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Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Cites Fake Bin Laden Visit to Slam Manafort Indictment

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President Reagan meeting with Afghan Mujahideen leaders in the Oval Office in 1983 / Public Domain

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman on Wednesday criticized the indictment of Donald Trump's former campaign manager this week by referring to a fake visit of Osama bin Laden to the White House.

Paul Manafort and his former business associate Rick Gates were charged on Monday with failing to disclose overseas payments from the pro-Kremlin Ukrainian Party of Regions and conspiring to launder money.

Commenting on the indictment, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said lobbying was a common practice in the U.S. political system and accused the political establishment of "rejecting itself."

"Speaking of lobbying, recall the fantastic and eye-popping photographs when they received

bin Laden in the White House," she said on the Kremlin-run Rossia-1 television network.

"This is classical lobbying in the very literal sense of the word," Zakharova added during the Monday broadcast of the news program "60 Minutes."

U.S. forces killed bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks in New York, in 2011. The U.S. reportedly worked with Pakistan to arm and train thousands of Mujahideen in Afghanistan to stop the Soviet Union from expanding toward the Middle East. Many of these fighters went on to form the Taliban, the organization that offered bin Laden a safe haven.

Russian news website Theins.ru linked Zakharova's reference to a doctored photograph of former State Secretary Hillary Clinton shaking hands with a musician in traditional garb with bin Laden's head superimposed on top. The fact-checking website Snopes.com traces the origin of the fake viral photo to a 2007 Photoshop contest.

Other observers speculated that Zakharova may have been referring to former President Ronald Reagan's meeting with Afghanistan's anti-Soviet "freedom fighters," or the Mujahideen.

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