



## **DISTURBING Leak of Witkoff Call Reveals Moral Rot of Security State**

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** Over the last hour or two, some breaking news took place that I think is extremely disturbing and very consequential. And before I get to that, I just want to set the context for it, which is that this is not the first time we've seen something like this happen. I think one of the most underappreciated events of the first term of President Trump was what was done to General Michael Flynn. As you may recall, President Trump named General Flynn his National Security Advisor in the transition. And the transition exists in order for the incoming administration officials to start transitioning into their jobs, not so that they don't just arrive one day at the White House with no preview work done. And one of the things Michael Flynn did during the transition is what all National Security Advisors not only have the right to do but are expected to do during the transition, which is they began reaching out to their counterparts in important governments. And at the time, Russia was probably the most important country in terms of the United States because of everything that was happening between the United States and Russia as a result of the Russiagate hoax and the 2016 election. President Obama had issued all sorts of sanctions on Russian officials, the two sides were expelling each other as diplomats. Basically, there was no communication. Which is incredibly dangerous when you consider that the US and Russia are the two largest nuclear armed countries. Russia has the largest nuclear stockpile on the planet. The United States has the second largest. They both have all of those archaic cold war systems where they have thousands of intercontinental ballistic missiles that are nuclear tipped pointed at one another's cities with hair trigger alerts. It's unbelievably dangerous to have what we had at the end of 2016 under the Obama administration, where there was all this intense tension to the point where neither side could even speak. And Michael Flynn did exactly what you would hope a National Security Advisor incoming would do, which is he picked up the phone and he spoke to Russian officials, including the ambassador to the US, Ambassador Kislyak and others. But as it turned out, the NSA was spying on those telephone calls between General Flynn and Russian officials. And their excuse was: Oh, we weren't targeting General Flynn, we were targeting Russian officials. But what the NSA did was they leaked the content of those communications between General Flynn and Russian officials to the Washington Post. And

the Washington Post then published the contents of those communications. David Ignatius, the CIA spokesman at the Washington Post is the one who published them. And it made it seem like General Flynn was trying to undermine these sanctions. When in reality what he was saying was: Look, once we get into office, we want to reset relations. We want to have better relations with Russia. But at the time, with all of this Russiagate hysteria going on, the fact that General Flynn spoke to his Russian counterparts was treated as some sort of nefarious, sinister act. President Trump forced General Flynn to resign, which I think Trump really regrets having done. And the FBI then used those transcripts to put General Flynn into a perjury trap, where they asked him if they could talk to him about his conversations with the Russians, and when he began to answer they knew exactly what he had said because they had those transcripts. And anything that he said that was a little bit off or inaccurate or poorly remembered James Comey used it to create a perjury indictment for General Flynn and he was indicted over that, and persecuted over that. And the reason this was so disturbing was because, and this was the point of the Snowden reporting of course, is it sure that the NSA now has the ability to spy not where they were intended to use their spying powers, which is to gather information about foreign adversaries. And instead, they're constantly using it for domestic purposes to spy on American citizens with no warrants, to spy on American officials.

And that was the case where the NSA, where the deep state was vigorously opposed to the Trump administration's policy of trying to improve relations with Russia. They didn't want to improve relations with Russia, the deep state didn't. And already the deep state was at war with Trump. That was when Trump was mocking the CIA for getting Iraq wrong. He was angry that they were trying to suggest his election victory was due to Russia. They had leaked all throughout 2016, incriminating and ultimately false information about Trump's relationship with the Russians designed to help Hillary Clinton win. And there was enormous tension between the deep state, the unelected secret of part of the government on the one hand, and the elected, the new elected president, President Trump on the other. And the NSA used its powers of spying, not to spy on foreign adversaries, but to spy on General Flynn, and then leaked the contents of those communications to the Washington Post. Now, as it turns out, of all the leaking crimes, and obviously, as somebody who's a journalist and who has worked with whistleblowers, I believe in whistleblowing, in leaking information designed to expose government corruption, government deceit, government illegality. That's not what this was. The NSA wasn't trying to expose illegality. It was trying to undermine policies with which it disagrees by using its spying powers, abusing its spying powers to try and destroy the Trump administration's efforts to improve relations with the Russians. And for all the hysteria about Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning and Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden and their leaking, under the US Code, the most serious leaking crime – in fact, it's one of the very few crimes that not just the leakers but the journalists can be prosecuted for – is this if you leak the contents of telephone calls that the NSA has spied on. Because among other things, not only is it a huge invasion of privacy, but also it alerts the officials that the NSA has spied on, that their phones are compromised. It shows the Russians, it shows Kislyak, it shows the Russian officials the NSA has compromised your phone. They're able to listen in on your conversations, and obviously they will then adjust their security measures,

and the NSA will lose that access. So that's considered the worst crime, but the NSA did exactly that along with the Washington Post, not to expose government law breaking, but to undermine and sabotage the newly elected president's policy of trying to improve relations with Russia.

So that brings us to today. And a very similar thing happened just about an hour and a half ago. Steve Witkoff is the person on whom President Trump most relies, who he most trusts to negotiate peace deals. He's known Witkoff forever. Witkoff is a New York real estate billionaire like Trump. They go back a long way. He trusts Witkoff completely. And he tasks Witkoff to try and negotiate the deals, the two ceasefire deals that President Trump was able to engineer between Israel and the Palestinians and Gaza. And now Witkoff has been passed to work on a peace deal between the Russians and the Ukrainians to end the war, which is one of President Trump's top foreign policy priorities. Even though so many Republicans, even his own Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and most of the deep state oppose this plan, that is the elected president's policy. And as part of his work for the president, Witkoff was speaking to top-level Russian officials and a Western intelligence agency, probably the NSA, maybe the British counterparts, spied on those conversations, created transcripts of Steve Witkoff's conversations with Russian officials that were geared toward facilitating a peace deal with Ukraine that many people inside the US government want to sabotage, and then leak the contents of those telephone calls to Bloomberg, which then published it.

Here you see the Bloomberg article. This was just an hour or two ago. Bloomberg: *Witkoff Advised Russia on How to Pitch Ukraine Plan to Trump*. And the framing here is designed to suggest that Steve Witkoff was somehow working in collaboration with the Russians against the United States, that he was sort of acting almost in a treasonous manner to betray his own country by giving tips to the Russians on how they could speak to President Trump in order to facilitate a peace deal to get a better peace deal. Now, it's so childish to think this isn't what a negotiator does. Steve Witkoff's goal, his task, his assignment is to get a peace deal done between Russia and Ukraine. And whatever he has to do to try and get that done is what he's supposed to be doing. But the NSA or British intelligence or whomever who spied on this call, leaked this call in the transcript of it – again, if it's the NSA, that means spying not on a foreign adversary, but on a United States official, on an American citizen, and then leaking the contents of their call in order to make it seem like Steve Witkoff had done something treacherous, that he was again this Russiagate narrative that he was working on behalf of the Russians. When what he's actually doing is his assignment that President Trump has given him of trying to facilitate a peace deal. So here's part of what Bloomberg said with these transcripts. Quote, "In an October 14th phone call that lasted a little over five minutes, Witkoff advised Yuri Ushakov, Putin's top foreign policy aid on how the Russian leader should broach the issue with Trump. His guidance included suggestions on setting up a Trump-Putin call before Zelensky's White House visit later that week and using the Gaza agreement as a way in. Quote, 'This story proves one thing'" – okay, so the framing is that Witkoff is giving tips to the Russians on how to deal with Trump. So we're all supposed to say, oh my God, Witkoff is betraying the United States government. He's betraying Trump.

He's working with the Russians on how to manipulate Trump. And that's why we leaked the call because this is a traitor to the United States.

The Problem is that President Trump and the White House believe that this is exactly what Steve Witkoff is supposed to be doing. So Bloomberg took these transcripts to the White House and said: Here is what Witkoff was saying to the Russians, what is your response? And here is what the White House said, quote, "'This story proves one thing'" – this is White House communications director Steven Cheung – "'This story proves one thing: Special envoy Witkoff talks to officials in both Russia and Ukraine nearly every day to achieve peace, which is exactly what President Trump appointed him to do.'" It's a little bit difficult to try and say that somehow. Steve Witkoff was betraying President Trump, was betraying the United States government when the policy of the United States government is determined by the elected president, which is President Trump. And President Trump believes this is what Steve Witkoff should be doing, that this is exactly what is his job to do everything possible to negotiate, to try and work all sides in order to accomplish something very difficult, which is to get a peace deal. But you have so many people inside Washington and inside the deep state who want this war to continue. It's their war. They don't care what the elected president wants. They don't care what the American people voted for. And so now you have a case of the NSA yet again abusing its spying powers to invade the privacy of American citizens, to release the tags of the calls that American officials have made, even though it's considered a grave crime under the US code – obviously, nobody's going to be prosecuted for that. There won't be charges under the Espionage Act like there were for Chelsea Manning or Edward Snowden or Julian Assange or Daniel Ellsberg. These are the highest levels of the US deep state. They're not held responsible under our laws. They're their own government.

Now I've seen some imbeciles when I noted these things on social media saying: Oh my god, it's hypocritical of you to oppose leaks when you're a journalist who has constantly worked with leaks and defended leaks. Now, just on principle for just one second before I get into the specifics of that, just think about how utterly stupid that is. Sometimes it really worries me that the US education system produces people who reason this way and can't immediately recognise the obvious fallacy in their reasoning. The fact that I'm a journalist who has worked with people who have leaked classified information doesn't mean I support every leak. If tomorrow the NSA leaked incriminating information about Lindsey Graham's personal life, or J.D. Vance's private conversations, or the personal lives of citizens who are critical of Donald Trump as punishment for their politics, that doesn't mean I would support their leaks. I would obviously oppose those leaks. I would say these leaks are wrong. And then you would have these imbeciles saying: Oh, look, Glenn Greenwald's denouncing leaks, even though previously he worked with leaks. The fact that you think some leaks are justified, meaning leaks that are designed to be whistleblowing, to expose illegality and criminality and deceit of the highest levels of the American government, doesn't mean that in order to be consistent, you have to defend every leak. The question is, what is the leak for? What is it designed to do? Who's doing the leak? This is not a case of people inside the government discovering criminality and blowing the whistle. This is the case of people who control the deep state abusing their powers, their spying powers as part of the NSA in order to sabotage

and undermine the work of our elected leaders. It's the deep state sabotaging and undermining and subverting American democracy, as they did throughout the entire first Trump term, including with that Flynn leak. But even the specifics of it, the whole point of the Snowden reporting was that the NSA has this immense omnipotent spying power that they increasingly abuse not to spy on and collect intelligence about foreign adversaries, but instead to spy on the conversations and activities of American citizens and American officials and use it not to provide the president with intelligence about foreign adversaries, but instead to subvert and interfere in American politics, something the NSA was never supposed to do. This is exactly, this example of what the NSA just did, or what the Western intelligence agency that leaked this just did, is exactly the thing that Snowden reporting was designed to warn about. So the idea that there's some inconsistency between me doing reporting about whistleblowing, showing how abusive the NSA is, on the one hand, and now denouncing the abuse of power by the NSA, but there's some inconsistency between those two things requires an immense amount of stupidity. It's like the sort of thing that the most simpleton mind would find appealing, like: Oh, look, he previously worked with leaks and now he's defending leaks and now he's denouncing leaks. There's an inconsistency. It's so childish. But the more important point here is that this shows the abuse of the power of the deep state. This is what the whole first term of the Trump presidency was. The media would celebrate when generals would ignore or countervail orders of President Trump to remove troops from Syria. And they would deceive him and pretend they've done it when in fact they would keep troops in Syria. And there were so many examples like that of leaks designed to subvert the policies of the elected president by the deep state. And the people who claim they were so in favour of democracy, the guardians of democracy would cheer and applaud the secretive unelected parts of our government, abusing their power to undermine democratically ratified policy goals. That's exactly what has happened here. These are people who do not want the war in Ukraine to end, who see the progress being made by Steve Witkoff, by the Trump White House, toward a negotiated settlement that people in the deep state think is too favourable to Russia. And so they're abusing their power as the NSA or as the Deep State or with foreign intelligence agencies to try and undermine and sabotage a policy that President Trump ran on, which is ending the war in Ukraine, so that this war instead will continue. If you even pretend to believe in democracy, this is something that should outrage you, regardless of your views of the war in Ukraine. This is something we've seen from the deep state for decades. It's why it's called the deep state. Because it's a powerful faction in Washington of elections, and often is even more powerful than our democratically elected officials because they operate in secrecy without democratic accountability. And this is a perfect instance of this, working hand in hand with the US media that also wants this war to continue. And that's why people lose faith in democracy. You can go to the ballot box and vote for a politician who says, I'm going to end the war in Ukraine. And yet you have all these people inside the government, unelected people, abusing their power, working hand in hand with the corporate media to undercut and sabotage and impede that goal because they oppose it and don't believe in it. And that is so much of how our government has worked for so long. It's why the deep state is so menacing and why the US media's subservience to the deep state, its partnership with it, has been as damaging as anything else.

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