

NOTHING HAPPENS IN A VACUUM: DIPLOMATIC SCUFFLES AND ACADEMIC SPEECHES IN MOSCOW

In front of a brick building one pre-dawn summer morning, a security guard tackled a man as he walked toward the entrance after exiting a cab. The security guard slammed the man onto the building's concrete steps, choking him as he restrained the man. The man managed to open the door and gain partial egress into the foyer without use of his hands while the guard continued to choke him.

The guard was Russian.

The man was an American.

The building was the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

The two-man scuffle happened June 6, 2016, exactly one month before Trump campaign foreign policy adviser Carter Page would view the UEFA Portugal vs. Wales semi-final match at a Morgan Stanley-hosted event in Moscow.

On June 26, WaPo's Josh Rogin wrote about increasing harassment of U.S diplomats across Europe by Russia. Episodes included breaking into diplomats' homes and stalking diplomats' children. Norm Eisen, U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic from 2011 to 2014, called this harassment "gray war."

On June 29, Rogin wrote about the June 6 scuffle; the American was not identified by name or by employment. He may have been a diplomat or a spy under diplomatic cover; different sources gave different possible explanations.

But the guard who beat up the American was an FSB employee. The American's shoulder was broken; the severity of his injuries required a

flight out of Russia for urgent medical care.

On June 30, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova issued a statement* and claimed WaPo, the U.S. State Department and 'special services' had spread false information about the June 6 event. The FSB guard acted when the American didn't show his ID; further, the "police officer on duty was attacked" and can be seen in surveillance video.

On July 7, Josh Rogin wrote that Congress had begun to investigate the June 6 event, concerned the FSB guard's actions violated the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations. The Obama administration had refused comment though State Department's John Kirby said the Russian's statements were "inaccurate" while administration officials quietly briefed members of Congress about the episode.

This same day Carter Page gave a speech at the New Economic School in Moscow, the day after he attended the UEFA semifinals viewing party, meeting Rosneft's Director of Investor Relations Andrey Baranov, Gazprom Investproekt's CEO Oleg Nagovitsyn, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, and members of the Duma. A video of Page's speech is uploaded that day to YouTube by a think tank.

On July 8, RT (Russia Today) publishes on YouTube a tightly edited excerpt from a surveillance camera videotape which captured the June 6 scuffle. The FSB guard clearly had the upper hand from the moment he slammed the unnamed diplomat to the concrete.

This same day Carter Page would give a commencement speech at the New Economic School; it, too, is captured on video and uploaded to YouTube, though not until months later.

How odd that it took a little over a month for RT to acquire the video and upload it to their YouTube channel.

How odd that RT never asked Carter Page, a foreign policy adviser, what he might recommend

to Trump to prevent future “gray war” events like the June 6 scuffle.

How odd that the “gray war” episodes which concerned Republican members of Congress so much are now inert about the sanctions they placed on Russia, with little concern for the effect on NATO.

“The problem is there have been no consequences for Russia,” said Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio), who serves as president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. “The administration continues to pursue a false narrative that Russia can be our partner. They clearly don’t want to be our partner, they’ve identified us as an adversary, and we need to prepare for that type of relationship.”

What changed since June 2016 besides the presidency?

** Open with caution; link is to a Russian government site.*