

Russia's Influence Spreads

Last week, we discovered that former national security adviser Michael Flynn lied to the FBI about the import of what he told it regarding his contacts with former Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Yet Flynn once served as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency during the presidency of Barack Obama. Why would he lie to the FBI about what passed between him and Kislyak? Had he forgotten that, for a certitude, the conversation of a Russian ambassador was being recorded secretly by American intelligence agencies? Moreover, when he was being interviewed by the FBI, why did he not bring with him a lawyer? When I was being interviewed by the FBI about my perfidious Arkansas Project, I most certainly brought a lawyer with me, and it helped that my lawyer looked like he once worked for Don Corleone. Thinking back on it, I should have brought two lawyers.

We are told Flynn is now cooperating with the government. Yet it appears that he has implicated President Donald Trump not at all, or at least in no criminal activity. So what is the fuss all about? Flynn presumably was acting on behalf of people high up in the Trump administration, but unless they were giving Kislyak state secrets or accepting bribes from him, there is nothing wrong with that. I have in my library the memoirs of Anatoly Dobrynin for recreational reading. Dobrynin was the ambassador representing the Soviet Union for 24 years in Washington, DC, during the Cold War. In his memoirs, the ambassador writes of meeting with then-President Jimmy Carter's representative Averell Harriman in September 1976 before the November election. He met with other Carter advisers before and after the election. Doubtless he did the same with other presidential emissaries during his long years in Washington. No one was prosecuted. In those happy years, diplomatic contacts were not adjudged criminal acts.

How did the Russians become such an ominous force in American elections, or at least in the tragic election of 2016? I would direct you to turn to page 395 of *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*, the highly acclaimed chronicle of that epochal election written by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes.

On election night, Hillary Clinton may have been gently soused, but slowly even she saw the light. The authors tell us that in the days after the election, she "kept

pointing her finger at Comey and Russia.” It was the beginning of her post-election “strategy.” The authors proceed to say, “That strategy had been set in motion within twenty-four hours of her concession speech.” Despite her Karamazovian hangover, she and her aides “went over the script they would pitch to the press and the public.” And “Already, Russian hacking was the centerpiece of the argument.” From that point on, Clinton and her aides kept flogging it.

Today even the FBI has taken up Clinton’s strategy, but nothing has implicated Trump, and no White House grandee is implicated in a Russian-related crime. As of this weekend, we know that a Clinton supporter working high up in the FBI, Peter Strzok, shaped then-Director James Comey’s relatively lenient — if improper — judgment of her handling of emails. Additionally, before Strzok was demoted, he had a role in investigating the Trump campaign and Russia. The FBI has a lot to answer for, and it ought to be investigated itself.

As for the Russians, they now have more say in Washington than at any time I can remember. Those in Official Washington who have adopted Clinton’s strategy have made Kislyak a powerful force in the Trump investigation and his boss, Russian President Vladimir Putin, quite possibly the most powerful man in the world. Together they have power over the Trump administration through their willing agents in the FBI and the office of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III.

All Kislyak has to do is dispute what Flynn told him, or for that matter, what some other personage in the administration told him. From Mueller’s public statements there is no hint that the FBI doubts Kislyak’s good word. It is the administration’s word that the FBI finds dubious. Kislyak could tell investigators that Flynn or some other administration aide had sent him a letter or expressed himself through “body language.” Off the FBI would go chasing after Kislyak’s lead. And, by the way, other Russians could insist that they had conspired with Trump’s people in private conversations that no intelligence agency of the federal government apprehended. Flynn’s fate might well be just the beginning. This investigation ought to be shut down somehow. Mueller is compromised, and the FBI appears complicitous in Hillary Clinton’s strategy.

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