



Excerpts from Joint Interview

Ambassador P. Michael McKinley
Former Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Conducted on October 16, 2019

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“I’ve worked in conflict areas the world over. And by diplomats doing what they do overseas, they help keep this country secure and prosperous and also offer us the possibility of being linked to the outside world. In terms of supporting our values, we’re also the front line in promoting issues of human rights, democracy, and cooperation internationally. In this context, frankly, to see the emerging information on the engagement of our missions to procure negative political information for domestic purposes, combined with the failure I saw in the building to provide support for our professional cadre in a particularly trying time, I think the combination was a pretty good reason to decide enough, that I had—I had no longer a useful role to play.”

Ambassador McKinley stated that he resigned because of his concerns about “the engagement of our missions to “procure negative political information for domestic purposes” and “the failure I saw in the building to provide support for our professional cadre in a particularly trying time.” (Page 80-81)

I have spent 37 years being a diplomat. Being a diplomat for the United States means supporting millions of Americans overseas. It means supporting our companies to create jobs at home. It means resolving conflicts that impact the United States. It means keeping the homeland safe. It means working with our military, the agency, all of our civilian agencies on projecting our interests and influence overseas. It means projecting American values. In Afghanistan I worked with three four-star generals, with General Dunford, General Campbell, General Nicholson. I’ve worked in conflict areas the world over. And by diplomats doing what they do overseas, they help keep this country secure and prosperous and also offer us the possibility of being linked to the outside world. In terms of supporting our values, we’re also the front line in promoting issues of human rights, democracy, and cooperation internationally. In this context, frankly, to see the emerging information on the engagement of our missions to procure negative political information for domestic purposes, combined with the failure I saw in the building to provide support for our professional cadre in a particularly trying time, I think the combination was a pretty good reason to decide enough, that I had—I had no longer a useful role to play.

Ambassador McKinley “had never seen” efforts to use the State Department to dig up dirt on a political opponent “in 37 years in the Foreign Service.” (Page 112)

Q: I think you’ve also said that part of the reason why you decided to resign was that you couldn’t be blind to what was happening, and what was happening was efforts to use the State Department to dig up dirt on a political opponent. Is that fair as well?

A: That is fair. And if I can underscore, in 37 years in the Foreign Service and different parts of the globe and working on many controversial issues, working 10 years back in Washington, I had never seen that.

Ambassador McKinley proposed issuing a public statement in support of Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch in the aftermath of the release of the President’s July 25, 2019, call record. (Page 38-39)

Q: Right. And just so the record is clear, we will get into the call transcript, but I believe what you’re referring to is the statement by President Trump in the July 25th call record where he says, quote, “The former Ambassador from the United States, the woman, was bad news. And the people she was dealing with in the Ukraine were bad news. So I just want to let you know that.” And then, later on, the President says, “Well, she’s going to go through some things.” What did you understand him to mean when you read, “She’s going to go through some things”?

A: I didn't try to read into it or even understand it. The words themselves spoke for themselves. And my reaction was, well, there's a simple solution for this. We think she's a strong, professional career diplomat who's still on the rolls, who's still a full-time Department employee. It shouldn't be difficult to put out a short statement that's not political, stating clearly that we respect the professionalism, the tenure of Ambassador Yovanovitch in the Ukraine. Thank you. That's pretty much as straightforward and simple a statement as I was proposing.

Ambassador McKinley asked Ambassador Yovanovitch if she would welcome a statement from the State Department, and she told him he was the first senior Department official to contact her. (Page 60, 65)

Q: What was Ambassador Yovanovitch's response when you asked her that question?

A: She—she's—well, you've had her here, so you know she's very careful in the way she speaks and presents. And she said: Yes, I would welcome it. And it was pretty much that. But also I asked whether others in the building had reached out to her in the preceding days or weeks, and the answer was no.

...

What I do believe is that as this developed over this very short period, the appropriate thing would have been for senior management to reach out. Whether it was the legal advisor, the under secretary for management, the under secretary who was responsible for Europe, there should have been at least let us know if there is or we can't help you because, whatever. Some sort of conversation. So, you know, I was flying solo. I didn't know what the rules of engagement were. But I did know that, as a Foreign Service officer, I would be feeling pretty alone at this point. And so I reached out. I was surprised when I found out that I was the first senior person they had been in touch with.

Senior State Department officials supported Ambassador McKinley's proposal, but Secretary Pompeo "decided that it was better not to release a statement at this time." (Page 57-58)

Q: So we understand that you had emailed five people. Four responded positively. You spoke to all four and they all responded positively about a statement.

A: Yeah.

Q: What happened next?

A: Probably a couple hours later [State Department spokesperson] Morgan [Ortagus] reached out to me by phone and told me that the Secretary had decided that it was better not to release a statement at this time and that it would be in part to protect Ambassador Yovanovitch not draw undue attention to her.

Secretary Pompeo was non-responsive when Ambassador McKinley requested multiple times that the State Department defend Ambassador Yovanovitch—including when Ambassador McKinley told the Secretary he was resigning because "this is unacceptable." (Page 47-48, 49)

- Q: How many conversations did you have with the Secretary about this matter?
- A: Three probably. And the subsequent ones were in the context of—because, if I can remind, I presented my resignation on Monday, September 30th. So it wasn't very long after the initial conversation. And in presenting my resignation, I made clear that I was looking to leave the Department, I wasn't looking to create any news story out of it, but that he should be aware that, of course, part of the reason, people were very aware that I was concerned about what I saw as the lack of public support for Department employees. The—
- Q: And what was the Secretary's response when you said that?
- A: On that subject, he did not respond at all, again. What I—if—I know this is difficult to fathom or believe. Across the 8 or 9 days, whatever period it was, that I was seeking to raise this, nobody ever really said anything to me. I was, like, receive mode. And I just continued to raise the question in different ways, and I still would not receive a reaction. I think once or twice—somebody once said, "But we are protecting the staff. We're providing legal guidelines, which allows them the time to prepare their testimony, collect documents. We're looking at how to work with the congressional requests." And it would be left at that. But the central question I was raising about say something publicly just was not addressed.
- ...
- Q: In the first conversation you had with the Secretary, you essentially got no response to the request for a statement. Is that accurate?
- A: That's accurate.
- Q: And in the final conversation with the Secretary where you raised the matter again, you again got no specific response to that issue when you raised it with the Secretary. Is that correct?
- A: That is correct, yeah.
- Q: And was there a third conversation?
- A: Yeah. So I presented my resignation on September 30th. I spoke with the Secretary again when he called from Europe to discuss my resignation. And I think that at that point I said, well, you know, we really—I was pretty direct. I said, you know, this situation isn't acceptable. We need to—you know, I've already made my recommendation, but I do—I am resigning. And that was the conversation. Again, I didn't get a reaction on that point.

On October 3, 2019, Deputy Assistant Secretary George Kent emailed Ambassador McKinley a memo documenting the Department's failure to timely gather information for Congress and questioning the accuracy of Secretary Pompeo's letter to the Committees two days earlier. (Page 92-94)

On October 3rd, you know, I decided it was time to meet the person I'd talked to on the phone. I think I'd try—anyways, so, you know, because I remember I did the phone call the previous weekend. So I went down to his office and sat with him, and what he told me was that he had been in the starting throes of pulling together documentation, whatever. I didn't pay attention exactly, you know, data, documentation, whatever that

had come with a congressional request for documents. And he told me that there were 10 or 15 people in the room and that among those who participated was a lawyer from the legal office. I don't have the memo because I don't—but I can tell you, he sent it to me that night, okay. But in the memo—forget the memo. I mean, he told it to me and then he wrote it up. And if I remember correctly, he challenged the deadline they were working against, why weren't they given the request for documents on a timely basis and why were they having to pull together whatever they were pulling together days after the congressional request had come in. He also raised what he saw—there was a response, which I never read, from State Department to Congress on parameters for the whatever you were going to do. And he also raised that there were inaccuracies in there, in particular about protecting or providing legal support or services.

Ambassador McKinley sent Deputy Assistant Secretary Kent's memorandum to other senior State Department officials because it identified "allegations of intimidation and bullying," as well as questions about "accuracy" and whether there were "lies in statements." (Page 94, 100-101, 110)

A: He wrote it up as a memorandum to the files, and he sent it to me. That was that Thursday night. And I felt absolutely obliged to send it to other people on the 7th floor. I thought it was a serious memorandum. I thought it indicated a lack of support that was broader than simply a question of statements.

...

Q: What exactly did you put in writing?

A: So get the memo to the files, right, the memo to the files that was sent to me. And so, on top of it, I said, I'm forwarding the following report, which is of concern on a number of levels. It includes allegations of intimidation and bullying and questions accuracy—I don't know whether I used the word—and raises questions about whether there are lies in statements, you know. And then I said: And this is why we really need to do something forcefully for our colleagues in the Foreign Service. And I also mentioned, frankly, the legal fees concern that I had.

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Q: One of the representations apparently made in that letter from the State Department was that State Department witnesses like Mr. Kent or perhaps yourself or others were being bullied, not by the State Department, but by Congress. But what Mr. Kent was raising with you was his concern that he was being bullied by the State Department. Is that correct?

A: That's correct.