

13 Questions About The Wiretapping Of Paul Manafort

The wiretapping of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort is a bombshell that raises many questions about the motives and method of such surveillance.

[Ben Domenech](#)

Monday's [CNN exclusive](#) detailing that former Donald Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was wiretapped by the government is a bombshell that raises many questions about the motives and method of such surveillance.

We know that Manafort has reportedly been the focus of Robert Mueller's investigation for some time, including details of a dawn raid [reported in the New York Times](#). What is less clear is the exact nature of this wiretap, the time period that it was running on Manafort, the justification by which it was restarted after a reported gap, and the identities of others—including potentially the then-president-elect—caught up during this surveillance period by the government.

Yesterday, Manafort's spokesman released the following statement:

If true, it is a felony to reveal the existence of a FISA warrant, regardless of the fact that no charges ever emerged. The U.S Department of Justice's Inspector General should immediately conduct an investigation into these leaks and to examine the motivations behind a previous Administration's effort to surveil a political opponent. Mr. Manafort requests that the Department of Justice release any intercepts involving him and any non-Americans so interested parties can come to the same conclusion as the DOJ – there is nothing there.

Now let's be clear about what this doesn't mean: if the institutional firewalls function as intended, being surveilled by the FBI and being surveilled directly by the Obama administration are different things. This does not confirm a "wiretap of Trump" as the president's now-infamous tweet read. But as we've seen with the case of Susan Rice's potentially unjustified unmasking of Trump transition officials, that's something where skepticism is certainly warranted.

Here, though, are 13 questions that I have, given the CNN report and others that have emerged about this surveillance of Manafort, in no particular order. I believe these questions deserve to be answered, in front of Congress or in the public square:

1. When, exactly, was Paul Manafort wiretapped by the government?
2. Did the wiretap cease when Manafort became Trump's campaign chairman in March 2016, and did it resume after he ceased to have this role in August 2016, or did it overlap?
3. Was the FBI wiretap steady in the months before March 2016, before he had any official affiliation with the Trump campaign, during which time he was reportedly talking regularly with Trump and living in Trump Tower?
4. Given that Manafort lived there, did the wiretap cover Trump Tower—yes or no?
5. When was the wiretap renewed? On whose orders was the request made, and what new justification was involved?
6. If the evidence contained within the conversations the government wiretapped were indeed "not conclusive" about acts of collusion, as two sources tell CNN, why was the wiretap renewed (presuming that was the case) after Manafort left the campaign? Was it investigating the same activity, or new ones?
7. This was a 2014-based investigation given Manafort's activity on behalf of a Vladimir Putin-friendly political party in Ukraine at the time. Back in April the Podesta Group [revised](#) their FARA reporting on their involvement in that Ukraine election, when their activity was directed by Manafort. Was the Podesta Group or any of its officials included in any wiretaps in 2016?
8. The piece says that the wiretapping, which related to Manafort's work in Ukraine, was "discontinued at some point last year for lack of evidence," but that "The FBI then restarted the surveillance after obtaining a new FISA warrant that extended at least into early this year." What evidence precipitated the request for that new warrant? Presumably not new work for Ukraine. Why the change?
9. Was there anything that changed in the intervening time preceding the restart of the investigation other than the role Manafort played with the Trump campaign in 2016?
10. Was any of the justification contained within the application for the wiretap's renewal dependent on the Steele Memo, whose many claims cannot be substantiated or have been significantly debunked? We know according to [prior CNN reporting](#) it was used for approval from a FISA court regarding Carter Page.

CNN reports: "The conversations between Manafort and Trump continued after the President took office, long after the FBI investigation into Manafort was publicly known, the sources told CNN. They went on until lawyers for the President and Manafort insisted that they stop, according to the sources. It's unclear whether Trump himself was picked up on the surveillance."

11. How could it be possible that Republican nominee, president-elect, or President Trump was NOT picked up on the surveillance of Manafort if the two talked by phone as frequently as has been reported?
12. Why did Attorney General Jeff Sessions say there was no basis for Trump's tweet when it seems clear that in fact someone as senior as Manafort, working and operating within Trump Tower, was indeed wiretapped? It is possible he was being literal and specific. But if this wiretap did indeed pick up conversations with Trump, how did Sessions not know about it? Was his recusal part of that? Did it end prior to his confirmation?
13. Finally, why are we just learning about this now? Who is the person leaking information—illegally, as Manafort's statement notes—about a FISA court-based investigation? Who benefits from this report, and what is his or her motivation in letting it be known?

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