

# The Israel-gate Side of Russia-gate

While unproven claims of Russian meddling in U.S. politics have whipped Official Washington into a frenzy, much less attention has been paid to real evidence of Israeli interference in U.S. politics, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In investigating Russia's alleged meddling in U.S. politics, special prosecutor Robert Mueller uncovered evidence that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressured the Trump transition team to undermine President Obama's plans to permit the United Nations to censure Israel over its illegal settlement building on the Palestinian West Bank, a discovery referenced in the plea deal with President Trump's first National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

At Netanyahu's behest, Flynn and President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner reportedly took the lead in the lobbying to derail the U.N. resolution, which Flynn discussed in a phone call with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak (in which the Russian diplomat rebuffed Flynn's appeal to block the resolution).

I spoke on Dec, 18 with independent journalist and blogger Richard Silverstein, who writes on national security and other issues for a number of blogs at [Tikun Olam](#).

Dennis Bernstein: A part of Michael Flynn's plea had to do with some actions he took before coming to power regarding Israel and the United Nations. Please explain.

Richard Silverstein: The Obama administration was negotiating in the [UN] Security Council just before he left office about a resolution that would condemn Israeli settlements. Obviously, the Israeli government did not want this resolution to be passed. Instead of going directly to the Obama administration, with which they had terrible relations, they went to Trump instead. They approached Michael Flynn and Jared Kushner became involved in this. While they were in the transition and before having any official capacity, they negotiated with various members of the Security Council to try to quash the settlement resolution.

One of the issues here which is little known is the Logan Act, which was passed at the foundation of our republic and was designed to prevent private citizens from usurping the foreign policy prerogatives of the executive. It criminalized any private citizen who attempted to negotiate with an enemy country over any

foreign policy issue.

In this case, what Flynn and Kushner were doing was going directly against US foreign policy, because Obama wanted the resolution to pass; He just didn't want to vote for it because that would cross the Israel lobby in the United States.

The US finally ended up abstaining on the resolution and it passed 14-0.

But before that happened, Flynn went to the Russians and to Egypt, both members of the Security Council, and tried to get the resolution delayed. But all of Israel's machinations to derail this resolution failed and that is what Mueller was investigating, the intervention and disruption of American foreign policy by private citizens who had no official role.

This speaks to the power of the Israel lobby and of Israel itself to disrupt our foreign policy. Very few people have ever been charged with committing an illegal act by advocating on behalf of Israel. That is one of the reasons why this is such an important development. Until now, the lobby has really ruled supreme on the issue of Israel and Palestine in US foreign policy. Now it is possible that a private citizen will actually be made to pay a price for that.

This is an important development because the lobby till now has run roughshod over our foreign policy in this area and this may act as a restraining order against blatant disruption of US foreign policy by people like this.

Bernstein: So this information is a part of Michael Flynn's plea. Anyone studying this would learn something about Michael Flynn and it would be part of the prosecution's investigation.

Silverstein: That's absolutely right. One thing to note here is that it is reporters who have raised the issue of the Logan Act, not Mueller or Flynn's people or anyone in the Trump administration. But I do think that Logan is a very important part of this plea deal, even if it is not mentioned explicitly.

Bernstein: If the special prosecutor had smoking-gun information that the Trump administration colluded with Russia, in the way they colluded with Israel before coming to power, this would be a huge revelation. But it is definitely collusion when it comes to Israel.

Silverstein: Absolutely. If this were Russia, it would be on the front page of every major newspaper in the United States and the leading story on the TV news.

Because this is Israel and because we have a conflicted relationship with the Israel lobby and they have so much influence on US policy concerning Israel, it has managed to stay on the back burner. Only two or three media outlets besides mine have raised this issue of Logan and collusion. Kushner and Flynn may be the first American citizens charged under the Logan Act for interfering on

behalf of Israel in our foreign policy. This is a huge issue and it has hardly been raised at all.

Bernstein: As you know, Rachel Maddow of MSNBC has made a career out of investigating the Russia-gate charges. She says that she has read all this material carefully, so she must have read about Flynn and Israel, but I haven't heard her on this issue at all.

Silverstein: Even progressive journalists, who you'd think would be going after this with a vengeance, are frightened off by the fact the lobby really bites back. So, aside from outlets like the Intercept and the Electronic Intifada, there is a lot of hesitation about going after the Israel lobby. People are afraid because they know that there is a high price to be paid. It goes from being purely journalism to being a personal and political vendetta when they get you in their sights. In fact, one of the reasons I feel my blog is so important is that what I do is challenge Israeli policy and Israeli intervention in places where it doesn't belong.

Bernstein: Jared Kushner is the point man for the Trump administration on Israel. He has talked about having a "vision for peace." Do you think it is a problem that this is someone with a long, close relationship with the prime minister of Israel and, in fact, runs a foundation that invests in the building of illegal Israeli settlements? Might this be problematic?

Silverstein: It is quite nefarious, actually. When Jared Kushner was a teenager, Netanyahu used to stay at the Kushner family home when he visited the United States. This relationship with one of the most extreme right political figures in Israel goes back decades. And it is not just Kushner himself, but all the administration personnel dealing with these so-called peace negotiations, including Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman, the ambassador. These are all orthodox Jews who tend to have very nationalist views when it comes to Israel. They all support settlements financially through foundations. These are not honest brokers.

We could talk at length about the history of US personnel who have been negotiators for Middle East peace. All of them have been favorable to Israel and answerable to the Israel lobby, including Dennis Ross and Makovsky, who served in the last administration. These people are dyed-in-the-wool ultra-nationalist supporters of [Israeli] settlements. They have no business playing any role in negotiating a peace deal.

My prediction all along has been that these peace negotiations will come to naught, even though they seem to have bought the cooperation of Saudi Arabia, which is something new in the process. The Palestinians can never accept a deal

that has been negotiated by Kushner and company because it will be far too favorable to Israel and it will totally neglect the interests of the Palestinians.

Bernstein: It has been revealed that Kushner supports the building of settlements in the West Bank. Most people don't understand the politics of what is going on there, but it appears to be part of an ethnic cleansing.

Silverstein: The settlements have always been a violation of international law, ever since Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967. The Geneva Conventions direct an occupying power to withdraw from territory that was not its own. In 1967 Israel invaded Arab states and conquered the West Bank and Gaza but this has never been recognized or accepted by any nation until now.

The fact that Kushner and his family are intimately involved in supporting settlements—as are David Friedman and Jason Greenblatt—is completely outrageous. No member of any previous US administration would have been allowed to participate with these kinds of financial investments in support of settlements. Of course, Trump doesn't understand the concept of conflict of interest because he is heavily involved in such conflicts himself. But no party in the Middle East except Israel is going to consider the US an honest broker and acceptable as a mediator.

When they announce this deal next January, no one in the Arab World is going to accept it, with the possible exception of Saudi Arabia because they have other fish to fry in terms of Iran. The next three years are going to be interesting, supposing Trump lasts out his term. My prediction is that the peace plan will fail and that it will lead to greater violence in the Middle East. It will not simply lead to a vacuum, it will lead to a deterioration in conditions there.

Bernstein: The Trump transition team was actually approached directly by the Israeli government to try to intercede at the United Nations.

Silverstein: I'm assuming it was Netanyahu who went directly to Kushner and Trump. Now, we haven't yet found out that Trump directly *knew* about this but it is very hard to believe that Trump didn't endorse this. Now that we know that Mueller has access to all of the emails of the transition team, there is little doubt that they have been able to find their smoking gun. Flynn's plea meant that they basically had him dead to rights. It remains to be seen what will happen with Kushner but I would think that this would play some role in either the prosecution of Kushner or some plea deal.

Bernstein: The other big story, of course, is the decision by the Trump administration to move the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. Was there any

pre-election collusion in that regard and what are the implications?

Silverstein: Well, it's a terrible decision which goes against forty to fifty years of US foreign policy. It also breaches all international understanding.

All of our allies in the European Union and elsewhere are aghast at this development. There is now a campaign in the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution condemning the announcement, which we will veto, but the next step will be to go to the General Assembly, where such a resolution will pass easily.

The question is how much anger, violence and disruption this is going to cause around the world, especially in the Arab and Muslim world. This is a slow-burning fuse. It is not going to explode right now. The issue of Jerusalem is so vital that this is not something that is simply going to go away. This is going to be a festering sore in the Muslim world and among Palestinians. We have already seen attacks on Israeli soldiers and citizens and there will be many more.

As to collusion in all of this, since Trump always said during the campaign that this was what he was going to do, it might be difficult to treat this in the same way as the UN resolution. The UN resolution was never on anybody's radar and nobody knew the role that Trump was playing behind the scenes with that—as opposed to Trump saying right from the get-go that Jerusalem was going to be recognized as the capital of Jerusalem.

By doing that, they have completely abrogated any Palestinian interest in Jerusalem. This is a catastrophic decision that really excludes the United States from being an honest broker here and shows our true colors in terms of how pro-Israel we are.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

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