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## NATIONAL SECURITY

# Flynn Promoted Nuclear-Plant Project While in White House

Then-Trump security adviser had his staff meet with those involved in Middle East proposal that once included Russian firms



Mike Flynn promoted a private-sector nuclear power project in which he had played a role while working in the White House as President Trump's national security adviser. PHOTO: JIM LO SCALZO/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Christopher S. Stewart, Rob Barry and Shane Harris

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As President Donald Trump's national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn promoted a controversial private-sector nuclear power plan in the Middle East that had once involved Russian companies, according to former security-council staffers and others familiar with the effort.

While working at the White House, Mr. Flynn advocated for a group of former senior U.S. military officers with whom he had worked while in the private sector. The project, which the former military officers were helping promote on behalf of several U.S. companies, envisions building and operating dozens of nuclear plants in Saudi Arabia and across the Middle East, the people familiar with it said.

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project was valued at hundreds of billions of dollars and described as a Marshall Plan for the region, according to the people familiar with it. Mr. Flynn, as a private citizen before entering the White House, had advised U.S. companies that aimed to provide security for the project.

White House disclosure forms indicate that Mr. Flynn's year-and-a-half work on the project ended in December 2016, but Mr. Flynn in fact remained involved in the project

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once he joined the Trump administration in January, discussing the plan and directing his National Security Council staff to meet with the companies involved, the former staffers said.

A lawyer for Mr. Flynn declined to comment, as did a White House spokeswoman.

The former NSC staffers said Mr. Flynn's contacts with the former military officers were unusual—happening “outside normal channels”—and raised questions among NSC staff about potential conflicts of interest. His actions were “highly abnormal,” and “not the

way things were supposed to go,” said one former NSC staff member.

The activity continued even after NSC ethics advisers directed Mr. Flynn to remove himself from the project, former and current officials said.

During his brief tenure in office, Mr. Flynn sought to meet with the former military officers, an administration official said. While the official confirmed a meeting between the former officers and NSC staff did occur, Mr. Flynn “was instructed that it would be inappropriate for him to attend and he did not attend. Whether he did something we don't know about? We don't know what we don't know.”

Now, congressional investigators say they are examining details about Mr. Flynn's relations with various companies involved in the plan after he joined the Trump administration, as well as any previous travel, contacts with foreign government officials or compensation related to the nuclear project that he failed to disclose.

On Wednesday, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee released correspondence with executives at the companies that Mr. Flynn advised. They confirmed to the committee that he had traveled to the Middle East and met with foreign government officials and foreign business associates in June 2015 to promote the nuclear project.

“It appears that General Flynn violated federal law by omitting this trip and these foreign contacts from his security clearance renewal application in 2016 and concealing them from security clearance investigators who interviewed him as part of the background check process,” wrote Reps. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the ranking Democrat on the oversight committee, and Eliot Engel of New York, the ranking Democrat on the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

To obtain a security clearance, officials are required to disclose foreign travel and contacts, as well as all sources of income, going back several years. Conviction for concealing information from security-clearance investigators can result in criminal penalties of up to five years in prison.

At one point, the nuclear project called for Russian companies to play a key role by providing fuel and taking the power-plant waste, the people said. More recently, the plan became more of an “American initiative,” a person familiar with the project said.

Mr. Flynn was forced to resign in February for failing to disclose his conversations with the Russian ambassador about U.S. sanctions and is now under investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller, who declined to comment. Mr. Flynn's lawyer has not commented on the Russia probe.

Committee Democrats said they shared with Mr. Mueller their findings about Mr. Flynn's travel and work on behalf of the nuclear project.

For the former military officers, the purpose of contact with the NSC was to use Mr. Flynn to “get into the administration” and “make sure the White House was on the same side” as them, said a person familiar with the project.

One of the former military officers said after one meeting with NSC staff that “there’s a lot of interest” in the deal, one of the people familiar with the project said.

Though the nuclear plan had been floated for a number of years, several people familiar with it said its various backers didn’t meet with the Obama administration’s National Security Council members. Typically, such requests were routed to government agencies such as the Commerce Department, former staffers said.

In initial White House disclosure forms, Mr. Flynn stated his relationship with two companies involved in the deal, X-Co Dynamics and IronBridge, but didn’t disclose any payments from them. That relationship spanned about a year and a half and carried through the 2016 presidential campaign and the transition period, when he was advising Mr. Trump. Mr. Flynn said in the forms that the relationship ended in December 2016.

X-Co Dynamics and IronBridge were to provide security for the plants.

Mr. Flynn later amended the form, saying he was paid by a third company in the nuclear venture, ACU Strategic Partners. He didn’t give a specific amount, saying only that it was more than \$5,000.

ACU said in a statement to the House oversight committee that Mr. Flynn made a trip to the Middle East on its behalf in June 2015 and that it covered his travel expenses.

Even after Mr. Flynn left the White House, the former military officers continued to push the plan with the administration.

In April, several members of the group met in the White House with Gary Cohn, Mr. Trump’s top economic adviser, and Thomas Barrack Jr. , an adviser and real estate billionaire who helped plan the administration’s May trip to Saudi Arabia.

The companies had lobbied the administration to get the nuclear-plant plan on the trip’s agenda. But the plans weren’t discussed on the trip because of time constraints, an administration official said.

The official acknowledged Mr. Cohn’s participation in the meeting and said his role there was to listen.

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