

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2018

General John F. Kelly
Chief of Staff
The White House
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable John J. Sullivan
Deputy Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear General Kelly and Deputy Secretary Sullivan:

We have obtained extremely disturbing new documents from a whistleblower indicating that high-level officials at the White House and State Department worked with a network of conservative activists to conduct a “cleaning” of employees they believed were not sufficiently “supportive” of President Trump’s agenda. They appear to have targeted these staffers despite being fully aware that they were career civil service employees and despite the career employees expressing willingness to support the policy priorities of the Trump Administration.

Over the past year, we have heard many reports of political attacks on career employees at the State Department, but we had not seen evidence of how extensive, blunt, and inappropriate these attacks were until now. In light of this new information, we now request that you produce additional documents regarding these staffing decisions and make several officials available for transcribed interviews with Committee staff.

If these documents are authentic, they appear to show that Deputy Assistant to the President for Presidential Personnel Sean Dooney, Deputy White House Counsel Makan Delrahim, National Security Council Senior Director Derek Harvey, and other senior White House officials were communicating with high-level political appointees at the State Department, including:

- Margaret Peterlin, Chief of Staff;
- Christine Ciccone, Deputy Chief of Staff;
- Matthew Mowers, Senior White House Adviser;
- Brian Hook, Director of the Policy Planning Staff;
- Edward Lacey, Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff; and
- Julia Haller, White House Liaison.

The documents show that these political appointees characterized career State Department employees in derogatory terms, including as “a leaker and troublemaker”; “Turncoat”; “associated with previous policy”; and “Obama/Clinton loyalists not at all supportive of President Trump’s foreign policy agenda.”

The documents include communications with a network of conservative outside parties—including former Speaker Newt Gingrich, conservative activist Barbara Ledeen, and former Dick Cheney and John Bolton advisor David Wurmser.

In one email Mr. Gingrich forwarded to Trump appointees inside the State Department, Mr. Wurmser wrote:

Newt: I think a cleaning is in order here. I hear Tillerson actually has been reasonably good on stuff like this and cleaning house, but there are so many that it boggles the mind...

We are particularly concerned by documents relating to Sahar Nowrouzadeh, a career civil servant at the State Department. After being targeted by a conservative news outlet, she sent an email to her supervisor, Brian Hook, the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, to inform him about the article and seek his assistance to “correct the record.” She wrote:

I am and have been a career civil servant for nearly 12 years now. I began government service in the Bush Administration at DOD/NSA. ... I’ve adapted my work to the policy priorities of every administration I have worked for. I’d welcome an opportunity to discuss this once you’re back but in the meantime would welcome your thoughts on how to approach and potentially correct the record. The author of this piece has previously personally targeted me.

Instead of helping Ms. Nowrouzadeh, Mr. Hook forwarded her email to other political officials at the Department, who then forwarded it to officials at the White House and used it as the basis for a wide-ranging internal discussion that questioned her loyalty to President Trump:

- Referring to Ms. Nowrouzadeh’s previous work on the Iran nuclear agreement, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Mr. Lacey, the Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff, wrote that “she did a stint with the NSC Staff in the Obama Administration and helped promote and defend the JCPOA—I would say, with enthusiasm.”
- Ms. Haller, the White House Liaison, wrote, “As background, she worked on the Iran Deal, specifically works on Iran within S/P [the Policy Planning Staff], was born in Iran and upon my understanding cried when the President won.”
- Ms. Haller also wrote to Mr. Doocey and others at the White House, “It is easy to get a detail suspended and because she’s a conditional career, we just need to confirm the year she is in.”
- Mr. Hook then wrote, “I’ve emailed friends who tracked the Iran deal for intel on her and waiting to hear back.”

Ms. Nowrouzadeh was removed from her detail to the Policy Planning Staff three months early in a manner she characterized as “not in accordance with that which was explicitly stated in my MOU [Memorandum of Understanding].”


Request for Documents and Transcribed Interviews

In order to evaluate the extent of these personnel actions, and whether any were prohibited under the law, we request that you provide, by March 29, 2018, the following documents and information:

- (1) all documents and communications referring or relating to any reassignment or proposed reassignment that was considered or ordered since January 20, 2017, of career or civil service employees at the Department;
- (2) all documents and communications referring or relating to any proposed or actual reassignment or removal of career or civil service employees at the Department since January 20, 2017, based on alleged personal political beliefs, prior service with previous Administrations, or work on prior Administrations' foreign policy priorities, including any documents authored by, copying, involving, or referring to:
 - (a) Christine Ciccone;
 - (b) Makan Delrahim;
 - (c) Sean Doocey;
 - (d) Julia Haller;
 - (e) Brian Hook;
 - (f) Edward Lacey;
 - (g) Matthew Mowers; or
 - (h) Margaret Peterlin; and
- (3) all documents and communications referring or relating to proposed or actual personnel actions since January 20, 2017, against Sahar Nowrouzadeh, including the curtailment of her detail to the Policy Planning staff.

We also request transcribed interviews with the officials listed above in (2). To arrange these interviews, or if you have any questions about this request, please contact Janet Kim of the Oversight Committee staff at (202) 225-5051 or Sajit Gandhi of the Foreign Affairs Committee staff at (202) 226-8467. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,


Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform


Eliot L. Engel
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs

General John F. Kelly, White House Chief of Staff
The Honorable John J. Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of State
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cc: The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Ed Royce, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs