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Russian Officials See Flynn’s Resignation as a Major Blow to Diplomacy

By Jason Ditz
February 14, 2017

The resignation of National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, surrounding questions about his pre-inauguration conversation with the Russian Ambassador, has brought a new round of media attempt to US-Russia relations. In Russia, however, it’s mostly just brought concerns.

A number of high-ranking Russian MPs reacted with anger at the news that Flynn was effectively forced out of his position, seeing the negative attention he got as a result of him being a supporter of US-Russia diplomacy, and saw the circumstances surrounding the case as underscoring how dangerous it is for US officials to negotiate, with Russia’s Senate Foreign Affairs Chairman Konstantin Kosachev saying that Flynn’s “readiness for dialogue is perceived by the hawks in Washington as a thought-crime.”

Kosachev saw the ouster of a National Security Adviser for something he described as a “usual diplomatic practice” as a source of major concern, and said the fact that Trump hadn’t gone to bat for him suggested “Russophobia has permeated the new administration from top to bottom.”

A number of other Russian officials expressed doubt that President Trump would ever deliver on his previous talk of improved relations with Russia, seeing Flynn’s removal as ushering in a shift toward more establishment figures in Trump’s inner circle, and a continuation of the anti-Russia policy of the Obama years.

Trump has yet to meet with Putin, and no such meeting is expected until at least this summer, though there is a possibility Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the next few days. Whether this provides any new insight on a possible rapprochement remains to be seen.