

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2025

The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Inspector General Horowitz:

We write to request that you open an inquiry into the facts and circumstances surrounding the Department of Justice's involvement in facilitating President Trump's effort to acquire a luxury airplane from Qatar, including the actions of Attorney General Pam Bondi. The Department of Defense confirmed today that it is accepting the plane as a gift from the government of Qatar.¹ Given today's announcement and the fact that the Department's leadership has effectively politicized the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), which, under normal circumstances, would investigate professional misconduct by Department attorneys, it is imperative that your office undertake an independent and comprehensive investigation.

New revelations suggest that President Trump or senior administration officials actively solicited this foreign gift by initiating outreach to Qatar regarding the Boeing 747-8 plane in its possession, and, contrary to claims by President Trump and his associates, by proposing to Qatar that the transfer be in the form of a gift or donation, as opposed to a government-to-government sale.² The reporting also raises questions as to whether the administration disclosed to the Qatari government that the Department of Defense would ultimately relinquish the plane and transfer it to President Trump after leaving office, potentially through his presidential library.

Public reports suggest that Attorney General Bondi played a crucial role in providing cover for such a gift by issuing a legal memorandum to White House Counsel David Warrington that "concluded it would be 'legally permissible' for the donation of the aircraft to be conditioned on transferring its ownership to Trump's presidential library before the end of his term."³ Under this scheme, the Department of Defense would serve as a clearinghouse to launder the plane on President Trump's behalf, while bearing the enormous financial cost to retrofit the aircraft to meet necessary security and counterintelligence standards and requirements for Air Force One.⁴

¹ Eric Lipton and Eric Schmitt, *U.S. Formally Accepts Luxury Jet From Qatar for Trump*, The New York Times (May 21, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/21/us/politics/qatar-plane-trump-air-force-one.html>.

² Alex Marquardt, Kristen Holmes, and Natasha Bertrand, *Sources contradict Trump narrative about Qatar offering plane as "gift,"* CNN (May 19, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/19/politics/trump-administration-approached-qatar-jet>. See also, Eric Lipton, Maggie Haberman, Adam Rasgon, and Eric Schmitt, *The Inside Story of Trump's Search for a New Air Force One*, The New York Times (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/us/politics/trump-air-force-one-qatar-jet.html>.

³ Jonathan Karl and Katherine Faulders, *Trump administration poised to accept 'palace in the sky' as a gift for Trump from Qatar: Sources*, ABC (May 11, 2025), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-administration-poised-accept-palace-sky-gift-trump/story?id=121680511>.

These reports raise the troubling possibility that the Department, and Attorney General Bondi personally, were integral to this scheme by crafting a legal justification to enable the President to circumvent the Foreign Emoluments Clause of the Constitution, federal bribery and ethics laws, and Congress in order to acquire one of the largest foreign gifts in our history.⁵ We are particularly concerned that elements of the Department, such as the Office of Legal Counsel, were enlisted to develop such a justification and produce one or more memoranda to allow the White House to claim that such a transfer is lawful. Among other concerns, these new revelations raise key questions regarding whether Department lawyers had a full understanding of the facts to render a complete and accurate legal opinion, or were directed to assess the legality of such a transfer based on incomplete, selective, or shaded details.

Attorney General Bondi's personal involvement in this scheme requires particular attention. During her confirmation hearing, Attorney General Bondi committed under oath to "consult with the career ethics officials with the Department [of Justice]" to "make the appropriate decision" with respect to matters pertaining to Qatar, given her previous registration as a lobbyist for Qatar under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.⁶ The aforementioned solicitation of a \$400 million gift from the Qatari government presents a plain conflict of interest that undermines the public's trust in Attorney General Bondi's ability to provide impartial legal advice.

Moreover, your office is uniquely positioned to conduct such an inquiry. During Attorney General Bondi's tenure, the Department has removed senior career ethics officials and kneecapped offices responsible for overseeing ethics and professional misconduct, including the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), which was established 50 years ago in response to ethics abuses and serious professional misconduct by senior Department of Justice officials during the Watergate scandal.⁷ We have well-founded concerns that OPR is no longer able to fulfill its mandate since the Department's political leadership removed OPR's career lead, Jeffrey Ragsdale, who had served in the role since 2020. OPR's absence as an oversight check on the Department's senior leadership further reinforces the need for your office to undertake an independent investigation, including into Attorney General Bondi's actions and whether she consulted career ethics officials as she pledged to do.

⁴ Dan De Luce, Tom Winter, Laura Strickler, Courtney Kube, and Gordon Lubold, *Turning Qatari 747 into Air Force One could cost \$1 billion and take years, experts say*, NBC News (May 13, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/turning-qatari-747-air-force-one-cost-1-billion-take-years-experts-say-rcna206582>.

⁵ The Foreign Emoluments Clause of the U.S. Constitution plainly states that "no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State." U.S. Constitution, Art. 1, Section 9, Clause 8. Congress has granted consent in only a narrow set of circumstances under the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act, none of which are applicable here. 5 U.S.C. § 7342(c).

⁶ The Nomination of the Honorable Pamela Bondi to be Attorney General of the United States: Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary (Jan. 15, 2025). *See also* Kelsey Warner, *Trump's new attorney general pick is a former Qatar lobbyist*, Semafor (Nov. 22, 2024), <https://www.semafor.com/article/11/22/2024/pam-bondi-trumps-new-attorney-general-pick-is-a-former-qatar-lobbyist>; Registration Statement, Exhibit B (July 23, 2019), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6415-Exhibit-AB-20190723-16.pdf>.

⁷ *See, e.g.,* Perry Stein et. al., *Several top career officials ousted at Justice Department*, The Washington Post (March 7, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/07/justice-department-trump-firings/>.

Such an investigation would complement parallel oversight requests by Members of Congress, including a request that the acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense investigate the Department of Defense's involvement in this scheme, questions to the Secretaries of Defense and the Air Force regarding the cost and operational security of retrofitting such a plane, and letters to Attorney General Bondi regarding her role.⁸

The Department of Justice has a long and storied history of rooting out and combatting corruption without fear or favor that is now at risk. In this moment, the responsibility of the Office of Inspector General to “detect and deter waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct” in the Department has never been more important.⁹ Your office has a solemn obligation to hold the Department to account, especially given the credible concerns that it has been used to justify and enable unconstitutional acts and corruption at the highest levels of government.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator

⁸ See, e.g., Letter from Senator Schiff et. al. to Acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense (May 13, 2025), <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025.05.13-Senator-Schiff-Letter-to-DOD-IG.pdf>; Letter from Senator Duckworth et. al. to the Secretaries of Defense and the Air Force (May 14, 2025), https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_request_dod_inquiry_into_trumps_acceptance_of_qatari_plane.pdf; Letter from Senator Durbin to Attorney General Bondi (May 14, 2025), <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-05-14%20Letter%20to%20DOJ%20Qatari%20Plane%20Gift.pdf>; Letter from Senate Minority Leader Schumer to Attorney General Bondi (May 13, 2025), https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/leader_schumer_letter_to_bondi_on_placing_hold_on_doj_nominations.pdf; and Letter from Representative Raskin et. al. to Attorney General Bondi and White House Counsel Warrington (May 15, 2025), https://democrats-judiciary.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025-05-15_raskin_et_al_to_bondi_doj_warrington_whco_re_qatar_plane_emolument.pdf.

⁹ U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, *DOJ OIG Strategy Plan FY 2024-FY2026*, <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/FY24-26DOJOIGStrategicPlan.pdf>.

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Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alex Padilla', written over a horizontal line.

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

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Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cory A. Booker', written over a horizontal line.

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator