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INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

# A look at those Trump has targeted in tactic of revoking security clearances

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration’s announcement this week that it would rescind the security clearances of 37 current and former national security...



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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration’s announcement this week that it would [rescind the security clearances](https://apnews.com/article/trump-security-clearances-revoked-ad7f95a222ad9277452d2de995b70619) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-security-clearances-revoked-ad7f95a222ad9277452d2de995b70619>) of 37 current and former national security officials was hardly an isolated act.

In ordering the revocation of the clearances, President Donald Trump was turning to a [favored retributive tactic](https://apnews.com/article/trump-retribution-columbia-paul-weiss-law-firms-40c8cbafaa3592a6b2cc5858770d3731) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-retribution-columbia-paul-weiss-law-firms-40c8cbafaa3592a6b2cc5858770d3731>) that he’s wielded — or at least tried to — against high-profile political figures, lawyers and intelligence officials.

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Some were among the national security professionals who had signed onto a 2019 letter that criticized Trump and that was recently highlighted online by [influential Trump ally Laura Loomer](https://apnews.com/article/state-department-gaza-visas-halted-laura-loomer-da6299b9ecffe35f45dac99b14f06f59) (<https://apnews.com/article/state-department-gaza-visas-halted-laura-loomer-da6299b9ecffe35f45dac99b14f06f59>). Among them was Joel Willett, a military veteran and former CIA officer who spent time in the White House Situation Room under then-President Barack Obama before leaving the government 10 years ago. He said he was not given a reason for why he was targeted but doesn't think it has anything to do with his long-past government service.

"I think there was a profound sadness and disappointment that this is what our country has become in 2025," he said in describing how he felt when he got the news.

The practical impact is unclear because it's not known how many of the people newly singled out by [Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard](https://apnews.com/hub/tulsi-gabbard) (<https://apnews.com/hub/tulsi-gabbard>) still maintain security clearances. But critics are decrying the move as an act of retribution meant to chill dissent and make the intelligence community think twice before reaching conclusions at odds with the president's interests.

A look at some of the other people and industries affected by Trump's security clearance actions:

## Signers of the letter on Hunter Biden's laptop

On his first day in office, Trump [moved to revoke the clearances](https://apnews.com/article/trump-intelligence-hunter-biden-laptop-9d49578c70e3de03e628d0d0cf6592f0) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-intelligence-hunter-biden-laptop-9d49578c70e3de03e628d0d0cf6592f0>) of more than four dozen former intelligence officials who in 2020 had signed a letter saying the [Hunter Biden laptop saga](https://apnews.com/article/biden-steve-bannon-politics-united-states-government-robert-hunter-d20948db8967e21024059f38cde5e94c) (<https://apnews.com/article/biden-steve-bannon-politics-united-states-government-robert-hunter-d20948db8967e21024059f38cde5e94c>) bore the hallmarks of a "Russian information operation."

The list includes prominent officials like James Clapper, the director of national intelligence under Obama; and John Brennan and Leon Panetta, who both served as Obama's CIA directors. Also targeted was John Bolton, who was [fired as Trump's national security adviser](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-joe-biden-lawsuits-entertainment-government-and-politics-0bc0171d2dc3392623ab18278a1a94ef) (<https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-joe-biden-lawsuits-entertainment-government-and-politics-0bc0171d2dc3392623ab18278a1a94ef>) during his first term and later wrote a book whose publication the White House unsuccessfully sought to block on grounds that it disclosed national security information.

The laptop storyline surfaced after The New York Post in 2020 reported that it had obtained from longtime Trump ally Rudy Giuliani a hard drive of a computer that Hunter Biden had dropped off at a Wilmington, Delaware, repair shop. The newspaper published communications related to the younger Biden's business dealings in Ukraine.

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A subsequent letter from 51 former intelligence officials raised alarms about the provenance of emails reported by the Post. The signatories wrote that they didn't know whether the emails were authentic but that their emergence has "all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation."

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Top Biden administration officials saw their security clearances suspended in a March order, including [former Vice President Kamala Harris](https://apnews.com/hub/kamala-harris) (<https://apnews.com/hub/kamala-harris>) and [former Secretary of State Antony Blinken](https://apnews.com/hub/antony-blinken) (<https://apnews.com/hub/antony-blinken>).

## Other Trump foes

A host of Trump’s perceived adversaries also were targeted in that same March order, including:

— [Andrew Weissmann](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-us-news-politics-entertainment-andrew-weissmann-7b26df8ed548de1cf827dda6d2dbacf7) (<https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-us-news-politics-entertainment-andrew-weissmann-7b26df8ed548de1cf827dda6d2dbacf7>), a top prosecutor on the Justice Department special counsel team that during Trump’s first term investigated ties between Russia and his 2016 presidential campaign.

— Alvin Bragg, [the Manhattan district attorney](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-deliberations-jury-testimony-verdict-85558c6d08efb434d05b694364470aa0) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-deliberations-jury-testimony-verdict-85558c6d08efb434d05b694364470aa0>), whose office prosecuted Trump last year in connection with hush money payments in 2016 to an adult film actor who has said she had sex with Trump.

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— Mark Zaid, a prominent Washington national security lawyer whose clients have included an intelligence community whistleblower whose complaint initiated the first of two impeachment cases against Trump.

[Zaid subsequently sued](https://apnews.com/article/trump-security-clearances-retribution-zaid-3b7a65e737b0a3dc94fc02aea417b061) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-security-clearances-retribution-zaid-3b7a65e737b0a3dc94fc02aea417b061>), calling it an act of “improper political retribution” that jeopardized his ability to continue representing clients in sensitive national security cases.

## Law firms

Trump also made the suspension of clearances a key provision [in a spate of executive orders](https://apnews.com/article/trump-russia-law-firm-security-clearance-07d64211baec9df99d6d6869486e8ab6) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-russia-law-firm-security-clearance-07d64211baec9df99d6d6869486e8ab6>) this year targeting prominent law firms over legal work he disfavored or for their relationships with attorneys he did not like.

The actions also sought to bar firm attorneys from accessing federal buildings and threatened the cancellation of federal contracts.

Four firms — Perkins Coie, WilmerHale, Susman Godfrey and Jenner & Block — sued in federal court to block the enforcement of the orders and in each case [prevailed in getting them struck down](https://apnews.com/article/trump-law-firm-mueller-executive-order-38f59ba3f701c9f988df0488d42b3b5f) (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-law-firm-mueller-executive-order-38f59ba3f701c9f988df0488d42b3b5f>), leaving the clearances intact.

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