

## The New York Times

# *McFarland's Testimony About Russia Contacts Is Questioned*



K.T. McFarland, President Trump's former deputy national security adviser, during her confirmation hearing to be ambassador to Singapore in July.

Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times

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WASHINGTON — A leading Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee questioned on Monday whether a high-ranking official in Donald J. Trump's transition team had been deceptive over the summer about her knowledge of discussions between Michael T. Flynn, the former national security adviser, and a former Russian ambassador.

K. T. McFarland served on the presidential transition team before becoming the White House deputy national security adviser. In July, she was questioned in writing by Senator Cory Booker, Democrat of New Jersey, on whether she had ever spoken to Mr. Flynn about his contacts with Sergey I. Kislyak, who was then the Russian ambassador to Washington, before Mr. Trump took office.

"I am not aware of any of the issues or events described above," Ms. McFarland wrote in response, sidestepping a direct answer to the question.

An email exchange obtained by The New York Times

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/02/us/russia-mcfarland-flynn-trump-emails.html>) indicates that Ms. McFarland was aware at the time of a crucial Dec. 29 phone call between Mr. Flynn and Mr. Kislyak that was intercepted by American intelligence. During that call, Mr. Flynn urged Moscow to respond cautiously to sanctions just imposed by the Obama administration (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/us/politics/russia-election-hacking-sanctions.html>) for Russia's interference in the presidential election.

Mr. Flynn pleaded guilty on Friday to lying to F.B.I. agents

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/01/us/politics/michael-flynn-guilty-russia-investigation.html>) about that conversation and other interactions with Mr. Kislyak. He promised to cooperate with the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, who is investigating possible collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign and obstruction of justice by Mr. Trump.

If senators on the Foreign Relations Committee find that Ms. McFarland was evasive in her testimony, it could complicate her nomination to become ambassador to Singapore. Repeated attempts to reach Ms. McFarland, who left her post as deputy national security adviser in May, were unsuccessful.

In his written questions to Ms. McFarland, submitted as part of her confirmation process, Mr. Booker wrote that Mr. Flynn had been warned by another transition official that his contacts with the Russian ambassador would most likely be intercepted by American intelligence agencies. Mr. Booker also mentioned Mr. Flynn's 2015 trip to Moscow, where he attended a dinner hosted by a Kremlin-backed news network

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/us/politics/michael-flynn-financial-disclosure-russia-linked-entities.html>) and was seated at the head table next to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

Mr. Booker asked, "Did you ever discuss any of General Flynn's contacts with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak directly with General Flynn?"

In a statement on Monday, Mr. Booker said that he was concerned that Ms. McFarland might have given "false testimony" in her answers.

"If this is the case, this is an alarming development, and another example of a pattern of deception on the part of Trump's closest associates regarding their connections and communications to Russian government officials," he said.

Court documents released on Friday, along with Mr. Flynn's guilty plea, indicate that senior members of Mr. Trump's transition team were well aware of his discussions with the Russian ambassador about the Obama administration's sanctions. Mr. Flynn talked to Mr. Kislyak by phone on Dec. 29, the day the sanctions took effect, and several days later.

In her email to another transition official hours before the first phone call, Ms. McFarland described President Barack Obama's decision to expel 35 Russian diplomats as a last-minute attempt to discredit Mr. Trump's victory, box him in diplomatically and provoke him into a potentially politically damaging statement in Russia's defense.

"General Flynn is talking to the Russian ambassador this evening," she wrote.

She also wrote: "If there is a tit-for-tat escalation, Trump will have difficulty improving relations with Russia which has just thrown U.S.A. election to him." A White House lawyer said on Friday that Ms. McFarland did not mean Russia had tipped the election, only that Democrats were portraying it that way.

Court documents state that Mr. Flynn discussed what he should tell Mr. Kislyak with another transition official beforehand and briefed that person afterward. The court documents do not identify that official, who was with other senior members of the transition team at Mr. Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla. White House officials said on Friday that they believed that the official was Ms. McFarland, but that information has not been confirmed.

During their follow-up call, Mr. Kislyak informed Mr. Flynn that Russia would not retaliate immediately for the sanctions — a surprise to many foreign policy experts. Mr. Flynn then briefed senior transition team members about his discussions with Mr. Kislyak, the records show.

Ms. McFarland worked so closely with Mr. Flynn on the transition team that her colleagues sometimes referred to her as his "brain."

([https://www.facebook.com/dialog/feed?app\\_id=9869919170&link=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2017%2F12%2F04%2Fmcfarland-flynn-russia-emails-congressional-testimony.html&smid=fb-share&name=McFarland%E2%80%99s%20Testimony%20About%20Russia%20Contacts%20and%20Flynn%E2%80%99s%20Guilty%20Plea](https://www.facebook.com/dialog/feed?app_id=9869919170&link=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2017%2F12%2F04%2Fmcfarland-flynn-russia-emails-congressional-testimony.html&smid=fb-share&name=McFarland%E2%80%99s%20Testimony%20About%20Russia%20Contacts%20and%20Flynn%E2%80%99s%20Guilty%20Plea))

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Tom Brenner/The New York Times

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The president's lawyer argued that the United States Constitution bars a defamation suit brought by a woman who had accused Mr. Trump of unwanted sexual advances.

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Dec. 5

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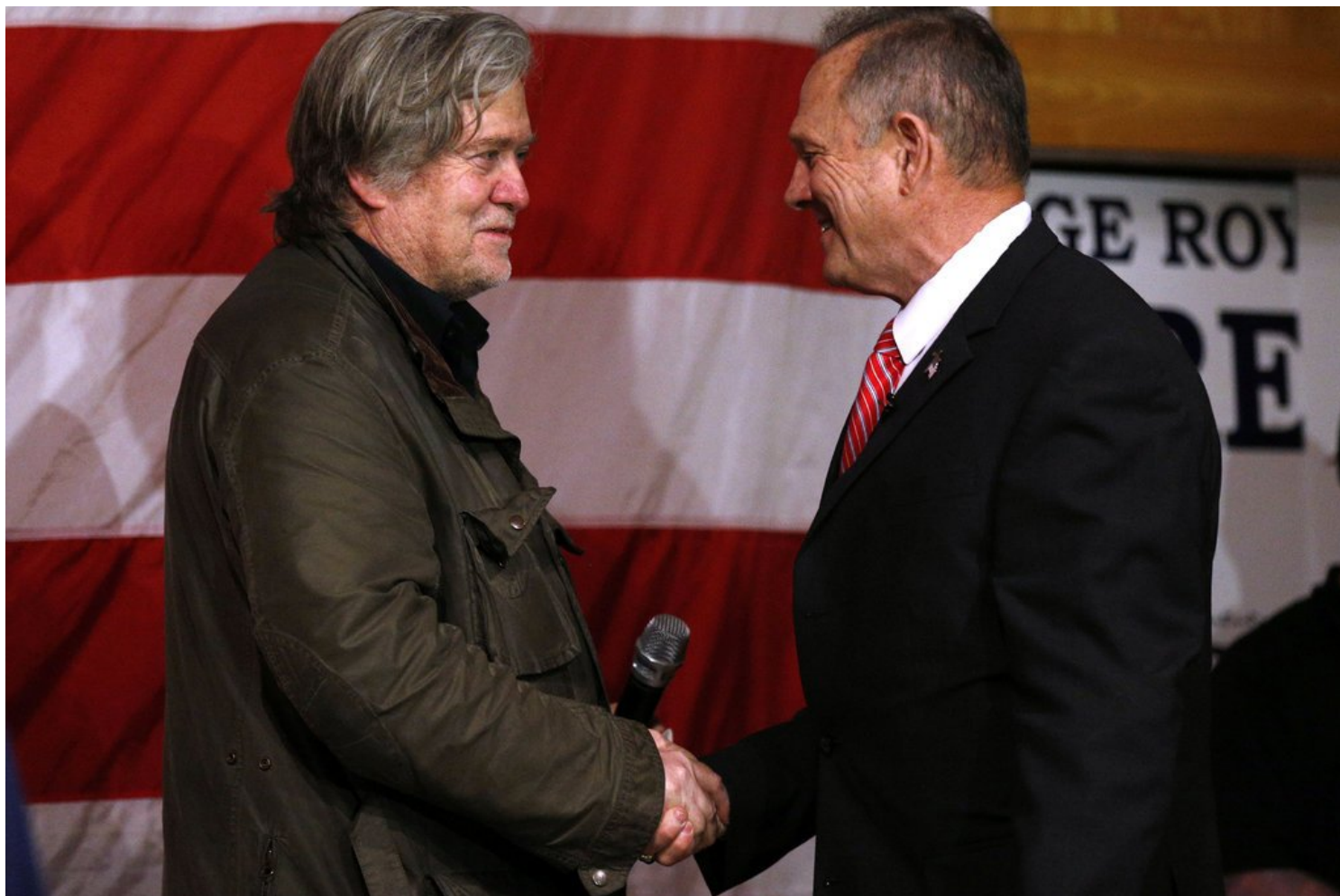
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