

Comey statement ignites new media firestorm against Trump

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The statement issued Wednesday by former FBI Director James Comey detailing repeated efforts by President Trump to interfere with the FBI investigation into alleged connections between the Trump presidential campaign and the Russian government has touched off a new and more explosive stage in the political crisis of the Trump administration and the US ruling elite as a whole.

This follows press reports Tuesday that Trump had asked both Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats and National Security Agency Director Michael Rogers to intervene with Comey against the Russia probe. Coats and Rogers refused to discuss these claims Wednesday at a hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee, despite repeated questioning by Democratic senators.

Comey is to testify before the same Senate panel this morning. He prepared the statement for delivery to the hearing, but at his request it was made public Wednesday afternoon, in time to dominate the evening television news broadcasts. The timing was deliberate, aimed at inciting a media firestorm directed against the Trump White House.

The statement details five of the nine one-on-one conversations Comey claims to have had with Trump during the first four months of 2017—in contrast to only two such conversations with President Obama during the three years following Obama’s appointment of Comey to the top job at the FBI.

These include three face-to-face meetings, on January 6, January 27 and February 14, and two phone conversations, on March 30 and April 11, the last direct contact before Trump fired Comey as FBI director on May 9. It is not clear what transpired in the other four Trump-Comey conversations, but that is likely to be one of the questions to Comey when he appears before the Senate panel.

The January 27 meeting, a one-on-one dinner initiated by Trump, had been widely reported before, based on a

leak to the media of Comey’s memorandum of the discussion written soon afterward. This was the occasion for Trump’s sounding out of the FBI director over whether he wished to remain in office, even though Comey had already told Trump he would like to finish out his 10-year term, which would end in 2023.

The implied quid pro quo, by Comey’s account, was that Trump expected “loyalty” if he retained him as FBI director. According to Comey, he offered “honesty” as the duty owed to the president, before eventually agreeing on “honest loyalty” as an ambiguous compromise.

The February 14 meeting came one day after the firing of retired Gen. Michael Flynn as Trump’s national security adviser, allegedly for lying to Vice President Mike Pence about discussions with the Russian ambassador to Washington. By Comey’s account, Trump asked him to drop any further investigation into Flynn. “I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go,” he quotes Trump as saying. “He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go.”

Comey claims that he never communicated this request to the FBI agents and Justice Department lawyers involved in the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the US elections, which included an examination of Flynn’s activities and contacts.

The former FBI director also claims that after that meeting, he approached Attorney General Jeff Sessions with an extraordinary request: “I took the opportunity to implore the attorney general to prevent any future direct communication between the president and me. I told the AG that what had just happened—him being asked to leave while the FBI Director, who reports to the AG, remained behind—was inappropriate and should never happen. He did not reply.”

On March 20, Comey made his much-publicized public statement before the House Intelligence Committee, confirming the existence of the FBI investigation into

possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian government officials, which had been an open secret in Washington for months.

Ten days later, Trump telephoned Comey directly, complaining that the Russia probe was a “cloud” hanging over his administration and asking what could be done to “lift the cloud.” He tried several gambits, suggesting to Comey that some “satellite” aides to his campaign might have done something wrong, but that he, Trump, had not. He also questioned the role of FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, whose wife was an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the Virginia state legislature in 2015.

On April 11 came the final Trump call to Comey, in which he again complained about the “cloud” from the Russia investigation. Comey reassured Trump, for the third time, that he was not personally a target of the investigation, and Trump repeated a request that the FBI director make that known publicly. Comey informed the Justice Department of this request but took no other action.

The attention of the media has been largely focused on these four interactions, after Trump took office, because they substantiate a pattern of direct interference by the president into an investigation of his own campaign, arguably constituting obstruction of justice, an impeachable offense.

But it is the January 6 meeting that is actually the most revealing of the political warfare within the American capitalist state. This meeting took place at Trump Tower in New York City. The top leaders of the intelligence apparatus trekked to Manhattan to give a briefing to the president-elect on the Russia investigation. Comey and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper were among those in attendance.

The meeting was carefully prepared by the intelligence chiefs, who were all opposed to Trump’s professed desire to seek better relations with Russia and to pull back from efforts to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the lone Arab ally of Moscow. The unsubstantiated allegations of Russian “intervention” in the US elections were disseminated by the intelligence agencies, using the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* as their main mouthpieces, in order to block such a shift in US foreign policy.

Comey was delegated to brief Trump “on some personally sensitive aspects of the information assembled during the assessment” of the alleged Russian intervention in the US elections, including a 36-page

report, compiled by a former British intelligence officer, making uncorroborated claims that Trump had consorted with prostitutes during a Moscow business trip and was vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

According to Comey, the intelligence agencies “thought it important, for a variety of reasons, to alert the incoming President to the existence of this material, even though it was salacious and unverified.” In other words, they sought to hold it over Trump’s head like a club.

Comey was chosen to deliver the message because he was not leaving office on January 20, unlike the other top officials, because he had a fixed 10-year term. The FBI director would therefore still be around to wield the club after Trump became president.

This is stated more bureaucratically in Comey’s testimony, but that was essentially the position. Along with the implied threat came the implied benefit: Comey told Trump that the FBI was not targeting him personally in the investigation.

Then comes the most extraordinary passage in the Comey statement, where he writes: “I felt compelled to document my first conversation with the president-elect in a memo. To ensure accuracy, I began to type it on a laptop in an FBI vehicle outside Trump Tower the moment I walked out of the meeting.”

In other words, two weeks before Trump’s inauguration, one of the leading figures in the intelligence apparatus was already documenting their interactions for the purpose of making a “case” against his incoming boss, preparing a written record to be used as a weapon in the escalating political warfare within the state.



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