



General Flynn, We Hardly Knew You

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After serving only 24 days as President Donald Trump's National Security Advisor, Lt. General Michael Flynn has resigned, leaving behind chaos within the National Security Council (NSC). The president has named Retired Lt. General Joseph Keith Kellogg as Acting National Security Advisor.

Flynn's resignation, at the request of President Trump, came as no surprise to Washington observers. After the revelation of his improper conversations with the Russian ambassador in December 2016, it was clear his days were numbered and his departure was only a matter of time. In his [letter of resignation](#) Flynn did not admit discussing sanctions on Russia with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, instead admitting that due to the rush of events following the November 8 election he "inadvertently" briefed Vice President Mike Pence and others with incomplete information regarding his phone call with the ambassador.

To be sure, Flynn has a controversial history. In 2014 he was removed as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) for telling a congressional committee that the American people were in more danger than just a few years before. [Stars and Stripes](#) reported Flynn did not leave the Obama Administration on good terms and that he was removed as part of a leadership shake-up after clashing with officials over his management style and vision for the agency.

In late January, former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates warned the Trump Administration that Flynn had misled administration officials about his conversation with the Russian ambassador and that, as a result, Flynn could be vulnerable to Russian blackmail attempts. Yates's warning was prompted by Flynn's denial that he had discussed Obama Administration sanctions on Russia for its interference in the 2016 elections, and he may have assured the Russian ambassador that sanctions would be lifted after Trump became president. Apparently, the White House took no action, instead firing Yates for her refusal to defend Trump's travel ban. Did Flynn, a former DIA director, not understand that, in all probability, his conversation with the Russian ambassador was monitored? And if he did not, what does that say about his ability to lead the NSC?

The Impact of Flynn's Resignation

NSC: Flynn's departure adds to the current upheaval within the NSC. Rumors are rife about infighting among NSC staff and competing factions jockeying for position. There are also rumors of a shake-up at any time. As with his experience at the DIA, Flynn was distrusted by many of Trump's advisors; even the president was concerned that Flynn would continue to encounter opposition from the intelligence community. More important is the enormous embarrassment to

the Trump Administration, already perceived as disorganized, by Flynn's departure. Flynn's Russian contacts also call into question the ties between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin. Reportedly, US law enforcement officials are investigating links between Russia and others in Trump's circle.

Congress: The Senate and House Intelligence Committees are conducting investigations into Russian interference in the US elections. Representative Adam Schiff (D-California), the ranking member on the House Intelligence Committee, welcomed Flynn's resignation, as have other members of Congress, including Republicans, who are reluctant to defend Flynn. The next questions likely to be raised will be, what did the president know about Flynn's Russian contacts and when did he know it? Was Flynn acting on behalf of the president?

Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-New York) has filed a [resolution of inquiry](#), a parliamentary maneuver used to force presidents and executive branch agencies to share records with Congress. The [resolution](#) "asks Attorney General Jeff Sessions to provide 'copies of any document, record, memo, correspondence, or other communication of the Department of Justice' that pertains to any 'criminal or counterintelligence investigation' into Trump, his White House team, or certain campaign associates; any investment made by a foreign power or agent thereof in Trump's businesses; Trump's plans to distance himself from his business empire; and any Trump-related examination of federal conflict of interest laws or the emoluments clause of the Constitution." Senators Roy Blunt (R-Missouri) and John Cornyn (R-Texas) also have called for an investigation.

Foreign Policy: The impact of Flynn's abrupt resignation is likely to be felt as the Trump Administration grapples with its Russia and Iran policies. The impact on both Middle East and Asia policy will largely depend on who is appointed National Security Advisor.

Iran: In early February, the Trump Administration said it was putting Iran on notice in reaction to its ballistic missile test. The threat was made by Flynn, whose views on Iran have influenced Trump. The announcement was followed by the imposition of sanctions on 25 Iranian individuals and entities. Trump also has been critical of the Iran nuclear agreement (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), as has Flynn. Trump, however, has backed away from his earlier promise to dismantle or withdraw the United States from the JCPOA; with Flynn's departure, he may abandon his plans altogether.

Russia: No one knows precisely why Trump seems to admire Russian President Vladimir Putin, but knowledgeable sources believe Flynn heavily influenced Trump's thinking. Washington observers wonder if Flynn's resignation will end the controversy over Trump's relationship with Russia—or mark the beginning of a larger crisis. Flynn is not the first Trump advisor to leave over the question of Russia. [Paul Manafort](#), Trump's former campaign manager, and [Carter Page](#), another advisor, left after reports about their contacts with Russia. Flynn's resignation reinforces the suspicion among Washington observers (and those beyond the beltway) that something is not quite right regarding President Trump's ties to Russia.

Israel: President Trump is scheduled to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 15, amid the furor over Flynn's resignation. Will Flynn's departure overshadow the visit? Although Flynn was a central figure in arranging the meeting, most observers doubt his departure will have much effect on the meeting. Trump and Netanyahu are expected to have a productive meeting, although it is unlikely they will agree on all issues.

Who Will Succeed Flynn?

Kellogg has been appointed as a place holder but is not expected to stay. It is also unclear whether Flynn's deputy, K. T. McFarland, will remain, or the NSC staff he hand-picked. President Trump is expected to move quickly to replace him. Currently under consideration are the following individuals:

Vice Admiral Robert S. Harward (Ret.) is a leading contender to replace Flynn. Harward served as Deputy Commander of CENTCOM under General Mattis, who is now Secretary of Defense. Harward is a former Navy SEAL who served in Iraq and Afghanistan as a commander of special operations. He also served on President George W. Bush's National Security Council and was assigned to the National Counterterrorism Center in 2005.

General David Petraeus (Ret.) is also being considered. Petraeus is a former CIA director during the Obama Administration; however, he brings "baggage" to the position and may not be the best choice. Petraeus resigned from the CIA in 2012 for sharing secrets with his biographer, with whom he also was having an affair. In 2015 he was convicted of sharing classified information and sentenced to two years' probation and a \$100,000 fine.

Stephen Hadley has also been mentioned, but appears to be a long-shot. Hadley served as National Security Advisor under President George W. Bush.

Tom Bossert, is another possibility. He served as a Deputy Homeland Security Advisor under President George W. Bush and now has responsibility for cybersecurity in the Trump Administration.

The Future of the Trump Presidency

Since taking office on January 20, Trump has been subject to criticism, if not ridicule, from some quarters. It has been, to put it mildly, a rocky start. The Flynn fiasco is only part of the confusion at the Trump White House, beginning with the botched rollout of the travel ban against seven predominantly Muslim countries to the ill-advised raid in Yemen which killed 30 civilians and US Navy SEAL William Owens.

President Trump arrived in Washington full of bravado and arrogance, determined to blow up Republican ideology and stale conventions. Despite his electoral victory he entered office with

record-high disapproval ratings. He has started his presidency mired in controversy and disagreement. President Trump would do well to study his Republican predecessors like Ronald Reagan, another outsider who came to Washington with the same intent as Trump's, and who went on to become one of the most popular presidents in modern US history.