

Paradise Papers Claim Ties Between Sanctioned Russian Firm and Trump Associate

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U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross (U.S. Embassy Bangkok / Flickr (CC BY 2.0))

A member of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has financial ties to a Russian firm partly owned by sanctioned oligarchs and the alleged son-in-law of President Vladimir Putin, a massive leak of offshore documents known as the Paradise Papers [reveals](#).

Current and former officials in Trump's orbit are under scrutiny for connections to Kremlin-linked entities, with investigators probing whether Trump or his 2016 campaign aides colluded with Russia to secure the presidency.

Russia-financed "trolls" are believed to have bought several thousand ads on social media websites to stir unrest ahead of the presidential vote.

The report covers 13.4 million offshore financial documents by Bermuda-based law firm Appleby. The leak was reviewed by 96 media partners in the International Consortium of

Investigative Journalists, the group that previously also published the Panama Papers.

The leaked documents show that U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross holds a stake in a shipping giant that received millions of dollars from a gas and petrochemical firm connected to Putin's inner circle.

The firm, Sibur, is partly-owned by Kirill Shamalov, who is reportedly married to Putin's youngest daughter, and two sanctioned oligarchs, according to details published Sunday.

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The U.S. blacklisted one of Sibur's shareholders, tycoon Gennady Timchenko, after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in March 2014. The U.S. also imposed sanctions on gas producer Novatek, in which Leonid Mikhelson is a major shareholder. Mikhelson is also a shareholder in Sibur.

According to details contained within the leak, Ross has an indirect stake in Navigator through layers of offshore investments with ties to the shipping company, which operates a lucrative partnership with Sibur.

The leak shows that Sibur contributed some \$68 million to Navigator from 2014 to 2016. In 2017, Navigator expanded its fleet for Sibur's energy exports to four vessels, the Paradise Papers show.

Ross denied he had any business ties to Russia during his confirmation hearings this year. A U.S. Commerce Department spokesman told the investigation's authors that Ross never met Shamalov and recused himself from matters having to do with transoceanic shipping.

After being nominated to lead the Commerce Department, Ross was [quoted](#) as telling Navigator's CEO that "your interests are aligned with mine."

"The U.S. economy will grow, and Navigator will be a beneficiary."

The Paradise Papers also show that Russian tycoon Yury Milner has poured millions of dollars into social media websites Facebook and Twitter, helped by VTB, a Russian state-controlled bank.

The documents also show that Milner invested \$850,000 in a real estate firm co-founded by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser.

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