

TRUMP HAS NO POLICY PROCESS, JUST WORMTONGUE AND PALACE INTRIGUE

The last paragraph of this NYT story describing absolutely insane plans for the State Department -“eliminating almost all of its Africa operations,” “cutting offices ... that address climate change[,] refugee issues, ... democracy[,] and human rights concerns,” mandating use of AI for “‘policy development and review’ and ‘operational planning’,” and replacing the Foreign Service exam with loyalty oaths – describes that the Executive Order laying out those plans is not the only proposed plan out there.

It links this story, published by NYT five days earlier, describing more modest plans: closing six embassies in Africa, not the entire continent.

The Trump administration is considering plans to close 10 embassies and 17 consulates and reduce or consolidate the staff of several other foreign missions, according to an internal State Department memo viewed by The New York Times.

The closures and other reductions outlined in the document, which is undated, would pare back the American presence on nearly every continent. They represent an expansion of plans the Trump administration was working on earlier this year for closing a dozen foreign missions and laying off local staff who work in those locations.

The cuts are in keeping with President Trump’s plans to reduce federal spending across the government, as well as a proposal that State Department leaders

have been considering to cut nearly 50 percent of the department's spending.

But the new proposed reductions have raised fresh concerns that the United States will be ceding vital diplomatic space to China, including in areas of the world where Washington has a greater presence than Beijing, compromising American national security, including intelligence gathering.

The competing plans – one a memo, the other an Executive Order that would be signed by Trump and would therefore oblige memo-writers to defer to Trump's order – comes in the wake of the ouster of Pete Marocco, the Jan6er who effectuated the destruction of USAID, from the State Department.

There are several versions of Marocco's ouster and his fate, but this Politico story describes that Marco Rubio fired him, in part because of differing opinions about how to destroy USAID (which has long since been accomplished, but during which, Rubio repeatedly made claims about GOP-supported programs like PEPFAR that turned out to be false).

Peter Marocco, the Trump administration official in charge of dismantling USAID, left a meeting at the White House last week to return to his office at the State Department. But when he arrived, Marocco could not enter the building: security told him he was no longer an employee there, according to a person familiar with the situation.

Word of Marocco's firing quickly tore through the Republican Party and MAGA ecosystem, startling President Donald Trump's loyalists who viewed the aide as part of an elite cohort of administration true believers. Loud voices on the right piled on Secretary of State Marco Rubio, accusing him of

undermining their disruptive agenda.

Yet Marocco's abrupt termination, which has not been fully reported until now, was not an impulsive dismissal or a case of Rubio going rogue. This report was based on conversations with five people, including administration officials and allies, all of whom were granted anonymity to discuss sensitive internal matters. Four of the people said Rubio fired Marocco. They gave varying explanations: one administration official said Rubio and others wanted Marocco out due to what they saw as his bulldozer operating style and failure to work effectively with colleagues; others pointed to substantive disagreements between Rubio and Marocco over how to dismantle USAID. Meanwhile, Marocco allies viewed Rubio and his team as insular, controlling and obstructionist to the DOGE agenda ordered by the president.

One White House official said Rubio went to a senior White House aide for clearance to remove Marocco after tensions reached a boiling point last week. They described Marocco's firing as "the first MAGA world killing from inside the White House."

It also describes the backlash targeting Rubio that has resulted.

In the days since his ouster, Marocco's MAGA allies have come to his defense and raised new suspicions of Rubio, including questions about why he would want to protect USAID and whether he's loyal to the president.

[snip]

"He's really not a MAGA guy, he's a neocon," a Trump ally said of Rubio, adding that this move "is gonna bite

him.”

This is the third instance of an ugly cabinet-level dispute in the Trump Administration in recent weeks.

NYT’s account of Gary Shapley’s installment to head the IRS, without Scott Bessent’s involvement, followed by his removal at the hands of Bessent, incorporates several pieces of intrigue. First, there’s Shapley’s installment by Musk and then Bessent’s reversal of Musk’s plot.

Mr. Bessent had complained to Mr. Trump this week that Mr. Musk had done an end run around him to get Mr. Shapley installed as the interim head of the I.R.S., even though the tax collection agency reports to Mr. Bessent, the people familiar with the situation said. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

The clash was the latest instance of Mr. Musk’s influence in the Trump administration that has alarmed top officials. It was also the latest upheaval at the tax agency, with much of its staff pushed out or quitting. Mr. Trump earlier this week called for the I.R.S. to revoke Harvard University’s tax-exempt status after the school refused to impose sweeping changes demanded by the administration.

An I.R.S. spokeswoman declined to comment on the leadership changes.

Mr. Shapley, a longtime I.R.S. agent, gained fame among conservatives after he claimed that the Justice Department had slow-walked its investigation into Hunter Biden’s taxes.

Mr. Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency pushed Mr. Shapley’s appointment through White House

channels, but Mr. Bessent was not consulted or asked for his blessing, according to those with knowledge of the dynamic. Mr. Bessent then got Mr. Trump's approval to unwind the decision within days, they said. Mr. Shapley had been working from the I.R.S. commissioner's office as late as Friday morning.

Then, there's Musk's magnification of Laura Loomer's attack on Bessent in response.

The feud between Mr. Musk and Mr. Bessent went public late Thursday night, when Mr. Musk amplified a social media post from the far-right researcher Laura Loomer accusing Mr. Bessent of colluding with a "Trump hater."

"Troubling," Mr. Musk wrote about Mr. Bessent's meeting John Hope Bryant, the chief executive of the nonprofit Operation HOPE. Mr. Bryant is working on a financial literacy effort with Treasury officials.

Ms. Loomer had called that meeting a "vetting failure."

Finally, there's an oblique comment about DOGE boy Gavin Kliger's removal on the same day as Shapley, one that WaPo describes in more detail: Kliger was shut out of IRS systems just as he was about to start a purge of IRS employees in the middle of tax season.

Early Friday morning, the IRS rescinded building and systems access for DOGE official Gavin Kliger, according to the people familiar with the situation. The Post could not immediately confirm the reason for the revocation.

Kliger was managing the massive layoffs at the agency that could cut the tax agency's headcount by 25 percent. More

layoff notices had been planned for Friday afternoon, the people said, but those notifications have been paused.

As laid out in declarations from USAID workers, Kliger left his digital fingerprints all over Morocco's dismantling of USAID.

Left unsaid is whether Musk installed Shapley so as to empower Kliger to destroy the IRS just as it sets to processing this year's tax receipts.

Thus far, we have correlation, without any insight into causation.

The far right targeting of Bessent is of particular concern, given the evidence he's holding together the US (and with it, the global) economy with his own shoestrings. WSJ reported this week that he and Howard Lutnick had to sneak into the Oval Office to override Peter Navarro's disastrous tariff plans.

On April 9, financial markets were going haywire. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick wanted President Trump to put a pause on his aggressive global tariff plan. But there was a big obstacle: Peter Navarro, Trump's tariff-loving trade adviser, who was constantly hovering around the Oval Office.

Navarro isn't one to back down during policy debates and had stridently urged Trump to keep tariffs in place, even as corporate chieftains and other advisers urged him to relent. And Navarro had been regularly around the Oval Office since Trump's "Liberation Day" event.

So that morning, when Navarro was scheduled to meet with economic adviser Kevin Hassett in a different part of the White House, Bessent and Lutnick made their move, according to multiple people familiar with the intervention.

They rushed to the Oval Office to see

Trump and propose a pause on some of the tariffs—without Navarro there to argue or push back. They knew they had a tight window. The meeting with Bessent and Lutnick wasn't on Trump's schedule.

The two men convinced Trump of the strategy to pause some of the tariffs and to announce it immediately to calm the markets. They stayed until Trump tapped out a Truth Social post, which surprised Navarro, according to one of the people familiar with the episode. Bessent and press secretary Karoline Leavitt almost immediately went to the cameras outside the White House to make a public announcement.

And multiple outlets have described Bessent's thus far successful efforts to prevent Trump from firing Jerome Powell.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has repeatedly cautioned White House officials that any attempt to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell would risk destabilizing financial markets, according to two people close to the White House granted anonymity to share details of private discussions.

Bessent's private message reinforces what President Donald Trump already knows but comes as the president's anger with the Fed chair is growing because Powell hasn't shown signs that he will cut interest rates soon. It also comes against the backdrop of widespread market turmoil over the administration's far-reaching trade war.

Trump's fury with Powell burst into public view on Thursday morning, when he said in a post on Truth Social that his "termination cannot come fast enough!"

But Powell's job looks safe for now.

Bessent is a mediocre Treasury Secretary, in no way the match for his counterparts. Yet he is increasingly all that's standing between Trump and his most feverish nutjobs and far bigger financial catastrophe.

Given Loomer's success firing NSA Director Timothy Haugh and six NSC staffers, it may be only a matter of time before the nutjobs get to Bessent, too.

The third cabinet level blowup is more opaque. As laid out here, three of Whiskey Pete Hegseth's top aides were escorted out of the Pentagon in the wake of a leak investigation. Politico reported that they were fired – passive voice – on Friday, but the guy who led the investigation used to explain their ouster is also leaving his current role.

Joe Kasper, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's chief of staff will leave his role in the coming days for a new position at the agency, according to a senior administration official, amid a week of turmoil for the Pentagon.

Senior adviser Dan Caldwell, Hegseth deputy chief of staff Darin Selnick and Colin Carroll, the chief of staff to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg, **were placed on leave** this week in an ongoing leak probe. All three **were terminated** on Friday, according to three people familiar with the matter, who, like others, were granted anonymity to discuss a sensitive issue.

[snip]

Two of the people said Carroll and Selnick plan to sue for wrongful termination. The Pentagon did not respond to a request of comment.

Kasper had requested an investigation into Pentagon leaks in March, which included military operational plans for the Panama Canal, a second carrier

headed to the Red Sea, Musk's visit and a pause in the collection of intelligence for Ukraine.

But some at the Pentagon also started to notice a rivalry between Kasper and the fired advisers.

"Joe didn't like those guys," said one defense official. "They all have different styles. They just didn't get along. It was a personality clash."

The changes will leave Hegseth without a chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, or senior adviser in his front office.

"There is a complete meltdown in the building, and this is really reflecting on the secretary's leadership," said a senior defense official. "Pete Hegseth has surrounded himself with some people who don't have his interests at heart."
[my emphasis]

Some of those targeted – who have long-standing ties to Hegseth, going back to his failed non-profit management – are denying any role in leaks.



Dan Caldwell  
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Joint statement from Dan Caldwell, Colin Carroll, and Darin Selnick:

We are incredibly disappointed by the manner in which our service at the Department of Defense ended. Unnamed Pentagon officials have slandered our character with baseless attacks on our way out the door. All three of us served our country honorably in uniform - for two of us, this included deployments to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, based on our collective service, we understand the importance of information security and worked every day to protect it. At this time, we still have not been told what exactly we were investigated for, if there is still an active investigation, or if there was even a real investigation of "leaks" to begin with. While this experience has been unconscionable, we remain supportive of the Trump-Vance Administration's mission to make the Pentagon great again and achieve peace through strength. We hope in the future to support those efforts in different capacities.

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Whatever the genesis of this upheaval or the partisan explanation for it, it leaves a wildly unqualified man at the top of the world's

largest military with no top aides.

There are other signs of the collapse of all management inside the White House – such as the White House attempt to explain away their attack on Harvard with a bullshit claim that they *accidentally* sent out a letter demanding to effectively take over Harvard University.

Everywhere you look you have to wonder whether Susie Wiles is as much in charge as Amy Gleason is at DOGE, whether her title of Chief of Staff is just a convenient fiction to cover up for the reality that Trump does whatever the last person in the room tells him to do.

And often as not, the last person in the room is Stephen Miller.

We've already seen that the three cabinet secretaries struggling to assert control over their own agencies deferred to Stephen Miller when he told the participants of the famous Signal chat what Trump thought.

That is, it's not just that Stephen Miller is often the last one in the room with Trump. It's not just that Stephen Miller's policy ideas are batshit insane (and that he's the author of Trump's most egregious abuses of power). It's also that Miller often stands in as the Word of DOGE, the Word of Trump.

Kremlinologists are pointing to evidence – his demotion at Trump's most recent cabinet meeting, for example – that Elon's power at the White House has started to wane (while ignoring that Elon has moved onto the next phase of takeover, cashing in, cashing in, and cashing in).

But behind all the intrigue, Stephen Miller's ascendance remains, apparently uncontested and possibly unbound.