

Mike Pence insists he didn't know Flynn was under investigation for Turkey lobbying



WASHINGTON – Vice President Pence is standing by his claims that he did not know former national security adviser Michael Flynn had been secretly lobbying for the Turkish government until March, despite a new report claiming Flynn had actually disclosed to the Trump transition team back in January that he was under a federal investigation.



Pence's office, in a statement Thursday, said the vice president “stands by his comments in March upon first hearing the news regarding General Flynn's ties to Turkey and fully supports the president's decision to ask for General Flynn's resignation.”

However, on Wednesday, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that Flynn first told Trump’s transition team on Jan. 4 that team he was under federal investigation for not initially reporting he was a paid lobbyist for

Turkey during the campaign. The Times said the disclosure was first made to the transition team's chief lawyer, Donald F. McGahn II, who is now the White House counsel.

All this renewed questions about why Flynn was still hired for the national security adviser position – and whether Pence, who was head of the Trump transition team, knew about it.

Pence told Fox News in March that he was hearing about Flynn's work for Turkey for the first time after news reports. "It's the first I heard of it, and I think it is an affirmation of the president's decision to ask General Flynn to resign," Pence said.

Flynn [was fired in February](#) for misleading Pence about discussions with a Russian official. He didn't officially file the papers required for lobbyists of foreign governments until March.

Flynn was fired after misleading administration officials – including Pence – that sanctions placed on Russia by the Obama administration hadn't been discussed during a December phone call between Flynn and Sergei Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the U.S. Eavesdropping by U.S. intelligence officials undercut Flynn's denial, which Pence had repeated on national TV.

Now, the FBI is in the middle of an ongoing counterintelligence investigation into whether Trump campaign associates, including Flynn, colluded with Russia in the country's attempts to interfere in the American presidential election.

On May 8, former acting attorney general Sally Yates testified to Congress that she had been so disturbed that Flynn misled Pence about his talks with Kislyak that she alerted the White House counsel he was vulnerable to blackmail and could even face criminal charges.

[Yates recounted before a Senate panel](#) the details of a Jan. 26 meeting in which she alerted McGahn, the White House counsel, that Flynn had lied. "Compromise was the No. 1 concern," Yates said, referring to the possibility that Russian officials, aware that Flynn had misled his colleagues, could blackmail him by threatening to expose his lies and tank his career. "It was a whole lot more than one White House official lying to another. It involved the vice president of the United States."

Meanwhile, the [Pentagon Inspector General is investigating](#) whether Flynn, a retired Army lieutenant general, accepted payments from a foreign government without seeking the required prior approval.

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President Trump on Thursday denounced the Russia investigation as the biggest "[witch hunt](#)" in U.S. political history.

The Justice Department one day earlier appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller to be a special counsel, taking over the ongoing probe examining possible collusion between his campaign and Russia. The news came days after the abrupt firing of FBI Director James Comey and [revelations he kept notes of his conversations](#) with Trump – including one that indicated the president pressed Comey to drop the inquiry into Flynn.

The news is another setback for Republicans who haven't made significant progress on major legislation despite controlling both the White House and both chambers of Congress.

House Speaker Paul Ryan was asked Thursday about lawmakers who have been wondering, after the latest bombshell revelations, whether, as the reporter put it, “We might be better with Vice President Pence.”

“I’m not even going to comment on that,” Ryan said.