimnik had with Manafort, the former Trump campaign chairman.

What it doesn't state is that Kilimnik was a “sensitive” intelligence source for State going back to at least 2013 while he was still working for Manafort, according to FBI and State Department memos I reviewed.

Kilimnik was not just any run-of-the-mill source, either.

He interacted with the chief political officer at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, sometimes meeting several times a week to provide information on the Ukraine government. He relayed messages back to Ukraine's leaders and delivered written reports to U.S. officials via emails.
that stretched on for thousands of words, the memos show.

The FBI knew all of this, well before the Mueller investigation concluded.

Alan Purcell, the chief political officer at the Kiev embassy from 2014 to 2017, told FBI agents that State officials, including senior embassy officials Alexander Kasanof and Eric Schultz, deemed Kilimnik to be such a valuable asset that they kept his name out of cables for fear he would be compromised by leaks to WikiLeaks.

“Purcell described what he considered an unusual level of discretion that was taken with handling Kilimnik,” states one FBI interview report that I reviewed. “Normally the head of the political section would not handle sources, but Kasanof informed Purcell that KILIMNIK was a sensitive source.”

Purcell told the FBI that Kilimnik provided “detailed information about OB (Ukraine’s opposition bloc) inner workings” that sometimes was so valuable it was forwarded immediately to the ambassador. Purcell learned that other Western governments relied on Kilimnik as a source, too.

“One time, in a meeting with the Italian embassy, Purcell heard the Italian ambassador echo a talking point that was strikingly familiar to the point Kilimnik had shared with Purcell,” the FBI report states.

Kasanof, who preceded Purcell as the U.S. Embassy political officer, told the FBI he knew Kilimnik worked for Manafort’s lobbying firm and the administration of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, whose Party of Regions hired Manafort’s firm.

Kasanof described Kilimnik as one of the few reliable insiders the U.S. Embassy had informing on Yanukovych. Kilimnik began his relationship as an informant with the U.S. deputy chief of mission in 2012–13, before being handed off to the embassy's political office, the records suggest.

“Kilimnik was one of the only people within the administration who was willing to talk to USEMB,” referring to the U.S. Embassy, and he “provided information about the inner workings of Yanukovych’s administration,” Kasanof told the FBI agents.

“Kasanof met with Kilimnik at least bi-weekly and occasionally multiple times in the same week,” always outside the embassy to avoid detection, the FBI wrote. “Kasanof allowed Kilimnik to take the lead on operational security” for their meetings.

State officials told the FBI that although Kilimnik had Ukrainian and Russian residences, he did not appear to hold any allegiance to Moscow and was critical of Russia’s invasion of the Crimean territory of Ukraine.
“Most sources of information in Ukraine were slanted in one direction or another,” Kasanof told agents. “Kilimnik came across as less slanted than others.”

“Kilimnik was flabbergasted at the Russian invasion of Crimea,” the FBI added, summarizing Kasanof’s interview with agents.

Three sources with direct knowledge of the inner workings of Mueller’s office confirmed to me that the special prosecutor’s team had all of the FBI interviews with State officials, as well as Kilimnik’s intelligence reports to the U.S. Embassy, well before they portrayed him as a Russian sympathizer tied to Moscow intelligence or charged Kilimnik with participating with Manafort in a scheme to obstruct the Russia investigation.

Kasanof’s and Purcell’s interviews are corroborated by scores of State Department emails I reviewed that contain regular intelligence from Kilimnik on happenings inside the Yanukovych administration, the Crimea conflict and Ukrainian and Russian politics. For example, the memos show Kilimnik provided real-time intelligence on everything from whose star in the administration was rising or falling to efforts at stuffing ballot boxes in Ukrainian elections.

Those emails raise further doubt about the Mueller report’s portrayal of Kilimnik as a Russian agent. They show Kilimnik was allowed to visit the United States twice in 2016 to meet with State officials, a clear sign he wasn't flagged in visa databases as a foreign intelligence threat.

The emails also show how misleading, by omission, the Mueller report’s public portrayal of Kilimnik turns out to be.

For instance, the report makes a big deal about Kilimnik’s meeting with Manafort in August 2016 at the Trump Tower in New York.

By that time, Manafort had served as Trump’s campaign chairman for several months but was about to resign because of a growing controversy about the millions of dollars Manafort accepted as a foreign lobbyist for Yanukovych’s party.

Specifically, the Mueller report flagged Kilimnik’s delivery of a peace plan to the Trump campaign for settling the two-year-old Crimea conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

“Kilimnik requested the meeting to deliver in person a peace plan for Ukraine that Manafort acknowledged to the Special Counsel’s Office was a ‘backdoor’ way for Russia to control part of eastern Ukraine,” the Mueller report stated.

But State emails showed Kilimnik first delivered a version of his peace plan in May 2016 to the Obama administration during a visit to Washington. Kasanof, his former handler at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, had been promoted to a top policy position at State, and the two
met for dinner on May 5, 2016.

The day after the dinner, Kilimnik sent an email to Kasanof's official State email address recounting the peace plan they had discussed the night before.

Russia wanted “a quick settlement” to get “Ukraine out of the way and get rid of sanctions and move to economic stuff they are interested in,” Kilimnik wrote Kasanof. The email offered eight bullet points for the peace plan — starting with a ceasefire, a law creating economic recovery zones to rebuild war-torn Ukrainian regions, and a “presidential decree on amnesty” for anyone involved in the conflict on both sides.

Kilimnik also provided a valuable piece of intelligence, stating that the old Yanukovych political party aligned with Russia was dead. “Party of Regions cannot be reincarnated. It is over,” he wrote, deriding as “stupid” a Russian-backed politician who wanted to restart the party.

Kasanof replied the next day that, although he was skeptical of some of the intelligence on Russian intentions, it was “very important for us to know.”

He thanked Kilimnik for the detailed plan and added, “I passed the info to my bosses, who are chewing it over.” Kasanof told the FBI that he believed he sent Kilimnik’s peace plan to two senior State officials, including Victoria Nuland, President Obama’s assistant secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs.

So Kilimnik’s delivery of the peace plan to the Trump campaign in August 2016 was flagged by Mueller as potentially nefarious, but its earlier delivery to the Obama administration wasn’t mentioned. That’s what many in the intelligence world might call “deception by omission.”

Lest you wonder, the documents I reviewed included evidence that Kasanof’s interview with the FBI and Kilimnik’s emails to State about the peace plan were in Mueller’s possession by early 2018, more than a year before the final report.

Officials for the State Department, the FBI, the Justice Department and Mueller’s office did not respond to requests for comment. Kilimnik did not respond to an email seeking comment but, in an email last month to The Washington Post, he slammed the Mueller report’s “made-up narrative” about him. “I have no ties to Russian or, for that matter, any intelligence operation,” he wrote.

Kilimnik holds Ukrainian and Russian citizenship, served in the Soviet military, attended a prestigious Russian language academy and had contacts with Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska. So it is likely he had contacts over the years with Russian intelligence figures.
There also is evidence Kilimnik left the U.S.-funded International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2005 because of concerns about his past connections to Russia, though at least one IRI witness disputed that evidence to the FBI, the memos show.

Yet, omitting his extensive, trusted assistance to the State Department seems inexplicable.

If Mueller’s team can cast such a misleading portrayal of Kilimnik, however, it begs the question of what else might be incorrect or omitted in the report.

Attorney General William Barr has said some of the Mueller report’s legal reasoning conflicts with Justice Department policies. And former Trump attorney John Dowd made a compelling case that Mueller’s report wrongly portrayed a phone message he left for a witness.

A few more such errors and omissions, and Americans may begin to wonder if the Mueller report is worth the paper on which it was printed.

John Solomon is an award-winning investigative journalist whose work over the years has exposed U.S. and FBI intelligence failures before the Sept. 11 attacks, federal scientists’ misuse of foster children and veterans in drug experiments, and numerous cases of political corruption. He serves as an investigative columnist and executive vice president for video at The Hill. Follow him on Twitter @jsolomonReports.