

Trump's national security advisor Michael Flynn resigns

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Donald Trump's national security advisor, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, resigned late Monday following an escalating controversy in Washington over reports that he discussed anti-Russian sanctions with Moscow's ambassador to the US in the month before President Donald Trump took office.

Speculation within the media was rife Monday that Flynn could either be fired or forced to resign following the revelations concerning his discussions with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in light of the previous repeated denials from Flynn, Vice President Mike Pence and others in the administration that they included sanctions.

While the conflict within the administration was initially reported as centering on Flynn supposedly lying to Pence about the content of his conversation with the Russian ambassador, the *Washington Post* reported late Monday that Sally Yates, the acting attorney general fired by Trump for refusing to defend his Muslim ban against court challenges, had informed the incoming administration of the discussion of sanctions last month.

The conversations between Flynn and the Russian ambassador had been bugged by US intelligence agencies, which first provided transcripts to the outgoing Obama administration and then leaked them to the media.

The conversations in question—Reuters reports that there were five separate calls—took place on December 29, the same day that the Obama administration announced a series of measures targeting Russia in connection with unsubstantiated allegations that the government of Vladimir Putin hacked into the Democratic National Committee and sought to interfere in the 2016 US presidential election. The moves include the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats and the imposition of economic sanctions against Russian intelligence agencies and officials.

According to the account of the conversations published by the *Post* last week, Flynn's comments to the Russian ambassador "were interpreted by some senior US officials as an inappropriate and potentially illegal signal to the Kremlin that it could expect a reprieve from sanctions ... Flynn urged

Russia not to overreact to the penalties being imposed by President Barack Obama."

A seldom enforced law known as the Logan Act bars private citizens from engaging in diplomacy with a foreign government "in relation to any disputes or controversies with the United States."

The *Washington Post* reported Monday that support for Flynn within the administration had "eroded largely because of a belief that he was disingenuous about Russia" and cited one White House official as saying, "The knives are out for Flynn."

The website Politico, meanwhile, reported that "Trump has told several people that he is particularly displeased with national security advisor Michael Flynn over reports that he had top-secret discussions with Russian officials and lied about it." It quoted a person said to be "familiar" with Trump's thoughts on the matter as saying, "I would be worried if I was General Flynn."

Speaking on Sunday morning talk shows, Stephen Miller, the ultra-right Republican operative designated as Trump's "chief policy adviser," made no attempt to deflect the denunciations of Flynn. "It's not for me to tell you what's in the president's mind," he said, when asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" whether the president still had confidence in his national security advisor.

This was followed on Monday by contradictory statements from Trump aide Kellyanne Conway, who said the president had full confidence in Flynn, and White House spokesman Sean Spicer, who reported, "The president is evaluating the situation. He is speaking to...Vice President Pence relative to the conversation the vice president had with General Flynn and also speaking to various other people about what he considers the single most important subject there is, our national security."

For his part, a spokesman for the Kremlin declined to comment on the matter. "We would like to give no comments on any internal discussions in Washington," said Dmitry Peskov.

It is difficult to believe that Flynn initiated the talks with

the Russian ambassador without Trump's knowledge. He emerged as one of the then-Republican candidate's closest and most loyal advisors during the election campaign and was acting on an agenda that Trump himself had spelled out of seeking at least a tactical rapprochement with Russia.

That position on foreign policy was met with a vitriolic campaign in which Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and her supporters revived the rhetoric of McCarthyism, seeking to foment fear about Russia and painting Trump as an agent of Moscow.

The Democrats' attacks reflected the position of the leading sections of the US military and intelligence apparatus, which has invested substantial resources in the buildup of military aggression against Moscow, from the Middle East, to the 2014 coup in Ukraine, to the ongoing deployment of US and NATO troops on Russia's western borders.

The Obama administration's imposition of a new round of sanctions last December had the aim of further boxing the Trump administration into the confrontation with Russia.

To the extent that Trump has indicated a new global strategy, it has been one of attempting to drive a wedge between Russia, on the one hand, and Iran and China, on the other, in order to concentrate US aggression against these two countries. This is clearly not a policy of pulling back from the drive toward global war that developed uninterruptedly under the Obama administration, but merely changing the order of targets.

In response to the latest revelations about Flynn's meetings with the Russian ambassador and denials of what the CIA has now leaked to the media, leading Democrats mounted a campaign demanding that Flynn be stripped of his security clearance, suspended as national security advisor or fired.

The Democrats' targeting Flynn was carried out in close collaboration with the intelligence agencies, whose leading layers had little use for the former lieutenant general when he was head of the Defense Intelligence Agency and stridently promoted a theory of a new world war against Islam, while seeking non-existent "intelligence" linking Iran with ISIS.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Democrat, California) issued a statement Monday declaring that Flynn "cannot be trusted not to put Putin before America," adding, "This Administration has exhausted its excuses. Vladimir Putin's grip on President Trump must be investigated, exposed and broken. National security demands that General Flynn be fired immediately."

Meanwhile, two leading Senate Democrats, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Chris Murphy of Connecticut, called for an investigation of Flynn's actions.

Just a week and a half ago, Flynn came forward as the spokesman for the real policy of escalating militarism and war that underlies Trump's "America First" policy, when he marched into a White House press conference announcing that "we are officially putting Iran on notice" over the country's ballistic missile test. At the time, there was no comparable hue and cry over this ultimatum and implied threat of a new and far bloodier war in the Middle East. Rather, the reaction of the Democrats and the media that supports them was either subdued or sympathetic.

The Democrats are neither able nor willing to mount any significant opposition to Trump's policy of war abroad and reaction at home. Instead, they continue with their relentless campaign to demonize Russia and denounce Trump for being too close to Putin, a point of attack that aligns them closely with leading factions in the military-intelligence apparatus.

The White House issued a statement announcing that Flynn would be replaced with Joseph Kellogg, another retired lieutenant general, who had served as chief of staff of the National Security Council. While in the military, Kellogg played a prominent role in the US occupation regime in Iraq. After retirement, he went to work for several military contractors.

Meanwhile, it was also reported that Trump has arranged an interview with David Petraeus on Tuesday, possibly to take the post of national security advisor. Petraeus, a former CIA director and four-star general, was forced to resign in 2012 and was subsequently convicted in connection with sharing classified information with his mistress and biographer, Paula Broadwell. In testimony to before a House panel at the end of last month, Petraeus portrayed Russia and the Putin government as attempting to undermine "our entire democratic way of life."



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