

EXHIBIT 103

The New York Times

Kirstjen Nielsen, Chief of Homeland Security, Almost Resigned After Trump Tirade

By Michael D. Shear and Nicole Perlroth

May 10, 2018

WASHINGTON — Kirstjen Nielsen, the homeland security secretary, told colleagues she was close to resigning after President Trump berated her on Wednesday in front of the entire cabinet for what he said was her failure to adequately secure the nation's borders, according to several current and former officials familiar with the episode.

Ms. Nielsen, who is a protégée of John F. Kelly, the White House chief of staff, has drafted a resignation letter but has not submitted it, according to two of the people. As the head of the Department of Homeland Security, Ms. Nielsen is in charge of the 20,000 employees who work for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Mr. Trump's anger toward Ms. Nielsen, who was sitting several seats to his left at the meeting, was part of a lengthy tirade in which the president railed at his cabinet about what he said was its lack of progress toward sealing the country's borders against illegal immigrants, according to one person who was present at the meeting.

Asked about the heated exchange at the meeting, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, said Thursday that "the president is committed to fixing our broken immigration system and our porous borders."

In a statement, Ms. Nielsen said she intended to “continue to direct the department to do all we can to implement the president’s security-focused agenda.” She said Mr. Trump was “rightly frustrated that existing loopholes and the lack of congressional action have prevented this administration from fully securing the border.”

Tyler Q. Houlton, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security, disputed that Ms. Nielsen had drafted a resignation letter and was close to resigning, calling those assertions “false.”

Mr. Trump’s anger about immigration has grown in recent weeks, according to several officials. He repeatedly claimed credit for the fact that during his first year in office, illegal border crossings dropped to their lowest levels in decades. But this year, they have risen again, robbing him of one of his favorite talking points.

In remarks to reporters before Wednesday’s meeting, Mr. Trump hinted at the anger that would cause him to erupt once TV cameras were led out of the room.

“We’ve very much toughened up the border, but the laws are horrible,” Mr. Trump said. “The laws in this country for immigration and illegal immigration are absolutely horrible. And we have to do something about it — not only the wall, which we’re building sections of wall right now.”

One person familiar with Mr. Trump’s blowup at the meeting said it was prompted by a discussion about why Mexico was not doing more to prevent illegal border crossings into the United States. Another person said the president was primarily focused on the Homeland Security Department because he viewed Ms. Nielsen as primarily responsible for keeping illegal immigrants out of the country.

During the meeting, Mr. Trump yelled about the United States' porous border and said more needed to be done to fix it. When members of his cabinet pointed out that the country relies on day laborers who cross the border each day, Mr. Trump said that was fine, but continued to complain, one person said.

The president also complained about the continued failure of his administration to find a way to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico, two people familiar with the episode said.

Ms. Nielsen viewed the president's rant as directed mostly at her, and she told associates after the meeting that she should not continue in the job if he did not view her as effective. One person close to Ms. Nielsen said she was miserable in her job.

Mr. Trump has clashed with Ms. Nielsen for weeks about his belief that more should be done to secure the border. In early April, the president repeatedly expressed frustration with Ms. Nielsen that her department was not doing enough to close loopholes that were allowing illegal immigrants into the country, according to one official familiar with those discussions.

During those discussions, officials had presented Mr. Trump with a list of proposals that would help border agents crack down on those trying to cross the border illegally and send them back more quickly. The president urged Ms. Nielsen to be more aggressive, the official said.

One persistent issue has been Mr. Trump's belief that Ms. Nielsen and other officials in the department were resisting his direction that parents be separated from their children when families cross illegally into the United States, several officials said. The president and his aides in the White House had been pushing a family separation policy for weeks as a way of deterring families from trying to cross the border illegally.

On Monday, Justice Department officials announced that border agents will refer 100 percent of illegal crossings for prosecution, a decision that will most likely result in more family separations.

But one official said the family separation issue is just one part of the president's broader frustration with the pace of progress on an immigration crackdown, which was a central promise that he made to voters during his 2016 presidential campaign.

Since taking office, Mr. Trump's efforts to impose a travel ban on several predominantly Muslim countries were held up for months in the courts. The courts have also interfered with his push to end an Obama-era program to help people brought to the United States illegally as young children.

In recent weeks, Mr. Trump has been increasingly focused on the obstacles to immigration changes, even in public speeches where he had planned to talk about other topics.

"We don't have laws. We have laws that were written by people that truly could not love our country," the president told members of the National Rifle Association last week in Dallas during lengthy remarks about immigration.

"We're going to start defending our country. We're going to start defending our borders," he said with the same enthusiasm that he demonstrated when he talked about immigration during his campaign.

The episode at the cabinet meeting on Wednesday is the latest evidence of staff turmoil at the White House, where many of Mr. Trump's top advisers have either been fired or have resigned in recent weeks.

The president fired Rex W. Tillerson, his secretary of state, and pushed out Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, his second national security adviser, replacing him with John R. Bolton, who in turn fired several top aides at the National Security Council.

Those staff changes followed the announced departures of Gary D. Cohn, the president's top economic adviser in the White House, and Hope Hicks, who was Mr. Trump's communications director and confidante. Thomas P. Bossert, the president's homeland security adviser, also quit.

Mr. Trump's relationship with Mr. Kelly, who was the president's first secretary of homeland security, has also soured in recent months as the president has grown weary of Mr. Kelly's attempts to impose order on his White House operations.

Ms. Nielsen was Mr. Kelly's chief of staff at the Homeland Security Department, and followed Mr. Kelly to the White House when he became chief of staff. She frequently clashed with other members of the president's staff as she and Mr. Kelly sought to end the chaotic access to Mr. Trump in the Oval Office.

Mr. Trump later nominated Ms. Nielsen to be the new homeland security secretary on Mr. Kelly's recommendation.

Even so, people close to Mr. Trump said he viewed her with suspicion because she had spent years working for President George W. Bush as a homeland security aide and later as a top official for the Transportation Security Administration in the Homeland Security Department.

Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Maggie Haberman contributed reporting.

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A version of this article appears in print on May 10, 2018, on Page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: A Tirade by Trump, Then a Resignation Letter