

EVEN AFTER LEARNING THE FBI WAS INVESTIGATING, TRUMP BERATED FLYNN FOR NOT BEING OBSEQUIOUS ENOUGH TO PUTIN

The Independent has a story that is being taken as news: That Trump berated then National Security Advisor Mike Flynn in front of Theresa May for not telling him that Vladimir Putin had called.

Theresa May's former Chief of Staff, Nick Timothy, described Trump shouting in the middle of a formal luncheon.

Mr Timothy spoke about a "fairly extraordinary" lunch during which Mr Trump shouted at his then-national security advisor Michael Flynn.

"Somebody just mentioned in passing that Vladimir Putin had asked for a call with him, and right in front of us he absolutely shouted down Mike Flynn," he said.

"Like really shouted. This was at a formal dinner with butlers and fancy crockery – and he was properly shouting at him down the table."

Mr Timothy said the president yelled: "If Putin wants a call with me you just put him through."

It's not actually a new story. Trump told a version of the story himself in real time, to Jim Comey, at the same dinner where he asked for loyalty from the FBI Director. According to Jim Comey's memo memorializing the January 27 dinner, Trump raised the incident in an attempt to convince Comey that he, Trump, believed Flynn

had poor judgment.

He then went on to explain that he has serious reservations about Mike Flynn's judgement and illustrated with a story from that day in which the President apparently discovered during his toast to Theresa May that [Putin] had called four days ago. Apparently, as the President was toasting PM May, he was explaining that she had been the first to call him after his inauguration and Flynn interrupted to say that [Putin] had called (first, apparently). It was then that the President learned of [Putin's call] and he confronted Flynn about it (not clear whether that was in the moment or after the lunch with PM May). Flynn said the return call was scheduled for Saturday, which prompted a heated reply from the President that six days was not an appropriate period of time to return a call from the [President] of a country like [Russia]. This isn't [redacted] we are talking about.") He said that if he called [redacted] and didn't get a return call for six days he would be very upset. In telling the story, the President pointed his fingers at his head and said "the guy has serious judgment issues."

But the differences in the story – with Timothy emphasizing that Trump was pissed for not putting Trump on the phone with Putin immediately, as compared to Trump's claim that he was pissed because Flynn scheduled the return call six whole days later – are notable (if subtle), particularly when read in context.

We've known for some time that Sergey Kislyak first started trying to schedule a call between Trump and Putin during his December 29, 2016 call with Flynn, when Flynn asked Russia to keep any retaliation against US sanctions measured; the meeting itself was even mentioned in the original David Ignatius column that revealed the

call. But we now have *some* of the transcripts of those calls. Those transcripts show how Kislyak pitched the meeting – and the January 21 date – even before Flynn raised the sanctions (Kislyak was also pushing for public US participation in a Turkish-Russian “peace” initiative on Syria to be held the first week of the Administration, something else included in KT McFarland’s cover story for the call).

KISLYAK: I mean heads up, we wanted you to know this. And the third final uh, point, General, is uh, I am entrust to convey through you to Seer- uh to President Elect, proposal from the Kremlin. Maybe to organize a conversation over the secure video line that starting on the twentieth would be available to Mr. Trump. And it’s there, certainly, uh – uh, between the White House and the Kremlin. And our proposal is to have the conversation on the twenty-first between our Presidents. And the idea of Mr. Putin is first of all to congratulate uh, your President Elect or the President, at the time, and maybe to discuss small number~ briefly, of issues that are on our agenda. So his proposal is on the twenty-first of January.

FLYNN: Okay. Ummm

[Timestamp: 05:20]

KISLYAK: Is by security video. Secure video line.

Then, on December 31, after Kislyak told Flynn that Putin had considered Flynn’s request not to escalate before deciding not to even respond, Flynn offered up that “the boss is aware” of the request for a January 21 secure call. Flynn acknowledged Kislyak was trying to schedule it for the day after the inauguration, but did not commit to that date.

FLYNN: I haven’t gotten, I haven’t gotten a, uh, confirmation on the, on

the, uh, secure VTC yet, but the, but the boss is aware and so please convey that

KISL YAK: I will

FLYNN: And we can set that up fairly quickly and well have at I don't want to go through, I don't want to go through a big, uh, uh, gyrations of, you know, what is on the agenda. I think the agenda just needs to be a couple of simple things uh, and let the two talk about, let the two communicate if, if we end up having it on the 21st, if not

KISL YAK:

Absolutely, FLYNN: the 21st, then what we, we, uh, may end up, you know, sometime very close after just because other, other scheduled events, if that makes sense. Okay. [my emphasis]

Then, the day before inauguration, Kislyak left a message reiterating Russia's request to speak "after the inauguration," and reminding Flynn of their conversation – a conversation that had been revealed by David Ignatius, leading Flynn to start lying publicly about the request he had made on it.

KISLYAK: Good morning, General. This [sic] Sergey Kislyak, Russian ambassador. I, uh, apologize that I disturb you but I wanted to check whether you have, um, uh, answer to the idea of our two presidents speaking, uh, re-... uh, after the inauguration. You remember our conversation and we certainly would appreciate any indication as to when it is going to be possible. Uh, I would appreciate your calling back and telling me where we are. Thank you so much. All the best.

And then, according to the public story, Putin

called to congratulate Trump on January 21, the call for January 28 got scheduled at some point, and on January 27, Trump had a public meltdown about how all that had gone down. In both versions of the story, Trump was pissed that Flynn hadn't been responsive enough to Putin. In Trump's version, however, he claimed to be unaware Putin wanted to call on January 21; Mike Flynn told Kislyak he knew of that all along (and the public record shows that Trump knew that Putin placed the call no later than a presser immediately before the lunch in question).

What happened the day before is instructive. On January 26, 2017, the day before Trump had an embarrassing meltdown because his National Security Advisor wasn't prioritizing a call with Vladimir Putin that Trump first learned about – in the context of secret requests of Russia – weeks earlier, Trump learned that the FBI not only knew of the calls with Kislyak, but knew the substance of his calls with the Russian Ambassador. Trump learned that the FBI found those calls – in one of which Flynn affirmed that Trump knew of the call request – problematic.

On January 26, 2017, Acting Attorney General Sally Yates contacted White House Counsel Donald McGahn and informed him that she needed to discuss a sensitive matter with him in person. 142 Later that day, Yates and Mary McCord, a senior national security official at the Department of Justice, met at the White House with McGahn and White House Counsel's Office attorney James Burnham. 143 Yates said that the public statements made by the Vice President denying that Flynn and Kislyak discussed sanctions were not true and put Flynn in a potentially compromised position because the Russians would know he had lied. 144 Yates disclosed that Flynn had been interviewed by the FBI. 145 She declined to answer a specific question

about how Flynn had performed during that interview, 146 but she indicated that Flynn's statements to the FBI were similar to the statements he had made to Pence and Spicer denying that he had discussed sanctions.147 McGahn came away from the meeting with the impression that the FBI had not pinned Flynn down in lies, 148 but he asked John Eisenberg, who served as legal advisor to the National Security Council, to examine potential legal issues raised by Flynn's FBI interview and his contacts with Kislyak. 149

That afternoon, McGahn notified the President that Yates had come to the White House to discuss concerns about Flynn.150 McGahn described what Yates had told him, and the President asked him to repeat it, so he did. 151 McGahn recalled that when he described the FBI interview of Flynn, he said that Flynn did not disclose having discussed sanctions with Kislyak, but that there may not have been a clear violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1001. 152 The President asked about Section 1001, and McGahn explained the law to him, and also explained the Logan Act. 153 The President instructed McGahn to work with Priebus and Bannon to look into the matter further and directed that they not discuss it with any other officials. 154 Priebus recalled that the President was angry with Flynn in light of what Yates had told the White House and said, "not again, this guy, this stuff." 155

When telling the FBI Director about Flynn's failures to set up a call with Putin on January 21 that Putin's Ambassador had asked for in the very same call where Trump's National Security Advisor had made an ask that undermined Obama's punishment of Russia for tampering in American democracy, Trump described it (in the same

conversation where he asked Comey for loyalty) as poor judgment.

It's unclear why Trump did that, in a dinner meeting fairly obviously designed to undermine FBI scrutiny of why Flynn did what he did.

But if Trump believed that Flynn exercised poor judgment, it would mean he judged that Flynn should have made good on the request that Kislyak made in the same call where Trump, via Flynn, made a request. It would have meant, in context, that Trump believed Flynn should have showed more subservience to Putin.