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State Department slammed in investigation

Favoritism seen in questionable envoy behavior

By [Guy Taylor](#) - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, October 16, 2014

State Department managers created the appearance of giving "undue influence and favoritism" by quashing or delaying official probes into accusations of prostitution solicitation, sexual assault and document leaking by American diplomats in recent years, a report by the department's internal watchdog said Thursday.

In one case, diplomatic security managers essentially lied to investigators by claiming they simply came up short in pursuing a tip that a U.S. ambassador hired a prostitute in a public park, states the report by the department's office of inspector general.

Not only did the Bureau of Diplomatic Security fail to interview "multiple potential witnesses," they "never interviewed the Ambassador," said the report, marking the latest twist in a series of scandalous accusations that rocked Foggy Bottom in June 2013 when a memo about them suddenly appeared in the media.

The accusations, which surfaced roughly four months after Hillary Rodham Clinton stepped down as secretary of state, became so politically explosive that Republican lawmakers threatened to open a congressional probe. Rep. Edward R. Royce, California Republican and chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, wrote a letter to the State Department's inspector general at the time, asserting that he was "troubled by reports that senior State Department officials may have prevented the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) from investigating instances of administrative and criminal misconduct."

An official in the inspector general's office told *The Washington Times* at the time that its own probe had been launched into eight "allegations of quashing" by department higher-ups, stemming from a 2012 review of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

On Thursday, the inspector general's office released its declassified summary of a report on those cases, asserting that in "three of the eight" the office "found that a combination of factors in each case created an appearance of undue influence and favoritism by Department management."

The summary maintained that in four cases there was no evidence of wrongful meddling by department higher-ups, and that one case remains open. The document offered few details about the cases, but said the one still open "concerned the use of deadly force during three incidents that took place during counternarcotics operations in Honduras in 2012." That case is now the subject of a "joint review" involving the State and Justice Department inspector generals, it said.

The document makes no mention of names or locations associated with eight cases. But an examination of previous media reports, along with an internal and preliminary memo tied to the cases, shed some light on locations and players involved.

The most scandalous element of the memo, which was first reported on in June by CBS News and later obtained by *The Times*, involved reference to the accusation that a U.S. ambassador had solicited a prostitute in a public park.

The State Department's public affairs office has long denied the legitimacy of the accusation and the name of the ambassador has never been officially confirmed.

As headlines were swirling around the memo in June, however, U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman emailed an abrupt statement to reporters, saying he was "angered and saddened" by "baseless allegations that have appeared in the press."

"I live on a beautiful park in Brussels that you walk through to get to many locations, and at no point have I ever engaged in any improper activity," Mr. Gutman said in the statement.

"To watch the four years I have proudly served in Belgium smeared is devastating," he said.

In a separate case, the June 2013 memo claimed State Department higher-ups intentionally quashed a probe into an accusation that a department security official in Beirut had sexually assaulted foreign nationals hired as embassy guards. The inspector general's report summary released Thursday appeared to confirm that case as one of those sullied by "undue influence and favoritism."

The summary described an "undue delay" in the case and said the official in question attempted "to intimidate" investigators trying to get to the bottom of the accusations. The official was ultimately fired after the State Department's office of civil rights got involved, the document said.

It also cited a case in which a member of Mrs. Clinton's inner circle was accused squashing a probe into whether a 2012 nominee to become a U.S. ambassador had engaged in the "unauthorized release of the internal communications."

"The then Chief of Staff and Counselor to the Secretary of State was alleged to have unduly influenced that investigation," the document said, apparently in reference to Cheryl Mills, who held the position at the time and is regarded to be a longtime confidante of Bill Clinton and Mrs. Clinton.

The document said the inspector general "found no evidence of any undue influence" by Mrs. Mills, but concluded another official, who was assistant secretary of state in charge of diplomatic security, engaged in delays that brought an investigation into matter "to a temporary standstill."

The position was then held by Patrick F. Kennedy, now the department's undersecretary for management.

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