

## Inside the Shadowy Think Tank Tied to Paul Manafort

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A shadowy think tank that Paul Manafort boasted about directing featured one of the libertarian movement's most prominent foreign policy voices—who told *The Daily Beast* he didn't know the now-convicted fraudster was involved.

The think tank, which appears to no longer exist, typifies the way savvy lobbyists can covertly introduce and amplify voices backing their clients—a strategy that's especially valuable when those clients are tough to defend.

But while it's not unusual for lobbyists to turn to K Street to gin up support for their clients, it is extraordinary for them to manufacture entire institutions—which is just what Manafort's group reportedly did.

*The Guardian* reported in April that Manafort's then-business partner, Alan Friedman, started a “fake think tank” called the Center for the Study of Former Soviet Socialist Republics (CXSSR) to push narratives that supported his then-client, former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. People affiliated with the think tank say they don't share the assessment that it was fake, and one said he received a monthly stipend for his work.

In a charging document that Manafort endorsed in federal court last Friday as part of his guilty plea, special counsel Robert Mueller's team printed an email Manafort sent to someone only identified by the initials “SL”—presumably Yanukovich's chief of staff at the time, Serhiy Lyovochkin. In the email, sent April 21, 2013, Manafort listed several articles that he said he directed to be “done in tandem” with his lobbying work: two press releases, an op-ed published by CNN, and a piece published by the think tank.

The think tank article was headlined: “Europe makes wise choice in engaging Ukraine.”

The think tank's website no longer works. But archived internet pages show Doug Bandow, currently a scholar with the libertarian Cato Institute, was listed as its only “senior scholar” going back to 2012. A few other names come and go from the archived masthead, some of them with virtually nonexistent online footprints.

One such figure is Erika Chen. An archived version of the website, saved on May 18, 2014, described Chen as a “freelance graduate student” working on a book about the transition of

former Soviet states. Searches of Amazon and Google Books show no books by anyone named Erika Chen.

CXSSR's website also listed a scholar named Matthew Lina, described as a businessman who "operates out of Kyiv, London, and the United States" and ran a software development company and several charities. A search of Nexis shows only one person in the United States with the name Matthew Lina—who died in 1981. Five posts appeared under Lina's byline from 2011 to 2012, including a piece praising Yanukovich for moving Ukraine away from Russia's influence and another defending the prosecution of his top political rival, Yulia Tymoshenko.

Bandow told The Daily Beast the site was run by an Atlanta-based attorney named Chris Badeaux.

"This is the first that I heard Manafort was involved in any way," Bandow said via email. "Chris said he raised support for the site and I wrote a couple times a month on the region generally, including the Baltics, Central Asia, and Balkans. Then he said the money dropped off and he was ending the project (which included a couple of other regular contributors, he said)."

Bandow's writings elsewhere hew closely to the Russian position on foreign affairs. He has strenuously opposed American military support for Ukrainian forces resisting the Russian seizure of Crimea, and more recently he questioned official British government findings that Russia was behind a Salisbury nerve gas attack against a former Russian spy and his daughter in March.

Union University professor Hunter Baker is another person listed as a CXSSR scholar on the site.

"I'd be surprised to hear that CXSSR had anything to do with helping Yanukovich," Baker told The Daily Beast. "My recollection was that the group's work was directed toward the freedom of the former Soviet republics. The pieces I wrote tended to examine the situation of people in the former republics hoping to keep or achieve Western-style human rights and freedoms. The tenor of those pieces, then, was primarily suspicious of Russian intent toward the states it previously dominated and perhaps continued to control to some degree. My understanding was that the freedom of those former Soviet republics was the entire focus of the work done at the time."

Baker said Badeaux also connected him to the organization and that he was paid \$1,000 a month for the four months he wrote for the site. The site listed him as a scholar in 2012 and then as a "scholar emeritus" for years afterward.

Emails to Badeaux for comment generated an automated reply. He did not respond to follow-up questions.

Baker and another CXSSR writer, Mark Impomeni, were both contributors to the popular conservative site RedState. Impomeni, who still lists a link to his CXSSR author page in his Twitter bio, declined to comment on his work. "I haven't written on politics in a few years and separated from CXSSR sometime in 2013," he told The Daily Beast in an email. "I don't have anything further to say on the matter."

Manafort appears to have taken interest in coverage of pro-Yanukovich writings at RedState. BuzzFeed published a story on July 16, 2013, detailing efforts to persuade conservative bloggers to write favorable pieces about Yanukovich's party. The next day, according to court filings, an email was sent with the story's headline as its subject line.

The email's sender and recipient are not listed, but it was included as a potential piece of evidence in Manafort's D.C. trial. That trial would have focused on his illegal lobbying work. But it never happened, because he pleaded guilty.