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C.I.A. Sends White House an Unclassified Email With Names of Some Employees

The list of partial names was provided in an effort to comply with an executive order to trim the federal work force.

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John Ratcliffe, the C.I.A. director, during his swearing-in ceremony last month. Mr. Ratcliffe has begun an effort to push long-tenured agency officers to retire early. Doug Mills/The New York Times

By [David E. Sanger](#) and [Julian E. Barnes](#)

Reporting from Washington

Feb. 5, 2025 Updated 1:30 p.m. ET

The C.I.A. sent the White House an unclassified email listing all employees hired by the spy agency over the last two years to comply with an executive order to shrink the federal work force, in a move that former officials say risked the list leaking to adversaries.

The list included first names and the first initial of the last name of the new hires, who are still on probation — and thus easy to dismiss. It included a large crop of young analysts and operatives who were hired specifically to focus on China, and whose identities are usually closely guarded because Chinese hackers are constantly seeking to identify them.

The agency normally would prefer not to put these names in an unclassified system. Some former officials said they worried that the list could be passed on to a team of newly hired young software experts working with Elon Musk and his government efficiency team. If that happened, the names of the employees might be more easily targeted by China, Russia or other foreign intelligence services.

One former agency officer called the reporting of the names in an unclassified email a “counterintelligence disaster.”

Current officials confirmed that the C.I.A. had sent the names of employees to the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, complying with an executive order signed by President Trump. But the officials downplayed security concerns. By sending just the first names and initials of the probationary employees, one U.S. official said, they hoped the information would be protected.

But former officials scoffed at the explanation, saying that the names and initials could be combined with other information — from driver’s license and car registration systems, social media accounts and publicly available data from universities that the agency uses as recruiting grounds — to piece together a more complete list.

The number of officers involved remains classified, but it could be significant. In 2024, the C.I.A. had its best recruiting drive since the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. C.I.A. officers, because of their intense training, have a long probationary period, up to four years. However, the White House required only the names of people who had served two years or fewer.

Under William J. Burns, the former C.I.A. director, the agency put a new emphasis on trying to recruit a diverse group of officers, arguing that overseas spying operations required people with an array of language skills and cultural knowledge. He focused particularly on expanding the agency’s coverage of China, creating a China center at the headquarters that included analysts, operatives and others. When Mr. Burns arrived at the agency in 2021, about 9 percent of the agency’s budget was devoted to China-related analysis and espionage; today it is closer to 20 percent.

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So any large-scale culling of more recent hires could have a disparate impact on Mandarin speakers and technology experts, along with the agency's minority work force. But current officials said the C.I.A.'s new director, John Ratcliffe, was prioritizing China and did not want to see any mass exodus of people with expertise in that area.

The Trump administration has made quick work of diversity programs, ordering them shut down and scrubbed from websites.

The White House review of probationary hires comes as Mr. Ratcliffe has begun an effort to push long-tenured agency officers to retire early. Mr. Ratcliffe, officials said, hopes to clear a path to leadership jobs for midcareer officers.

The C.I.A. is offering its employees what it is calling "deferred resignation," an option to quit but continue to be paid through September, as part of the efforts led by Mr. Musk to shrink the size of the federal work force, officials said.

National-security-related agencies had originally been exempted, at least partially, from the governmentwide "[fork in the road](#)" offer to leave their jobs that was extended last week. But Mr. Ratcliffe pushed to have a version of the offer extended to his work force.

Under the C.I.A.'s program, the agency will retain some say over the timing of when anyone leaves to ensure that critical areas have enough officers.

Otherwise, however, the offer is structured in much the same way as what Mr. Musk's team pushed out across the federal government.

In an email sent on Tuesday, agency officers were extended an offer to leave the agency effective Sept. 30 but continue to be paid. An aide to Mr. Ratcliffe said it was "effectively giving them a buyout and a runway to the private sector."

The offer was [reported earlier by The Wall Street Journal](#).

The aide to Mr. Ratcliffe, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under agency protocol, said the effort was meant to encourage some of the large group of officers who joined after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to retire early.

"These moves are part of a holistic strategy to infuse the agency with renewed energy, provide opportunities for rising leaders to emerge and better position the C.I.A. to deliver on its mission," according to a statement released by a C.I.A. spokeswoman.

The spokeswoman said the offer would ensure that the agency's

work force was responsive to the Trump administration's "national security priorities."

David E. Sanger covers the Trump administration and a range of national security issues. He has been a Times journalist for more than four decades and has written four books on foreign policy and national security challenges. [More about David E. Sanger](#)

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