



FBI Probes Retired General in Qatar Lobbying Conspiracy

As part of an investigation into an illegal lobbying campaign benefitting the middle eastern nation of Qatar, retired four-star Marine Corps General John R. Allen has had some of his electronic data seized by the FBI. The bureau claims Allen made false statements and withheld “incriminating” documents related to the conspiracy.



AP Images
John R. Allen

According to federal court filings examined by the [Associated Press](#), Allen faces a potential criminal case in a probe that has several members of Congress being questioned by authorities.

The investigation has led to Richard G. Olson, a prominent former U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, pleading guilty to federal charges. Imaad Zuberi, a major political donor, is serving a 12-year prison sentence over the matter.

Allen is known for leading American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. In 2017, he became president of the Brookings Institution, one of the country’s most prestigious think tanks.

Per the court filings, Allen worked behind the scenes to influence U.S. government policy on behalf of Qatar in 2017, at a time when the Qatari monarchy was in the middle of a diplomatic crisis with neighboring countries.

“There is substantial evidence that these FARA [Foreign Agents Registration Act] violations were willful,” wrote FBI agent Babak Adib when applying for a search warrant.

Adib accuses Allen of misleading U.S. officials about his role in the influence campaign, failing to disclose “that he was simultaneously pursuing multimillion-dollar business deals with the government of Qatar.”

After giving a “false version of events” about his work for Qatar while speaking with investigators, Allen did not comply with a grand jury subpoena for relevant emails, the FBI says.

A spokesperson for Allen told AP that the general “voluntarily cooperated with the government’s investigation into this matter.” Allen in the past has denied working as a Qatari agent, claiming his actions in 2017 were a way of preventing a war in the Persian Gulf that would endanger the lives of American troops.

According to the affidavit, Allen used his official Brookings email for some correspondence related to the Qatar situation. As AP notes, Qatar is known to be one of Brookings’ top bankrollers, although the think tank says it stopped taking Qatari money recently.

During the Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates organized a blockade against Qatar over several issues, including its alleged terror ties. President Donald Trump appeared to take sides against Qatar.

AP recounts what allegedly happened next:

The court papers say Allen played an important role in shifting the U.S.’s response. Specifically, authorities say Allen lobbied then-National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster to



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have the Trump administration adopt more Qatar-friendly tone.

In an email to McMaster, Allen said the Qataris wanted the White House or State Department to issue a statement with language calling on all sides of the Gulf diplomatic crisis to “act with restraint.”

Federal law enforcement officials say then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did just that two days later, issuing a statement that called on other Gulf countries to “ease the blockade against Qatar” and asked “that there be no further escalation by the parties in the region.”

The feds say that, amid the crisis, Olsen and Allen flew to Qatar to personally meet with the Emir and various high officials.

While there, Allen allegedly advised the Qataris on how to influence the American government to their benefit, encouraging them to use “the full spectrum” of information operations — including “black and white” operations. The fact that Allen allegedly encouraged Qatar to engage in black ops is notable in light of the country’s reputation for hacking its rivals.

The affidavit further claims that Allen sought to “have a chat” with Olsen and Zuberi about money. Allen allegedly wrote in an email that he wanted to be paid a \$20,000 “speaker’s fee” for his time, despite the fact that he wasn’t delivering a speech. He also allegedly hoped to “work out a fuller arrangement of a longer-term relationship.”

The affidavit says Zuberi paid for Allen’s flight, although there is no evidence that the general was ever paid a speaker’s fee.

According to the FBI, Allen had other motives for wanting to help the Qataris.

“At the same time he was lobbying U.S. government officials on behalf of Qatar, Allen pursued at least one multimillion-dollar business deal with the Qatari government on behalf of a company on whose board of directors he served,” the affidavit reads.

The FBI says that after they returned from the Middle East, Allen and Olsen lobbied members of Congress, including Representative Ted Lieu (D-Calif.), who told investigators he didn’t recall Allen’s exact words but surmised the general was there “to support the Qatari officials and their position.”



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