

MEDITATIONS: WHAT IS THIS THING? EXAMINING TRUMP-RUSSIA

"This thing, what is it in itself, in its own constitution? What is its substance and material? And what its causal nature (or form)? And what is it doing in the world? And how long does it subsist?"

– *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book VIII, sect. XI*

When writing about the Trump-Russia investigations, there's invariably push back questioning the legitimacy of inquiry or the sanity of those who seek answers.

One of the most persistent demands is for unassailable proof the Russians were responsible for hacking the US, whether the DNC or other systems, and any inability to provide such unquestionable evidence invalidates investigations for those who insist on proof.

But such demands may never be met in a way satisfying these demands. Some of these demands are made knowing with certainty that full disclosure of evidence would reveal sources and methods and therefore cannot be made in public.

It's the specificity of these demands which redirects the attention away from what the investigations may find. Rather than allow ourselves to be derailed by what we aren't able to answer, we should rely on first principles and examine what is directly in front of us.

What is this thing?

Pull together what are known facts and look at them. Here are a few; what are they, at face value?

- Then-president Obama warned Trump against

Michael Flynn as national security adviser.
(10-NOV-2017)

- Trump hired Flynn anyhow, against his predecessor's recommendation. (18-NOV-2017)
- Flynn had a history of breaking rules, including the secret installation of an internet connection in his Pentagon office.
- Flynn had dialogue with foreign agents without disclosing truthfully the nature of his discussions. (29-DEC-2016; possibly more and other contacts earlier)
- Trump kept Flynn on as national security adviser after deputy attorney general Sally Yates warned White House counsel Don McGahn that Flynn could be blackmailed. (26/27-JAN-2017)
- Yates was fired the same day she was to provide White House counsel with more information about Flynn, after she announced the DOJ would not enforce the executive order signed 27-JAN-2017 banning Muslim travelers; the president wrote she was "weak on borders and very weak on illegal immigration." (30-JAN-2017)
- Flynn denied talking with Russian ambassador Sergei Kislyak in December 2016 about U.S. sanctions on Russia. (08-FEB-2017)
- The Washington Post reported Flynn had spoken with Kislyak about the sanctions according to officials from both Obama and Trump administration with access to reports about Flynn's communications. (09-FEB-2017)
- Flynn resigned as national security adviser.
- Trump nominated Jeff Sessions as attorney general.
- During his Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, Sessions said, "I didn't have—did not have communications with

the Russians” when asked if there was any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of the campaign. (10-JAN-2017)

- In responses to written questions from Senate Judiciary Committee member Pat Leahy, Sessions denied he had been “in contact with anyone connected to any part of the Russian government about the 2016 election”. (17-JAN-2017)

- Reports emerged that Sessions had spoken twice with Kislyak during the campaign season. (01-MAR-2017)

- In a statement later the same evening, Sessions said, “I never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign. I have no idea what this allegation is about. It is false.”

- After calls by Democratic members of Congress for Sessions to resign, Sessions recused himself from any investigations into Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election. (02-MAR-2017)

What is this, on the face of it, with regard to Flynn, Sessions and Trump-Russia? What was the nature of Flynn’s and Sessions’ contacts with Russian officials? What were these multiple undisclosed meetings and denials supposed to do, if left unquestioned and uninterrupted? Why would two key figures in the Trump campaign and administration both have contact with Russian officials either during the campaign season or after the election before inauguration, and then lie about the nature contacts?

Similarly, we can look at Donald Trump Jr.’s and Jared Kushner’s actions through the campaign and post-election and -inauguration. We see more undisclosed interactions, more denials and lies, more forced disclosure.

We can also look at Trump’s words and deeds: long sympathetic to Russia, he more than hints

that Russia should hack his opponent's emails during the campaign season. He is not forthcoming about his finances. He does not resolve conflicts of interest. He leans on FBI director to drop the investigation into Flynn's Russia-related activities, ultimately firing him. His attendance at the G20 meeting yielded private, unrecorded meetings with Russian president Putin. He's harassed Sessions for having recused himself from the Russia investigations. He vacillated on whether he will or will not sign the latest sanctions on Russia which Congress passed last week.

And in the last 24 hours, after Russia demanded an end to specific sanctions on former U.S.-based Russian compounds, after Russia retaliated by ejecting U.S. diplomatic personnel, Trump does not offer any response, leaving VP Mike Pence to offer tepid supportive comments for NATO allies.

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