

# THE FLYNN-TURKEY DEAL RAISES THE OBSTRUCTION STAKES FOR THE PREET BHARARA FIRING

Twitter is abuzz this morning with the WSJ story (this is the NBC version of it; here's a paywall free link) that Mike Flynn and his spawn hoped to make up to \$15 million for kidnapping Fethullah Gulen and delivering him to Turkey.

Investigators for Special Counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russia's interference with the U.S. presidential election recently questioned witnesses about the alleged December 2016 meeting between Flynn and senior Turkish officials, two people knowledgeable with the interviews said. The questions were part of a line of inquiry regarding Flynn's lobbying efforts on behalf of Turkey.

Mueller's investigation into Flynn's potential deal with Turkey was first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*.

Four people familiar with the investigation said Mueller is looking into whether Flynn discussed in the late December meeting orchestrating the return to Turkey of a chief rival of Turkish President Recep Erdogan who lives in the U.S. Additionally, three people familiar with the probe said investigators are examining whether Flynn and other participants discussed a way to free a Turkish-Iranian gold trader, Reza Zarrab, who is jailed in the U.S. Zarrab is facing federal charges that he helped Iran skirt U.S.

sanctions.

The story has already been told; what's new about this iteration of it is the eye-popping pay-off, as well as more details about the timing and location of a second meeting.

The meeting allegedly took place at the upscale 21 Club restaurant in New York, just blocks away from Trump Tower where Flynn was serving on the presidential transition team. Flynn was offered upwards of \$15 million, to be paid directly or indirectly, if he could complete the deal, according to two sources familiar with the meeting.

Mostly, the focus has been on the kidnapping part of the story (perhaps, in part, because Republicans tried to attack James Woolsey for his involvement in it a few weeks back). But, because of the timeline, I think the far more interesting side of it is the inclusion of a deal on the Reza Zarrab prosecution – because that implicates Trump's decision to fire Preet Bharara, substantiating a parallel case to his firing of Jim Comey.

As noted, SDNY is prosecuting Zarrab for laundering Turkish gold into Iranian coffers. Rudy Giuliani and Michael Mukasey are representing Zarrab, with Giuliani going so far as brokering a deal that would trade foreign policy cooperation for Zarrab's release even while defying pressure from DOJ about explaining his role in it. Because the case implicates Recep Tayyip Erdogan personally, the impending trial has led to increasing diplomatic tensions with Turkey.

By November 30, Trump assured Preet, as he did Comey, that he would stay on in the Trump Administration. But that changed when, in March, Trump unexpectedly asked for the resignation of almost all US Attorneys. Preet forced the issue and made Trump fire him; early reports suggested

Marc Mukasey might replace Preet. Since then, Jeff Sessions has struggled to explain his own role in the firing, which could be an important element to proving the reasons behind it. In the same hearing, it came out that Trump has personally interviewed potential successors for Preet.

In the wake of the Preet firing, those watching closely honed in on the connection between increasing scrutiny on Flynn's ties with Turkey and the firing.

There's another reason we should all be alarmed by the unceremonious firing of Preet Bharara, outgoing U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Bharara is presently involved in a case against Reza Zarrab, a dual Iranian-Turkish national accused of violating U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Investigators initially focused on Zarrab's sanctions evasion. They then discovered that Zarrab was in close contact with Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, who used illicit funds to provide weapons, financing and logistics for jihadi groups in Syria including ISIS.

Bharara has a reputation as a non-partisan professional. He is known for independence and resisting direction, which led to tensions with the Justice Department and the U.S. Department of State.

As it happens, Bharara's dismissal occurred the same day [actually Flynn filed his FARA registration on March 7] former National Security Adviser Gen. Michael Flynn admitted to obscuring ties with Turkish interests in violation of the Foreign Agent Registration Act. Bharara's dismissal also occurred in the wake of recent contact between Berat Albayrak, Erdogan's son-in-law, and

Jared Kushner.

What this story provides is – like the Comey firing and not coincidentally also tied to Mike Flynn’s actions – important timing. In November, Trump promised to keep Preet. In December, Flynn continued his discussions with the Turks. In March, just after DOJ started forcing Flynn to reveal details about his work for Turkey, Trump reneged on his promise to Preet and – in the guise of firing everyone – fired Preet.

Here’s what the timeline looks like:

November 30: Trump tells Preet he can stay

Mid-December: Flynn has meeting discussing \$15 million payoff for doing Turkey’s bidding

March 7: Flynn submits delated FARA registration *ending* in November

March 11: Trump fires Preet

Given Sessions’ confusion about whether he was really involved in that decision, I would bet there’s a paper trail showing he provided, as he did for the Comey firing, cover for a decision that had already been made.

The one other important detail of this story, which follows on stories from yesterday, is that Mueller has implicated Flynn Jr in this deal. That reportedly is already making Flynn Sr consider pleading, to protect his son.

But if he does that, he may be forced to disclose how closely Trump was involved in these discussions to sell US policy to Turkey to enrich a staffer.