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Subject: FW: Exclusive: Financier Is Top Choice to Advise President on Intelligence Matters ---
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From: [redacted] NRO USA GOV
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Exclusive: Financier Is Top Choice to Advise President on Intelligence Matters

Trump has finally picked members for a key intelligence advisory board, and billionaire Stephen Feinberg is slated to head it.
Jenna McLaughlin, ForeignPolicy.com, 22 January 2018

The man who once reportedly dreamt of being the most powerful American in Afghanistan has now set his sights on a new intelligence job that would give him direct access to U.S. President Donald Trump and the White House.

After a year in office, Trump has zeroed in on a group of personal advisors on intelligence matters, and Stephen Feinberg, a billionaire financier who has angled for a position in the White House for nearly a year, is top on the list to lead it.

Feinberg will lead the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, six sources with knowledge of the matter told Foreign Policy. The sources requested anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence matters and internal policy.

A spokeswoman for Feinberg declined to comment.

Feinberg is the CEO of private investment firm Cerberus Capital Management, which owns the private security firm DynCorp International. Over the past summer, Feinberg and Blackwater founder Erik Prince both pitched plans for a private military force in Afghanistan to the White House.

Prince had also suggested creating a "viceroy" to oversee U.S. operations in Afghanistan —
a position that Feinberg was reportedly angling to fill. Trump instead went with a more

1

traditional military plan.

Prince said he has no knowledge of Feinberg's potential role on the intelligence advisory board.

The board, created in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, has typically been composed of independent experts in business and academia, or retired military and intelligence professionals. The members serve in an unpaid capacity as a personal resource for the president on intelligence matters — reviewing everything from bioweapons to intelligence failures, like the Bay of Pigs scandal.

Over the years, the board has had varying degrees of impact; it helped create the Central Intelligence Agency's science and technology division and the Defense Intelligence Agency. However, the board's effectiveness has often depended upon its leadership and how close the chair is to the president.

Trump, who has been openly skeptical of and sometimes hostile toward the intelligence community, may be eager for an outsider's perspective. Some of his supporters have alleged that a "deep state" is working to destroy Trump through intelligence leaks and pursuing an investigation into Russia's meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Feinberg does not have experience in government, but he donated nearly $1 million to a pro-Trump PAC five days before the election, and his name has repeatedly surfaced as a candidate for various national security and military roles during Trump's first year in office.

Reuters reported last February that Trump was considering hiring Feinberg to conduct an expansive review of the intelligence community to find ways to restructure it. By March, Feinberg was joining Trump on an official military visit to an aircraft carrier in Virginia.

But Congress and Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence, expressed reservations about Feinberg conducting such a review. Instead, Coats suggested at the time that Feinberg should work on the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, one senior intelligence official told FP.

Feinberg, at one point over the past year, was also in talks to possibly take a role in defense or homeland security, but he was blocked by senior officials, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Now, Feinberg will finally get his chance to consult on intelligence directly for the president.

One source familiar with Feinberg's thinking told FP the financier said he wants to conduct onsite reviews of the intelligence agencies, a role that typically falls to groups with more oversight power, like inspectors general, rather than a presidential advisory committee.

Yet Feinberg's financial ties have complicated his road to power in the Trump administration. Cerberus wrote a letter to investors in February last year suggesting that if Feinberg accepted a position in government, he would need to turn over "voluminous information" to the Office of Government Ethics to be scrutinized. Feinberg faces the same

hurdle in joining the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

Previous candidates who turned down the leadership role include tech magnate Peter Thiel and Oracle executive Safra Catz; the latter may still be considering membership on the board. A spokesperson for her company, Oracle, declined to comment on whether Catz will be participating as a member.

Yet the White House finally appears to be moving full speed ahead to appoint its board, which has been empty longer than under almost any other president (Jimmy Carter chose to disband the group entirely). Trump's choices are currently undergoing security clearance review.

Samantha Ravich, a senior advisor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, is the top choice to be Feinberg's deputy, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter. Between 2011 and 2013, Ravich led a review of the intelligence community's research and development programs.

Ravich did not immediately respond to request for comment.

It's unclear how many members Trump will ultimately appoint to the board. Former President Barack Obama maintained a 16-person board made up mostly of members he personally selected.

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