

# Why Would Jared Kushner Trust Russian Officials So Much?

A *Washington Post* report suggests the president's son-in-law and adviser sought to give Moscow information he wanted to conceal from America's own intelligence agencies.



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Why did Jared Kushner seemingly trust Russian officials more than he trusted the U.S. government?

Friday evening, *The Washington Post* broke the story that, according to an intercepted report by the Russian ambassador in Washington to his superiors in Moscow, Kushner sought to use secure communications facilities at the Russian Embassy to correspond directly with Russian officials. The Russian ambassador, Sergei Kislyak, reported that the proposal was made in December, after Trump won the election but before he had taken office. The conversations reportedly involved Michael Flynn, the former Trump national-security adviser who was fired after it was revealed that he lied to administration officials about the content of his conversations with Russian officials.

Although Kushner never used those facilities, [former national-security officials said](#) that for officials with access to classified information, entering foreign embassies is considered a security risk. The White House has not commented directly on the report. Kushner's attorney, Jamie Gorelick, a former Justice Department official with extensive national-security experience, has neither confirmed nor denied the report, but she has emphasized Kushner's willingness to cooperate with ongoing investigations into the Trump team's contacts with the Russians. If Kushner did in fact make the request, that alone would have put him in a compromising position, since Russian officials could have used it as leverage against him.

But what is also peculiar is the level of trust Kushner would have been placing in Russian officials in asking for such a communications channel. Foreign affairs is often complex, yet Kushner didn't want the U.S. government's help—or supervision.

"What is unusual and borderline disturbing about this is less that it cut out the State Department or cut out the intelligence community; I think there is a precedent for both of those things in back-channels," said Jon Finer, former State Department chief of staff under John Kerry. "It shows a level of trust in Russian intelligence, and Russian diplomatic personnel beyond the level of trust afforded to American intelligence and American personnel."

The White House has obliquely defended Kushner's actions while refusing to comment on them specifically. "We have back-channel communications with a number of countries. So, generally speaking, about back-channel communications, what that allows you to do is to communicate in a discreet manner," National-Security Adviser H.R. McMaster [told reporters on Saturday](#). Asked whether it would be cause for concern if a National Security Council staffer used such a back-channel to Moscow, he said: "No, I would not be concerned about it."

"What puts this in an entirely different category is that this is a transition; they weren't in the government yet," said Paul Pillar, a former analyst with the Central Intelligence Agency. "That's really a departure. It's normal for an incoming administration to have contacts with foreign leaders, but I can't think of a precedent for this kind of thing."

And former national-security officials noted that while back-channel communications are often compartmentalized—meaning they can only be viewed by a select number of officials—they usually have some level of involvement from national-security officials. Communicating with Moscow using Russian facilities could have shielded Kushner's

correspondence from U.S. intelligence agencies, without denying their Russian counterparts the same access.

“The only reason you would operate that way is if you were hiding something from your own government. That's it. That's the only plausible explanation,” said Nada Bakos, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and a former CIA analyst. “There's compartmentalized classification—if they wanted to take this to the highest level of classification they could do that. It didn't have to be widely disseminated.”

Reports from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* have cited anonymous administration officials claiming that the purpose of the communications would have been to discuss the Syrian civil war. But that explanation raises similar issues: If that was the topic, why would Kushner want to cut out U.S. officials? And why couldn't it wait until after the transition?

Discussing Syria "just doesn't seem tremendously credible or urgent on the timelines they were seeking to operate,” said Finer. “It begs the question of what this was all about. Until we know that, we don't know if this is a bombshell, or just people who didn't know what they were doing.”

Kushner's contacts with the Russian government are reportedly a topic of interest for the FBI, which is investigating whether there was any collusion between the Trump presidential campaign and what intelligence agencies have said was a deliberate Russian influence operation on Trump's behalf in the 2016 presidential election.

Reuters also reported Friday that Kushner's contacts with Russian

officials were much [more extensive than he had previously acknowledged](#). Gorelick told Reuters that Kushner “participated in thousands of calls in this time period” and that he had “no recollection of the calls as described.”

The reasons for the contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials—and the willingness of those associates to conceal those contacts—remain an ongoing mystery.

“Collusion between the campaign and the Russian government would obviously be devastating for the administration,” Finer said. “But you don't need to get anywhere near that far to be disturbed by what's been revealed already—unprecedented and unexplained contacts between an adversarial government meddling in our election and people in ever-closer proximity to the president himself, after denials that proved false and alibis that don't make sense.”

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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