

ONE DAY AFTER SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL LEAKS DETAILS OF “RED PHONE” CALL, RUSSIA CUTS BACK COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE US

Yesterday, I expressed alarm that someone identified as a “senior intelligence official” not only leaked to NBC *that* President Obama had used the crisis “Red Phone” with Russia for the first time in his presidency (at least in a cyber context), but characterized the communication as muddled.

A month later, the U.S. used the vestige of an old Cold War communications system – the so-called “Red Phone” that connects Moscow to Washington – to reinforce Obama’s September warning that the U.S. would consider any interference on Election Day a grave matter.

This time Obama used the phrase “armed conflict.”

[snip]

A senior intelligence official told NBC News the message ultimately sent to the Russians was “muddled” – with no bright line laid down and no clear warning given about the consequences. The Russian response, said the official, was non-committal.

But it alarms me that someone decided it was a good idea to go leak criticisms of a Red Phone exchange. It would seem that such an instrument depends on some

foundation of trust that, no matter how bad things have gotten, two leaders of nuclear armed states can speak frankly and directly.

Without that conversation being broadcast to the entire world via leaks.

Today, Reuters released a bizarre report – really signals within signals – claiming that most channels of dialogue are frozen.

The Kremlin said on Wednesday it did not expect the incoming U.S. administration to reject NATO enlargement overnight and that almost all communications channels between Russia and the United States were frozen, the RIA news agency reported.

“Almost every level of dialogue with the United States is frozen. We don’t communicate with one another, or (if we do) we do so minimally,” Peskov said

I say it’s bizarre because it’s not a firsthand report. It reports that RIA reported that Peskov said this in an interview with the Mir TV station. So it lacks context.

Moreover, it appears to be false, given that John Kerry spoke with Sergei Lavrov yesterday (with whom he seems to have a pretty good relationship).

MR KIRBY: Well, as you know, we weren’t a party to the talks, but Secretary Kerry did speak today to both Foreign Minister Lavrov and Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, who were there. And they provided the Secretary a sense of how the discussions went.

Nevertheless, this may be a kind of signaling.

It’s precisely the kind of possibility that I worried about when I noted the leak.