

Guilty plea by Trump's former national security adviser Flynn intensifies US political crisis

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The guilty plea Friday by Michael Flynn, President Donald Trump's former national security advisor, marks a major escalation in the unprecedented political crisis in the United States. The bitter conflicts within the ruling class, centered on issues of foreign policy, are entering a new and explosive stage.

Flynn pleaded guilty to lying about his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the US, Sergei Kislyak, in the run-up to Trump's inauguration. However, the real significance lies less in the content of the charges than the implications of the plea deal. It is an unmistakable indication that the retired general has agreed to provide evidence against more important targets, including both Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and adviser, and the president himself.

There are powerful sections of the ruling class that want to push Trump out, and with Flynn they appear to have obtained plenty of ammunition. At the very least, the investigations into allegations of collusion with Russia, headed by former FBI chief Robert Mueller, are now targeting Trump's family and inner circle.

In an indication of the nervousness within the financial aristocracy over the implications of political instability in the US, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged 350 points following news of the guilty plea, before regaining much of what it lost on anticipation of the Senate's passage of a tax handout to the rich. The sharp financial fluctuations reflect growing concerns within the ruling oligarchy that the bitter internecine conflict in Washington, and increasing signs of instability in the Trump White House, could spin out of control.

The brief one-felony count charge to which Flynn pleaded was that he made "materially false, fictitious and fraudulent statements" to FBI agents regarding two telephone calls the retired general, then a senior member

of Trump's transition team, held with the Russian ambassador in late December 2016. Flynn has pledged to fully cooperate with Mueller's investigation, including by testifying in any future criminal cases.

Prosecutors said that Flynn had discussed his communications with the Russian ambassador with a top figure in the Trump transition team, and that he had been directed by "a very senior member" of the team.

ABC News, citing a Flynn confidante, reported that Flynn was prepared to testify that Trump had instructed him to make contact with Russian officials when he was still a presidential candidate.

The plea marks the fall of the first major figure in Trump's inner circle to the investigation into allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 election led by the Justice Department's special prosecutor, Mueller.

The special prosecutor has charged three other individuals. However, two of them, Paul Manafort, a former Trump campaign manager, and his business associate, Richard Gates, were indicted over offenses unrelated to the campaign. The third, George Papadopoulos, a low-level campaign adviser who assumed no position in the Trump administration, was, like Flynn, charged with lying to the FBI about contacts with individuals claiming to have connections with top Russian officials.

Flynn, however, was one of the most senior campaign and foreign policy advisers to Trump. A retired three-star Army general and former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), he was a man who shared Trump's virulent anti-Muslim views. He was bitterly hostile to the Democratic Party and the leadership of the military and the intelligence agencies over being forced out as DIA director.

Trump named him his national security adviser, a

position Flynn held for just the first 25 days of the administration. He was forced out over allegedly lying to Vice President Mike Pence about a conversation in which Flynn relayed a request to the Russian ambassador for Moscow not to retaliate aggressively to sanctions imposed by the Obama administration.

Trump was well aware of this request, however, and the White House had been informed of the content of the phone calls and Flynn's lies to the FBI by then-acting Attorney General Sally Yates 18 days before Flynn was fired. The calls had been recorded by the FBI, which had bugged the Russian ambassador's phone.

Even after his firing, Trump repeatedly praised Flynn, and, according to FBI Director James Comey, whom Trump subsequently fired, directly asked for the bureau to drop its investigation of the retired general.

On Friday, however, Trump's lawyer issued a statement attempting to distance the White House from Flynn, describing him as a "former Obama administration official."

In a statement read to the court Friday, Flynn lamented having had to "endure these months of false accusations of 'treason' and other outrageous acts," while acknowledging that "the actions I acknowledged in court today were wrong."

While Flynn may not have committed treason, he, like many other top members of the Pentagon brass, cashed in on his military service after being forced into retirement by the Obama administration in 2014. He is accused of acting as a lobbyist for the Turkish government without registering his company, Flynn Intel Group, as an agent of a foreign government. His activities reportedly included discussions of kidnapping Fethullah Gulen, an Islamist opponent of the Erdogan regime who lives in Pennsylvania, and forcibly returning him to Turkey.

Among the most significant facts disclosed in the special prosecutor's case against Flynn is that the second call with Kislyak was initiated at the request of a "very senior member" of the transition team—identified by various sources as Jared Kushner—to secure Russia's cooperation in squelching or postponing a vote by the United Nations Security Council to censure Israel over the expansion of illegal Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank. The Obama administration had signaled that, for the first time, the US would not veto such a measure. In the end, the vote went ahead, with the US abstaining.

The US media has largely glossed over this issue, either omitting any mention of the Israeli connection or making no analysis of its significance. That the Trump transition

team was intervening on behalf of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, not Putin, cuts across the narrative of Moscow's supposed meddling in the 2016 election and the anti-Russia propaganda campaign that is bound up with both war preparations abroad and the suppression of free speech and democratic rights at home.

From the evidence presented so far, outside of lying to the FBI and obstruction of justice, any underlying offense would fall under the Logan Act, a law drafted in 1797 that bars private citizens from negotiating with foreign governments or subverting the policies of the US government on their behalf.

No one has ever been prosecuted under this law, despite the interventions by then-Republican candidates Richard Nixon to scuttle Vietnam peace negotiations in 1968 and Ronald Reagan to delay the release of US embassy hostages in Iran in 1980, in order to influence elections. Any prosecution of the Trump administration would be problematic given the connection to Israel, whose interests are regularly promoted by politicians of both major parties.

Whether Flynn's plea deal is the opening gambit in a move to oust Trump from the White House remains to be seen. It has taken place in the context of Trump's re-tweeting of British fascist anti-Muslim filth, threats to obliterate nuclear-armed North Korea, and increasing media commentary questioning the US president's sanity. Significant factions of the ruling class see Trump's presidency as a disaster for US imperialist interests abroad and for the stability of the United States at home.

Underlying the escalating crisis are intense social, economic and geopolitical tensions bound up with the erosion of both the global dominance and national stability of American capitalism. Within the capitalist ruling class, opposition to Trump is driven largely by hostility to any weakening of the anti-Russia policy developed under Obama.

Removal of Trump from office on these grounds will only create the conditions for a government even more firmly under the control of the US military and intelligence apparatus.



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