

POLITICS

Trump Says He Fired Michael Flynn ‘Because He Lied’ to F.B.I.

By MAGGIE HABERMAN, MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT and MICHAEL D. SHEAR DEC. 2, 2017

President Trump said on Saturday that he had fired Michael T. Flynn, his first national security adviser, because he lied not just to the vice president but also to the F.B.I.

The president has long asserted that he fired Mr. Flynn in February, less than a month after he took office, because Mr. Flynn had lied to Vice President Mike Pence over whether he talked with the Russian ambassador, Sergey I. Kislyak, about sanctions imposed on Russia by President Barack Obama.

By saying on Twitter on Saturday that Mr. Flynn’s lies to the F.B.I. had also contributed to his firing, some took that to mean that Mr. Trump was acknowledging that he had known in February that Mr. Flynn was untruthful with the bureau’s agents. Any such admission would be important in light of Mr. Trump’s effort that month to persuade the bureau’s director at the time, James B. Comey, to drop the investigation into Mr. Flynn.

But White House officials said that Mr. Trump was merely acknowledging what had happened the day before: Mr. Flynn’s guilty plea for lying to the F.B.I. about his conversations with Mr. Kislyak.

While Mr. Trump's tweet on Saturday raised questions about what he knew, he did not actually write it, according to two people briefed on the matter. It was composed by his top personal lawyer, John Dowd, who was in contact with Mr. Trump on Friday and Saturday, trying to calm him after Mr. Flynn's guilty plea.

Mr. Dowd apologized to White House officials for the tweet, saying he should have been more careful with his language in trying to parrot a statement released on Friday by another Trump lawyer, Ty Cobb.

It is not clear that Mr. Trump was ever told that the F.B.I. believed that Mr. Flynn had lied in his interview with agents. Shortly after the acting attorney general, Sally Q. Yates, told the White House counsel, Donald F. McGahn II, in January that Mr. Flynn might be compromised because he had misled the vice president, Mr. McGahn briefed Mr. Trump, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Mr. McGahn told Mr. Trump that it was his impression from Ms. Yates that the federal authorities were not pursuing a case against Mr. Flynn for lying to the F.B.I., according to one of the people. It is unclear whether the president understood this to mean that Mr. Flynn had been cleared.

The president's lawyer believed Ms. Yates, in part, because she had not told him that Mr. Flynn should be fired or lose his security clearance, the person said. In subsequent conversations between Mr. Trump and Mr. McGahn about whether Mr. Flynn should be fired, Mr. Trump did not cite Mr. Flynn's truthfulness with the F.B.I.

Going against his aides' wishes, Mr. Trump spoke to reporters outside the White House on Saturday. But he only repeated his contention that there had been "no collusion" with Russia. The Saturday tweet, however, was quickly seen as off the mark by a number of White House aides.

Since firing Mr. Flynn, Mr. Trump has insisted that his national security adviser did nothing wrong by talking with the Russian ambassador. He repeated that in his tweet.

“It is a shame because his actions during the transition were lawful,” he said.
“There was nothing to hide!”

Mr. Trump spent Saturday in New York attending two fund-raisers for the Republican National Committee. He did not mention Mr. Flynn or the Russia investigation in his remarks at either fund-raiser, according to two people who attended them.

In conversations with aides on Friday and Saturday, Mr. Trump was relatively subdued. He made no dramatic declarations about the Russia investigation, though he asked several advisers what Mr. Flynn’s plea deal could mean.

Christina Caron contributed reporting.

A version of this article appears in print on December 3, 2017, on Page A22 of the New York edition with the headline: Trump Says He Dismissed National Security Adviser ‘Because He Lied’ to the F.B.I.