

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

The Honorable
Steve A. Linick
Inspector General
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

MAR 25 2015

Dear Inspector General Linick:

It is critical for the State Department to preserve a full and complete record of American foreign policy, consistent with federal laws and regulations. It is also important for the American public to have access to that record. The Department of State is committed to these interrelated principles of preservation and transparency.

For several years, the Department has been engaged in an effort to update its approach to records management in line with guidance from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). These are important initiatives: We must adapt our systems and policies to keep pace with changes in technology and the way our personnel work. At the same time, the Department is focused on improving the way we search for and produce documents in response to requests, whether through the Freedom of Information Act, inquiries from Congress, or access granted to historians and researchers.

I am pleased the Department has made strides to promote both preservation and transparency. We are working to improve and upgrade our capabilities. We are updating our technologies, improving and clarifying our training, and hiring additional people to work on these issues. And we are doing so with an eye towards meeting present obligations and anticipating the demands of the future.

Of course, there is still work to do. For example, the Department currently faces a sizable Freedom of Information Act burden—over 18,000 requests per year—that places a significant strain on existing resources and requires personnel to take time away from their work to further U.S. foreign policy. Although we are working to address the challenge, I am aware of recent reports that we are not there yet with respect to the FOIA. We are also facing challenges regarding our integration of recordkeeping technologies and the use of non-government systems by some Department personnel to conduct official business.

It is clear that putting the principles of preservation and transparency into practice is an evolving challenge, often hampered by resource constraints. The Department is working to improve, but I also know we can and must increase our efforts. To that end, I am requesting that your office undertake a review of our efforts to date, and to recommend concrete ways we can improve. The Department will benefit from your review, which will reinforce and augment the efforts already underway.

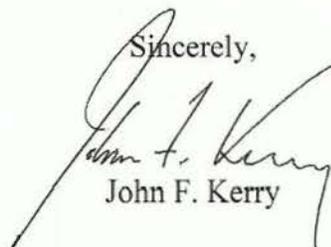
Several of the questions that have been brought to our attention are set forth below for your consideration. I welcome your insights on these and related matters:

- How are changes in technology and the way Department personnel work challenging existing preservation and transparency technologies and policies, especially with respect to email? Does the Department have the resources and tools it needs to meet NARA guidance on preservation and the concomitant resources to meet its obligations to disclose information pursuant to FOIA and other requests?
- What unique challenges are posed by the Department's global presence, spanning more than 280 overseas posts, with respect to meeting its preservation and transparency goals?
- How can the Department improve and streamline individual employees' efforts to preserve appropriate documents, both during their tenure and upon their departure? Are current training and instructions on preservation and responding to requests adequate and easy to follow?
- How can the Department improve its tools and methods for complying with the FOIA and other requests to search for and produce documents from both current and former employees?
- Congressional investigations and requests from multiple Committees have greatly increased, and the Department has had difficulty responding in a timely way. While new technology is being tested, what further steps can be taken to respond more effectively to Congressional inquiries, and what funding is necessary to accomplish this goal?
- Are bureaus within the Department currently engaged in an integrated approach to these challenges? Are there ways to improve the synergy between, for example, IRM, A Bureau, the Executive Secretariat, and regional and functional bureaus?
- Would the Department benefit from outside expertise on an integrated approach to document management, preservation, and transparency? If so, what expertise is required? Are there specific models or technologies the Department should consider?
- What resource constraints are inhibiting the Department's goals with respect to document management, preservation, and transparency?

The Department is already engaged on these and other challenges associated with meeting its preservation and transparency obligations. Again, I recognize the work that has already been done. But I also request your help in ensuring that the Department is doing everything it can to improve. I welcome your findings and commit the Department to cooperating fully with your review. Because of the importance of these issues, I ask you to consider an expedited review of these issues.

Thank you for your consideration of my request, and for your shared commitment to furthering the public interest.

Sincerely,



John F. Kerry