

FOUR YEARS AGO TODAY, RUSSIA TOLD TRUMP THE DEEP STATE WAS TARGETING TRUMP ALONG WITH RUSSIA

Four years and a few days ago, when Trump's Transition team learned that President Obama would impose sanctions on Russia, in part, to punish them for interfering in the election that got Trump elected, Mike Flynn and KT McFarland strategized about how to respond. Before Flynn returned a request for a call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, McFarland asked Homeland Security Czar Tom Bossert to find out from his predecessor how Russia was responding to the sanctions. He came back with a report that he emailed to Trump's top advisors, including Steve Bannon at his private email.

[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.

Immediately after Bossert sent out this email, Flynn and McFarland talked about what he should say to Kislyak. We don't know what they said. Shortly after they hung up, Flynn called Kislyak

and asked him not to escalate. Among other things, Flynn told Kislyak that Russia would be sending a message that Trump's team would recognize if they didn't escalate.

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]

About 12 minutes after Flynn and the Ambassador hung up, McFarland sent an email responding to Bossert's (with at least Bannon using his personal email), purporting to strategize about a response, and claiming that Flynn would speak to Kislyak in the future (even though Flynn had already returned the call). Her email repeated some of the language Flynn had used – a (second) request that Russian not box Trump in, a hope to avoid a tit for tat escalation – in his call with Kislyak (which the analyst who transcribed the call thought might have been made on a speaker phone).

On Dec. 29, a transition adviser to Mr. Trump, K. T. McFarland, wrote in an email to a colleague that sanctions announced hours before by the Obama administration in retaliation for Russian election meddling were aimed at discrediting Mr. Trump's victory. The

sanctions could also make it much harder for Mr. Trump to ease tensions with Russia, "which has just thrown the U.S.A. election to him," she wrote in the emails obtained by The Times.

[snip]

Mr. Obama, she wrote, was trying to "box Trump in diplomatically with Russia," which could limit his options with other countries, including Iran and Syria. "Russia is key that unlocks door," she wrote.

She also wrote that the sanctions over Russian election meddling were intended to "lure Trump in trap of saying something" in defense of Russia, and were aimed at "discrediting Trump's victory by saying it was due to Russian interference."

"If there is a tit-for-tat escalation Trump will have difficulty improving relations with Russia, which has just thrown U.S.A. election to him," she wrote. [my emphasis]

The next day, Russia first announced, then backed off an escalation.

Then, on December 31, 2016, Kislyak called Flynn again. It had been two days since the calls Flynn made from a hotel phone in the Dominican Republic and the emails sent to insecure private emails. It had been over a week since Flynn foolishly blurted out to the Russian Ambassador that he wasn't *just* trying to undermine President Obama's policies with Russia; he was making similar calls to a bunch of other countries.

In short, it had been plenty of time for Russia to recognize there were likely insecure communications floating around talking about Flynn's (and Trump's) efforts to undermine the official policy of the United States.

In case Russia's public "good message" to Flynn hadn't been enough, Kislyak wanted to tell Flynn personally (on a phone he surely knew was bugged) that Putin had made his decision based on Flynn's promise to operate with cooler heads. But along the way, he echoed something that McFarland had said in her own email.

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. [my emphasis]

As McFarland had said two days earlier, Kislyak

echoed back: The sanctions weren't [just] about punishing Russia for interfering in the election. They also targeted Trump.

Four years ago today, the Russian Ambassador secretly spoke to Flynn and told him that Russia and Trump had both been targeted, together, by the US government. That comment explains a lot of what happened since.