

Behind the Flynn resignation and Trump crisis: A bitter conflict over imperialist policy

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The Trump administration is facing an escalating political crisis following the Monday evening resignation of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. There are growing calls from the media and sections of the political establishment for congressional investigations into Flynn's contacts with Russia prior to Trump's inauguration, and demands that Trump explain what he knew about the contacts and whether Flynn was operating with his knowledge and approval.

On Tuesday afternoon, it was reported that the FBI interviewed Flynn soon after Trump's inauguration about his telephone conversation with the Russian ambassador to Washington, Sergey Kislyak, on December 29, 2016. The call was secretly monitored and recorded by the National Security Agency.

The *Washington Post* revealed that Justice Department officials informed the White House several weeks ago that Flynn had discussed US sanctions on Russia with the ambassador, and that his repeated denials of that fact were false. A transcript of the Flynn-Kislyak conversation is reportedly circulating at the highest levels of official Washington.

In the corporate-controlled media, a series of commentators, serving as conduits for material provided by the Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency, have begun to raise the specter of impeachment or a Nixon-style forced resignation.

A raging conflict within the US ruling elite has erupted to the surface of American political life. The battle involves the major institutions of the capitalist state—the White House, CIA, NSA, FBI and Pentagon—as well as the leaderships of both the Democratic and Republican parties. At the center of this conflict are divisions over foreign policy and concerns within the military-intelligence apparatus that

the Trump administration is not taking a sufficiently aggressive line against Russia.

The campaign against Trump is no less reactionary and militaristic than the new administration itself. It has a definite logic, leading to an escalation of the political and military confrontation with Russia, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the entire world.

This campaign is the central preoccupation of the Democratic Party. Throughout the final months of the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton repeatedly attacked Trump as a political stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin, while presenting herself as the more reliable defender of American imperialism.

The issue was raised again during the postelection transition, with claims that “Russian hacking” was responsible for Trump's surprise victory. Following Trump's inauguration, the theme has been taken up once more, with congressional Democrats and a section of Senate Republicans acting as the political spearhead of the CIA and Pentagon.

Congressional Democrats seized on Flynn's resignation to raise the Watergate-era question, “What did the president know and when did he know it?” Their contention is that when Flynn telephoned Kislyak on December 29, the same day President Obama imposed new sanctions on Russia, Flynn was conveying assurances from Trump that those sanctions would be relaxed or discarded outright once Trump entered the White House.

The most strident comments came from Eric Swalwell of California, a member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, who declared that Trump aides “have improper relationships with Russia” and that Trump himself was implicated. “The Republicans may have the majorities in Congress and their candidate may have won the White House, but [the

Democrats] are not helpless,” he said. “We have the American people, and the American people will not be satisfied until they know whether the president is with us or with Russia.”

Swalwell would have been more truthful if he had said the Democrats “are not helpless” because they have the CIA, the NSA and much of the Pentagon behind them, powerful sections of the state apparatus that have made an enormous strategic investment in preparing for war with Russia.

The Democratic Party oozes complacency and passivity when it comes to Trump’s cabinet nominations and his issuance of antidemocratic and unconstitutional executive orders. This is because, whatever their tactical criticisms of these elements of Trump’s policy, they are in line with the interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy that both parties represent. But when given the chance to wage a McCarthy-style campaign claiming that Trump is a Russian stooge, they charge into battle frothing at the mouth.

It is significant that sections of congressional Republicans, as well as Democrats, have distanced themselves from Trump over this issue. It is not just warmongers like John McCain and Lindsey Graham. The Senate Republican leadership has agreed to investigate alleged Russian interference in the US elections and to include Flynn’s contacts with Russia within the scope of the inquiry.

US imperialism seeks to counter its declining world economic position by exploiting its unchallenged global military dominance. It sees as the principal roadblocks to its hegemonic aims the growing economic and military power of China and the still-considerable strength of Russia, possessor of the world’s second-largest nuclear arsenal, the largest reserves of oil and gas, and a critical geographical position at the center of the Eurasian land mass.

Trump’s opponents within the ruling class insist that US foreign policy must target Russia, with the aim of weakening the Putin regime or overthrowing it. This is deemed a prerequisite for taking on the challenge posed by China.

Numerous Washington think tanks have developed scenarios for military conflicts with Russian forces in the Middle East, in Ukraine, in the Baltic States and in cyberspace. The national security elite is not prepared

to accept a shift in orientation away from the policy of direct confrontation with Russia along the lines proposed by Trump, who would like for the present to lower tensions with Russia in order to focus first on China.

Even as the struggle rages within the ruling class and the capitalist state, the Trump administration’s attacks on democratic rights are provoking an unprecedented outpouring of popular opposition. Millions of working people and youth, native-born and immigrant, have taken part in protests against the new government. But this broad social movement has, as yet, neither a clear political program articulating the independent interests of the working class nor a revolutionary socialist leadership.

This situation poses grave dangers. The intelligence agencies, acting primarily through the Democratic Party, are seeking to hijack the mass opposition to Trump and redirect it behind their war plans, whether directed against Russia or China, using supposed external enemies as lightning rods for rising social and economic distress.

Workers and young people must not line up behind either faction of the ruling elite. Both are preparing for new military bloodbaths to safeguard the profits of American corporations. They are fighting over tactics and the sequence of targets, not over whether to send American youth to kill or be killed in imperialist wars.

The struggle against the Trump administration poses the need for a complete break with the Democrats and Republicans, the twin parties of big business, and the building of a mass independent political movement of working people, based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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