

POLITICS

Mueller Seeks White House Documents Related to Trump's Actions as President

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By MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT SEPT. 20, 2017

WASHINGTON — Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel, has asked the White House for documents about some of President Trump's most scrutinized actions since taking office, including the firing of his national security adviser and F.B.I. director, according to White House officials.

Mr. Mueller is also interested in an Oval Office meeting Mr. Trump had with Russian officials in which he said the dismissal of the F.B.I. director had relieved “great pressure” on him.

The document requests provide the most details to date about the breadth of Mr. Mueller's investigation, and show that several aspects of his inquiry are focused squarely on Mr. Trump's behavior in the White House.

In recent weeks, Mr. Mueller's office sent a document to the White House that detailed 13 areas in which investigators are seeking information. Since then, administration lawyers have been scouring White House emails and asking officials

whether they have other documents or notes that may pertain to Mr. Mueller's requests.

One of the requests is about a meeting Mr. Trump had in May with Russian officials in the Oval Office the day after James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director, was fired. That day, Mr. Trump met with the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, and the Russian ambassador to the United States at the time, Sergey I. Kislyak, along with other Russian officials. The New York Times reported that in the meeting Mr. Trump had said that firing Mr. Comey relieved "great pressure" on him.

Mr. Mueller has also requested documents about the circumstances of the firing of Michael T. Flynn, who was Mr. Trump's first national security adviser. Additionally, the special counsel has asked for documents about how the White House responded to questions from The Times about a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower. That meeting was set up by Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son, to get derogatory information from Russians about Hillary Clinton.

In July, when The Times put questions about the meeting to the White House, Mr. Trump and senior administration officials prepared a response on Air Force One that made no mention of the meeting's real purpose, saying instead that it focused on Russian adoptions. Mr. Mueller has asked for all documents the White House has about the meeting, and all internal White House communications about the statement drafted on Air Force One.

Ty Cobb, the lawyer Mr. Trump hired to provide materials related to the Russia investigation to the special counsel and Congress, has told Mr. Mueller's office that he will turn over many of the documents this week.

"We can't comment on any specific requests being made or our conversations with the special counsel," he said.

Based on the document request to the White House, there is no indication that Mr. Mueller is pressing to examine Mr. Trump's personal finances or business dealings — areas the president has said should be off limits. It is not clear whether Mr. Mueller has made separate document requests elsewhere to examine those subjects.

Mr. Mueller has asked for all internal White House communications about numerous former campaign officials, including Paul J. Manafort, the former campaign chairman who is now under federal investigation. The document request also seeks communications about Mr. Trump's campaign foreign policy team: Carter Page, J. D. Gordon, Keith Kellogg, George Papadopoulos, Walid Phares and Joseph E. Schmitz.

Of the 13 subjects in Mr. Mueller's document request, four are related to Mr. Flynn. The retired lieutenant general was fired in February after it was revealed that he misled Vice President Mike Pence about December phone calls he had with Mr. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador at the time.

American officials said Mr. Flynn had told the vice president that he had only exchanged holiday greetings with Mr. Kislyak, when in fact the two men had discussed economic sanctions against Russia. The phone calls took place in late December, around the same time the Obama administration was announcing sanctions to punish Russia for what American officials said was a Russian campaign to disrupt the November presidential election.

F.B.I. agents interviewed Mr. Flynn about the phone calls, and the special counsel has requested all internal White House communications about the F.B.I. interview. Mr. Mueller has also asked for documents about how the White House responded to concerns raised by the Justice Department that Mr. Flynn might be subject to Russian blackmail for misleading Mr. Pence about the calls.

Three of Mr. Mueller's requests focus on Mr. Comey's firing. The special counsel wants any White House documents about the decision-making that led to Mr. Comey's firing, and about all meetings Mr. Comey had with Mr. Trump.

Mr. Mueller was appointed in May, shortly after it was revealed that Mr. Comey had written a series of memos about his interactions with Mr. Trump — including one Oval Office meeting when Mr. Comey said Mr. Trump had asked him to end the F.B.I. investigation of Mr. Flynn. During another meeting, the president asked for a pledge of loyalty from the F.B.I. director, according to Mr. Comey's public testimony.

The special counsel has requested documents about a statement made a week before Mr. Comey's firing by the former White House press secretary, Sean Spicer.

During a May 3 news briefing, Mr. Spicer said that "the president has confidence in the director."

The previous night, Mr. Trump had tweeted that Mr. Comey "was the best thing that ever happened to Hillary Clinton in that he gave her a free pass for many bad deeds!"

Matt Apuzzo contributed reporting from Washington, and Maggie Haberman from New York.

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