

ON THE BREADCRUMBS SUGGESTING FEDS FLIPPED REZA ZARRAB

In response to last week's WSJ story on Mike Flynn's sustained discussions about helping Turkey kidnap Fethullah Gulen, I suggested the far more interesting detail was his involvement in brokering a deal for Reza Zarrab, a Turk accused of laundering gold to benefit Iran. That's because, in addition to any taint of a quid pro quo, it also implicated Trump's decision to fire Preet Bharara.

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.

[snip]

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 delayed 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.

Today, the Daily Beast has a piece suggesting (albeit backed by a long series of no comments from lawyers) that the Feds may have flipped Zarrab.

Mueller is reportedly looking at a December meeting blocks from Trump Tower where Michael Flynn—shortly before Trump became president and named him national security adviser—was reportedly offered upward of \$15 million if he could help Turkey win the extradition of cleric Fethullah Gülen as well as the release of gold trader Reza Zarrab.

Now it appears Zarrab, whose trial for allegedly cheating U.S. sanctions by facilitating gold-for-gas deals between Turkey and Iran is scheduled to begin in just days, may be working with federal prosecutors.

Last month, lawyers for his co-defendant, bank manager Mehmet Atilla, remarked sardonically in court filings that Zarrab, the man at the root of the charges facing their client, had all but vanished, and it seemed “likely that Mr. Atilla will be the only defendant appearing at trial.”

It's a reasonable suggestion. And one other bread crumb might support it: the tidbit that Mueller's team added a prosecutor last week, who remains unnamed.

Mueller's work isn't just confined to his team of prosecutors, which special counsel spokesman Peter Carr said grew last week to 17 with the addition of an unnamed lawyer.

Zarrab was removed from BOP custody on Wednesday November 8, so the same week that this unnamed additional prosecutor was added to the team.

Mind you, it's not clear how much Zarrab – who was in jail for the period of the alleged meetings – would know about Flynn's involvement in any proposed deals. He would, however, know what his lawyers Rudy 9/11 and Michael Mukasey had claimed about such deals.

Of course, it's also possible he was flipped on someone else, like other officials in the Turkish government, or that something else explains the move.

That said, the prosecutors from SDNY would surely be quite interested in exacting some kind of price for Preet's abrupt removal, and Zarrab might provide the way to do that.

Update: There has always been confusion about whether Michael (the former AG) or Marc (his son) was the lawyer who weighed in for Zarrab, which continues (as Jim notes). It was Michael, not Marc. I've corrected this post accordingly.