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Russia Reacts to Flynn: 'Is This a Crime Worthy of the Electric Chair?'

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U.S. President Donald Trump's former national security advisor Michael Flynn pleaded guilty on Friday to lying to the FBI about his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the United States in the weeks leading up to Trump's inauguration.

In Russia, news of the plea was played down over the weekend as the most recent chapter in a long-running political witch hunt buoyed by anti-Russian sentiment.

The charges against Flynn come as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into the Trump campaign's alleged collusion with Russia. Multiple congressional committees are also investigating the extent of Russia's 2016 U.S. presidential election interference.

Alexei Pushkov, a senior lawmaker, tweeted that the United States was filling a "bag of smoke." He also asked what was so wrong about contacting the Russian ambassador.

"Is this a crime worthy of the electric chair?" the lawmaker wrote on Twitter Saturday

morning.

Mueller's investigation is looking into whether Trump's incoming administration worked to undermine a sitting president — Flynn and former Ambassador Sergei Kislyak reportedly discussed Russia's response to sanctions imposed by U.S. President Barack Obama.

Related article: Flynn Admits to Lying, Says Trump Team Knew of His Russia Talks

Speaking in court as part of his plea agreement, Flynn said Trump's team directed him to contact Russians, including former Ambassador Sergei Kislyak. Flynn also alleged he called an official from Trump's transition team before and after talking to Kislyak.

The head of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, called the news a "theater of the absurd" on his Facebook page Saturday night. If anything, he wrote, the charges show that Washington was trying to influence Moscow.

"The conversations in question, even with the sickest imagination, cannot be regarded as Russian attempts to intervene in American affairs," Kosachev wrote. "On the contrary, judging by the details of the conversations, Flynn was trying to influence the Kremlin via Kislyak."

Improving relations with Russia was a focal point of Trump's campaign, even as the U.S. Congress levied new sanctions after Trump won the November 2016 election. Trump transition team emails reported by The New York Times on Saturday indicate Flynn's aim was to reassure the Russians over those new sanctions.

The deputy head of the Federation Council's Defense Committee Franz Klintsevich told the state-run RIA Novosti that Flynn had simply been caught up in attacks whose real target was the U.S President. "The main target, of course, is Donald Trump," he said.

Sputnik, a Kremlin-funded news outlet, ran a roundup of analysis of the news with the headline: "Flynn's Guilty Plea Not the Smoking Gun in Mueller Investigation."

RT, another Kremlin-funded news outlet — which was recently required to register as a "foreign agent" in the United States — cited several Russian political scientists as saying the news was a big fuss about nothing.

"If Flynn really had information that could confirm Russia's interference in the elections in the United States," political scientist and member of the Academy of Military Sciences Sergei Sudakov told RT, "then it would have been used, and that would have been enough to impeach the president."

Grigory Yarygin, an American Studies professor at St. Petersburg State University told RT: "This all sounds like a witch hunt."

On her Telegram channel late Friday night, RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan referred to a 2015 dinner in Moscow during which Flynn sat next to President Vladimir Putin.

“Putin did not know who he was,” Simonyan wrote, adding that the two hardly spoke.

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