

“NORMAL TRANSITIONS:” KT MCFARLAND SENT TOM BOSSERT TO “SPY” ON LISA MONACO

Trump is excusing his refusal to transition power by claiming he never got a real transition.

The President’s refusal to concede, as CNN has previously reported, stems in part from his perceived grievance that Hillary Clinton and former President Barack Obama undermined his own presidency by saying Russia interfered in the 2016 election and could have impacted the outcome, people around him have said.

Trump continues to hold a grudge against those who he claims undercut his election by pointing to Russian interference efforts, and he has suggested it is fair game to not recognize Joe Biden as the President-elect, even though Clinton conceded on election night in 2016 and the Trump transition was able to begin immediately.

That’s not true, but it’s also not new that he’s blaming others for his own mistakes and obstinance.

Because he’s ignoring the many efforts the Obama Administration made to ease the transition (many of which were rebuffed), it bears making something implicit in this post more explicit.

KT McFarland sent someone – almost certainly Tom Bossert – to learn what Obama’s Homeland Security Czar, Lisa Monaco, knew of Russias’

response to Obama's sanctions. Only after Flynn got Bossert's response did he call Sergey Kislyak.

And Kislyak exploited Trump's insecurities as a result.

It's not public precisely when Flynn (or his assistant) told McFarland that Ambassador Kislyak had reached out to the incoming National Security Advisor. It seems likely that Flynn forwarded the text he received from Kislyak on December 28 to McFarland and her assistant, however, because Kislyak's text to Flynn is sourced to the subpoena production of that assistant, Sarah Flaherty, in the Mueller Report.

According to KT McFarland's own testimony, however, she believes she told Steve Bannon about the upcoming call before it happened. The Mueller Report places this conversation shortly after McFarland called Flynn on his personal cell phone at 2:29PM on December 29 but did not reach him. That would confirm McFarland knew Flynn was going to speak to the Russian Ambassador before Flynn texted Flaherty to see if McFarland was available for a call at 3:14PM. Flaherty told Flynn that McFarland was unavailable because she was speaking with Homeland Security Czar designee Tom Bossert.

So at 3:14PM, McFarland already knew Flynn was preparing to talk to Kislyak and she was talking with Bossert.

Sometime in between 3:14PM and 3:50PM, based on Flynn's representation that this call happened before he spoke with McFarland, Flynn called the spouse of the SJC staffer currently leading the pushback on this investigation, Michael Ledeen. Flynn and Ledeen spoke for 20 minutes.

At 3:50PM, McFarland called Flynn on his personal cell phone. They spoke for 6:39 minutes.

At 4:01PM, Bossert emailed a group including Flynn, McFarland, Bannon (at a private email),

Keith Kellogg, and Reince Priebus, relaying what he had learned speaking with Lisa Monaco.

[Monaco] confirms the Russian [sic] have already responded with strong threats, promising to retaliate. [She] characterized the Russian response as bellicose. My thoughts, sans the Russia angle, on which I defer to Mike and KT: [redacted] : Cyber attacks by forcing governments or anyone else are unacceptable and must be taken seriously. The alleged Russian hack of US entities involved in the US political process is a problem. Of course we must separate their attempts to influence our election from the rash conclusion that they succeeded in altering the views of any American voter. We must be wary of escalatory retaliation to follow.

At 4:01PM, just as he would have received that email, Flynn called McFarland using his hotel phone. They discussed highly sensitive foreign policy issues on that unsecure phone for 11 minutes.

At 4:20PM, shortly but not immediately after speaking to McFarland about what surely included what Bossert had learned from Monaco's representation of real time intelligence collection on and conversations with Russia, Flynn called the Ambassador to Russia, again from his hotel phone.

Even though Kislyak initiated the outreach after Obama had announced sanctions, Russia's Ambassador feigned having called for other reasons, reasons that pre-dated the imposition of the sanctions. He went through them one-by-one:

- He reassures Flynn that Russia won't take any actions on the Middle East (notably Israel),

particularly because it might change under the Trump Administration. He tells Flynn he has told Obama that.

- He invites Flynn to send representatives to a Russian-Turkish conference on Syrian peace in Astana that will take place after Trump is inaugurated.
- He proposes that Trump and Putin speak by secure videoconference on January 21, the day after the inauguration.

Flynn all but interrupted Kislyak and asked him to make sure that Obama not box Trump in (the fact that Flynn raised sanctions himself is one reason DOJ and FBI were so certain Flynn was lying when he claimed to the FBI that he never spoke about sanctions with Kislyak).

Flynn: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I understand. Okay, um, okay. Listen, uh, a couple of things. Number one, what I would ask you guys to do – and make sure you, make sure that you convey this, okay? – do not, do not uh, allow this administration to box us in, right now, okay? Um –

Kislyak: We have conveyed it. And–

Note: By saying “we have conveyed it,” Kislyak seems to suggest he has already gotten and fielded this request. That suggests that may be something that Flynn raised during their December 22 conversation, the transcript of which Ric Grenell has kept hidden.

Flynn continued, barreling through his request

on sanctions.

Flynn: Yeah.

Kislyak: It's, uh, it's uh, very very specifically and transparently, openly.

Flynn: So, you know, depending on, depending on what uh, actions they take over this current issue of the cyber stuff, you know, where they're looking like they're gonna, they're gonna dismiss some number of Russians out of the country, I understand all that and I understand that, that, you know, the information. that they have and all that, but what I would ask Russia to do is to not – is – is – if anything – because I know you have to have some sort of action – to, to only make it *reciprocal*. Make it reciprocal. Don't – don't make it – don't go any further than you have to. Because I don't want us to get into something that has to escalate, on a, you know, on a tit for tat. You follow me, Ambassador?

Kislyak sounded hesitant, noting that FSB and GRU couldn't very well partner with the US on terrorism if they were under sanctions and Flynn agrees. Kislyak then agreed that he will try to "get the people in Moscow to understand it," obviously a reference to Putin.

Then Flynn specifically framed Russia's response as a kind of *message* to Trump.

Flynn: And please make sure that its uh – the idea is, be – if you, if you have to do something, do something on a reciprocal basis, meaning you know, on a sort of even basis. Then that, then that is a good message and we'll understand that message. And, and then, we know that we're not going to escalate this thing, where we, where because if we put out – if we send out 30 guys and you send out 60, you know, or you shut down

every Embassy, I mean we have to get this to a – let's, let's keep this at a level that us is, even-keeled, okay? Is even-keeled. And then what we can do is, when we come in, we can then have a better conversation about where, where we're gonna go, uh, regarding uh, regarding our relationship. [my emphasis]

And Russia's response *was viewed as* a signal. KT McFarland said as much in two sets of emails, the first to Flynn, Kellogg, Spicer, Priebus, Bannon, and others (all at their official accounts):

My take is Russians are taking the most restrained retaliation possible – it's his Signal to trump that he wants to improve relations once obama leaves. Although [Obama] didn't mean to he has given [Trump] new leverage over Putin.

Then, hours later, she sent an email to Flynn, Kellogg (on his official account), Kushner, Priebus, and Spicer (at least some of whom were on on personal accounts), adding:

Putin response to NOT match obama tit for tat are signals they want a new relationship starting jan 20. They are sending us a signal.

Shortly thereafter, Trump thanked Putin for his restraint – the action that Flynn said would be interpreted by Trump as a message – publicly on Twitter, shortly after which McFarland wrote a cover email to hide that Flynn had discussed sanctions with Kislyak.

But Russia, knowing well that Kislyak was tapped, didn't leave this implicit signaling to chance.

On December 31, Kislyak reached out to Flynn again, emphasizing that he had a message on top

of what Putin's decision said publicly. A key part of that message was that Trump and Russia were on the same side, pitted against the US government.

Kislyak: Uh, you know I have a small message to pass to you from Moscow and uh, probably you have heard about the decision taken by Moscow about action and counter-action.

Flynn: yeah, yeah well I appreciate it, you know, on our phone call the other day, you know, I, I, appreciate the steps that uh your president has taken. I think that it was wise.

Kislyak: I, I just wanted to tell you that our conversation was also taken into account in Moscow and...

Flynn: Good

Kislyak: Your proposal that we need to act with cold heads, uh, is exactly what is uh, invested in the decision.

Flynn: Good

Kislyak: And I just wanted to tell you that we found that these actions have targeted not only against Russia, but also against the president elect.

Flynn: yeah, yeah

Kislyak: and and with all our rights to responds we have decided not to act now because, its because people are dissatisfied with the lost of elections and, and its very deplorable. So, so I just wanted to let you know that our conversation was taken with weight.

This exchange was, transparently and successfully, an attempt to convince the paranoid Flynn and his insecure boss that Russia was on the same side as them, against all their detractors. Even when this transcript was

released, it was clearly an attempt to play on the resentments of Flynn and his boss. Every single thing that has happened since suggests it worked, presumably with similar massaging along the way to reinforce that sentiment.

But with the release of the warrant applications targeting Flynn, we now know that these exchanges, with McFarland and Flynn holding off on a response until they learned what the Obama Administration knew about the Russian response, were conducted in significant part on totally unsecure devices – Flynn’s cell phone, his hotel phone, and at least Bannon and apparently several others using their private email to discuss how to respond to sanctions.

Thus, it’s likely that by the time Kislyak called Flynn back, Russian intelligence had picked up at least some of this back and forth. It’s likely he knew that Trump’s closest advisors were effectively treating Russia as a more trusted partner than the Obama Administration, and even using one of their only civil relationships with the Obama Administration, Bossert, to better counteract Obama’s actions in order to establish closer ties with Russia.

For years, Trump has falsely claimed that the Obama Administration spied on the Trump campaign. This exchange suggests the opposite happened: Trump used one of the only civil relationships his Transition team had with Obama not to ensure a smooth transition, but instead to use Obama’s information to more closely align with Russia.