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Exclusive: Documents Detail Meetings Of Russians With Treasury, Federal Reserve



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Alexander Torshin and Maria Butina met in 2015 with top leaders in the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve, according to materials obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

<https://n.pr/2WxuyLz>

Torshin, then a Russian central banker, brought his protégée, Maria Butina, for meetings with senior officials and even sought another with the then-chair of the Fed, the documents confirm.

Newly obtained documents describe what happened when two now-infamous Russians took their outreach campaign into the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve in 2015.

Agency officials described what happened before and since in internal materials obtained by NPR under the Freedom of Information Act. The fact of the meetings has previously been reported, but their contents have not been fully described until now.

Torshin and Butina sought to build bridges between the Russian government and influential Americans via enthusiasm for gun rights. Both had life memberships in the NRA

At the same time, Russia was stepping up its broader campaign of influence against the United States.

In 2015, after the chill in relations between Washington and Moscow following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Torshin sought to take advantage of his connection to Russia's central bank.

Paul Saunders, who was then the executive director of a D.C.-based think tank called the Center for the National Interest, reached out to officials with the Treasury and the Fed to help organize meetings.

Saunders helped broker a meeting for Torshin and Butina with Nathan Sheets, then the undersecretary of the Treasury for international affairs.

After Butina was arrested, a Treasury staffer wrote about what took place.

According to that newly revealed account, the discussion about banking as about denying Russia's involvement in the shoot-down of a Malaysia Airlines jetliner and amplifying Torshin's support for guns.

"The meeting was supposed to be about economics, but the guy just went on and on about how the Russians didn't shoot down MH17 for an hour or so," the Treasury Department official wrote, referring to the Malaysia Airlines flight.

"The guy was also a gun fanatic and said he was a 'life member of the NRA.' In fact I think he was even in town for personal business tied to the NRA."

Saunders also reached out to request a meeting between then-Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen and Torshin in March 2015.

Yellen's office passed on the meeting and suggested that Torshin instead meet with Vice Chairman Stanley Fischer. Following the approval of an adviser, Fischer took the meeting on April 8, 2015, without further investigation into Torshin's background.

After months of investigations and headlines about Russia's influence campaign against the United States, Torshin was placed under sanction by the U.S. government in 2018.

In the evidentiary package that designated Torshin as a target for U.S. sanctions the Treasury established that Torshin was a Russian official who could be targeted under existing sanctions authorities.

But the package also highlighted Torshin's links w Russian organized crime.

the document noted that Torshin was in "frequent contact" with Alexander Romanov, who heads the Taganskaya organized crime group, between August 2012 to May 2013.

"Torshin may have personally given instructions to members of the Taganskaya on money laundering methods using Spanish bank accounts and real estate," the evidentiary package reads.

The package cites no classified or governmental sources, but experts say the inclusion of references to Torshin's alleged organized crime links suggests the U.S. government had reason to believe the allegation was truthful.

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