



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AIR COMBAT COMMAND
LANGLEY AFB, VA

9 July 2021

**MEMORANDUM FOR SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH,
SENATOR GARY PETERS,
REPRESENTATIVE SEAN CASTEN,
REPRESENTATIVE RASHIDA TLAIB,
MEMBERS OF THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE,
MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE PERMAMENT SELECT
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE,
MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE**

**FROM: Lt Col Ryan Sweazey, Deputy Chief, Flight Operations Division, Air Combat
Command, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA**

**SUBJECT: Toxic Culture in the Defense Attaché Service and the Resultant Threat to
National Security**

Dear esteemed members of Congress,

My first introduction to toxicity within the Defense Attaché Service (DAS) began on the first day walking into Geographic Division [REDACTED] which occurred early on in my attaché training. During the first briefing I received, leaders professed, and continued to profess throughout my attaché assignment: “high production, low drama.” I would come to discover over time that this mantra actually translated to: “don’t rock the boat” and “don’t bother us with your problems.” I was later initiated into the highly retributive culture of the DAS in September 2019 when [REDACTED] visited Defense Attaché Office (DAO) [REDACTED]. She held a one-on-one meeting with me and began it by accusing three of my attaché colleagues ([REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]) of regularly meeting to “overthrow the office.” I was stunned by her unprofessionalism, given her high-ranking position, as well as total disregard of the facts when arriving at her off-base conclusions. This surprised me because I had worked with these three individuals for a significant period of time, years at this point, and held them in high professional esteem. In fact, the three individuals she accused of “mutiny” were some of the most prolific attachés within the division at that time, with writing statistics to prove it.

I later learned that DAO [REDACTED]’s [REDACTED] had been spinning an intentionally false narrative about the three attachés and reporting that misrepresentation of facts to [REDACTED] who subsequently used that misinformation as the basis

for her claims of insubordination. It became clear at this stage that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] targeted attachés who were focused and dedicated to the mission and who thusly refused to accept the dereliction of duty which the [REDACTED], promulgated by professing his approach of “no one ever got sent home for not writing.” Unbeknownst to me at the time, [REDACTED] would continue collecting and reporting on her own teammates when concocting a narrative which would result in my reprisal four months later.

Following [REDACTED]'s visit to [REDACTED], the morale within the office began to deteriorate as attachés grew impatient with [REDACTED]'s inability to effectively enable the operations of the unit whilst propagating his leadership approach that there was no expectation of mission performance in the unit. As a fighter pilot and combat veteran, I could not accept [REDACTED]'s dereliction of duty by not leading the office and not executing the DAO's primary mission. When I addressed this with [REDACTED], he responded by regressing my primary rater from himself to another officer with whom I had a contentious relationship with, thereby committing reprisal. By raising issues of toxicity and gross mismanagement, I became a target of the DAS as they would shortly thereafter carry out a character assassination on me just as they had done with [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED].

In October 2019, upon hearing of [REDACTED]'s subversive reporting activities leading up to the visit the previous month, I engaged in an endeavor to definitively determine her trustworthiness. I received my draft Officer Performance Report (OPR) from DIA and was instructed to rewrite it. I proceeded to tell [REDACTED] and only [REDACTED] that I would refuse to comply, despite, in reality, rewriting it and submitting it within three days. A day later, I received an email from [REDACTED] accusing me of refusing to cooperate with the OPR rewrite and that my actions would put my future DAS career in jeopardy. I promptly responded with the fact that I had already submitted a rewrite to which she reneged on her veiled threat. It was at this point that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that [REDACTED] was in fact actively engaged in a derogatory slander campaign against the office's attachés, and in doing so, intentionally circumventing and subverting her chain of command, most likely at the behest of [REDACTED].

In December 2019, I drafted an IG complaint and sent it to [REDACTED] for review. The complaint cited multiple instances of gross mismanagement by [REDACTED] and an underperforming [REDACTED] whose inability to gel with the team was detracting from mission performance. I requested her intervention in these issues in order to avert an IG complaint/investigation. In response, [REDACTED] led what she called a “fact-finding mission” to [REDACTED] in January 2020. When she arrived, her behavior was reprehensible. She gathered all DAO members of the office in a conference room, dismissed the two senior officers (who were the subjects of the complaint) including [REDACTED], and launched into an egregiously unprofessional tirade about how the office's members were not supportive of its leaders. She accused attachés of attempting to again “overthrow” the DAO; a narrative clearly concocted by [REDACTED]. In reality, however, the only two in the room who were intentionally usurping the

chain of command were the two colluders: [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The over-the-top and baseless accusations made by [REDACTED] thereby only further exposed her hypocritical and tyrannical approach vis-à-vis attachés.

After the first hour of the team's visit, [REDACTED] committed reprisal against me by removing me from consideration for a follow-on assignment when she stated "I can't send you to [REDACTED] after this {the fact that you reported issues of wrongdoing to the chain of command}."

On the team was also [REDACTED]'s deputy, [REDACTED], who had traveled to, as [REDACTED] claimed, investigate the allegations I made in the IG complaint. However, [REDACTED] instead assisted [REDACTED] in her character assassination of me and other attachés. In fact, [REDACTED], as an alleged "objective third-party investigator," during his interview of witnesses, slandered me to my fellow attachés labeling me as arrogant, confrontational, and unprofessional. When my colleagues reported to me how he had denigrated me during interviews, I was appalled. Not only was he out of line in that he was supposed to be "fact finding," but his unfounded and blatant attack on my character was clear evidence that he and [REDACTED] had traveled to [REDACTED] not to fact-find, but to directly retribute those who raised issues to DIA.

[REDACTED]'s, [REDACTED]'s and [REDACTED]'s reprehensible behavior all but erased the trust DAO members had in them, in DAO leadership, as well as in DAS leadership. As attachés, we were trained to constantly be aware of potential threats from competitor and adversary actors, but never would any of us in DAO [REDACTED] thought the greatest threat to us would be fellow Americans who were our own DAS teammates!

Following the visit, the morale within the office declined, as did mission performance. Trust amongst our teammates dwindled and the trust we had in DIA was now shattered. I became angry, frustrated, and had bouts with anxiety and depression. My family life suffered as did my personal and professional life. In one short year, I had gone from being among the best attachés in Europe (having been ranked #1 in the U.S. Embassy and being presented an award for excellence by the DAS Deputy Director) to a jaded, angry and marginalized shell of myself. I spent the final eight months of my assignment struggling to find meaning and purpose in my work and in my life. I departed [REDACTED] in September 2020 and upon arrival in the U.S., grappled with insomnia, anger management, depression and anxiety. I began therapy, the first in my 22-year career, in December 2020 and am still undergoing treatment for the trauma that I experienced.

Beyond the personal impact to me was the overall mission impact and correlating threat to national security that [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] inflicted. Through their ineptitude as leaders and their prioritization of subjugating DAS personnel over providing operational support, the mission suffered and adversaries gained a strategic foothold in the country. Through their vindictiveness, they marginalized far too many dedicated and passionate Americans including me, rendering our contribution to the mission of DIA to only a

fraction of what it could have and should have been all while doing untold harm to our families, our psychological well-being and our careers. They also destroyed the trust other dedicated Americans had in them and in the Defense Intelligence Agency itself. They tarnished the reputation and prestige that the term “U.S. Defense Attaché Office” once held and that did not go unnoticed abroad. They, and DAS leaders such as [REDACTED], who consistently turned a blind eye to their ignominious behavior, have done their nation a great disservice and ultimately undermined our national security.

During the course of nearly two years, I consistently raised issues of gross mismanagement, dereliction of duty, toxic leadership, fraud/waste/abuse, and reprisal to my chain of command. These reports graduated in the level I addressed them to as well as the severity of the claim. Each engagement with my chain of command resulted in either leadership ignoring the issues and/or punishing me for raising them. Along the way, I watched other attachés suffer the same fate as I. I also watched our dedicated [REDACTED] locally-employed staff suffer as well, becoming themselves victims of vendettas and retribution.

From September 2019 through today, I have requested intervention in the aforementioned mission and personnel-impacting issues from my supervisor [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. Without exception, there was no resolution sought and, in most cases, my reports of wrongdoing were not even acknowledged. At the same time, the DIA/IG investigation that began in August 2020 has moved at a glacial pace, now entering its eleventh month with no conclusion in sight. Additionally unnerving regarding the IG investigation is that early on in the process, the DIA/IG office scoped the investigation to only two of the nine allegations, referring to command six and dismissing one, however, there have been no actions taken by command in response to those six referrals.

Because of the constant failures within DIA to address and rectify the wrongdoings I and others raised over the course of two years, I was left with my only remaining option: to file Congressional-level complaints against the Defense Intelligence Agency. In doing so, I solicited members of the DAS requesting their inputs regarding toxic leadership. As of the submission of this document, I have received inputs from 31 individual current and former DAS members, citing toxic leadership, fraud/waste/abuse, abuse of authority, dereliction of duty, subversions of the chain of command, a highly retributive culture, and an inability of the chain/IG to address DAS member complaints. The overall effect of this culture is significant mission degradation, the squandering of resources and an amazing pool of talent, and, ultimately, a threat to national security.

Ladies and gentlemen, I undertook this endeavor to root our toxicity in the DAS because I still believe in the amazing potential of the Attaché Service and what, when supported adequately, an attaché can achieve in the field. Sadly, the state of today’s DAS is a far cry from the “crown

jewel of the DIA” it touts itself to be. It has been taken over by a toxic civilian cabal; a group that values self/job preservation and subjugation of its military members far above mission accomplishment. It’s toxic and inept leaders inhibit and disrupt the mission, ultimately achieving the same effects foreign adversary intelligence agencies aim to realize. The dedicated and professional members of the organization live in fear of retribution, doled out arbitrarily and capriciously and without due process. Today’s DAS, quite frankly, resembles more an embarrassment than a “crown jewel”, and, to boot: a waste of national resources and amazing talent. I have gone to great lengths and at great personal and professional cost to help bring about change to the organization I still believe in. I adamantly request that my, and my fellow Americans’ efforts and sacrifices in this endeavor, are not in vain.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a cursive name.

Lt Col Ryan Sweazey, USAF
Deputy Division Chief, Flight Operations
Air Combat Command