

## Opening Statement of P. Michael McKinley - October 16, 2019

Thank you for your invitation to appear before you today. My understanding is that I could best be of assistance by clarifying the circumstances of my resignation. The following is an account of what led to my decision to step down when I did.

I want to make clear from the start that Ukraine was not among the issues I followed for Secretary Pompeo. I was not aware at the time of the efforts of Ambassadors Volker and Sondland to work with the President's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, and I was not aware at the time of the President's phone call with President Zelensky. I do think I can shed some light on how events have impacted State Department professionals and what motivated my resignation.

The timing of my resignation was the result of two overriding concerns: the failure, in my view, of the State Department to offer support to Foreign Service employees caught up in the Impeachment Inquiry on Ukraine; and, second, by what appears to be the utilization of our ambassadors overseas to advance domestic political objectives.

I have served my country loyally for almost four decades in difficult environments. I served as ambassador to some of our largest missions in the world, including Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Afghanistan. All my confirmations were unanimous, and I was nominated by both Democratic and Republican administrations. I know there are difficult choices and compromises to be made on many of the issues we work. I also know that as a foreign service officer, it is my duty to serve the incumbent administration faithfully consistent with my oath to the Constitution. It was therefore also my duty to resign when I felt I could no longer do so.

By way of background, when Secretary Pompeo first asked me in May 2018 to return to the Department from my posting in Brazil as ambassador, the pitch was to help rebuild the institution and restore State as the lead foreign affairs agency for the United States Government (USG). Although I still had eighteen months to run in Brazil, and knowing full well the challenges of returning to a building many saw as broken and demoralized, I decided I had an obligation to the Foreign Service to accept.

Over the subsequent months, there were positive changes. The personnel cuts to the Department workforce ended, and the hiring freeze was lifted to include for family members overseas. The Secretary selected distinguished foreign service officers to serve as the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and the Director General of the Foreign Service. While the other senior positions in the Department continued to be overwhelmingly held by political appointees, dozens of career foreign service officers were successfully nominated for ambassadorships. The recruitment of the next generation of foreign service officers began again, and promotions returned to their normal levels. State once again played the lead role on policy, and in seeking negotiated solutions to long-running conflicts and crises in different parts of the globe. There was certainly room for further improvement, but the hollowing out of the Department under Secretary Tillerson was reversed.

Morale never entirely recovered, however. In August 2019, the State Department's Inspector General released a critical report about the leadership of the Bureau of International Organizations (IO). It became apparent, however, that the Department would not be taking the key corrective actions that many employees had anticipated.

It was in this environment that the whistleblower account appeared in the press. I was disturbed by the implication that foreign governments were being approached to procure negative information on political opponents. I was convinced that this would also have a serious impact on foreign service morale and the integrity of our work overseas. The initial reports were followed on September 25 by the release of the transcript of the President's telephone conversation with President Zelensky which included negative comments on Ambassador Yovanovitch. The disparagement of a career diplomat doing her job was unacceptable to me. Inside the building, meanwhile, there was no discussion whatsoever, at least in my presence, by senior State Department leadership on what was developing.

At this point, and over the coming days, I suggested to senior levels of the Department that a statement in support of Ambassador Yovanovitch's professionalism should be released. I received a polite hearing from officials I spoke to, but no substantive response to the concern I was raising.

On Saturday, September 28, I sent an email to senior officials proposing a strong and immediate statement of support for Ambassador Yovanovitch's professionalism and courage, particularly to send a message to Department employees that leadership stood behind its employees in this difficult moment. I was told that the decision was not to issue a statement.

It was also that weekend of September 28-29 when I first spoke with Ambassador Yovanovitch about the situation. Ambassador Yovanovitch confirmed to me that she would welcome more public support from the Department; that no one had reached out to her from senior levels of the Department; and that she had retained private counsel. I spoke with EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary George Kent, who had been Deputy Chief of Mission in Ukraine under Ambassador Yovanovitch, and who stated he too would welcome more Department support. He also noted that I was the first senior Department official to reach out to him.

Realizing that there was no change in the handling of the situation, and that there was unlikely to be one, I decided to step down. I informed the Secretary on September 30, before he left for a trip to Italy and Greece, suggesting mid-November as the departure date. During the Secretary's absence, however, I continued to raise my concerns with other senior Department officials. At a meeting with the Deputy Secretary and Under Secretaries, I mentioned the impact on Department morale of unfolding events. I also had conversations with the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the Counselor, and the Under Secretary for Management. They listened, but, again, I do not remember receiving a substantive response.

On Thursday, October 3, I met with EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Kent just after he had finished chairing a Bureau meeting on how to collect the data requested by Congress. Kent noted his unhappiness with the tenor of the meeting which a Department lawyer attended. He later wrote a memorandum to the files summarizing his experience that day, and sent it to me. I forwarded it to the Under Secretary of Political Affairs, the Department's Acting Legal Adviser, and the Deputy Secretary. I noted the seriousness of what was reported in the memorandum; and raised the significant legal costs being incurred by our Department colleagues through no fault of their own. No one answered me.

Although my original intention had been to transition quietly out of the Department by mid-November, by the week of October 7, I no longer felt that I could be effective as a liaison to the Seventh Floor for the Foreign Service.

I accelerated my departure, informing the Secretary that October 11 would be my last day.

In closing, I would like to say that no one wants to end a career on this note. I repeat: since I began my career in 1982, I have served my country and every President loyally. Under current circumstances, however, I could no longer look the other way as colleagues are denied the professional support and respect they deserve from us all.