

# DAVID IGNATIUS' CURIOUS ROLE IN THE MIKE FLYNN STORY

I'm traveling again, so I'm running on delayed coverage of the Trump circus.

But I wanted to point out something that has been puzzling me: David Ignatius' curious role in the events leading up to the forced resignation of Mike Flynn as President Trump's National Security Adviser.

After all, Ignatius set off the events with this article. The article included two curious details. First, in an update to the story, Ignatius stated as fact that the Russian plane carrying a military choir to Syria had been shot down.

This official later added that Flynn's initial call was to express condolences to Kislyak after the terrorist killing of the Russian ambassador to Ankara Dec. 19, and that Flynn made a second call Dec. 28 to express condolences for the shoot-down of a Russian plane carrying a choir to Syria.

Perhaps this was a mistake, but no cause for the crash has been reported (and it'd be even more curious if Trump's people knew this was a shoot-down right away, given the lack of public accounting for it). There has been no follow-up about who shot down this plane (and little claim that it was terrorism).

More importantly for the Flynn story, Ignatius reported the December 29 calls between Sergey Kislyak and Flynn, the first public mention of them.

According to a senior U.S. government official, Flynn phoned Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak several times on Dec. 29, the day the Obama

administration announced the expulsion of 35 Russian officials as well as other measures in retaliation for the hacking. What did Flynn say, and did it undercut the U.S. sanctions? The Logan Act (though never enforced) bars U.S. citizens from correspondence intending to influence a foreign government about “disputes” with the United States. Was its spirit violated? The Trump campaign didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

If the Trump team’s contacts helped discourage the Russians from a counter-retaliation, maybe that’s a good thing. But we ought to know the facts.

Ignatius not only knew of the calls, but he knew enough to ask the question – which the FBI would later pose to Flynn in an interview – about whether Flynn had undercut US sanctions. In response to his mention of the calls, other journalists followed up with Mike Pence, which ultimately led to the excused reason for Flynn’s firing, that he had lied to Pence about the calls. Frankly, that questioning also clearly led to Flynn correcting his story between February 8 and 9, which suggests he may have reviewed the transcripts in the interim.

While Ignatius’ report is mentioned in a WaPo timeline of these events, he’s not bylined in either of the two big bombshells from WaPo on this, even though up to seven journalists are mentioned.

There are two obvious explanations. First, that Ignatius’ column, which serves as a mouthpiece for the IC (and especially CIA), is not generally treated in the same way other journalism at the WaPo is. And possibly, specifically in this case, if that reference were treated as reporting rather than speculation, it might lead Trump’s leak investigation back to the source that kicked off this leak fest. But by posing it as speculative

questioning, it protects that original source.

Whatever the explanation is, I think the odd circumstances surrounding the story invite further attention to two of the other questions Ignatius poses in that column. He asked, for example, whether Obama delayed his response to the Russian out of fears Russia would do something worse to Hillary.

Did the administration worry that the Russians would take additional steps to hurt Clinton and help Trump, and might disrupt balloting itself?

According to public reports, Obama twice raised probes of registration databases directly with Putin; after the election the IC included them among Russia's roles. What exactly was the Obama Administration worried about here?

And Ignatius also asked a question I've heard floated (which is one reason I focused so intently on the curious forensic details about the dossier): that the Russians themselves released the anti-Trump dossier compiled by Christopher Steele to sow further chaos (and, presumably, to hurt Trump).

Finally, what's the chance that Russian intelligence has gamed its covert action more subtly than we realize? Applying a counter-intelligence lens, it's worth asking whether the Russians hoped to be discovered, and whether Russian operatives fed the former MI6 officer's controversial dossier deliberately, to sow further chaos.

Clearly, Ignatius' source on the Flynn call with Kislyak advanced the story in a direction that led to Flynn's firing. What else were Ignatius' source or sources for the this story trying to lead reporting to?