

POLITICS

# Rough Transcript Shows Trump Pressed Ukraine to ‘Look Into’ Joe Biden and Son

Administration prepares to turn over whistleblower complaint to Congress by the end of the week

*By Rebecca Ballhaus, Sadie Gurman and Dustin Volz*

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WASHINGTON—President Trump asked his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, to “look into” former Vice President Joe Biden and his son and said he would direct his personal lawyer and Attorney General William Barr to contact Mr. Zelensky to help him in a possible investigation, according to a document released Wednesday by the White House.

The document, a rough transcription of a July phone call between the leaders, also revealed that Mr. Trump, before asking Ukraine to examine actions by Mr. Biden’s son, reminded Mr. Zelensky that the U.S. sends security aid to Ukraine.

“I will say that we do a lot for Ukraine,” the president said. “We spend a lot of effort and a lot of time.” He contrasted the U.S. aid with what European countries do to help Ukraine.

According to the document, Mr. Trump didn’t make an explicit link on the call between the U.S. aid—which he had ordered be placed on hold a week earlier—and an investigation into Mr. Biden’s son. Mr. Zelensky responded that the president was “absolutely right” and that European countries were “not working as much as they should work for Ukraine.”

The lack of an explicit quid pro quo didn’t quiet the calls among Democrats on Capitol Hill for an impeachment inquiry, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) made formal a day earlier, citing the Republican president’s interactions with Ukraine. The number of House lawmakers publicly supporting an impeachment probe increased to 218, hitting the number needed for a House vote on the investigation. Mrs. Pelosi, however, intends to avoid such a vote and has reclassified current House probes as now falling “under that umbrella of impeachment inquiry.”

“The transcript and the Justice Department’s acting in a rogue fashion in being complicit in the President’s lawlessness confirm the need for an impeachment inquiry,” Mrs. Pelosi said in a statement Wednesday. “Clearly, the Congress must act.”

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The five-page document, which the White House and President Trump have referred to as a transcript, isn't verbatim and was based on voice-recognition software along with the "notes and recollections" of White House Situation Room and National Security Council officials, a senior administration official said. The call, which included translators, lasted about 30 minutes.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday that Mr. Trump pressured Ukraine's president in the July 25 phone call to investigate the Bidens. People familiar with the conversation said Mr. Trump urged Mr. Zelensky about eight times to work with Mr. Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani.

The document released Wednesday shows Mr. Trump urging Mr. Zelensky to work with Mr. Giuliani at least five times and to work with Mr. Barr at least five times.

Concerns about the call were raised in a complaint from a whistleblower in the intelligence community and referred by the director of national intelligence to the Justice Department for a possible investigation into whether Mr. Trump had committed campaign finance violations, department officials said Wednesday.

But officials, including career lawyers from the department's public integrity section, concluded within weeks that there wasn't enough evidence to open a criminal probe, and declined to do so. They relied on the White House's record of the Ukraine call, which an official said was the "best evidence" available.

The officials didn't take into consideration that Mr. Trump was withholding aid to Ukraine when they analyzed whether he committed a campaign-finance violation because they considered it a foreign policy matter that wasn't within the scope of what the Justice Department was asked to review, according to department officials.

Mr. Barr didn't consult with ethics officials about the possibility of recusing himself from the department's review, they said, but he wasn't involved in the analysis.

The whistleblower complaint—which contains information beyond the July call with Mr. Zelensky, according to people familiar with the matter—was also referred by the intelligence community's inspector general to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which deferred to the Justice Department's analysis, the officials said.

Hours after the White House released its record of the call, Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky, who both were at the United Nations, met for the first time. Asked whether he felt pressured by Mr. Trump to investigate Mr. Biden, Mr. Zelensky said, "Nobody pushed me."

Mr. Trump, who earlier called the July conversation a "nothing call," heaped praise on his lawyer, Mr. Giuliani, and reiterated his support for Mr. Giuliani's efforts to pursue investigations in Ukraine.

At a news conference later in the day, Mr. Trump said he would also release a transcript of an earlier phone call he had with Mr. Zelensky "if it's important to you," adding that he didn't like the precedent it would set. "It's hard to do business that way," Mr. Trump said.

He said that administration officials had spoken with Ukraine about releasing Wednesday's rough transcript.

Mr. Biden on Wednesday harshly criticized the July phone conversation between Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky. "It is a tragedy for this country that our president put personal politics above his sacred oath. He has put his own political interests over our national security interest, which is bolstering Ukraine against Russian pressure," he said in a statement.

Before the release of the document, a number of Republican lawmakers were called to the White House to review it. They included Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a close ally of the president, who later appeared on television news shows to dismiss Democratic assertions of wrongdoing, casting the call between the two leaders as "largely laudatory."

The president phoned into the White House meeting from New York, according to a person familiar with the matter.

On the call with Mr. Zelensky, Mr. Trump raised a discredited claim that Mr. Giuliani, has been pressing for months: that as vice president, Mr. Biden—now a leading 2020 presidential contender—called for the ouster of Ukraine's prosecutor general to protect his son, Hunter, who sat on the board of a company whose owner the prosecutor had investigated.

The prosecutor was the target of widespread criticism from the U.S. and other countries and had in fact hampered the investigation into the company, Burisma Group. Ukraine's prosecutor general in May said he had no evidence of wrongdoing by Mr. Biden or his son.

"There's a lot of talk about Biden's son, that Biden stopped the prosecution and a lot of people want to find out about that so whatever you can do with the attorney general would be great," Mr. Trump told Mr. Zelensky. "Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution, so if you can look into it...it sounds horrible to me."

Mr. Trump said Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Barr would call Mr. Zelensky and added: "I'm sure you will figure it out."

A Justice Department spokeswoman said the president never asked Mr. Barr to make the call nor did he ask the attorney general to investigate Mr. Biden. Mr. Barr also didn't discuss the call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky or other matters related to Ukraine with Mr. Giuliani, she said, and he wasn't aware that the president had invoked his name during the call until the complaint was referred to the Justice Department several weeks later.

Mr. Barr has had no communication with Ukraine, the spokeswoman said.

Mr. Barr months ago tapped John Durham, Connecticut's top federal prosecutor, to separately investigate the origins of the counterintelligence probe into Russian election interference that was ultimately taken over by former special counsel Robert Mueller.

Mr. Durham is "separately exploring the extent to which a number of countries, including Ukraine, played a role in the counterintelligence investigation directed at the Trump campaign during the 2016 election," the spokeswoman said, adding that "certain Ukrainians who are not members of the government have volunteered information to Mr. Durham, which he is evaluating."

In the call with Mr. Trump, Mr. Zelensky assured him that the new Ukraine prosecutor general would "look into the situation," and said that if Mr. Trump had any additional information to provide, it would be "very helpful for the investigation."

Mr. Zelensky was the first person on the call to bring up Mr. Giuliani, after the president asked him to "do us a favor" and investigate matters involving Ukraine related to Mr. Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election.

In the call, Mr. Trump pointed to Mr. Mueller's testimony before Congress a day earlier, which he said was "incompetent," but added that "a lot" of the special counsel's investigation had "started with Ukraine."

“Whatever you can do, it’s very important that you do it if that’s possible,” Mr. Trump said.

Mr. Zelensky was receptive, telling the president that he was ready to “open a new page on cooperation in relations” between the two countries. He also told the president that one of his aides had spoken with Mr. Giuliani recently, and he added that he hoped to meet Mr. Giuliani if he traveled to Ukraine.

Mr. Giuliani in May scuttled a planned trip to Kyiv to meet with Mr. Zelensky after news of it became public.

Mr. Trump on the call repeatedly praised Mr. Giuliani, calling him a “highly respected man” who “very much knows what’s happening.”

“If you could speak to him, that would be great,” Mr. Trump said.

Mr. Trump also criticized the former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, who was ousted in May, saying she was “bad news.” Mr. Zelensky agreed, saying he agreed “100%” that she was a bad ambassador and that “her attitude towards me was far from the best.” Mr. Trump assured him that the ambassador, Marie Yovanovitch, was “going to go through some things.”

It is highly unusual for a president to criticize his own country’s ambassador to a foreign leader. Conservatives, including the president’s son Donald Trump Jr. , criticized Ms. Yovanovitch this spring as being anti-Trump.

Activists in Ukraine and colleagues of the ambassador, a career diplomat, said she was disliked by many of Mr. Giuliani’s protégés in Ukraine, who said she wasn’t sympathetic with the president’s agenda. The ambassador couldn’t be reached for comment.

The document also revealed for the first time that Mr. Trump also sought to recruit the newly minted Ukrainian president to help undermine the widely accepted conclusion that Russia was responsible for the hack of the Democratic National Committee in 2016.

During the call, Mr. Trump asked Mr. Zelensky to do another favor for the U.S. related to a debunked conspiracy about the U.S.-based cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike, which conducted forensic analysis of the DNC’s computer network after it was broken into in 2016.

CrowdStrike concluded the hack was carried out by Russian intelligence officers, a finding corroborated by U.S. intelligence agencies and Mr. Mueller. But Mr. Trump has repeatedly cast doubt on the conclusion of Russian involvement in the Democratic hacks, and said in an April 2017 interview that CrowdStrike’s findings may not be credible because the company is “Ukrainian-based,” which is false.

“With regards to our investigation of the DNC hack in 2016, we provided all forensic evidence and analysis to the FBI,” CrowdStrike said in a statement. “As we’ve stated before, we stand by

our findings and conclusions that have been fully supported by the U.S. Intelligence community.”

Lawmakers are continuing to investigate whether there was a link between the request that Ukraine investigate Mr. Biden and the administration’s decision to put a hold on nearly \$400 million in aid to Ukraine this summer. About a week before his call with Mr. Zelensky, the president directed his acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, to put a hold on the funds, the Journal has reported.

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The investigations on Capitol Hill will escalate in the coming days, when Joseph Maguire, the acting director of national intelligence, is set to testify before the House Intelligence Committee about the whistleblower complaint. The White House is preparing to allow the complaint to be turned over to Congress by the end of the week, according to a person familiar with the matter.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D., Calif.) on Tuesday also asked the whistleblower to speak to the Intelligence Committee on a voluntary basis on Thursday.

In a seven-page opinion released Wednesday, the Justice Department’s office of legal counsel advised the director of national intelligence that the whistleblower’s complaint didn’t require reporting to Congress. The complaint didn’t constitute an “urgent concern” because it arose not in connection to U.S. government intelligence activity but in “a confidential diplomatic communication between the president and a foreign leader” that the whistleblower received secondhand, the opinion says.

The whistleblower, whose identity remains unknown to Justice Department officials, said that unnamed White House officials had expressed concern about the content of the phone call. The inspector general said his preliminary review found some signs “of an arguable political bias on the part of the [whistleblower] in favor of a rival political candidate” but nonetheless concluded that the allegations appeared credible.

—*Alan Cullison and Alex Leary contributed to this article.*

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