

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 6, 2016

The Honorable Steve A. Linick  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of State  
Room 8100, SA-3  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Inspector General Linick:

We write to request that your office initiate an inquiry into the Department of State's Bureau of Public Affairs. We are moved to make this request in light of the deletion from the Department's website and YouTube channel of video footage that depicted an exchange between James Rosen, a Fox News correspondent, and Jen Psaki, then-State Department spokesperson, at the December 2, 2013, State Department daily press briefing. We are puzzled by the apparent degradation of the Bureau's commitment to transparency and openness.

Recent media reports have stated that the exchange between Mr. Rosen and Ms. Psaki, along with eight minutes of footage from the December 2, 2013, daily press briefing, were deleted from the State Department's website and official YouTube channel.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, the Bureau excised footage of Ms. Psaki responding to a question from Mr. Rosen about whether it is the policy of the State Department to lie in order to preserve the secrecy of negotiations with other countries.<sup>2</sup> Ms. Psaki stated: "I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that."<sup>3</sup>

At the May 10, 2016, State Department daily press briefing, when asked why this deletion occurred, Elizabeth Trudeau, Director of the State Department Press Office, stated: "We're looking into it. Genuinely we think it was a glitch."<sup>4</sup>

On June 1, 2016, however, State Department spokesperson and Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, John Kirby, stated that the deletion of the December 2, 2013, Rosen-Psaki exchange was done based on "a deliberate request."<sup>5</sup> He also added that the deletion "wasn't a technical glitch."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Rosen: It's Stunning that State Dep't Tried to Censor my Questioning on Iran Deal*, FOX NEWS INSIDER, May 11, 2016; *State Dep't: There Was 'Deliberate Request' to Delete Video of Rosen's Iran Questions*, FOX NEWS INSIDER, June 1, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Morello, *It wasn't a 'glitch': State Department deliberately cut embarrassing questions from press briefing video*, WASH. POST, June 1, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, Daily Press Briefing, May 10, 2016, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/05/257074.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, Daily Press Briefing, June 1, 2016, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/06/257880.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

Last week, in a letter to Secretary Kerry, the Committee requested documents from the Department that will identify the individual or individuals who made and received the request to delete the Rosen-Psaki exchange, and any related communications. The letter also covered communications relating to any other requests to delete portions of daily press briefings from publicly accessible portals. The Committee will review the information that the Department provides to better understand this incident and to determine whether the Bureau routinely whitewashes the Department's public portals.

As you may be aware, there has been very limited disclosure of the facts surrounding the deletion of video that depicted the December 2, 2013, Rosen-Psaki exchange. Assistant Secretary John Kirby and Deputy Spokesperson Mark Toner have stated that the individual who edited the December 2, 2013 video received the request to do so through a phone call, but cannot remember from whom.<sup>7</sup> When pressed by the media on whether the "phone calls that were made to the individual who received that request on that date" could be tracked, Assistant Secretary Kirby responded: "I know of no such technology here that exists that would allow you to do that. And no, that effort was not pursued."<sup>8</sup> Assistant Secretary Kirby also stated that "there were no rules, no regulations in place that prohibited this."<sup>9</sup> In fact, in a daily press briefing on June 1, 2016, he repeatedly emphasized that the Department's rules and regulations were not broken.<sup>10</sup>

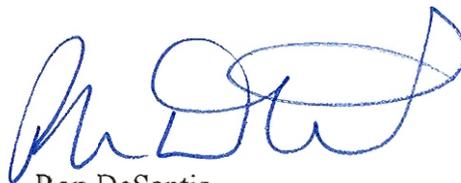
Given the manner in which this deletion reflects on the Bureau of Public Affairs' commitment to its mission of "communicat[ing] timely and accurate information,"<sup>11</sup> and given the fact that specific questions relating to the aforementioned phone conversation require the special investigative and forensic capabilities with which your office is equipped, the Committee believes that it is appropriate for your office to open an investigation to address many of the unanswered questions with respect to this matter, and to evaluate whether this matter implicates any laws or regulations related to openness and transparency.

Please contact Sang Yi of the Majority staff at (202) 225-5074 with any questions regarding this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.



Jason Chaffetz  
Chairman

Sincerely,



Ron DeSantis  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member  
The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* See also U.S. Dep't of State, Daily Press Briefing, June 2, 2016, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/06/257911.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> *Supra* note 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/>.