

# FINANCIAL TIMES

## **Trump clashes with FBI chief over Obama wiretap claim Little support outside of White House for new president's unsubstantiated accusations**

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Washington President Donald Trump is siding with rightwing news outlets over his own FBI director in a dispute over unsubstantiated claims that former President Barack Obama ordered the wiretapping of Mr Trump during last year's election. Sample the FT's top stories for a week You select the topic, we deliver the news. Select topic Enter email address Invalid email Sign up By signing up you confirm that you have read and agree to the terms and conditions, cookie policy and privacy policy. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a White House spokeswoman, said on Monday that the president does not accept FBI director James Comey's dismissal of Mr Trump's weekend claim that Mr Obama had tapped the phones at Manhattan's Trump Tower.

"You know, I don't think he does," she said on ABC's Good Morning America programme. Mr Trump made his extraordinary claim in a Saturday morning tweetstorm following a report on Breitbart News, the conservative website formerly run by Steve Bannon, his chief White House strategist. The Breitbart story summarised allegations by conservative talk radio host Mark Levin, who says Mr Obama is using "police state" tactics to undermine the Trump presidency. Through a spokesman, Mr Obama denied the new president's wiretapping claim. Neither the Department of Justice nor the FBI will comment on reports that Mr Comey asked senior DoJ officials on Saturday to publicly rebut Mr Trump's claim as false.

I have not seen anything directly that would support what the president has said Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House oversight and government reform committee The DoJ must obtain a warrant from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court before placing a communications wiretap. Between 2010 and 2015, the court granted more than 9,500 warrant applications without rejecting one, according to DoJ records. Outside the White House, there was little support for the president's allegation that he had been illegally wiretapped. "The president was angry and harried and just said something inflammatory based on a misunderstanding of a third-hand summary of questionable press reports," said Julian Sanchez, a Cato Institute expert on government surveillance programmes.

Devin Nunes, Republican chairman of the House intelligence committee, plans to evaluate the president's assertion as part of its probe of alleged Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential campaign. But other Republicans were sceptical. Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the

House oversight and government reform committee, told CBS on Monday: “Thus far I have not seen anything directly that would support what the president has said.” Democrats, meanwhile, are demanding that the DoJ name a special prosecutor to investigate alleged ties between Trump campaign aides and Russia. The White House has denied any such links with Ms Sanders saying the press is peddling a “false narrative that there are connections between the Trump campaign and the Russians.”

Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer has said that he will press Rod Rosenstein, who has been nominated to be deputy attorney-general, to commit to appointing a special prosecutor to investigate Mr Trump’s alleged Russia links. Mr Rosenstein, US attorney in Baltimore, is scheduled to testify on Tuesday before the Senate judiciary committee, which is considering his nomination. Related article FBI chief asked superiors to deny Trump wiretapping claim Comey made request to justice department after unsubstantiated accusation about Obama If confirmed as the department’s second-ranking official, Mr Rosenstein will assume responsibility for Russia-related investigations. Attorney-general Jeff Sessions, under fire for misleading Congress about his own contacts with the Russian ambassador to the US, recused himself last week from any “existing or future investigations of any matters related in any way to the campaigns for President of the United States.”

Another judiciary committee Democrat, Senator Richard Blumenthal, has vowed to “use every possible tool” to block Mr Rosenstein’s nomination until he promises to name a special prosecutor. On Monday, Mr Schumer also called for the DoJ’s independent inspector-general to investigate whether the White House has interfered with the investigation of the Trump campaign’s ties to Russia. “We need to ensure that the investigation is impartial, and hasn’t already been compromised in any way by the Trump administration,” Mr Schumer wrote to Michael Horowitz, the DoJ’s inspector-general.