

## House Dems reveal new info on a shady White House plan to sell nuclear tech to Saudi Arabia

Posted by Joan Russow

Thursday, 07 March 2019 22:47 - Last Updated Saturday, 09 March 2019 19:17

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BY Michael Flynn, Trump's disgraced former national security adviser, was behind it.

Alex Ward Feb 19, 2019,

<https://www.vox.com/world/2019/2/19/18231812/saudi-arabia-nuclear-flynn-trump-democrats>

[trump-democrats](#)



President Donald Trump meets Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Oval Office at the White House on March 20, 2018, in Washington, DC. Kevin Dietsch-Pool/Getty Images

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Kevin Dietsch-Pool/Getty Images

A new report from House Democrats reveals disturbing new details about a secretive effort by top Trump administration officials to sell sensitive nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia — in defiance of at least some of the nation's ethics statutes.

The House Oversight and Reform Committee on Tuesday released a report — accompanied by a tranche of internal White House emails — detailing a scheme spearheaded by now-disgraced former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn to sell technology for roughly 40 nuclear power plants to Saudi Arabia.

The plan was already known due to previous reporting by the Wall Street Journal, for example, but the Democrats' report does add more insight into what was happening behind the scenes to push the proposal through.

The effort was part of a broader Middle East economic development plan Flynn began putting together before Trump's inauguration while he was serving as an adviser to Trump's campaign and transition team.

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During that same time period, though, Flynn was also working as an adviser for a private company called IP3 International — a firm run by retired US military generals that bills itself as a “global enterprise to develop sustainable energy and security infrastructure.”

In other words, a company that had a clear financial interest in exporting US nuclear energy technology to Saudi Arabia.

Once Trump was inaugurated, Flynn, along with longtime Trump associate Thomas Barrack, worked with other senior officials in the new Trump administration to make the plan a reality.

And it seems they got pretty far: On January 27, 2017 — just seven days after the inauguration — several of the retired generals from IP3 went to the White House to meet with Derek Harvey, a senior staffer on Trump’s National Security Council at the time, to discuss the nuclear plan for Saudi Arabia.

“Immediately after the meeting,” the House report states, “Mr. Harvey directed the NSC staff to add information about IP3’s ‘plan for 40 nuclear power plants’ to the briefing package for President Trump’s call with [Saudi Arabia’s] King Salman.”

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As of now it seems the proposal is still under consideration, but there's no indication one way or the other that the president will agree to it. At a minimum, the White House is still in discussions to sell nuclear equipment to Saudi Arabia despite fierce Democratic opposition.

On the surface, the proposed nuclear deal makes sense: An American business would make a lot of money — possibly billions of dollars — selling nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh would get a new energy source to power its economy.

But the problem, as some White House officials warned those involved, is that Flynn and Barrack's scheme was potentially illegal.

### What it takes for the US to sell nuclear equipment to Saudi Arabia

For the US to sell nuclear technology to a foreign country, it must sign what's known as a "123 agreement." That comes from Section 123 of the 1954 US Atomic Energy Act, which establishes the criteria for the US to sell nuclear materials to other countries.

If a country wants to buy nuclear equipment from the US — say, a nuclear reactor — it must

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meet nine conditions, including a guarantee that it will not use the technology to make nuclear weapons. Congress doesn't have to approve the sale.

But according to the Democrats' report, Harvey, the senior National Security Council staffer (who is also a close Flynn ally), ignored all of that "and insisted that the decision to transfer nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia had already been made."

If true, that means Harvey tried to make the deal happen without arranging for Saudi Arabia to sign the 123 agreement. That's potentially dangerous, as that could allow Riyadh to pursue a nuclear weapon with US-sold equipment down the line.

On top of that, there's also the issue of Michael Flynn's personal involvement in the deal. Flynn used to consult for IP3, and "whistleblowers" who spoke with House Democrats were concerned about the national security adviser skirting ethics rules.

White House ethics officials apparently brought all of this up. According to the report, one senior political official apparently felt Harvey's proposal was "not a business plan," but rather "a scheme for these generals to make some money." That same official then added: "Okay, you know we cannot do this."

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Clearly, their warnings were ignored — which may be why the whistleblowers spoke to congressional Democrats in the first place.

The big story here is Democrats stepping up their oversight of Trump's foreign policy

As I said earlier, the broad outlines of this scheme have already been known for a while now, thanks to reporting from the Wall Street Journal and others.

Flynn's history of pushing specific policies while being on the payroll of the primary beneficiaries of said policies is also well documented. And Barrack, the longtime Trump associate who worked with Flynn to make the Saudi nuclear deal happen, has been extremely vocal about his support for Saudi Arabia.

But armed with insider information and internal documents from those whistleblowers, House Democrats were able to put together a report that fills in a lot of the gaps and shines new light on how this whole Saudi nuclear deal went from being an idea cooked up by Flynn and a few retired generals to a serious policy being pursued at the highest levels of the White House.

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This is exactly what Democrats promised to do when they took the House last November. Democratic Congress members and staffers told me they would oversee every aspect of Trump's foreign policy, from his use of the military to his foreign connections.

If the report didn't come out, it's entirely possible that the White House would have an easier time signing the nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia. That outcome is now in doubt, and any effort to make an agreement will likely be met with stiff resistance from Democrats in Congress.

That means Trump's ability to conduct global affairs as he wishes is now curtailed. Tuesday's report is at least a warning shot — but it could be a sign of bigger things to come.

Here's the House Oversight and Reform Committee's report.