

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE STEADY STATE TO COLLEAGUES WHO REMAIN ON DECK
JUNE 23, 2020

The United States' national security community is the product of its history. Its culture has roots in the Revolution of the late 18th Century, and evolves through the Civil War, the twin World Wars of the 20th Century, the Cold War which followed, and the response to terrorism and transnational threats which began this century. Those roots are nurtured in soil which appreciates democracy and rule of law, but draws on the lessons from our adversaries and, in some part, our own failings. There is a realization that nations depart from ethics, morals and law, with catastrophic results: Hitler and Stalin being the starkest examples, but even at home McCarthy and Nixon loom large. This recognition of the dangers of service requires most thoughtful people who serve, or have served, to consider, largely in the abstract a fundamental question: what do I do if asked to do wrong?

In the military, this often is considered in the context of the prohibition against following unlawful orders. In our intelligence services, the setting is the potential for abuse of institutions whose tradecraft and talents can so easily be used for nefarious purposes (and whose adversary services, the KGB and STASI, for instance, were so often turned inward in service of despotism). In the U.S. Department of State, the issue is supporting policy which may be wrong, or even illegal. In the U.S. Department of Justice and in law enforcement, the issue is when do I cross the line into unethical or unlawful actions. But the abstract thought boils down to: When do I resign? When do I speak out? When do I become a whistleblower? When do I say "no"?

For most, over the past decades, these thoughts have been abstract to the point of being academic. We thought about it, but were never really tested. We imagined how difficult the choices would really be, and hoped, if we were tested, we would pass. But we also hoped we would not face that test.

But now, you who remain in Federal service, and particularly in the national security and homeland security communities, are facing that test. Lt. Col. Vindman, Ambassador Yovanovitch, Inspector General Atkinson, and an unnamed CIA whistleblower, all passed. But they left behind colleagues who are part of what the President derisively calls the "Deep State," but are better thought of as the "Steady State": career professionals, in and out of uniform, whose patriotism is buttressed by belief in the Constitution and law, and the value of institutional competence.

Many of you still serving are facing what is likely among the hardest decisions of your lives: Should you stay in government, hoping to temper the tornado of incompetence and viciousness that seems to be at the core of policy as practiced? Should you resign in protest? Should you go to Congress? File a complaint with the Inspector General? Resign and quietly go away?

These are not easy questions. You are patriotic Americans who have families, and mortgages, and kids who need braces, and parents who are aging and need support. You have seen that real and perceived "enemies" of the President are attacked by Tweet and talk-radio. You are well aware that the President has called for investigations, arrests, and prosecutions of critics. He calls for violence and retribution, and his often-armed supporters listen. And your concerns are not only self-interested -- you are loyal to your colleagues and friends, and the institutions you serve.

It is impossible to provide advice to silent and still-secret professionals, other than the not-so-helpful “do the right thing.” But, what we can do is offer support and, perhaps, a safe haven. You are not alone.

The Steady State¹ group was formed from national security community veterans, from both parties, who see the critical danger our nation is in. Many of the group left government service because they faced these tough questions, and did what they thought was right – resigned. Others left the government years ago, but feel the call, as they did before, to do something to help their country in time of need. The Steady State group can offer an experienced, and confidential, ear to listen, to perhaps help. We can help those who remain in service wrestle with these toughest of questions, and if and when decisions are made, provide somebody to talk to who knows from where you come, where you are, and why you are there.

¹ [The Steady State](#) [hyperlink] is a group of veterans of the U.S. National Security Community who believe that President Trump, unfit for the Presidency, presents a clear and present danger to America’s safety and security. The Steady State, including former Intelligence Officers, defense policy makers, Ambassadors and diplomats and Congressional staffers, have served the country during Democratic and Republican administrations. Some have been lifelong Democrats; others, Republicans; some are resolutely independent.