

THE JARED KUSHNER MEETING GETS CLOSER TO QUID PRO QUO

Last week, several members of Congress anonymously told the press they had, for the first time, seen evidence that might support charges of collusion between Trump's associates and the Russians. The frenzied speculation mostly focused on the usual suspects: Paul Manafort, Mike Flynn, Roger Stone, or Carter Page (somehow, the frenzied speculation often forgets Trump lawyer Michael Cohen).

Today, the NYT has a story reporting that the Senate Intelligence Committee wants to talk to Jared Kushner about a previously undisclosed meeting arranged by Russian Ambassador to the US, Sergey Kislyak.

Until now, the White House had acknowledged only an early December meeting between Mr. Kislyak and Mr. Kushner, which occurred at Trump Tower and was also attended by Michael T. Flynn, who would briefly serve as the national security adviser.

Later that month, though, Mr. Kislyak requested a second meeting, which Mr. Kushner asked a deputy to attend in his stead, officials said. At Mr. Kislyak's request, Mr. Kushner later met with Sergey N. Gorkov, the chief of Vnesheconombank, which drew sanctions from the Obama administration after President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia annexed Crimea and began meddling in Ukraine.

The NYT only notes this obliquely by stating the committee has access to routine intercepts involving the Ambassador, but remember that FBI went through Kislyak's intercepted communications in hopes of explaining why

Vladimir Putin didn't respond more aggressively to sanctions Obama imposed in December. So SSCI likely discovered this undisclosed meeting that way.

Which is interesting, because Kushner did not reveal it to some senior Trump officials (likely including White House Counsel Don McGahn).

The extent of Mr. Kushner's interactions with Mr. Kislyak caught some senior members of Mr. Trump's White House team off guard, in part because he did not mention them last month during a debate then consuming the White House: how to handle the disclosures about Mr. Flynn's interactions with the Russian ambassador.

Ms. Hicks said that Mr. Trump had authorized Mr. Kushner to have meetings with foreign officials that he felt made sense, and to report back to him if those meetings produced anything of note. She said that because in Mr. Kushner's view the meetings were inconsequential, it did not occur to him to mention them to senior staff members earlier.

NYT raises the possibility that Kushner discussed his efforts to fund one of his family's business in NYC, though Hope Hicks claimed it – and the sanctions – did not come up.

But consider how this meeting might interact with another known Kislyak conversation, the multiple calls with Flynn on December 29 after Obama imposed hacking related sanctions. In context, that conversation was about the hacking sanctions, not the more onerous Ukraine ones. But if Kushner had just met with a sanctioned bank and discussed *those sanctions*, that could change Kislyak's understanding of what Flynn was saying.

One mistake of a lot of the frenzied speculation

is a focus on changing US policy towards Ukraine, a focus not borne out by the public evidence. The result of that focus is to ignore what the Christopher Steele dossier makes clear was the real Russian goal, unsurprisingly: the lifting of the Ukraine-related sanctions.

There still is no evidence that's what happened at this meeting that Kushner succeeded in hiding from people within the White House. But if it did, then it might amount to far more than all the smoke swirling around Manafort, Page, and Stone.