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## POLITICS

# Mike Flynn's Pro-Turkey Work: An Unfinished Documentary to Boost Country's Image

Unseen film footage appears to represent the core of the Flynn Intel Group's \$530,000 work on behalf of Turkey

*By Dion Nissenbaum*

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WASHINGTON—Last fall, as retired Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn traveled the country stumping for Donald Trump, his business partner holed up in a small Washington hotel room with the former head of Turkish military intelligence to work on a special project.

“General, hi. I’m Bijan Kian, welcome to Washington, D.C.,” Mr. Kian, the head of Mr. Flynn’s consulting firm, greeted the Turkish dignitary. “Gen. Flynn, my partner, sends his regards to you.”

The hotel room meeting was filmed as part of a documentary the Flynn Intel Group was producing for a Turkish businessman, who paid \$530,000 to the lobbying shop to polish the country’s image after a botched military coup. That contract has landed Mr. Flynn in legal jeopardy.

The unfinished, never-distributed film, details of which haven’t been previously reported, appears to represent the core of the Flynn Intel Group’s work for Turkish interests.

The contract is at the heart of an expanding investigation into Mr. Flynn’s business dealings. In February the retired three-star general was forced to resign, under fire over his conflicting statements about his contacts with Russian officials before the inauguration, after 24 days as Mr. Trump’s national security adviser.

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Mr. Flynn didn’t disclose to the federal government until March that his company was paid to represent Turkish interests. He is now facing military, congressional and criminal investigations into allegations that he improperly concealed his financial ties to Turkey and Russia, and into whether the ties played any role in his decisions as

the president’s adviser.

Along with the money from the Turkish businessman, Mr. Flynn received \$33,750 from a Russian state news network to travel to Moscow in 2015, sit next to President Vladimir Putin at a gala and give a public interview on U.S. foreign policy.

A federal grand jury in Virginia recently issued subpoenas to people who worked for the Flynn Intel Group. Last week, Mr. Flynn said he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and refuse to honor a subpoena from the Senate

Intelligence Committee, which is investigating allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

On Tuesday, Mr. Flynn said he would turn over documents from his businesses to the Senate Intelligence Committee, according to a person familiar with the matter. The Flynn Intel Group shut down in November.

Robert Kelner, the attorney for Mr. Flynn and the Flynn Intel Group declined to comment. In the past, Mr. Kelner has criticized what he called “unfounded allegations” against Mr. Flynn and said he hoped Mr. Flynn would have a fair chance to tell his story. Mr. Kian didn't respond to requests for comment.



Turkish journalist Nedim Sener and former head of Turkish military intelligence Ismail Hakki Pekin, both shown in 2015, were interviewed in a Flynn Intel Group project. PHOTOS: OZAN KOSE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES; HE CANLING/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS

Flynn Intel Group hired professionals to shoot the documentary and then worked to conceal its role in producing the film, according to David Enders, a former VICE News correspondent hired to work on the project. The Wall Street Journal reviewed footage prepared for the unfinished documentary, which was shelved last November, two days before Mr. Flynn was officially asked to become the president's national security adviser.

Mr. Enders and Rudi Bakhtiar, a former CNN anchor hired to be the on-camera face for the film, said the disclosure in March about Mr. Flynn's work as a foreign agent came as a shock.

Ms. Bakhtiar said she was misled about the true intentions of the film, which she said was focused on attacking a U.S.-based Turkish imam President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has accused of orchestrating last summer's botched military coup. She said she thought the work would produce an objective, investigatory documentary about Turkey and Fethullah Gulen, the imam.

As the documentary plans moved ahead last fall, Mr. Enders said that Mr. Kian told him he didn't want anyone to know who was behind the film about Mr. Gulen, whom Mr. Erdogan wants the U.S. to extradite to Turkey to face accusations he runs a terrorist group behind last summer's failed coup.

“Bijan said they did not want to be connected to this in any way,” Mr. Enders said. “He said: ‘We don't want anyone to know the Flynn Intel Group has anything to do with this.’” Mr. Enders said Mr. Kian didn't explain his reasons.

The project began last summer, after Mr. Erdogan quashed a poorly conceived July 15 military coup attempt. A few weeks later, Ekim Alptekin, a Turkish businessman

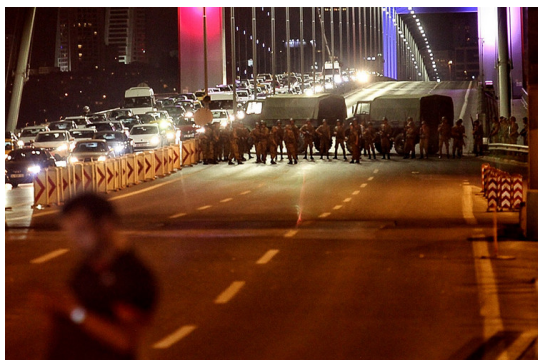
and Erdogan defender, signed a three-month contract with the Flynn Intel Group to help Turkish interests.

Mr. Alptekin, head of a Netherlands-based consulting firm called Inovo BV, and chairman of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council, a group that promotes business between the two countries, said he wanted to use the documentary to help expose America to the dangers of Mr. Gulen.

“We were thinking of a small, ‘60 Minutes’ kind of a thing, where these conclusions are brought to the public,” Mr. Alptekin told the Journal. “We thought that might have a good effect.”

Mr. Gulen, who lives in Pennsylvania, has repeatedly denied playing any role in last summer’s failed coup in Turkey or that he leads a terrorist group.

U.S. officials have said several times over the past year that Turkey has yet to provide enough evidence to extradite Mr. Gulen. Washington’s refusal to comply with the request remains a major point of contention between the two countries.



Soldiers take part in an attempted coup against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on July 15, 2016.  
PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

On Sept. 9, Mr. Alptekin’s company sent the first \$200,000 to the Flynn Intel Group, according to the U.S. company’s Foreign Agents Registration Act filing, the disclosure that was filed in March. Mr. Alptekin said the money for the project came from his own accounts and not the Turkish government.

Four days later, the Flynn Intel Group sent \$40,000 back to Mr. Alptekin’s firm and characterized it in the filing as a consulting fee.

Mr. Alptekin said the \$40,000 was actually a refund because the Flynn Intel Group didn’t have the ability to lobby the U.S. government as planned.

“They didn’t have a game plan, so they immediately wired the lobbying component of the contract back to me,” Mr. Alptekin said. “So that was a reimbursement to me.”

In its foreign registration filing, the Flynn Intel Group said its work was “focused on improving U.S. business organizations’ confidence regarding doing business in Turkey, particularly with respect to the stability of Turkey and its suitability as a venue for investment and commercial activity.”

In Washington, the Flynn Intel Group began gathering publicly available information about Mr. Gulen, with a particular focus on his network of charter schools in the U.S.

The company hired Mr. Enders, who said he was asked to track down for the documentary historic footage of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader who took power in 1979 after the country’s shah was overthrown. Mr. Enders, who was paid \$3,400 for his work, said he was initially told the film would be a “well-investigated documentary about Iran.” Mr. Enders said it later became clear that Mr. Kian saw Mr. Gulen as a Turkish Ayatollah.

Ms. Bakhtiar, who was hired to conduct interviews on camera, and Mr. Kian were old family friends united by their Iranian heritage. Mr. Kian, a former director of the



U.S.-based Turkish imam Fethullah Gulen was the subject of the Flynn Intel Group's unfinished documentary. PHOTO: CHARLES MOSTOLLER/REUTERS

Export-Import Bank, got in touch to express sympathies with Ms. Bakhtiar in 2005, after her father died. Ms. Bakhtiar's uncle, who served as the last prime minister of Iran before the 1979 revolution, was assassinated in Paris in 1991.

Ms. Bakhtiar had worked as an anchor at CNN and a correspondent at Fox News, Voice of America and Reuters, and had traveled to some of the world's toughest spots throughout her career, including Iran and Iraq.

Last fall, Ms. Bakhtiar said Mr. Kian told her he wanted to bring her in on a "very exciting" project about Turkey. At the time, Turkey was in the midst of a sweeping post-coup crackdown on dissent. Mr. Erdogan had imposed a state of emergency and had begun detaining tens of thousands of soldiers, police officers, teachers, journalists and diplomats accused of supporting Mr. Gulen.



Journalist Rudi Bakhtiar, shown in Syria in 2012, worked on the unfinished documentary made by the Flynn Intel Group. PHOTO: AFSHIN NARIMAN

Ms. Bakhtiar said she agreed to meet Mr. Kian at his office in Alexandria, Va. She said she didn't realize until she got there that it was the offices of the Flynn Intel Group. She said Mr. Kian told her at that meeting that the company he ran with Mr. Flynn would be funding the project.

At the time, Mr. Flynn, who had been fired as head of the Pentagon's intelligence branch in 2014, had recently rocketed to the center of the campaign news by delivering a fiery speech at the Republican National Convention, where he led the crowd in chanting "lock her up" about Mr. Trump's Democratic opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

"I was excited—until I realized it was Flynn Intel Group," said Ms. Bakhtiar, who agreed to work on the film anyway, in part because Mr. Kian was a family friend.

Meanwhile, lobbying firm SGR LLC, run by veteran Washington consultant Jim Courtovich, was hired to promote the film once it was made, and it developed proposals to try to place the documentary on news shows such as PBS's "Frontline," according to one consultant involved in the project.

SGR also created a Monopoly-style illustration it called "Gulenopoly." It was paid \$40,000 by the Flynn Intel Group for its work, according to the foreign registration filing.

A short time after the Alexandria meeting, Ms. Bakhtiar said Mr. Kian called her and asked her to meet him at a boutique hotel in Washington the next day to do some interviews for the film. Mr. Kian sent over a packet of background information to prepare, and all of it centered on Mr. Gulen.

The info on Mr. Gulen, said three people who saw it, was little more than a collection of information easily available on the internet, including publicly available details about his charter schools.

When Ms. Bakhtiar got to the hotel, she said she met Mr. Kian and Mr. Enders, who were waiting in a room to do the interviews. Mr. Kian gave Ms. Bakhtiar a list of questions to ask and told her the people coming didn't have much time.

Mr. Enders said Mr. Kian told him to bring the equipment in piece-by-piece so the hotel staff wouldn't know they were filming. "It was very hush-hush," Mr. Enders said. "They were like Keystone Kops."

As Ms. Bakhtiar prepared for the interviews, Mr. Kian greeted the men she would be talking to, which included Ismail Hakki Pekin, the general who once served as head of Turkey's military intelligence branch, and Nedim Sener, a well-known Turkish journalist.

The men have said they were persecuted by supporters of Mr. Gulen, who were once allies of Mr. Erdogan and held powerful government positions.

Ms. Bakhtiar said she had little time to prepare and knew little about the Turks she was interviewing.

In his 20-minute interview, Mr. Pekin repeated a contention by top Turkish officials that Mr. Gulen was an asset of the Central Intelligence Agency, which protected the Turkish cleric from being extradited.

Mr. Pekin said that he wanted to take part in the documentary because he saw it as a chance to let as many Americans as possible know about the danger posed by Mr. Gulen.

At the end of the interview with Mr. Sener, Mr. Kian stepped in to ask a few questions of his own. But he wanted to make sure he wouldn't be filmed.

"I don't want to be on camera," Mr. Kian can be heard whispering in the video reviewed by the Journal.

"That's fine," responds Mr. Enders, who was running the camera. "You're not."

Mr. Sener told the Journal that he came to Washington because he thought it was important to raise the issue of Mr. Gulen with U.S. officials. "The Americans think of him as a supporter of moderate Islam," he said. "However, Fethullah Gulen is the plotter of the July 15 coup."

Ms. Bakhtiar, who was paid \$1,200 for the day's work on the film, said she told Mr. Kian that she wanted to go to Turkey to round out the piece. "I said: 'I want to get both sides,'" she said. "I'm a journalist. He never said 'We're going to make a documentary that's going to crush Gulen.' I never would have done it."

She said she hasn't been contacted by any officials investigating Mr. Flynn.

A few days after the filming, Mr. Alptekin wired another \$185,000 to the Flynn Intel Group. Mr. Alptekin said he shaved off \$15,000 because the company wasn't living up to its pledge to produce some good publicity.

"PR is something that you have to see," he said. "It's not something that is behind-the-scenes. It's in front of the scenes, so if there is no output, it's very clear that nothing is

happening.”

The following week, the Flynn Intel Group sent another \$40,000 back to Mr. Alptekin's firm and later classified it as a consulting fee. Again, Mr. Alptekin said, the money was a reimbursement, not a consulting fee.

By mid-October, work on the film had come to a halt.

On Nov. 8, Election Day, The Hill newspaper printed an op-ed by Mr. Flynn that compared Mr. Gulen to Ayatollah Khomeini and backed Turkey's demand that Mr. Gulen be extradited.

The piece included an image of the spoof Gulenopoly game.

On Nov. 14, Mr. Alptekin sent another \$145,000 to the Flynn Intel Group. The next day, two days before the president-elect named Mr. Flynn as his first national security adviser, Mr. Alptekin and the Flynn Intel Group ended their contract.

Mr. Alptekin said the three-month contract came to a natural end. “They did a great job,” he said.

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