

# PENCE PLAYS STATESMAN WHILE TRUMP TWEETS ANGRILY FROM A FLORIDA RETIREMENT RESORT



Apparently, The Sun and a bunch of other media outlets claim to be able to distinguish Mike Pence's regular wide-browed dark glare from the look he gave Putin when the Russian leader tapped him on the shoulder for a chat at the gala dinner in the Singapore ASEAN meeting. Maybe they're right? But this looks to me like the same dark glare he always uses to make his retrograde policies look serious.

I'm more interested, however, that Pence not only lectured Putin about interfering in the 2016 election, but told Josh Rogin he did so.

When the plenary ended, the two men huddled in the corner for about 15 minutes as staff, security and translators swarmed around them. Pence decided to confront Putin about Russia's interference in U.S. democracy.

"So I looked at him and I said, 'We know what happened in 2016,' " Pence told me in an interview. "And I said, 'As the president has told you, we're not having it.' "

Putin denied that Russia had done

anything wrong, but Pence stuck to his guns.

“And I said, ‘Mr. President, I’m very aware of what you’ve said about that, but I’m telling you we’re not having it,’ ” Pence said. “I wanted to reiterate what the president has said. I thought it was important he hear that from the vice president, too.”

Mind you, Pence could be lying about this, but if he did, Russia would likely correct him publicly.

Pence is bragging about his tough stance with Putin in the wake of stories – including one in the NYT – reporting on Trump’s increasing suspicions about the loyalty of the one guy he can’t fire.

In recent weeks, with his electoral prospects two years from now much on his mind, Mr. Trump has focused on the person who has most publicly tethered his fortunes to him. In one conversation after another he has asked aides and advisers a pointed question: Is Mike Pence loyal?

Mr. Trump has repeated the question so many times that he has alarmed some of his advisers. The president has not openly suggested dropping Mr. Pence from the ticket and picking another running mate, but the advisers say those kinds of questions usually indicate that he has grown irritated with someone.

And while the NYT pitches Trump’s questions about Pence’s loyalty in terms of picking a running mate for 2020 or installing Nick Ayers as Chief of Staff, it could have repercussions sooner rather than later.

After all, as I’ve long noted, Republicans in Congress like Pence more than they like Trump.

So do some key Republican financial backers, starting with the Koch brothers.

Particularly given the way that Trump's behavior led to huge losses in the midterms, more Republicans may seek to distance themselves from Trump. And depending on what and when Mueller unveils, that may become more urgent in days ahead. If Pence has already tried to distance himself from Trump's Russian dalliance, that may make it easier.