

US pulls out of UN's global migration pact

AFP, United Nations

The administration of President Donald Trump has withdrawn the United States from a United Nations pact to improve the handling of migrant and refugee situations, deeming it "inconsistent" with its policies, the US mission to the global body announced Saturday.

"Today, the US Mission to the United Nations informed the UN Secretary-General that the United States is ending its participation in the Global Compact on Migration," the Americans said in a statement.

In September 2016, the 193 members of the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a non-binding political declaration, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, pledging to uphold the rights of refugees, help them resettle and ensure they have access to education and jobs.

"The New York Declaration contains numerous provisions that are inconsistent with US immigration and refugee policies and the Trump Administration's immigration principles. As a result, President Trump determined that the United States would end its participation in the Compact process that aims to reach international consensus at the UN in 2018," the US statement said.

US Ambassador Nikki Haley said the country would continue its "generosity" in supporting migrants and refugees around the world, but that "our decisions on immigration policies must always be made by Americans and Americans alone."

"We will decide how best to control our borders and who will be allowed to enter our country. The global approach in the New York Declaration is simply not compatible with US sovereignty."

Under Trump and his "America First" policies, the US has withdrawn from several global commitments, including the Paris climate deal.

Trump in deep trouble

His tweet that he fired Flynn for lying to FBI sparks impeachment calls for 'obstruction of Justice'

RUSSIA PROBE

Trump denies asking ex-FBI chief Comey to drop Flynn probe

Sources claim Saturday's tweet was written by Trump's personal lawyer

FBI official removed from probe for anti-Trump remarks



James Comey



Donald Trump



Robert Mueller

AGENCIES, CNN, BUSINESS INSIDER

US President Donald Trump yesterday denied having asked then FBI director James Comey to stop investigating ex-national security adviser Michael Flynn, who has since pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about discussions with Russia.

Trump also insisted he and his campaign had not colluded with Moscow in last year's election, and shifted blame on the Justice Department and his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton.

"I never asked Comey to stop investigating Flynn. Just more Fake News covering another Comey lie!" Trump said in a tweet.

But his position was complicated by another Twitter post on Saturday in which he indicated he had fired Flynn because the national security chief had been untruthful not just to Vice President Mike Pence but to the FBI as well.

"I had to fire General Flynn because he lied to the Vice President and the FBI," the president tweeted on Saturday. "He has lied to the FBI. It is a shame because his actions during the transition were lawful. There was nothing to hide!"

The tweet is garnering a lot of attention from critics -- with some calling it a possible admission of obstruction of justice, which is under investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller.

California Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence

Committee, tweeted, "If that is true, Mr. President, why did you wait so long to fire Flynn? Why did you fail to act until his lies were publicly exposed? And why did you pressure Director Comey to 'let this go?'"

White House officials, however, told The New York Times that Trump was only referencing Flynn's guilty plea for lying to the FBI about his conversations with then Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak over sanctions president Barack Obama slapped on Russia for election meddling.

And two people briefed on the matter said

the Twitter post was in fact written by Trump's personal lawyer John Dowd, who apologized to the White House for the tactless language.

Flynn was forced to resign as national security adviser in February, when news surfaced that Flynn had spoken to Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak about US sanctions on Russia on December 29 -- the same day that the sanctions were imposed by President Barack Obama.

Trump told reporters at the time that he

If Trump knew that Flynn was in the FBI's crosshairs when he asked former Comey, whom he later fired, to consider "letting Flynn go" the day after Flynn resigned, that could dramatically bolster the obstruction case federal prosecutors are building against him.

"I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go," Trump told Comey on February 14, according to Comey's testimony before the Senate

Deputy Attorney General Bill Yeomans.

"This tweet certainly contributes to the case. He knew Flynn lied to the FBI when he pressed Comey to drop the case and then fired Comey," Yeomans said. "Mostly disturbingly, however, the tweet shows either that the president is utterly clueless about his own jeopardy or he truly believes he is beyond accountability because neither his base nor Republicans in Congress will hold him responsible."

Andy Wright, a former associate counsel to President Barack Obama, said Trump's tweet "could be construed as an admission that he knew Flynn had lied to the FBI."

"Later that same week, DOJ tells the WH that Flynn is compromised and President Trump tells Jim Comey he 'needs loyalty.' Then, on Valentine's Day, the president asks Comey if the FBI could 'let Flynn go,'" Wright said. "Having not received the assurances he sought, he fired Comey under the false pretext of Comey's handling of the Clinton investigation. As an obstruction of justice timeline, it looks very bad."

The White House initially said Comey was fired because of his handling of the investigation into former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server.

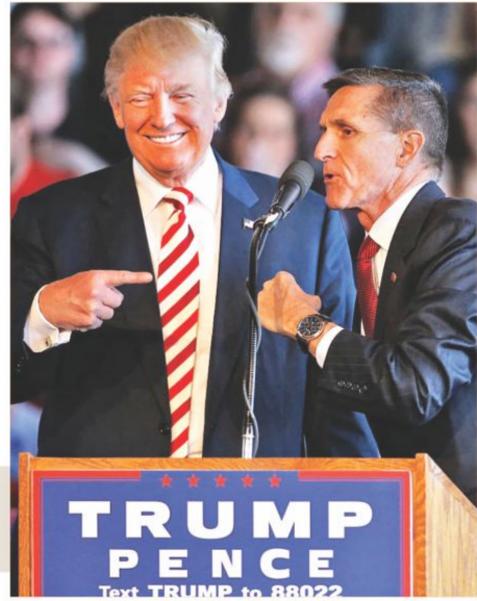
Later, however, Trump told NBC's Lester Holt that "this Russia thing" had been a factor in his consideration. He also told Russian officials during an Oval Office meeting one day after firing Comey that dismissing the FBI director had taken "great pressure" off of him.

"Oh my god, he just admitted obstruction of justice," tweeted former DOJ spokesman Matt Miller. "If Trump knew Flynn lied to the FBI when he asked Comey to let it go, then there is your case."

"So he knew Flynn had lied, and now he's admitted it. And of course it's possible he and Flynn discussed it at the time," Miller later told Business Insider. "Just unreal."

Meanwhile, US media reported that senior FBI counterintelligence official Peter Strzok was removed from Mueller investigation over the summer for sending text messages critical of Trump.

Comedy himself seemed to be addressing the latest developments in an Instagram message: "To paraphrase the Buddha -- three things cannot be long hidden: the sun; the moon; and the truth."



TRUMP PENCE Text TRUMP to 88022

● President Donald Trump tweeted on Saturday that he "had to fire" former national security adviser Michael Flynn because Flynn "lied" to Vice President Mike Pence and the FBI.

● The statement indicates that Trump was aware, when Flynn was forced to resign, that he had lied to the FBI about his contacts with Russian officials.

● The tweet sheds light on Trump's appeal to former FBI director James Comey to let go of the FBI's investigation into Flynn, and his subsequent decision to terminate Comey when he did not comply.

Intelligence Committee in June. "He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go."

Comedy gave no indication that he would consider Trump's request. Three months later, Trump abruptly fired Comey, who was leading the FBI's Russia investigation at the time.

"I think the obstruction case was already substantial -- both circumstantially and through Trump's own words," said DOJ veteran and former Assistant

had been forced to fire Flynn because he had misled Vice President Mike Pence about those conversations. But the White House gave no indication at the time that he knew Flynn had lied to the FBI in a January interview about those conversations -- a federal crime that Flynn pleaded guilty to on Friday.

Trump's tweet on Saturday appears to indicate that Trump was aware Flynn had lied to the FBI when he departed the administration in February.

US MOVES ON JERUSALEM

Hamas warns of intifada

AFP, Gaza City

The Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas which controls Gaza called Saturday for a new "intifada" if Washington recognises Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or moves its embassy to the disputed city.

Reports in Washington have suggested US President Donald Trump might fulfil a campaign pledge today on the American embassy, which like all other foreign missions is currently located in the coastal city of Tel Aviv.

"We warn against such a move and call on the Palestinian people to revive the intifada if these unjust decisions on Jerusalem are adopted," Hamas said in a statement.

Any decision to move its embassy there would be "a flagrant attack on the city by the American administration" and give Israel "a cover for continuing its crime of Judaizing the city and emptying it of Palestinians," it said.

The status of Jerusalem is a key issue in

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Both Israelis and Palestinians claim the city as their capital and previous peace plans have stumbled over debates on whether, and how, to divide sovereignty or oversee holy sites.

The last Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which claimed the lives of some 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis, was sparked by right-wing opposition leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the city's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound in 2000.

The Palestinian president's office told AFP on Friday that American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel would "destroy the peace process".

Since 1995 it has been in US law that Washington's embassy in Israel must be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as demanded by the Jewish state.

But every six months since the law was passed a succession of US presidents have signed a waiver to hold off on a switch which would enrage Palestinians and their Arab supporters.

Trump may fulfil a campaign pledge on the American embassy today: reports

Previous peace plans stumbled over debates on the city's sovereignty



Afghan security personnel inspect the site of a suicide attack in Jalalabad, yesterday. At least six people were killed after the suicide bomber attacked a political rally there, underscoring the deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Twin suicide blasts kill 13 in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

At least 13 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in a dual suicide bomb attack at a busy morning market in northeast Nigeria on Saturday, according to local sources. The attacks, carried out by two female bombers occurred in the town of Bui about 185 kilometres south of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, which has been in the epicentre of Boko Haram's Islamist insurgency.

Iran opens new Indian Ocean port

AFP, Tehran

Iran inaugurated a long-awaited new port at Chabahar in the southeast yesterday, which it is hoped will be a major new trade hub linking India and Africa with Central Asia. The project was first conceived in 2003 and has so far cost around \$1 billion, with India providing \$235 million of the financing as it seeks routes that bypass regional rival Pakistan.

Egypt presidential hopeful goes missing

REUTERS, Cairo

The family of former Egyptian prime minister Ahmed Shafik yesterday said it has lost contact with him since they say he was deported from the United Arab Emirates to Cairo days after announcing his intention to run for president next year. Shafik, a former air force chief and government minister, has been seen by critics of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as a potential challenger to the former military commander who is widely expected to run for a second term next year.

Half of Britons back second Brexit vote

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Half of Britons want a public vote on the UK's final Brexit deal with the EU once the Government's negotiations are over, a new poll suggests.

Of the 1,003 people surveyed in the Survation poll, 497, or 50 percent, said they would "support holding a referendum asking the public if they will accept or reject the deal".

A total of 343, or 34 percent, said they were against the idea of a public vote, while 164 (16 percent) said they did not know.

Of the people who were in favour of a referendum on the UK's deal for exiting the EU, 271 (54.5 percent) had voted Remain in the 2016 Brexit vote, while 145 (29 percent) voted Leave. Seventy-four (15 percent) did not vote.

Of those against holding a Brexit deal vote, 78 (23 percent) had voted Remain, while 224 (65 percent) voted Leave. Thirty-five (10 percent) did not vote.

Polling analyst Mike Smithson said the results of the poll represented "the first time any pollster has recorded backing" for a second Brexit referendum poll for the last five months.

Survation was the only company to accurately forecast June's General Election results.

Yemen rebel unity falters

Saleh turns to Saudis as 'street war' rages in Sanaa

AGENCIES

The rebel alliance controlling Yemen's capital appeared to crumble Saturday as a strongman opposed to the internationally recognised government reached out to a Saudi-led coalition fighting the insurgents.

The rift within rebel ranks erupted into violence in Sanaa this week, raising fears of a new front in a three-year war that has claimed thousands of lives and triggered a humanitarian catastrophe.

Ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who joined forces with the Iran-backed Huthi rebels to seize the capital in 2014, said he was ready to talk to the Saudi-led coalition if it lifts a crippling blockade on Yemen. The coalition welcomed the offer of talks.

His about-face sparked warnings of retribution by the Huthis, whose leader accused Saleh of "great treason".

Fresh clashes forced schools shut and shops shuttered in the Yemeni capital Sanaa yesterday as residents warned a three-year rebel

alliance was crumbling into a "street war".

Witnesses said forces loyal to Saleh had cut off a number of streets in central Sanaa and deployed heavily in anticipation of a possible attack by the Huthi rebels.

Loyalists of the former strongman renewed a bid to seize control of Al-Jarraf district, a stronghold of the Iran-backed Huthis, while the rebels fortified their positions with dozens of vehicles mounted with machine guns.

Residents of various neighbourhoods said they had barricaded themselves in their homes to avoid snipers and shelling as clashes flared up around key ministries where the two sides had been working together just days before, reported AFP.

UN and other aid officials said yesterday the United Nations is trying to evacuate at least 140 aid workers from the Yemeni capital amid fighting that has cut off the airport road but it awaits approval from the Saudi-led coalition.

UN seeks to evacuate aid workers from Sanaa

UAE denies Yemen rebel missile entered its air space