

FBI seeks interview with CIA whistleblower

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WASHINGTON — The FBI recently sought to question the CIA whistleblower who filed a complaint over President Trump’s July 25 Ukraine call — a move that came after a vigorous internal debate within the bureau over how to respond to some of the issues raised by the complaint’s allegations and whether they needed to be more thoroughly investigated, according to sources familiar with the matter.

An FBI agent in the Washington field office in October reached out to one of the lawyers representing the whistleblower and asked to question the CIA analyst who triggered the congressional inquiry into the president’s conduct, one of the sources said.

But no interview has yet to be scheduled. It is unclear what the intended scope of the interview would be or whether the whistleblower’s lawyers will agree to it. Mark Zaid, one of the lawyers for the whistleblower, said he and his co-counsel would have no comment. An FBI spokesperson also declined comment.



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The request from the FBI comes at a sensitive moment when Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee are making repeated efforts to “out” the whistleblower in order to suggest he may have had political motivations hostile to the president when he filed his Aug. 12 complaint with the intelligence community’s inspector general.

It also comes after multiple threats have been made against the whistleblower and his lawyers — some of which have been separately passed along by the lawyers to other officials at the FBI. But the agent who sought to question the whistleblower made no reference to the threats as the purpose of the interview, according to sources familiar with the discussions.

Any investigation by the FBI into the issues raised in the whistleblower complaint has the potential to introduce a new wild card into the debate over whether to impeach the president over his Ukraine dealings.

In late September, the Justice Department confirmed that Brian Benczkowski, the assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department’s criminal division, and an appointee of Trump, had reviewed the whistleblower’s detailed complaint the previous month and determined there was no violation of campaign finance laws by the president when he asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to open up an investigation into the gas company that once paid Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joe Biden, to serve on its board.

As a result, Kerri Kupec, chief of public affairs, said the Justice Department determined that “no further action was warranted.”

But that decision, a Justice Department official said, was limited only to the question of potential campaign finance law violations and not to any other issues raised in the whistleblower complaint. “It was a very narrow issue,” the official said.

Some officials within the FBI, which received its own copy of the whistleblower’s complaint in early September, chafed at a Justice Department move they believed was aimed at shutting down any inquiry at all, especially into potential counterintelligence issues raised by the allegations, according

to a former senior U.S intelligence official who has discussed the matter with current FBI counterintelligence agents.

There were “guys who wanted to run with it,” said the former senior official. “People were pissed off.”

Others in the FBI were wary and “didn’t want to touch [the whistleblower complaint] with a 10-foot pole because of the Russia investigation,” said this former senior official.

FBI counterintelligence officials were particularly concerned about the claims — detailed in the whistleblower’s complaint — that the president’s lawyer Rudy Giuliani and two of his associates may have been manipulated by Russian interests, said the former senior official.

The two associates in question are Igor Fruman and Lev Parnas, both of whom were recently indicted by federal prosecutors for allegedly conspiring to funnel foreign money into U.S. elections.

“There were guys within the [intelligence community] who believe this is another Russian attempt,” the former official said. “People think Giuliani is being led down the primrose path.”

One question likely to be raised by the FBI’s inquiry is why the bureau is still interested in talking to the whistleblower given that the House has since taken testimony from others who have far more direct knowledge of the White House’s interactions on Ukraine issues.

Yet, largely overlooked in the impeachment debate so far is that the CIA analyst, whose complaint was forwarded to the FBI, specifically raised his concerns in the context of an intelligence threat to the country. “I am also concerned that these actions pose risks to U.S. national security and undermine the U.S. Government’s efforts to deter and counter foreign interference in U.S. elections,” the analyst wrote.

Attached to the seven-page complaint was a classified appendix that has since been partially released. But one of the sections and a footnote to the appendix have been blacked out by the intelligence community and remain classified.

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