

# Special counsel seeks White House documents on Flynn, Comey, Manafort

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Press reports Thursday suggested that Justice Department special counsel Robert Mueller is now targeting President Trump for possible obstruction of justice charges related to his firing of FBI Director James Comey.

Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reported in their Thursday print editions that Mueller has asked the White House for documents in 13 separate areas, more than half of them concerning Trump's actions as president in the period leading up to the firing of Comey on May 9.

Mueller is heading the Justice Department investigation into allegations that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 US elections, and that individuals in the Trump campaign may have colluded in that effort. The document request suggests that the real focus of the probe has shifted from the period of the election campaign to possible obstruction of justice by Trump after he was inaugurated.

White House officials who spoke with the two newspapers said they were cooperating with Mueller's task force and were gathering the documents requested, including emails and internal memoranda.

Of the 13 areas in which the special counsel sought documents, four relate to the activities of Michael Flynn, Trump's top national security aide during the campaign and his national security advisor for the first 24 days of his administration. Flynn was fired February 13, for allegedly lying to Vice President Mike Pence about the content of his conversations with the Russian ambassador to Washington, Sergey Kislyak.

The FBI had begun an investigation into Flynn, and Trump appealed to Comey to allow the investigation to lapse, on the grounds that Flynn had been sufficiently punished through his public dismissal. Comey made detailed notes on these conversations, leaking some of them to the press before he was himself dismissed from

office by Trump.

According to the press accounts, three of the 13 areas for which Mueller requested documents concern Trump's interactions with Comey, including the ultimate decision to fire him. This includes a meeting with Russian officials in the Oval Office where Trump discussed the firing of Comey, saying that it had relieved "great pressure" on him.

Mueller is also seeking documents detailing any White House communications with or about Paul Manafort, the former chairman of Trump's election campaign, including internal White House discussions about the June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between Manafort, Donald Trump Jr., Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, and a delegation of Russian lawyers and businessmen.

The document request, according to the *Times* account, "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." Kellogg, a retired general, is the only one currently working in the White House, where he serves as chief of staff for the National Security Council.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Tuesday that Mueller's office has interviewed Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein—who is the Justice Department official overseeing Mueller's task force—about Trump's firing of Comey.

Rosenstein wrote a memorandum to Trump, at his request, recommending the firing of Comey for mishandling the FBI investigation into the private email server of former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, Trump's Democratic opponent.

After citing Rosenstein's recommendation—which argued that Comey had breached Justice Department rules in making harsh public comments about Clinton—Trump later admitted that his real motive for firing Comey was his conduct in the Russia investigation.

Mueller's document demands mark a new stage in the political warfare in Washington, which is fueled by divisions within the capitalist state, and the ruling elite as a whole, over foreign policy, particularly concerns that Trump is not taking a sufficiently hard line against Russian and the government of President Vladimir Putin (see: "Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class").

The press accounts of Mueller's demands for White House documents follow the CNN report that Mueller has threatened former campaign chairman Manafort with indictment on charges unrelated to the Trump campaign, concerning his activities as a consultant to former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, in an effort to compel Manafort to become a cooperating witness against Trump or Flynn.

Manafort collected more than \$13 million in fees from the pro-Russian president, who was ousted in February 2014 by a US-sponsored ultra-right coup, the product of a protracted campaign by the CIA and State Department that one US official revealed had cost at least \$5 billion.

The lucrative consulting business in Ukraine was a bipartisan affair. Manafort was joined in the effort by the Podesta Group, a Washington lobby shop run by Tony Podesta, brother of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager in 2016 and a senior official in the administrations of both Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Also on Thursday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that the company would turn over to congressional investigators several thousand social media ads allegedly placed by Russian operatives during the 2016 campaign, either to attack Hillary Clinton or promote Donald Trump.

Facebook had previously agreed to turn over this material to special counsel Mueller, in response to a search warrant obtained by the Department of Justice, but it initially refused to provide the material to the congressional committees investigating alleged Russian interference in the elections, because that would amount to making the material public.

The total sum expended on the ads, about \$100,000, is a drop in the bucket compared to the billions spent by the Democratic and Republican campaigns, and various US billionaires backing one or the other of the two big business candidates.

Nonetheless, Zuckerberg issued a statement portraying the alleged Russian ads as a drastic threat to American democracy. "I care deeply about the democratic process and protecting its integrity," he said during an apologetic

live broadcast on his own Facebook page. "I don't want anyone to use our tools to undermine our democracy."

Facebook is responding to demands by congressional Democrats that it disclose the identities of those who pay for political ads on its platform. The Democrats are also demanding that Facebook reveal how the ads were "targeted"—in other words, what demographic or geographic groups were selected to receive the ads. They have repeatedly suggested that the Trump campaign supplied targeting information to the Russian ad-buyers.

The lengthy statement issued by Facebook reveals that the social media giant is "actively working with the US government on its ongoing investigations into Russian interference." Twitter has agreed to brief the Senate Intelligence Committee next week on the alleged role of foreign agents using the company's social network to influence the election.

This collaboration with the US government extends well beyond this area. Facebook, Twitter and Google, and other tech corporations, are working systematically with the US military-intelligence apparatus to censor and suppress access to left-wing and antiwar websites and publications.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been a major target of this campaign, with a 75 percent drop in Google search referrals to the WSWS since the company introduced new algorithms in April, backed by the hiring of thousands of "evaluators" to review search results and downgrade those sites targeted for censorship, in favor of what the company called more "authoritative" content, i.e., that endorsed by the US government and corporate America.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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