

Michael Flynn pleads guilty to lying to the FBI

By **Carol D. Leonnig**, **Josh Dawsey** and **Devlin Barrett** December 1 at 11:20 AM

Former national security adviser Michael Flynn pleaded guilty Friday to lying to the FBI about his contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, marking another milestone in the wide-ranging probe of Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III.

Flynn's admission to the charge Friday in federal district court in D.C. is an ominous sign for the White House, as court documents indicate Flynn is cooperating in the ongoing probe of possible coordination between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin to influence the 2016 election. The plea relates to false statements Flynn made to the FBI on January 24 — four days after President Trump was inaugurated — about his conversations with Kislyak during the transition.

Flynn admitted making false statements to the FBI about asking the ambassador in late December to “refrain from escalating the situation in response to sanctions that the United States had imposed on Russia that same day.” Flynn also told authorities he did not recall the ambassador “subsequently telling him that Russia has chosen to moderate its response to those sanctions as a result of his request,” according to a court filing. That would suggest there was a second, previously unknown contact between Flynn and Kislyak.

Separately, authorities say Flynn lied about asking the ambassador to delay a vote on United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Flynn is the highest-profile Trump ally — and the first aide who worked in the White House — to face charges in Mueller's investigation. Trump developed a close rapport with Flynn on the campaign trail, where the general delivered fiery denunciations of Hillary Clinton, including leading a “lock her up” chant at the Republican National Convention, and he gave Trump much-needed national security credentials. Flynn, however, had a mixed reputation among other Trump aides, who thought he gave the president questionable information and questioned some of his business dealings.

Even after Flynn was described as having misled Vice President Pence about the contact with Kislyak, Trump was conflicted over firing him — and even said after Flynn left the White House that he may have made a mistake. Trump's request of former FBI director James B. Comey to be lenient with Flynn has also come under scrutiny by the special counsel.

In recent weeks, Trump's lawyers have expected Flynn to plead guilty, particularly after one of Flynn's lawyers, Robert Kelner, said he could no longer communicate about the probe with Trump's lawyers.

Flynn's negotiations to cooperate with Mueller's team began early last month, according to two people briefed on the discussions. Days after former campaign chairman Paul Manafort was indicted, Mueller's investigators warned Flynn's lawyers they planned to indict Flynn and also could charge his son, according to the two people who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations. Flynn's lawyers, Kelner and Stephen Anthony, provided a proffer of what information Flynn could provide and then Flynn met with Mueller's team.

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving, White House lawyer John Dowd contacted Flynn's team in a sporadic "check-in" call he made to other defense counsel in the Russia probe every few weeks, people familiar with the matter said. Kelner told Dowd on the call that he could no longer communicate with the White House lawyers. That signaled Flynn had begun to cooperate or was already actively seeking to cooperate with the special counsel's office because his lawyers have a duty to shut off communications with other defense teams in either case.

As part of Flynn's negotiations, his son, Michael G. Flynn, is not expected to be charged, according to a person with knowledge of the talks.

Barry Coburn, a lawyer for Flynn's son, declined to comment Friday morning. Kelner didn't respond to requests for comment. A White House spokesman referred questions to White House lawyer Ty Cobb, who didn't respond to a request for comment.

Flynn's case was assigned to U.S. District Judge Rudolph "Rudy" Contreras, 55, a 2012 Obama appointee and veteran federal lawyer who joined the civil division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District in 1994, rising to head the civil division of the Delaware federal prosecutor's office before returning to take the same position in the District in 2006. Contreras also serves on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

The plea caps a stunning fall for the general. A native of Rhode Island who grew up in a larger family of modest means, Flynn joined the Army officer school and chose early in his career to specialize in intelligence. Among his mentors was Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who praised Flynn's ability in Afghanistan to bond with his soldiers and get results. In 2012, Flynn was named director of the Defense Intelligence Agency but rankled some subordinates there, who questioned his temperament and decision-making. Obama removed Flynn from the DIA post in October 2014.

Flynn's son had been considered for a job in the Trump transition but ultimately was rejected because of the controversy surrounding the messages he has pushed on social media. Among the false stories he promoted was a viral rumor dubbed "Pizzagate" that accused Clinton and her allies of running a child sex ring out of a pizza parlor in the District. A North Carolina man who believed the reports traveled to Washington last year with a gun, saying he hoped to help free the children.


As Friday's court filing makes clear, Flynn has been a major investigative target of the FBI's probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election. A key question for investigators is whether any Trump associates coordinated with Russian officials to try to sway the presidential race.

Flynn's contacts with [Kislyak](#) are a key issue in the probe, and the plea deal could open new doors for investigators trying to determine what, if anything, Trump knew about such contacts.


Flynn has also come under scrutiny for having a secret financial stake in major foreign policy decisions while advising Trump during the campaign, transition and in the brief period he served in the administration.

Spencer S. Hsu, Rosalind S. Helderman and Matt Zapposky contributed to this report.

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