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## Trump team is questioning civil servants at National Security Council about commitment to his agenda

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Incoming senior Trump administration officials have begun questioning career civil servants who work on the White House [National Security Council](#) about who they voted for in the 2024 election, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by President-elect [Donald Trump's](#) team, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter.

At least some of these nonpolitical employees have begun packing up their belongings since being asked about their loyalty to Trump — after they had earlier been given indications that they would be asked to stay on at the NSC in the new administration, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

Trump's pick for national security adviser, [Florida Rep. Mike Waltz](#), in recent days publicly signaled his intention to get rid of all nonpolitical appointees and career intelligence officials serving on the NSC by Inauguration Day to ensure the council is staffed with those who support Trump's agenda.

A wholesale removal of foreign policy and national security experts from the NSC on Day 1 of the new administration could deprive Trump's team of considerable expertise and institutional knowledge at a time when the U.S. is grappling with difficult policy [challenges in Ukraine](#), the Mideast and beyond. Such questioning could also make new policy experts brought in to the NSC less likely to speak up about policy differences and concerns.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Monday that he has not been told by Waltz or Trump transition team officials that the incoming team has conducted or planned on conducting such vetting.

But Sullivan in recent days has made a robust case for the incoming Trump administration to hold over career government employees assigned to the NSC at least through the early going of the new administration. He called the career appointees "patriots" who have served "without fear or favor for both Democratic and Republican administrations."

"And many of them have raised their hands to say, 'I'm ready to stay and keep serving,'" Sullivan told reporters.



The White House is seen in Washington, Monday, Nov. 4, 2024, as the presidential campaign comes to an end. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

The NSC staff members being questioned about their loyalty are largely subject matter experts who have been loaned to the White House by federal agencies — the State Department, FBI and CIA, for example — for temporary duty that typically lasts one to two years. If removed from the NSC, they would be returned to their home agencies.

Vetting of the civil servants began in the last week, the official said. Some of them have been questioned about their politics by Trump appointees who will serve as directors on the NSC and who had weeks earlier asked them to stick around. There are dozens of civil servants at the directorate level at the NSC who had anticipated remaining at the White House in the new administration.

A second U.S. official told the AP that he was informed weeks ago by incoming Trump administration officials that they planned on raising questions with career appointees that work at the White House, including those at the NSC, about their political leanings. The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly, however, had not yet been formally vetted.

Waltz told Breitbart News last week that “everybody is going to resign at 12:01 on January 20.” He added that he wanted the NSC to be staffed by personnel who are “100 percent aligned with the president’s agenda.”

“We’re working through our process to get everybody their clearances and through the transition process now,” Waltz said. “Our folks know who we want out in the agencies, we’re putting those requests in, and in terms of the detailees they’re all going to go back.”

A Trump transition official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters, said the incoming administration felt it was “entirely appropriate” to seek officials who share the incoming president’s vision and would be focused on common goals.

The NSC was launched as an arm of the White House during the Truman administration, tasked with advising and assisting the president on national security and foreign policy and coordinating among various government agencies. It is common for experts detailed to the NSC to carry over from one administration to the next, even when the White House changes parties.

Sullivan has also said it was “up to the next national security adviser to decide how they want to play things. All I can say is how we did it and what I thought worked.”

“When they are selected to come over, they’re not selected based on their political affiliation or their policy opinions, they’re selected based on their experience and capacity and so we have a real diversity of people in terms of their views, their politics, their backgrounds,” Sullivan said of those assigned to the NSC, during a reporters roundtable hosted by the White House on Friday. “The common element of all of it is we get the best of the best here” from agencies including the State Department, the intelligence community, the Pentagon and the Homeland Security and Treasury departments.

Sullivan noted when Biden took office in 2021, he inherited most of his NSC staff from the outgoing Trump administration.

“Those folks were awesome,” Sullivan said. “They were really good.”

Virginia Rep. Gerry Connolly, the top Democrat on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, said such vetting “threatens our national security and our ability to respond quickly and effectively to the ongoing and very real global threats in a dangerous world.”

Trump, during his first term, was scarred when two career military officers detailed to the NSC became whistleblowers, raising their concerns about [Trump’s 2019 call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) in which the president sought an investigation of Biden and his son Hunter. That episode led to [Trump’s first impeachment](#).

Alexander Vindman was listening to the call in his role as an NSC official when he became alarmed at what he heard. He approached his twin brother, Eugene, who at the time was serving as an ethics lawyer at the NSC. Both Vindmans reported their concerns to superiors.

Alexander Vindman said in a statement Friday that the Trump team’s approach to staffing the NSC “will have a chilling effect on senior policy staff across the government.”

He added, “Talented professionals, wary of being dismissed for principled stances or offering objective advice, will either self-censor or forgo service altogether.”

The two men were heralded by Democrats as patriots for speaking out and derided by Trump as insubordinate. Eugene Vindman in November was elected as a Democrat to represent Virginia’s 7th Congressional District.

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