Twitter Thread by Ronan Farrow



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In the next @NewYorker, I look at a culture of retribution against whistleblowers under Trump—and a new complaint implicating CIA director Gina Haspel and Donald Trump's nominee for the top legal job in the intelligence community in a retaliation campaign.

In the complaint, a DOJ lawyer claims the retaliation came after he uncovered a secret CIA surveillance program and a practice of lying to prosecutors to conceal its use in criminal cases. The scheme was corroborated in hundreds of pages of emails, transcripts & other documents.

gathered. “This was undisclosed information, from an agency working internationally with different rules and standards,” Nancy Gertner, a retired federal district judge and a senior lecturer at Harvard Law School, told me. “This should worry Trump voters who talk about a ‘deep state.’ This is the quintessential deep state. This is activities beyond your view, fundamentally affecting what happens in American courts.”

Experts said the concealment may have broken laws and undermined convictions. The FBI told prosecutors that the CIA information, which resulted in numerous prosecutions, came from FBI investigations, named after the Pirates of the Caribbean films, into a fictional crime group.

Squizzero, an F.B.I. special agent, replied that the targeting information had been gathered in an F.B.I. operation called Black Pearl, made up of investigations called World's End, Calypso, and Wicked Wench —all references to the "Pirates of the Caribbean" film series. She wrote that those investigations had generated "case debriefs and electronic evidence" that pointed to a Mexican crime organization called La Victoria. McConnell and several other sources said that the investigations were a cover and could not be the source of the information. In a subsequent e-mail, Getchell expressed skepticism about La Victoria as well, writing that it was a group that "our office has never heard of." In fact, there is no evidence that any such organization exists. The F.B.I. spokesperson said that the Bureau takes "a host of precautions to protect both the intelligence we receive and the sources and methods used to gather it. This can include using code names."

As the DOJ lawyer, Mark McConnell, raised his concerns to superiors, he faced what six officials said was a retaliation campaign by CIA leadership. Intelligence officials were furious.

That spring and summer, the C.I.A. operative grew increasingly hostile to McConnell. During a meeting in March, according to McConnell, the operative warned, "If people keep talking about our program, someone is going to need to go to prison." A month later, a meeting devolved into a shouting match. "If that cocksucker Cambre wants to fuck me in the ass, the least he can do is use some lubricant," several people familiar with the conversation recalled the operative saying, referring to the D.E.A. agent who had initially raised the matter. "He's going all ballistic," McConnell told me, of the operative. "He was just lit."

CIA officials repeatedly called for repercussions or consequences for McConnell—Haspel allegedly personally joined those calls, though the agency denies it. McConnell's lawyer, who also represented the Ukraine whistleblower, called for an

investigation into Haspel’s role.

A little more than a month later, after C.I.A. officials accused McConnell of "spilling" classified information, the director of the task force suspended him. Soon, the C.I.A. director, Gina Haspel, visited the task force and was briefed on the matter. According to a sworn affidavit that McConnell filed with the Senate Intelligence Committee, and to a source with knowledge of the meeting, Haspel said that there needed to be repercussions for McConnell. (A C.I.A. spokesperson, Timothy Barrett, called the allegation "inaccurate and a gross mischaracterization.") The military leadership of the task force ignored McConnell's appeal of his suspension, and discussions about future assignments came to an abrupt halt. Six officials said that they believed the C.I.A. had retaliated against McConnell, leaving him nominally employed but unable to find a new post after decades of public service.

Officials also accused Associate Deputy Attorney General Patrick Hovakimian, Trump's nominee to become the general counsel for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, of failing to protect McConnell.

whistle-blowers. Security walked him out through the busy office and watched as he left in his car. "Their goal is to humiliate you," McConnell said. "Hovakimian should have been demanding to know why his prosecutor was walked out for properly giving evidence of wrongdoing. And he didn't."

After he resisted efforts to delete evidence, refused to sign an order by the CIA that officials involved sign NDAs, and talked to government inspector general investigators, McConnell was removed from his role. Officials said he was frozen out of subsequent assignments.

"This was appalling and blatant," Tom Padden, one of McConnell's supervisors, who has filed his own whistle-blower complaint, told me. "It was a blatant attempt to silence a career public servant who identified a real issue." McConnell

The CIA requested from DOJ legal immunity for its role in the scheme McConnell revealed (DOJ declined). It also explored a deal in which, if McConnell dropped the matter (and his request to talk to me), the agency would withdraw its complaints about him. McConnell passed.

This January, an official in the Department of Justice inspector general's office approached McConnell's attorneys with a message from the C.I.A.: if McConnell apologized and stopped pursuing the matter, the agency would drop its complaint about him. Later that month, after McConnell filed for permission to speak to *The New Yorker*, the agency made it clear that, if he talked to the press, the deal would be off. Legal experts said that the offer, which McConnell declined, may have broken the law. "That looks to me like an attempt to use a settlement to bypass the regulations," Meyer, the former head of the intelligence-community whistle-blower program, told me. "That is really bad business. That gets you terminated from your job in the federal government."

The disclosures come amidst a crackdown on government whistleblowers. The Obama admin charged, under the Espionage Act, more officials with disclosing classified information than all prior administrations combined. In half as long, the Trump admin has matched that count—and more:

that count. In 2018, Trump tweeted that "leakers are traitors and cowards, and we will find out who they are!" His ire has extended not just to officials who leak to the press but also to those, like McConnell, who file complaints with government investigators. Last December, the President shared on Twitter the rumored name of the intelligence official whose allegation that Trump solicited political favors from Ukraine's President eventually led to impeachment. Early this year, after Trump was acquitted, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, a key witness in the impeachment proceedings, was removed from his position on the National Security Council, and Michael Atkinson, the inspector general to the intelligence community, who had deemed the whistle-blower's complaint credible, was fired. This summer, Senate Republicans stripped whistle-blower protections from annual defense legislation.

McConnell’s allegations have been roiling intelligence and law enforcement circles for months. They are now also drawing congressional scrutiny.

Last month, the House Judiciary Committee chairman, Jerrold Nadler, notified Attorney General William Barr and Christopher Wray, the F.B.I. director, that the committee would be investigating McConnell’s allegations and requested records related to his case. Senator Ron Wyden, of Oregon, said that he would be calling on the Senate Intelligence Committee to investigate as well, and told me, “Senior officials should never punish employees who raise concerns about abuse, especially when it concerns secret programs or activities.” McConnell said, “The C.I.A. has corrupted F.B.I. agents to violate basic rules as to how the Department of Justice does criminal prosecutions.”