


# Whistleblower: Flynn told colleague Russia sanctions would be 'ripped up'

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## Story highlights

- The whistleblower's story starts Inauguration Day, at an event in D.C.
- The criminal case against Flynn in federal court barely touched on his work in private business

*Washington (CNN)*As President Donald Trump delivered his inaugural address, incoming national security adviser Michael Flynn texted his former business colleague about a plan to join Russia and build nuclear reactors in the Middle East: The project was "good to go," he told them, according to a summary of a whistleblower's account provided by a lawmaker.

The business colleague who texted with Flynn later recounted that he also suggested sanctions against Russia would be "ripped up" as one of the administration's first acts, according to the whistleblower.

Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, on Wednesday released his summary of the whistleblower's account detailing Flynn's conversations with colleagues as the Trump administration took power. The account provides the strongest claim yet that the administration was focused on unraveling the sanctions that President Barack Obama had just put in place and that Flynn had a personal motivation for doing so.

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Flynn attempted to "manipulate the course of international nuclear policy for the financial gain of his business partners," and assured a business partner the US would relax sanctions once he worked in Trump's White House, Cummings wrote to House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy, R-South Carolina.

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Flynn, while involved in the Trump transition, worked with companies including ACU Strategic Partners to make a deal with Russia to build nuclear reactors in the Middle East. But Cummings' letter to Gowdy described Flynn's interest in the deal for nuclear reactors in far more detail than was previously known.

However, Donald Gross, a lawyer for ACU Strategic Partners, denied that there was any contact between his company and Flynn at any point while Flynn was working for Trump. "For the record, no member of ACU received any communication in any form from General Flynn during the presidential campaign, the presidential transition, the inauguration, the period following the inauguration when General Flynn served as national security adviser or subsequent to General Flynn's resignation," Gross said in a statement Wednesday following the release of the whistleblower's account.

On Wednesday evening, Gowdy said his committee would not look into the issue, punting the matter to the House Intelligence Committee instead.

"I do get that Democrats want every committee in Congress to be investigating the same fact pattern. I don't think that's the best use of our resources," Gowdy said. "My committee is looking into the things that are in the jurisdiction of the Oversight Committee. ... We're not investigating Russia."

Rep. Mike Conaway, the Texas Republican leading the House Intelligence Committee's Russia investigation, declined to say if his panel would investigate the matter.

"I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to do," Conaway said. "I'll tell you what I've done."

The Wall Street Journal's previous reporting said Flynn had facilitated a draft memo with the National Security Council staff that would support the project. The memo was intended for Trump to sign, though there's no indication the President saw it, the Journal reported.

Cummings said the Flynn whistleblower was "extremely hesitant to come forward -- and still fears retaliation" but "feels duty bound as a citizen to make this disclosure." The whistleblower isn't named, but Cummings promised in the letter to share the person's identity with Gowdy if it remains confidential and Gowdy agrees to speak with the whistleblower.

Cummings also pushed back on ACU's denial, arguing that "General Flynn's own financial disclosure states that he served as an advisor to ACU from April 2015 through June 2016 -- which was during Donald Trump's campaign -- so it would have been odd for him not to have communicated at all with anyone at ACU during this period."

Flynn pleaded guilty to a charge in the criminal investigation into Russian collusion last week.

#### More charges could be coming against former Trump aide in Russia probe

His lawyer, Robert Kelner, declined to comment for this story.

The whistleblower's story to Cummings starts January 20, Inauguration Day, at an event in D.C. The whistleblower encountered a business partner of Flynn's, Alex Copson of ACU Strategic Partners, which was working on building the reactors. "I couldn't be better. This is the best day of my life," Copson told the whistleblower as he described the message from Flynn, Cummings said. "This is the start of something I have been working on for years, and we are good to go."

Flynn had texted Copson with the same message -- that the nuclear reaction project was "good to go" -- from his place on the dais outside the Capitol 10 minutes into Trump's inaugural address, the whistleblower told Cummings. Flynn also texted Copson to tell his business colleagues to "let them know to put things in place," Cummings wrote. Copson then told the whistleblower that Flynn "has been putting everything in place for us" and that the project would "make a lot of very wealthy people."

#### It's the obstruction of justice, stupid!

The whistleblower also heard from Copson that Flynn would try to reduce sanctions against Russia as "one of his first orders of business and that this would allow money to start flowing into the project," Cummings wrote.

The criminal case against Flynn in federal court barely touched on his work in private business, though it did describe his attempts during the presidential transition to mediate

Russia's response to sanctions from the Obama administration and to influence foreign nations' votes on a UN Security Council measure related to Israeli settlements.

Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to federal investigators about calls he had with the Russian ambassador about sanctions and the UN vote at the request of Trump campaign officials. A document filed in Flynn's case mentioned his failure to comply with foreign lobbying disclosure laws related to his work for Turkey, but his charging document didn't mention that work.

#### Democrats place hold on McFarland nomination

Flynn was the fourth person charged in the criminal investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, and the first staffer from Trump's West Wing.

Cummings also asked Gowdy to subpoena several of Flynn's business partners, related companies and other administration officials. Cummings said his office could not verify the whistleblower's story, and whether Copson was telling the whistleblower the truth, without subpoenaed documents.

Cummings has been critical of his Republican colleague Gowdy's leadership in their investigation of Flynn. Before Gowdy was House Oversight chair, Republican Jason Chaffetz of Utah led the committee. He and Cummings jointly exposed details that Flynn had lied on his security clearance forms earlier this year, though Chaffetz later backed off the inquiry despite the Democratic demands.