

Obama Warned Trump About Hiring Flynn, Officials Say

By **Michael D. Shear**

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WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama warned Donald J. Trump against hiring Michael T. Flynn to be part of his national security team when Mr. Obama met with his successor in the Oval Office two days after the November election, two former Obama administration officials said on Monday.

Mr. Obama, who had fired Mr. Flynn as the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told Mr. Trump that he would have profound concerns about Mr. Flynn becoming a top national security aide, said the administration officials, who were briefed on the Oval Office conversation. Mr. Trump later ignored the advice, naming Mr. Flynn to be his national security adviser.

Mr. Flynn was forced out of that position after it was revealed that he had lied to Vice President Mike Pence about his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States, amid a continuing investigation into connections between the Russian government and the Trump campaign.

Mr. Obama and Mr. Trump met for the first time in the Oval Office on Nov. 10 in what both men later described as a cordial, 90-minute session in which the outgoing president pledged to do everything he could to support the transition to a new administration.

Mr. Flynn's name came up during a broader discussion about personnel issues, the former administration officials said. Mr. Obama's concerns about Mr. Flynn, which were first reported by NBC News, were largely about his management of the D.I.A. and predated the later concerns about his contacts with the Russian ambassador, Sergey I. Kislyak.

But one of the former administration officials said that Mr. Obama was also aware of Mr. Flynn's well-publicized trip in 2015 to Moscow and other contacts with Russia.

The revelation on Monday about Mr. Obama's warning came hours before Sally Q. Yates, the former acting attorney general, was scheduled to testify in the afternoon in front of a Senate committee that she later raised her own concerns about Mr. Flynn's Russia contacts with the incoming Trump administration.

Mr. Trump blamed Obama officials on Monday, saying in two Twitter messages that it was his predecessor's administration that gave Mr. Flynn a security clearance.

"General Flynn was given the highest security clearance by the Obama Administration — but the Fake News seldom likes talking about that," Mr. Trump said.

In a second Twitter message, Mr. Trump added: “Ask Sally Yates, under oath, if she knows how classified information got into the newspapers soon after she explained it to W.H. Counsel.” An early version of the message misspelled “counsel.”

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, told reporters Monday afternoon that it should not come as a surprise that Mr. Obama “wasn’t exactly a fan of General Flynn’s,” since Mr. Obama fired Mr. Flynn in 2014.

And Mr. Spicer sought to cast doubt on Mr. Obama’s warning about Mr. Flynn, noting that the Obama administration had renewed Mr. Flynn’s security clearance in April 2016, well after Mr. Flynn’s departure from the D.I.A.

“If President Obama was truly concerned about General Flynn, why didn’t they suspend his security clearance, which they approved just months earlier?” Mr. Spicer said during his daily press briefing.

“Not only did they reaffirm it, but they took no steps to suspend it,” Mr. Spicer said. He said that decision casts doubt on how vigorous Mr. Obama’s warning to Mr. Trump was during their meeting in November.

But Mr. Spicer’s answers also called into question the Trump transition team’s own assessment of Mr. Flynn. Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey, who led the transition in the days after the election, did not recommend that Mr. Flynn be appointed national security adviser, preferring instead that he be slotted as director of national intelligence, a Cabinet-level job but one with narrower responsibilities. Mr. Christie had reservations about Mr. Flynn that he shared with Mr. Trump, according to three people close to the transition.

After Mr. Christie left the transition team, Mr. Pence, then the vice president-elect, took over, with Mr. Trump’s daughter and son-in-law, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, in prominent roles. Mr. Flynn told the team there were three appointments he was interested in: secretary of state or defense and national security adviser, according to one of the people. He was given the job of national security adviser, which does not require Senate confirmation, and was the first high-level appointment of the incoming administration.