

WON'T DOUBLING DOWN ON PAUL MANAFORT BEING A TRAITOR MAKE HIM MORE LIKELY TO FLIP?

Here is the full substance of what Steve Bannon said about the June 9, 2016 meeting between Don Jr, Jared Kushner, and Paul Manafort.

"The chance that Don Jr. did not walk these jumbos up to his father's office on the twenty-sixth floor is zero," said an astonished and derisive Bannon, not long after the meeting was revealed.

"The three senior guys in the campaign," an incredulous Bannon went on, "thought it was a good idea to meet with a foreign government inside Trump Tower in the conference room on the twenty-fifth floor—with no lawyers. They didn't have any lawyers. Even if you thought that this was not treasonous, or unpatriotic, or bad shit, and I happen to think it's all of that, you should have called the FBI immediately. Even if you didn't think to do that, and you're totally amoral, and you wanted that information, you do it in a Holiday Inn in Manchester, New Hampshire, with your lawyers who meet with these people and go through everything and then they verbally come and tell another lawyer in a cut-out, and if you've got something, then you figure out how to dump it down to Breitbart or something like that, or maybe some other more legitimate publication. You never see it, you never know it, because you don't need to. . . . But that's the brain trust that they had."

I'll return, at some point, to this formulation, which complains more about *how* Don Jr took this meeting with Russian figures than that they didn't involve cut-outs to maintain plausible deniability.

But for the moment, I want to look at the substance of Bannon's non-apology apology.

Threatened with being cut off from the Mercer family wingnut welfare, Bannon has offered this peace offering (you can click through to see how he boasts of his own importance in his obsequious comments on Trump):

- *"Donald Trump, Jr. is both a patriot and a good man. He has been relentless in his advocacy for his father and the agenda that has helped turn our country around."*

[snip]

- *"My comments about the meeting with Russian nationals came from my life experiences as a Naval officer stationed aboard a destroyer whose main mission was to hunt Soviet submarines to my time at the Pentagon during the Reagan years when our focus was the defeat of 'the evil empire' and to making films about Reagan's*

war against the Soviets and Hillary Clinton's involvement in selling uranium to them."

- "My comments were aimed at Paul Manafort, a seasoned campaign professional with experience and knowledge of how the Russians operate. He should have known they are duplicitous, cunning and not our friends. To reiterate, those comments were not aimed at Don Jr."
- "Everything I have to say about the ridiculous nature of the Russian 'collusion' investigation I said on my 60 Minutes interview. There was no collusion and the investigation is a witch hunt."
- "I regret that my delay in responding to the inaccurate reporting regarding Don Jr has diverted attention from the president's historical accomplishments in the first year of his presidency."

The statement is notable for the utter silence on Jared Kushner, a rivalry with whom is the chief source of animus for Bannon. Bannon appears willing only to suck up to Trump Senior and Junior, not the "globalist" son-in-law.

Bannon pretends that the reporting about his comments on Jr were inaccurate. Lordy, that sounds like an invitation to Michael Wolff to release the tapes he claims he has of his Bannon interviews.

Bannon nods to his 60 Minutes interview, which he did in fact say was a waste of time. But he also allegedly said firing Comey was the stupidest decision in modern politics, because it led to the Mueller investigation, with its expanded scope. That suggests he thinks Mueller will find things, which is consistent with the other Bannon statements reported by Wolff, that he believes Mueller will find evidence of money laundering, that the path to Trump "goes through Deutsche Bank and all the Kushner stuff."

Bannon invokes his Navy experience as a way, I guess, to explain why he used the word treasonous – to suggest he was speaking like a jingoist rather than someone with awareness of what a treason charge requires.

Which leaves us with his comments about Manafort. Given his walk-back of his comments about Jr and his stubborn silence on Kushner, Bannon suggests that Manafort should have known better. While, here, Bannon suggests Manafort should have told the neophyte global businessmen who also attended the meeting how duplicitous the Russians are (which is curious, because the Trump and Russian participants in the meeting keep pretending they're all telling the same true story about the meeting, evidence that this is a cover story notwithstanding).

Savvy Paul Manafort, who got hired to work for the campaign for free and who took that position, apparently, to pay off a favor if not \$19 million to Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, Paul Manafort whose reputation of working with

such thuggish types goes back years, Steven Bannon blames Manafort (who didn't set up the meeting) for not carrying out the meeting with more plausible deniability.

It doesn't make sense.

It doesn't make sense, given the known events surrounding the meeting.

But it also doesn't make sense, if Bannon's goal is to fix the damage his comments have done. Because, by issuing a statement that you believe will be acceptable to Trump that effectively calls Manafort a traitor – those other young men aren't traitors but that savvy businessman we had working for free is – you make it more likely he'll flip on Trump. You make it more likely that Manafort does precisely the thing that will bring down the whole scheme.

Maybe that's actually Bannon's intent?