

Ex-F.B.I. Chief Being Investigated Over Social Media Post About Trump

James Comey shared and later took down a post with a phrase used by critics of the president, saying there had been no ill intent.

**By Chris Cameron
New York Times**

The Trump administration is investigating James Comey, the former F.B.I. director who was [fired by President Trump](#) in his first term, for a social media post that officials claim amounted to a call for Mr. Trump's assassination, members of the president's cabinet said on Thursday evening.

The Instagram post, which Mr. Comey later took down and said was not meant as a call for violence, showed seashells on a beach forming the numbers "86 47," a phrase used by critics of the president online, at [protests](#) and on signs and [clothing](#). "Eighty-six," according to [Merriam-Webster](#), is an [old slang term](#) meaning to dismiss or remove, and Mr. Trump is the 47th president.

The phrase has not previously been described by officials in the current administration as threatening to Mr. Trump, but soon after Mr. Comey made the post on Thursday, Kristi Noem, the homeland security secretary, asserted that the former F.B.I. director had "called for the assassination" of Mr. Trump and that "D.H.S. and Secret Service is investigating this threat and will respond appropriately."

Other high-level Trump administration officials soon chimed in to denounce Mr. Comey's post, which he had already removed and [replaced](#) with a new message that he "didn't realize some folks associate those numbers with violence." Kash Patel, the current F.B.I. director, announced that his agency would "support the investigation" by the Secret Service, and Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, appeared on Fox News hours later and said that Mr. Comey should be jailed.

"James Comey, in my view, should be held accountable and put behind bars," Ms. Gabbard said in an interview with Jesse Watters.

Critics calling for the president to be "86'd" goes back at least to Mr. Trump's first term. Weeks before the 2020 election, Mr. Trump's re-election campaign [seized on a pin that said "86 45"](#) that could be seen on a table behind Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan during a TV interview. Asserting that "86 can be shorthand for killing someone," the Trump campaign accused Ms. Whitmer of ["encouraging assassination attempts against President Trump."](#)

After President Joseph R. Biden Jr. took office, clothing and signs with “86 46,” referring to Mr. Biden, soon began to appear and [continue to be sold online](#). During the 2024 campaign, [Mr. Trump posted a video featuring an image of Mr. Biden hogtied on the back of a truck](#), imagery that had spread among Mr. Trump’s followers. Mr. Trump had frequently featured violent imagery on his social media accounts during the campaign.