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Ex-CIA Chief Burns Criticizes Trump's Federal Worker Purge

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William Burns, former CIA director and longtime U.S. diplomat, has issued a strong rebuke of the Trump administration's mass dismissal of federal employees, warning that the move undermines national security and weakens public service.

In a letter published Wednesday in *The Atlantic* titled "*Letter to America's Discarded Public Servants*," Burns accused the administration of using reform as a pretext for retribution. He argued that the removal of career officials risks silencing dissenting views essential to effective governance.

“Under the guise of reform, you all got caught in the crossfire of a retribution campaign of a war on public service and expertise,” Burns wrote.

The White House has not responded to requests for comment.

Burns' Background in Public Service

Burns served as CIA director under President Joe Biden and held multiple senior roles during a diplomatic career spanning more than three decades. He worked under three Democratic and three Republican presidents, including positions as U.S. ambassador to Russia and deputy secretary of State.

Drawing on that experience, Burns emphasized that while reform of government institutions is necessary, it must be carried out responsibly. “There is a smart way and a dumb way to tackle reform, a humane way and an intentionally traumatizing way,” he said.

Concerns Over Silencing Dissent

According to Burns, the firings are not about efficiency but about discouraging opposition. “This is not about reform. It’s about retribution. It’s about breaking people and breaking institutions by sowing fear and mistrust throughout our government,” he wrote.

He added that such tactics resemble those of authoritarian leaders. “That’s what autocrats do. They cow public servants into submission, and in doing so, they create a closed system that is free of opposing views and inconvenient concerns.”

Comparison to Russia's Ukraine War

Burns pointed to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine as an example of the dangers of eliminating dissent. He said that the absence of internal debate contributed to a “catastrophic” miscalculation in Moscow.

By contrast, he warned that weakening the U.S. federal workforce risks leaving the country vulnerable. “The threat to the United States is not from an imaginary ‘deep state,’” Burns wrote, “but from a weak state no longer able to uphold the guardrails of our democracy or help the United States compete in an unforgiving world.”

The letter comes as debate intensifies in Washington over the balance between political loyalty and institutional independence within federal agencies.