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## **REPUBLICANS SPLIT OVER FLYNN INQUIRY AMID CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION OF TRUMP'S RUSSIA TIES**

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Donald Trump's ties with Russia must be investigated following the resignation of his national security adviser, Michael Flynn, Democrats demanded on Tuesday.

Flynn was forced to stand down after it emerged that he discussed sanctions with the Russian ambassador to Washington, then misled Vice-President Mike Pence about the conversations. Trump was under growing pressure on Tuesday to explain what he knew about the phone calls and when.

The White House also faced questions over why it did not act three weeks ago when it was first warned by the Department of Justice that the retired general might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

Nancy Pelosi, the House minority leader, called for a wide-ranging investigation. The truth and consequences of the Russia connection: the American people deserve to know the full extent of Russia's financial, personal and political grip on President Trump and what that means for our national security, she said.

Flynn's resignation is a reflection of the poor judgment of President Trump and demands answers to the grave questions over the president's involvement. By what authority did Flynn act and to whom did he report?

Pelosi called on the FBI to accelerate its investigation of the Russian connection with the Trump administration and said Congress must call for a bipartisan, independent, outside commission to fully investigate Russia's influence on the administration and the election.

Roy Blunt, the Republican who chairs the Senate intelligence committee, pledged to investigate the Flynn issue exhaustively.

I think everybody needs that investigation to happen, Blunt, a senator from Missouri, said on Tuesday in a local radio interview. And the Senate intelligence committee \* has been given the principal responsibility to look into this, and I think that we should look into it exhaustively so that at the end of this process, nobody wonders whether there was a stone left unturned, and shouldn't reach conclusions before you have the information that you need to have to make those conclusions.

Blunt suggested his committee would soon call upon Flynn to testify before Congress. I would think that we should talk to General Flynn very soon and that should answer a lot of questions, he said.

What did he know? What did he do? And is there any reason to believe that anybody knew that and didn't take the kind of action they should have taken?

The White House was scrambling on Tuesday to limit the damage of its first major casualty after just 24 days. Flynn had told Pence he did not discuss US sanctions with Russia, but transcripts of intercepted communications revealed that the issue had come up in calls between him and Russian ambassador Sergei Kislyak. In a resignation letter, Flynn said he gave Pence and others incomplete information about the calls.

Kellyanne Conway, a close aide to Trump, had claimed on Monday afternoon that Flynn continued to have the full confidence of the president. On Tuesday, she said Trump had supported him out of loyalty but that the situation reached a fever pitch and had become unsustainable.

By night's end, Mike Flynn had decided it was best to resign, Conway told NBC's Today show. He knew he'd become a lightning rod, and he made that decision.

I think misleading the vice-president really was the key here, and when I spoke with the president this morning he asked me to speak on his behalf and to reiterate that Mike Flynn had resigned. He decided that he was in a situation that had become unsustainable for him and the president accepted that resignation.

When asked why the White House did not move more quickly in response to the blackmail warning late last month from former acting attorney general Sally Yates, first reported by the Washington Post on Monday, Conway said only: As time wore on, obviously the situation became unsustainable. We're moving on.

Yates was the former attorney general who was fired by Trump on 30 January after she told DOJ lawyers not to make legal arguments defending Trump's travel ban executive order.

Flynn's departure deepened concerns over a chaotic start for the Trump White House and the national security council (NSC) in particular, as well as allegations of ties with Russia that continue to haunt the president.

Republican John McCain, chairman of the Senate armed services committee, described it as a troubling indication of the dysfunction of the current national security apparatus in a complex global environment.

McCain added: General Flynn's resignation also raises further questions about the Trump administration's intentions toward Vladimir Putin's Russia, including statements by the president suggesting moral equivalence between the United States and Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, threats to our NATO allies, and attempted interference in American elections.

Democrats scented blood. Adrienne Watson, national press secretary of the Democratic National Committee, said: Michael Flynn is gone, but the problem is not. We still have serious unanswered questions about the connections of Donald Trump, his White House and his campaign to Russia.

Watson called on Republicans to join with Democrats to support an independent, bipartisan 9/11 Commission-style investigation to find out what Trump knew and when he knew it. The 9/11 commission interviewed hundreds of people to produce a detailed report on the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Democratic congressmen John Conyers Jr of Michigan and Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the ranking members of the judiciary and oversight committees, called for a classified briefing for Congress regarding Flynn's actions.

We were shocked and dismayed to learn this evening of reports that three weeks ago, US law enforcement officials warned the White House counsel that General Flynn had provided false information to the public about his communications with the Russian government, but that the Trump administration apparently did nothing about it, the two said in a statement.

That White House counsel, Don McGahn, was informed last month by Yates about the risk of Flynn being blackmailed, according to the Washington Post. McGahn would normally be expected to then inform the president, but it is unclear what actions he took.

David Gergen, a political analyst and former adviser to four US presidents, told CNN: Its unimaginable that the White House general counsel would sit on it [and] not tell anybody else in the White House. In every White House I've ever been in, this would go to the president like that.

'The real consequences of fake news': Clinton reacts to Flynn's resignation

Intelligence agencies concluded that Russian computer hackers interfered in last year's presidential election with the intention of hurting Hillary Clinton, and therefore helping Trump. The property billionaire has repeatedly declined to criticize Putin.

Ben Rhodes, a former deputy national security adviser to Barack Obama, drew attention to the resignation last year of Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, who also had links to Russia. He tweeted: When campaign chairman and NSA both resign over Russia ties there is more. Manafort and Flynn had nothing in common except Russia and Trump.

Ben Cardin, ranking Democrat on the Senate foreign relations committee, described Russia's election meddling as a political Pearl Harbor and said he had filed a bill to set up a 9/11-style commission to investigate it.

First of all, it appears that Russia were using their normal MO, he said: they had information on General Flynn and they knew that he was compromised and intended to keep that in mind if they ever needed to put pressure on the Trump administration, that they had an avenue through General Flynn to perhaps affect decisions in our government.

That's blackmail and bribery and things like that, which is how Russia operates. Now, is General Flynn the only person who's been compromised? I don't know. We don't know. We need to understand the risk factors to our country. We know that they knew about the concerns on General Flynn several weeks ago, prior to President Trump taking the oath of office, and yet it was 25 days before action was taken. That's of concern.

Paul Ryan, the House speaker and most senior Republican on Capitol Hill, said that Trump had made the right decision in seeking Flynn's resignation.

You cannot have a national security adviser misleading the vice-president and others, Ryan said at a press conference.

As soon as this person lost the presidents trust, the president asked for his resignation \* It was the right thing to do.

Aides to the White House have insisted Flynn was not asked to resign, but that he did so on his own.

But Republican Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House oversight committee, said he would not pursue an investigation into Flynns contacts with Russia. That situation is taking care of itself, Chaffetz told reporters on Capitol Hill. I know that the [House intelligence committee] was looking into the hacking issue previously, so I think he did the right thing by stepping out.

Chaffetz further added it was the purview of the intelligence committee, and not his panel, to investigate the matter further. The Republican-led House oversight committee did, however, investigate Hillary Clintons handling of the 2012 Benghazi terrorist attack even as the Senate and House intelligence committees conducted their own inquiries.

Devin Nunes, chairman of the House intelligence committee and a longtime ally of Flynns, said he had no plans to investigate his communications with Russia, adding he was more concerned with the leaks surrounding the former national security adviser.

Trump named retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg as the acting national security adviser. Kellogg had previously been appointed the NSC chief of staff and advised Trump during the campaign. Trump is also reportedly considering former CIA director David Petraeus and Vice Adm Robert Harward, a Navy Seal, for the post.

The Kremlin had confirmed that Flynn was in contact with Kislyak but denied that they talked about lifting sanctions. On Tuesday, Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the foreign affairs committee at the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, said in a post on Facebook that firing a national security adviser for his contacts with Russia is not just paranoia but something even worse.

Kosachev also expressed frustration at the Trump administration: Either Trump hasnt found the necessary independence and hes been driven into a corner \* or Russophobia has permeated the new administration from top to bottom.

Flynn was often an angry, outspoken warmup act for Trump at his election campaign rallies. At last years Republican national convention in Cleveland he encouraged members to chant Lock her up!, in reference to Hillary Clinton.

The White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, was due to brief the media at 1pm on Tuesday. Journalist Joy Reid tweeted: Questions for today: what did the president know about Flynns dealings with the Russian ambassador, and did he authorize them.

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