

Opening Statement of Ambassador William B. Taylor

Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

November 13, 2019

Mr. Chairman, I am appearing today at the Committee's request to provide my perspective on the events that are the subject of the Committee's inquiry. I want to emphasize at the outset that, while I am aware that the Committee has requested my testimony as part of impeachment proceedings, I am not here to take one side or the other, or to advocate for any particular outcome of these proceedings. My sole purpose is to provide facts as I know them about the incidents in question as well as my views about the strategic importance of Ukraine to the United States.

By way of background, it has been a privilege for me to serve our country and the American people for more than fifty years, starting as a cadet at West Point, then as an infantry officer for six years, including with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam; then at the Department of Energy; then as a member of a Senate staff; then at NATO; then with the State Department here and abroad—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jerusalem, and Ukraine. I retired from the State Department in 2009 to join the U.S. Institute of Peace.

I am neither a career member of the Foreign Service nor of the civil service. I am non-partisan and have been appointed to my positions by every president from President Reagan to President Trump.

Let me summarize my main points.

First, Ukraine is a strategic partner of the United States, important for the security of our country as well as Europe. Ukraine is on the front line in the conflict with a newly aggressive Russia.

Second, even as we sit here today, the Russians are attacking Ukrainian soldiers in their own country and have been for the last four years. I saw this on the front line last week; the day I was there a Ukrainian soldier was killed and four were wounded.

Third, the security assistance we provide is crucial to Ukraine's defense and to the protection of the soldiers I met last week. It demonstrates to Ukrainians—and Russians—that we are Ukraine's reliable strategic partner. It is clearly in our national interest to deter further Russian aggression.

And finally, as the Committee is aware, I wrote that withholding security assistance in exchange for help with a domestic political campaign in the United States would be “crazy.” I believed that then, and I believe it now.

Let me tell you why.

On May 28 of this year, I met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who asked me to rejoin the State Department and return to Kyiv to lead our embassy in Ukraine. It was—and is—a critical time in U.S.-Ukraine relations.

I had served as Ambassador to Ukraine from 2006 to 2009, having been nominated by George W. Bush, and, in the intervening 10 years, had stayed engaged with Ukraine. Across the responsibilities I have had in public service, Ukraine is the highlight, and so Secretary Pompeo's offer to return as Chief of Mission was compelling.

Since I left Ukraine in 2009, the country had continued to turn toward the West. But in 2013, Vladimir Putin was so threatened by the prospect of Ukraine joining the European Union that he tried to bribe the Ukrainian president. This triggered mass protests in the winter of 2013 that drove that president to flee to Russia in February 2014, but not before his forces killed a hundred Ukrainian protesters in central Kyiv.

Days later Mr. Putin invaded Crimea, holding a sham referendum at the point of Russian army rifles. The Russians absurdly claimed that 97% voted to join Russia. In early April, Putin sent his army and security forces into southeastern Ukraine to generate illegal armed formations and puppet governments in what we know as Donbas. 14,000 Ukrainians have died in the war in Donbas. More die each week.

In July 2014, these Russian-led forces in Donbas shot down a civilian airliner en route from Amsterdam to Malaysia, killing all 298 people on board.

We, the Europeans, and most of the West imposed economic sanctions and kicked the Russians out of the G-8. Beginning in 2014, we and NATO began to provide military assistance to Ukraine's armed forces in the form of training, advice, military equipment, and weapons.

It is this security assistance that is at the heart of the controversy that we are discussing today. The pro-Russian president who was run out of Kyiv in 2014 had let the Ukrainian armed forces deteriorate to the point of ruin. In response to the Russian invasion, the new Ukrainian authorities—with an amazing outpouring of support from regular Ukrainian people—rebuilt the army, nearly from scratch, spending more than 5% of Ukrainian GDP on defense since the war started. The whole Ukrainian nation fiercely responded to the Russian attack. The nation united like never before. A rag-tag army developed into a strong fighting force. And the United States played a vital role.

Since 2014, you in Congress have provided over \$1.6 billion in military assistance to Ukraine. The security assistance provides small unit training at an army base near Lviv in the west of the country. It provides ambulances, night vision devices, communications equipment, counter-battery radar, navy ships—and finally, weapons. This security assistance demonstrates our commitment to resist aggression and defend freedom.

During the 2014 to 2016 period, I was serving outside of government and joined two other former ambassadors to Ukraine in urging Obama administration officials at the State Department, Defense Department, and other agencies to provide lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine in order to deter further Russian aggression. I also supported much stronger sanctions on Russia. I was pleased when the Trump administration provided Javelin anti-tank missiles and enacted stronger sanctions.

All to say, I cared about Ukraine's future and the important U.S. interests there. So, when Secretary Pompeo asked me to go back to Kyiv, I wanted to say "yes."

But it was not an easy decision. The former Ambassador, Masha Yovanovitch, had been treated poorly, caught in a web of political machinations both in Kyiv and in Washington. I feared that those problems were still present. I consulted both my wife and a respected former senior Republican official who has been a mentor. I will tell you that my wife, in no uncertain terms, strongly opposed the idea. The mentor counseled: if your country asks you to do something, you do it—if you can be effective.

I could be effective only if the U.S. policy of strong support for Ukraine—strong diplomatic support along with robust security, economic, and technical assistance—were to continue, and if I had the backing of the Secretary of State to implement that policy. And I worried about what I had heard concerning the role of Rudy Giuliani, who had made several controversial statements about Ukraine and U.S. policy toward the country.

So during my meeting with Secretary Pompeo on May 28, I made clear to him and the others present that if U.S. policy toward Ukraine changed, he would not want me posted there and I could not stay. He assured me that the policy of strong support for Ukraine would continue and that he would support me in defending that policy.

With that understanding, I agreed to go back to Kyiv. Because I was appointed by the Secretary but not reconfirmed by the Senate, my official position was Chargé d’Affaires ad interim. In effect, I was the acting ambassador to Ukraine.

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I returned to Kyiv on June 17, carrying the original copy of a letter President Trump signed the day after I met with the Secretary. In that letter, President Trump congratulated President Zelenskyy on his election victory and invited him to a meeting in the Oval Office.

But once I arrived in Kyiv, I discovered a weird combination of encouraging, confusing, and ultimately alarming circumstances.

First, the encouraging: President Zelenskyy was reforming Ukraine in a hurry. He appointed reformist ministers and supported long-stalled anti-corruption legislation. He took quick executive action, including opening Ukraine’s High Anti-Corruption Court. With a new parliamentary majority stemming from snap elections, President Zelenskyy changed the Ukrainian constitution to remove absolute immunity from Rada deputies, the source of raw corruption for two decades. The excitement in Kyiv was palpable. This time could be different—a new Ukraine finally breaking from its corrupt, post-Soviet past.

And yet, I found a confusing and unusual arrangement for making U.S. policy toward Ukraine. There appeared to be two channels of U.S. policy-making and implementation, one regular and one highly irregular. As the acting ambassador, I had authority over the regular, formal diplomatic processes, including the bulk of the U.S. effort to support Ukraine against the Russian invasion and to help it defeat corruption. My colleague, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent, and our colleagues at the National Security Council (NSC) were my main points of contact in Washington in this regular channel. This channel is

formally responsible for formulating and overseeing the implementation of U.S. foreign policy with respect to Ukraine, a policy that has consistently enjoyed strong, bipartisan support, both in Congress and in all administrations since Ukraine's independence from Russia in 1991.

At the same time, however, I encountered an irregular, informal channel of U.S. policy-making with respect to Ukraine, unaccountable to Congress, a channel that included then-Special Envoy Kurt Volker, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, and, as I subsequently learned, Mr. Giuliani. I was clearly in the regular channel, but I was also in the irregular one to the extent that Ambassadors Volker and Sondland included me in certain conversations. Although this irregular channel was well-connected in Washington, it operated mostly outside of official State Department channels.

The irregular channel began when Ambassador Volker, Ambassador Sondland, Secretary Perry, and Senator Ron Johnson briefed President Trump on May 23 upon their return from President Zelenskyy's inauguration. The delegation was as enthusiastic as I would soon become about the new Ukrainian president and urged President Trump to meet with him early on to cement the U.S.-Ukraine relationship. But from what I understood from the participants, President Trump did not share their enthusiasm for a meeting with President Zelenskyy.

When I arrived in Kyiv, the actions of both the regular and the irregular channels of foreign policy appeared to serve the same goal—a strong U.S.-Ukraine partnership. But it became clear to me by August that the channels had diverged in their objectives. As this occurred, I became increasingly concerned.

In late June, both channels were trying to facilitate a visit by President Zelenskyy to the White House for a meeting with President Trump,

which President Trump had promised in his congratulatory letter of May 29. The Ukrainians were clearly eager for the meeting to happen.

But during my subsequent communications with Ambassadors Volker and Sondland, they relayed to me that the President “wanted to hear from Zelenskyy” before scheduling the meeting in the Oval Office. It was not clear to me what this meant.

On June 27, Ambassador Sondland told me during a phone conversation that President Zelenskyy needed to make clear to President Trump that he, President Zelenskyy, was not standing in the way of “investigations.”

I sensed something odd when Ambassador Sondland told me on June 28 that he did not wish to include most of the regular interagency participants in a call planned with President Zelenskyy later that day. Ambassador Sondland, Ambassador Volker, Secretary Perry, and I were on this call, dialing in from different locations. However, Ambassador Sondland said that he wanted to make sure no one was transcribing or monitoring as they added President Zelenskyy to the call. Also, before President Zelenskyy joined the call, Ambassador Volker separately told the U.S. participants that he, Ambassador Volker, planned to be explicit with President Zelenskyy in a one-on-one meeting in Toronto on July 2. In that meeting, Ambassador Volker planned to make clear what President Zelenskyy should do to get the White House meeting. I did not understand what this meant, but Ambassador Volker said he would relay that President Trump wanted to see rule of law, transparency, but also, specifically, cooperation on investigations to “get to the bottom of things.”

Once President Zelenskyy joined the call, the conversation was focused on energy policy and the war in Donbas. President Zelenskyy also said he looked forward to the White House visit President Trump had offered in his May 29 letter.

By mid-July it was becoming clear to me that the meeting President Zelenskyy wanted was conditioned on the investigations of Burisma and alleged Ukrainian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections. It was also clear that this condition was driven by the irregular policy channel I had come to understand was guided by Mr. Giuliani.

In a regular NSC secure video-conference call on July 18, I heard a staff person from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) say that there was a hold on security assistance to Ukraine but could not say why. Toward the end of an otherwise normal meeting, a voice on the call—the person was off-screen—said that she was from OMB and that her boss had instructed her not to approve any additional spending on security assistance for Ukraine until further notice. I and others sat in astonishment—the Ukrainians were fighting the Russians and counted on not only the training and weapons, but also the assurance of U.S. support. All that the OMB staff person said was that the directive had come from the President to the Chief of Staff to OMB. In an instant, I realized that one of the key pillars of our strong support for Ukraine was threatened. The irregular policy channel was running contrary to the goals of longstanding U.S. policy.

There followed a series of NSC-led interagency meetings, starting at the staff level and quickly reaching the level of Cabinet secretaries. At every meeting, the unanimous conclusion was that the security assistance should be resumed, the hold lifted. At one point, the Defense Department was asked to perform an analysis of the effectiveness of the assistance. Within a day, the Defense Department came back with the determination that the assistance was effective and should be resumed. My understanding was that the Secretaries of Defense and State, the CIA Director, and the National Security Advisor sought a joint meeting with the President to convince him to release the hold, but such a meeting was hard to schedule and the hold lasted well into September.

On July 19 in a phone call with then-Senior Director for European and Russian

Affairs Fiona Hill and Director of European Affairs LTC Alex Vindman, they tried to reassure me that they were not aware of any official change in U.S. policy toward Ukraine, OMB's announcement notwithstanding. They did confirm that the hold on security assistance for Ukraine came from Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, who maintained a skeptical view of Ukraine.

In the same July 19 phone call, they gave me an account of a July 10 meeting with Ukrainian and American officials at the White House. They told me that part way through the meeting, Ambassador Sondland had connected "investigations" with an Oval Office meeting for President Zelenskyy, which so irritated then-National Security Advisor John Bolton that he abruptly ended the meeting, telling Dr. Hill and LTC Vindman that they should have nothing to do with domestic politics. He also directed Dr. Hill to "brief the lawyers." Dr. Hill said that Ambassador Bolton referred to this as a "drug deal" after the July 10 meeting. Ambassador Bolton opposed a call between President Zelenskyy and President Trump out of concern that it "would be a disaster."

Needless to say, the Ukrainians in the meetings were confused. Ambassador Bolton, in the regular Ukraine policy decision-making channel, wanted to talk about security, energy, and reform; Ambassador Sondland, a participant in the irregular channel, wanted to talk about the connection between a White House meeting and Ukrainian investigations.

Also during our July 19 call, Dr. Hill informed me that Ambassador Volker had met with Mr. Giuliani to discuss Ukraine. This caught me by surprise. The next day I asked Ambassador Volker about that meeting, but received no response. I began to sense that the two decision making channels—the regular and irregular—were separate and at odds.

Later that day, I received text messages on a three-way WhatsApp text conversation with Ambassadors Volker and Sondland, a record of which

was provided by Ambassador Volker. Ambassador Sondland said that a call between President Trump and President Zelenskyy would take place soon. Ambassador Volker said that what was “[m]ost impt is for Zelenskyy to say that he will help investigation—and address any specific personnel issues—if there are any.”

On the next day, July 20, I had a phone conversation with Ambassador Sondland while he was on a train from Paris to London. Ambassador Sondland told me that he had recommended to President Zelenskyy that he use the phrase, “I will leave no stone unturned” with regard to “investigations” when President Zelenskyy spoke with President Trump.

Also on July 20, I had a phone conversation with Alexander Danyliuk, President Zelenskyy’s national security advisor, who emphasized that President Zelenskyy did not want to be used as an instrument in a U.S. re-election campaign. The next day I texted both Ambassadors Volker and Sondland about President Zelenskyy’s concern.

On July 25, President Trump and President Zelenskyy had the long-awaited phone conversation. Even though I was acting Ambassador and was scheduled to meet with President Zelenskyy along with Ambassador Volker the following day, I received no readout of the call from the White House. The Ukrainian government issued a short, cryptic summary.

During a previously planned July 26 meeting, President Zelenskyy told Ambassador Volker and me that he was happy with the call but did not elaborate. President Zelenskyy then asked about the face-to-face meeting in the Oval Office as promised in the May 29 letter from President Trump. We could give him no firm answer.

After our meeting with President Zelenskyy, Ambassador Volker and I traveled to the front line in northern Donbas to receive a briefing from the commander of the forces on the line of contact. Arriving for the briefing in the military headquarters, the commander thanked us for

security assistance, but I was aware that this assistance was on hold, which made me uncomfortable.

Ambassador Volker and I could see the armed and hostile Russian-led forces on the other side of the damaged bridge across the line of contact. Russian-led forces continue to kill Ukrainians in the war, one or two a week. More Ukrainians would undoubtedly die without the U.S. assistance.

Although I spent the morning of July 26 with President Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials, the first summary of the July 25 Trump-Zelenskyy call that I heard from anybody inside the U.S. government was during a phone call I had with Tim Morrison, Dr. Hill's recent replacement at the NSC, on July 28. Mr. Morrison told me that the call "could have been better" and that President Trump had suggested that President Zelenskyy or his staff meet with Mr. Giuliani and Attorney General William Barr. I did not see any official readout of the call until it was publicly released on September 25.

By August, I was becoming more concerned.

On August 16, I exchanged text messages with Ambassador Volker in which I learned that Andriy Yermak, a senior advisor to President Zelenskyy, had asked that the United States submit an official request for an investigation into Burisma's alleged violations of Ukrainian law, if that is what the United States desired. A formal U.S. request to the Ukrainians to conduct an investigation based on violations of their own law struck me as improper, and I recommended to Ambassador Volker that we "stay clear." To find out the legal aspects of the question, however, I gave him the name of a Deputy Assistant Attorney General whom I thought would be the proper point of contact for seeking a U.S. request for a foreign investigation.

By mid-August, because the security assistance had been held for over a month for no reason that I could discern, I was beginning to fear that the

longstanding U.S. policy of strong support for Ukraine was shifting. I called State Department Counselor Ulrich Brechbuhl to discuss this on August 21. He said that he was not aware of a change of U.S. policy but would check on the status of the security assistance.

My concerns deepened the next day, on August 22, during a phone conversation with Mr. Morrison. I asked him if there had been a change in policy of strong support for Ukraine, to which he responded, “it remains to be seen.” He also told me during this call that the “President doesn’t want to provide any assistance at all.” That was extremely troubling to me. As I had told Secretary Pompeo in May, if the policy of strong support for Ukraine were to change, I would have to resign. Based on my call with Mr. Morrison, I was preparing to do so.

Just days later, on August 27, Ambassador Bolton arrived in Kyiv and met with President Zelenskyy. During their meeting, security assistance was not discussed—as far as I knew, the Ukrainians were not aware of the hold until August 29. I, on the other hand, was all too aware of and still troubled by the hold.

Near the end of Ambassador Bolton’s visit, I asked to meet him privately, during which I expressed to him my serious concern about the withholding of military assistance to Ukraine while the Ukrainians were defending their country from Russian aggression. Ambassador Bolton recommended that I send a first-person cable to Secretary Pompeo directly, relaying my concerns.

I wrote and transmitted such a cable on August 29, describing the “folly” I saw in withholding military aid to Ukraine at a time when hostilities were still active in the east and when Russia was watching closely to gauge the level of American support for the Ukrainian government. The Russians, as I said at my deposition, would love to see the humiliation of President Zelenskyy at the hands of the Americans. I told the Secretary that I could not and would not defend such a policy. Although I received no specific response, I heard that soon thereafter, the Secretary carried

the cable with him to a meeting at the White House focused on security assistance for Ukraine.

The same day that I sent my cable to the Secretary, Mr. Yermak contacted me very concerned, asking about the withheld security assistance. The hold that the White House had placed on the assistance had just been made public that day in a *Politico* story. At that point, I was embarrassed that I could give him no explanation for why it was withheld.

It had still not occurred to me that the hold on security assistance could be related to the “investigations.” That, however, would change.

On September 1, just three days after my cable to Secretary Pompeo, President Zelenskyy met Vice President Pence at a bilateral meeting in Warsaw. President Trump had planned to travel to Warsaw but at the last minute had cancelled because of Hurricane Dorian. Just hours before the Pence-Zelenskyy meeting, I contacted Mr. Danyliuk to let him know that the delay of U.S. security assistance was an “all or nothing” proposition, in the sense that if the White House did not lift the hold prior to the end of the fiscal year (September 30), the funds would expire and Ukraine would receive nothing. I was hopeful that at the bilateral meeting or shortly thereafter, the White House would lift the hold, but this was not to be.

On the evening of September 1, I received a readout of the Pence-Zelenskyy meeting over the phone from Mr. Morrison, during which he told me President Zelenskyy had opened the meeting by immediately asking the Vice President about security cooperation. The Vice President did not respond substantively, but said that he would talk to President Trump that night. The Vice President did say that President Trump wanted the Europeans to do more to support Ukraine and that he wanted the Ukrainians to do more to fight corruption.

During this same phone call with Mr. Morrison, he described a conversation Ambassador Sondland had with Mr. Yermak in Warsaw. Ambassador Sondland told Mr. Yermak that the security assistance money would not come until President Zelenskyy committed to pursue the Burisma investigation. I was alarmed by what Mr. Morrison told me about the Sondland-Yermak conversation. I understand that Mr. Morrison testified at his deposition that Ambassador Sondland proposed that it might be sufficient for the Ukrainian Prosecutor General to commit to pursue the investigation, as opposed to President Zelenskyy. But this was the first time I had heard that the security assistance—not just the White House meeting—was conditioned on the investigations.

Very concerned, on that same day—September 1—I sent Ambassador Sondland a text message asking if “we [are] now saying that security assistance and [a] WH meeting are conditioned on investigations?” Ambassador Sondland responded asking me to call him, which I did. During that phone call, Ambassador Sondland told me that President Trump had told him that he wants President Zelenskyy to state publicly that Ukraine will investigate Burisma and alleged Ukrainian interference in the 2016 U.S. election.

Ambassador Sondland also told me that he now recognized that he had made a mistake by earlier telling Ukrainian officials that only a White House meeting with President Zelenskyy was dependent on a public announcement of investigations—in fact, Ambassador Sondland said, “everything” was dependent on such an announcement, including security assistance. He said that President Trump wanted President Zelenskyy “in a public box” by making a public statement about ordering such investigations.

In the same September 1 call, I told Ambassador Sondland that President Trump should have more respect for another head of state and that what he described was not in the interest of either President Trump or President Zelenskyy. At that point I asked Ambassador Sondland to push back on President Trump’s demand. Ambassador Sondland pledged to

try. I suggested the possibility that the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, rather than President Zelenskyy, would make a statement about investigations, potentially in coordination with Attorney General Barr's probe into the investigation of interference in the 2016 elections.

The next day, September 2, Mr. Morrison called to inform me that Mr. Danyliuk had asked him to come to his hotel in Warsaw. Mr. Danyliuk expressed President Zelenskyy's concern about the possible loss of U.S. support for Ukraine. In particular, Mr. Morrison relayed to me that the inability of any U.S. officials to respond to the Ukrainians' explicit questions about security assistance was troubling them. I was experiencing the same tension in my dealings with the Ukrainians, including during a meeting I had had with the Ukrainian Defense Minister that day.

On September 5, I accompanied Senators Johnson and Murphy during their visit to Kyiv. When we met with President Zelenskyy, his first question to the senators was about the withheld security assistance. My recollection of the meeting is that both senators stressed that bipartisan support for Ukraine in Washington was Ukraine's most important strategic asset and that President Zelenskyy should not jeopardize that bipartisan support by getting drawn into U.S. domestic politics.

I had been making (and continue to make) this point to all of my official Ukrainian contacts. But the odd push to make President Zelenskyy publicly commit to investigations of Burisma and alleged interference in the 2016 election showed how the official foreign policy of the United States was undercut by the irregular efforts led by Mr. Giuliani.

Two days later, on September 7, I had a conversation with Mr. Morrison in which he described a phone conversation earlier that day between Ambassador Sondland and President Trump. Mr. Morrison said that he had a "sinking feeling" after learning about this conversation from Ambassador Sondland. According to Mr. Morrison, President Trump told Ambassador Sondland that he was not asking for a "quid pro quo."

But President Trump did insist that President Zelenskyy go to a microphone and say he is opening investigations of “Biden and 2016 election interference,” and that President Zelenskyy should want to do this himself. Mr. Morrison said that he told Ambassador Bolton and the NSC lawyers of this phone call between President Trump and Ambassador Sondland.

The following day, on September 8, Ambassador Sondland and I spoke on the phone. He confirmed that he had talked to President Trump as I had suggested a week earlier, but that President Trump was adamant that President Zelenskyy, himself, had to “clear things up and do it in public.” President Trump said it was not a “quid pro quo.” I believe this was the same conversation between Ambassador Sondland and President Trump that Mr. Morrison had described to me on September 7.

Ambassador Sondland also said that he had talked to President Zelenskyy and Mr. Yermak and had told them that, although this was not a quid pro quo, if President Zelenskyy did not “clear things up” in public, we would be at a “stalemate.” I understood a “stalemate” to mean that Ukraine would not receive the much-needed military assistance. Ambassador Sondland said that this conversation concluded with President Zelenskyy agreeing to make a public statement in an interview on CNN.

Shortly after that call with Ambassador Sondland, I expressed my strong reservations in a text message to Ambassador Sondland, stating that my “nightmare is they [the Ukrainians] give the interview and don’t get the security assistance. The Russians love it. (And I quit.)” I was serious.

The next day, September 9, I said to Ambassadors Sondland and Volker that “[t]he message to the Ukrainians (and Russians) we send with the decision on security assistance is key. With the hold, we have already shaken their faith in us.” I also said, “I think it’s crazy to withhold security assistance for help with a political campaign.”

Ambassador Sondland responded about five hours later that I was “incorrect about President Trump’s intentions. The President has been crystal clear no quid pro quo’s of any kind.”

During our call on September 8, Ambassador Sondland tried to explain to me that President Trump is a businessman. When a businessman is about to sign a check to someone who owes him something, the businessman asks that person to pay up before signing the check. Ambassador Volker used the same language several days later while we were together at the Yalta European Strategy Conference. I argued to both that the explanation made no sense: the Ukrainians did not “owe” President Trump anything, and holding up security assistance for domestic political gain was “crazy,” as I had said in my text message to Ambassadors Sondland and Volker on September 9.

Finally, on September 11, I learned that the hold had been lifted and that the security assistance would be provided. I was not told the reason why the hold had been lifted.

The next day, I personally conveyed the news to President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian Foreign Minister. And I again reminded Mr. Yermak of the high strategic value of bipartisan support for Ukraine and the importance of not getting involved in other countries’ elections. My fear at the time was that since Ambassador Sondland had told me President Zelenskyy already agreed to do a CNN interview, President Zelenskyy would make a statement regarding “investigations” that would have played into domestic U.S. politics.

I sought to confirm through Mr. Danyliuk that President Zelenskyy was not planning to give such an interview to the media. While Mr. Danyliuk initially confirmed that on September 12, I noticed during a meeting on the morning of September 13 at President Zelenskyy’s office that Mr. Yermak looked uncomfortable in response to the question. Again, I asked Mr. Danyliuk to confirm that there would be no CNN interview, which he did.

On September 25 at the UN General Assembly session in New York City, President Trump met President Zelenskyy face-to-face. He also released the transcript of the July 25 call. (The United States gave the Ukrainians virtually no notice of the release, and they were livid.) Although this was the first time I had seen the details of President Trump's July 25 call with President Zelenskyy, in which he mentioned Vice President Biden, I had come to understand well before then that "investigations" was a term that Ambassadors Volker and Sondland used to mean matters related to the 2016 elections, and to investigations of Burisma and the Bidens.

Last Friday, a member of my staff told me of events that occurred on July 26. While Ambassador Volker and I visited the front, this member of my staff accompanied Ambassador Sondland. Ambassador Sondland met with Mr. Yermak.

Following that meeting, in the presence of my staff at a restaurant, Ambassador Sondland called President Trump and told him of his meetings in Kyiv. The member of my staff could hear President Trump on the phone, asking Ambassador Sondland about "the investigations." Ambassador Sondland told President Trump that the Ukrainians were ready to move forward.

Following the call with President Trump, the member of my staff asked Ambassador Sondland what President Trump thought about Ukraine. Ambassador Sondland responded that President Trump cares more about the investigations of Biden, which Giuliani was pressing for. At the time I gave my deposition on October 22, I was not aware of this information. I am including it here for completeness. As the Committee knows, I reported this information through counsel to the State Department's Legal Adviser, as well as to counsel for both the Majority and the Minority on the Committee. It is my understanding that the Committee is following up on this matter.

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I recognize that this is a rather lengthy recitation of the events of the past few months told from my vantage point in Kyiv. But I also recognize the importance of the matters your committee is investigating, and I hope that this chronology will provide some framework for your questions. As I mentioned in my October 22 deposition, the information and quotes in my testimony are based on my best recollection as well as a review of my personal notes.

Let me return to the points I made at the outset. Ukraine is important to the security of the United States. The largest country in Europe by land mass, Ukraine is a young democracy, struggling to join Europe and ally itself with the United States. It has been violently attacked by Russia, which continues its armed aggression against Ukraine to this day. If we believe in the principle of the sovereignty of nations on which our security and the security of our friends and allies depends, if we believe that nations get to decide on their own economic, political, and security alliances, we must support Ukraine in its fight against its bullying neighbor. Russian aggression cannot stand.

Republican and Democratic administrations over three decades have been generous with assistance funding, both civilian and military, and political support. With overwhelming bipartisan majorities, Congress has imposed harsh sanctions on Russia for invading and occupying Ukraine.

Mr. Chairman, there are two Ukraine stories today. The first is the one we are discussing this morning and that you have been hearing for the past two weeks. It is a rancorous story about whistleblowers, Mr. Giuliani, side channels, quid pro quos, corruption, and interference in elections. In this story Ukraine is merely an object.

But there is another Ukraine story—a positive, bipartisan one. In this second story, Ukraine is the subject. This one is about young people in a

young nation, struggling to break free of its past, hopeful that their new government will finally usher in a new Ukraine, proud of its independence from Russia, eager to join Western institutions and enjoy a more secure and prosperous life. This story describes a nation developing an inclusive, democratic nationalism, not unlike what we in America, in our best moments, feel about our diverse country—less concerned about what language we speak, what religion if any we practice, where our parents and grandparents came from; more concerned about building a new country.

And I am now glad to answer your questions.