

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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May 18, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to request that you issue a subpoena to compel the White House and State Department to produce documents they are withholding relating to alleged attempts by political officials to conduct a “cleaning” of State Department employees deemed not sufficiently “supportive” of President Trump’s agenda. I also request that you issue subpoenas to compel several staff members at the White House and State Department who are implicated in this matter to appear for depositions before the Committee.

On March 15, 2018, Ranking Member Eliot Engel of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and I wrote to the White House and the State Department to alert them to disturbing documents from a whistleblower indicating that career State Department employees were apparently targeted for highly inappropriate attacks and retribution. The documents showed that in making staffing decisions, high-level political appointees of the Trump Administration 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 also contained inappropriate, potentially illegal, and inaccurate characterizations of career State Department staffer Sahar Nowrouzadeh’s ethnic origin, place of birth, and personal political beliefs. To investigate these allegations, we requested that the White House and State Department produce documents relating to these personnel actions and schedule transcribed interviews for the officials who engaged in these troubling communications.¹

On April 19, 2018, the State Department responded in a letter that did not deny any of the facts we alleged, but rather “referred the matter for review to the State Department’s Office of

¹ Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and Ranking Member Eliot Engel, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, to General John Kelly, White House Chief of Staff, and John Sullivan, Deputy Secretary, Department of State (Mar. 15, 2018) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2018-03-15.EEC%20Engel%20to%20WH%20%26%20State.pdf>).

Inspector General and the permanent U.S. Office of Special Counsel.” The Department did not produce any of the documents we requested and did not schedule any of the transcribed interviews we sought.² The White House has failed to acknowledge our request at all.

Subsequent news reports have underscored that the functional banishment of career State Department employees with valuable expertise is an ongoing problem. For example, according to the *New Yorker*:

An Asia specialist assigned to the turkey farm likened the experience to a Japanese tradition in which unwanted workers are relegated to a “banishment room,” to encourage them to resign out of boredom and shame. Another turkey-farm inhabitant, who has held senior intelligence and national-security posts, told me that he joined the government during the Reagan Administration and never conceived of himself as an opponent of Trump. “I’m a Reagan holdover,” he said, shaking his head in bewilderment. “I sometimes don’t go in before ten, and then leave before five. You just float.”³

In order to evaluate the extent of these personnel actions, and whether any were prohibited under the law, I request that you issue a subpoena to compel the State Department and the White House to produce, by June 1, 2018, the following documents:

- (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;

² Letter from Mary K. Waters, Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs, Department of State, to Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Apr. 19, 2018) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/State.041918.Response%20to%20EEC%20Engel%20re%20Whistleblower%20Allegations.pdf>).

³ *Trump vs. the “Deep State”*: How the Administration’s Loyalists are Quietly Reshaping American Governance, *The New Yorker* (May 21, 2018) (online at www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/05/21/trump-vs-the-deep-state).

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- (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 Nowrouzzadeh, including the curtailment of her detail to the Policy Planning staff.

I also request that you subpoena the individuals named in section (2) above to appear for depositions.

If you decide not to issue these subpoenas, then I ask you to place this matter on the agenda for our next regularly scheduled business meeting so all Committee Members will have the opportunity to debate and vote on this motion.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member