

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<http://oversight.house.gov>

August 22, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing to express our concern with your recent appointment of Brian Hook to lead the State Department's Iran Action Group as Special Representative for Iran, particularly in light of internal documents that show him engaging in significant acts of political retaliation against career State Department employees. We are also troubled that you have refused to produce any documents in response to multiple requests from Congress relating to Mr. Hook's retaliatory actions.

In remarks introducing Mr. Hook in his new role, you asserted that he "has worked tirelessly to advance President Trump's foreign policy priorities across multiple domains."¹ However, internal documents show that he engaged in gross acts of retaliation against career State Department employees.

For example, documents show that Mr. Hook failed to respond to a direct request for help from Sahar Nowrouzadeh, a career State Department employee, after she was targeted on false and inaccurate grounds by conservative news outlets. Instead of defending his employee, Mr. Hook used Ms. Nowrouzadeh's request for assistance to start a wide-ranging and factually inaccurate internal discussion that included the questioning of Ms. Nowrouzadeh's loyalty to President Trump and her national origin.

Ultimately, the State Department failed to defend Ms. Nowrouzadeh from the false and misleading charges. Ms. Nowrouzadeh's assignment to the Policy Planning office was cut short by three months, counter to the terms of her Memorandum of Understanding with the office.

In addition, documents obtained by our Committees show that Mr. Hook, in consultation with National Security Council official Derek Harvey, drafted a list characterizing specific career State Department employees in derogatory terms, including as a "leaker and troublemaker";

¹ *Remarks on the Creation of the Iran Action Group*, Department of State (Aug. 16, 2018) (online at www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/08/285183.htm).

“Turncoat”; “associated with previous policy”; and “Fully political.” One document shows Mr. Hook and his deputy referring to staffers in the Policy Planning staff as “Obama/Clinton loyalists not at all supportive of President Trump’s foreign policy agenda.”

On March 15, 2018, we wrote to the State Department expressing concern over Mr. Hook’s involvement in political retaliation against State Department employees. In our letter, we requested several categories of documents relating to Mr. Hook’s actions, and we asked for several State Department officials, including Mr. Hook, to be made available for interviews with our staff.²

However, the State Department has refused to provide any of the documents we requested and has declined to make available Mr. Hook or any of other officials we requested for interviews. In addition, the State Department has not responded to any of our subsequent letters requesting information about other individuals accused of acts of retaliation against career State Department employees.³

During your appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 23, 2018, you testified that you believe retaliation against career employees—including retaliation by Mr. Hook—had no place at the State Department:

RANKING MEMBER ENGEL: This past March, Ranking Member Cummings, Senator Menendez and I wrote to the State Department expressing concern over allegations that senior officials, including the Director of Policy Planning [Brian Hook] retaliated against career State Department employees based on their national origin, or because they were not—they were perceived as not sufficiently loyal to the president. Do you believe officials who targeted career employees in this way should be working at the State Department?

MR. POMPEO: I do not.⁴

² Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and Ranking Member Eliot L. Engel, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, to General John F. Kelly, White House Chief of Staff, and Deputy Secretary John J. Sullivan, Department of State (Mar. 15, 2018) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2018-03-15.EEC%20EEEngel%20to%20WH%20%26%20State.pdf>).

³ See, e.g., Letter from Ranking Member Eliot L. Engel, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and Ranking Member Robert Menendez, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, to Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State (June 19, 2018) (online at <https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/sites/democrats.foreignaffairs.house.gov/files/06-18-18%20Letter%20to%20Secretary%20Pompeo%20on%20Prohibited%20Personnel%20Practices%20at%20State%20Department.pdf>).

⁴ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Hearing on Reviewing the State Department’s Budget, Operations, and Policy Priorities* (May 23, 2018).

Request for Information and Documents

Given your decision to promote Mr. Hook and to disregard requests from Congress about his abuses, we request an immediate briefing about the measures the State Department has taken to investigate and stop retaliation against career State Department officials, as well as measures the State Department has taken in response to Mr. Hook's reported role in engaging in prohibited personnel practices. We also request that you provide all previously requested documents by September 4, 2018, including:

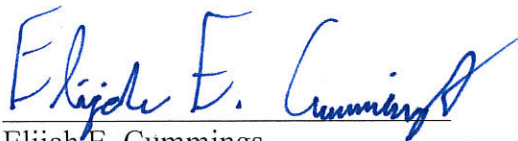
- (1) all documents and communications referring or relating to any reassignment or proposed reassignment that was considered or ordered since January 20, 2017, of career or civil service employees at the Department;
- (2) all documents and communications referring or relating to any proposed or actual 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;
- (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;
- (4) all documents or communications referring or relating to State Department Senior Adviser Mari Stull's efforts to categorize, vet, or research career State Department employees and employees of international institutions, including searches on social media websites;
- (5) all documents referring or relating to lists of career State Department employees and employees of international institutions created by Mari Stull or any other political appointee at the State Department; and
- (6) all documents or communications referring or relating to research conducted by political appointees relating to perceived political views of career employees.

The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State

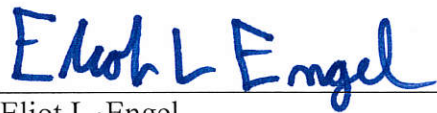
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If you have any questions about this request, please contact Janet Kim of the Oversight Committee staff at (202) 225-5051 or Sajit Gandhi of the Foreign Affairs Committee staff at (202) 226-8467. Thank you for your prompt response to this request.

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and



Eliot L. Engel
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs

cc: The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Ed Royce, Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs