Opening Statement of Ambassador William B. Taylor - October 22, 2019

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today to provide my perspective on the events that are the subject of the Committees' inquiry. My sole purpose is to provide the Committees with my views about the strategic importance of Ukraine to the United States as well as additional information about the incidents in question.

I have dedicated my life to serving U.S. interests at home and abroad in both military and civilian roles. My background and experience are nonpartisan and I have been honored to serve under every administration, Republican and Democratic, since 1985.

For 50 years, I have served the country, 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; and more recently, as Executive Vice President of the nonpartisan United States Institute of Peace.

While I have served in many places and in different capacities, I have a particular interest in and respect for the importance of our country's relationship with Ukraine. Our national security demands that this relationship remain strong. However, in August and September of this year, I became increasingly concerned that our relationship with Ukraine was being fundamentally undermined by an irregular, informal channel of U.S. policy-making and by the withholding of vital security assistance for domestic political reasons. I hope my remarks today will help the Committees understand why I believed that to be the case.

At the outset, I would like to convey several key points. First, Ukraine is a strategic partner of the United States, important for the security of our country as well as Europe. Second, Ukraine is, right at this moment—while we sit in this room—and for the last five years, under armed attack from Russia. Third, the security assistance we provide is crucial to Ukraine's defense against Russian aggression, and, more importantly, sends a signal to Ukrainians—and Russians—that we are Ukraine's reliable strategic partner. And finally, as the Committees are now aware, I said on September 9 in a message to Ambassador Gordon Sondland 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 still believe that.

Let me now provide the Committees a chronology of the events that led to my concern.

On May 28 of this year, I met with Secretary Mike Pompeo who asked me to return to Kyiv to lead our embassy in Ukraine. It was—and is—a critical time in U.S.-Ukraine relations: Volodymyr Zelenskyy had just been elected president and Ukraine remained at war with Russia. As the summer approached, a new Ukrainian government would be seated, parliamentary elections were imminent, and the Ukrainian political trajectory would be set for the next several years.

I had served as Ambassador to Ukraine from 2006 to 2009, having been nominated by George W. Bush, and, in the intervening 10 years, I have stayed engaged with Ukraine, visiting frequently since 2013 as a board member of a small Ukrainian non-governmental organization supporting good governance and reform. Across the responsibilities I have had in public service, Ukraine is special for me, and Secretary Pompeo's offer to return as Chief of Mission was compelling. I am convinced of the profound importance of Ukraine to the security of the United States and Europe for two related reasons:

First, if Ukraine succeeds in breaking free of Russian influence, it is possible for Europe to be whole, free, democratic, and at peace. In contrast, if Russia dominates Ukraine, Russia will again become an empire, oppressing its people, and threatening its neighbors and the rest of the world.

Second, with the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the continued aggression in Donbas, Russia violated countless treaties, ignored all commitments, and dismissed all the principles that have kept the peace and contributed to prosperity in Europe since World War II. To restore Ukraine's independence, Russia must leave Ukraine. This has been and should continue to be a bipartisan U.S. foreign policy goal.

When I was serving outside of government during the Obama administration and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, I 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 against Russia.

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. When I talked to her about accepting the offer, however, she urged me to go, both for policy reasons and for the morale of the embassy.

Before answering the Secretary, I consulted both my wife and a respected former senior Republican official who has been a mentor to me. 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. I worried about what I had heard concerning the role of Rudolph Giuliani, who had made several high-profile 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.

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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. I also brought with me a framed copy of the Secretary's declaration that the United States would never recognize the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea.

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

First, the encouraging: President Zelenskyy was taking over Ukraine in a hurry. He had appointed reformist ministers and supported long-stalled anti-corruption legislation. He took quick executive action, including opening Ukraine's High Anti-Corruption Court, which was established under the previous presidential administration but never allowed to operate. He called snap parliamentary elections—his party was so new it had no representation in the Rada—and later won an overwhelming mandate, controlling 60 percent of the seats. With his new parliamentary majority, President Zelenskyy changed the Ukrainian constitution to remove absolute immunity from Rada deputies, which had been the source of raw corruption for two decades. There was much excitement in Kyiv that this time things could be different—a new Ukraine might finally be breaking from its corrupt, post-Soviet past.

And yet, I found a confusing and unusual arrangement for making U.S. policy towards Ukraine. There appeared to be two channels of U.S. policy-making and implementation, one regular and one highly irregular. As the Chief of Mission, 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. This regular channel of U.S. policy-making has consistently had strong, bipartisan support both in Congress and in all administrations since Ukraine's independence from Russia in 1991.

At the same time, however, there was an irregular, informal channel of U.S. policy-making with respect to Ukraine, one which included then-Special Envoy Kurt Volker, Ambassador Sondland, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, 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. This 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 returned to Washington enthusiastic 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, President Trump did not share their enthusiasm for a meeting with Mr. Zelenskyy.

When I first arrived in Kyiv, in June and July, the actions of both the regular and the irregular channels of foreign policy served 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, one the goals of both channels was 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. During a conference call with Ambassador Volker, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phil Reeker, Secretary Perry, Ambassador Sondland, and Counselor of the U.S. Department of State Ulrich Brechbuhl on June 18, it was clear that a meeting between the two presidents was an agreed-upon goal.

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 about what President Zelenskyy should do to get the White House meeting. Again, it was not clear to me on that call what this meant, but Ambassador Volker noted that 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 Stanytsia-Luhanska bridge. President Zelenskyy also said he looked forward to the White House visit President Trump had offered in his May 29 letter.

I reported on this call to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent, who had responsibility for Ukraine, and I wrote a memo for the record dated June 30 that summarized our conversation with President Zelenskyy.

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.

On July 10, Ukrainian officials Alexander Danyliuk, the Ukrainian national security advisor, and Andriy Yermak, an assistant to President Zelenskyy, and Secretary Perry, then-National Security Advisor John Bolton, Ambassador Volker, and Ambassador Sondland met at the White House. I did not participate in the meeting and did not receive a readout of it until speaking with the National Security Council's (NSC's) then-Senior Director for European and Russian Affairs, Fiona Hill, and the NSC's Director of European Affairs, Alex Vindman, on July 19.

On July 10 in Kyiv, I met with President Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrei Bohdan, and then-foreign policy advisor to the president and now Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko, who told me that they had heard from Mr. Giuliani that the phone call between the two presidents was unlikely to happen and that they were alarmed and disappointed. I relayed their concerns to Counselor Brechbuhl.

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 of 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.

The next day on the phone, Dr. Hill and Mr. Vindman 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 and that the Chief of Staff maintained a skeptical view of Ukraine.

In the same July 19 phone call, they gave me an account of the July 10 meeting with the Ukrainian officials at the White House. Specifically, they told me that Ambassador Sondland had connected "investigations" with an Oval Office meeting for President Zelenskyy, which so irritated Ambassador Bolton that he abruptly ended the meeting, telling Dr. Hill and Mr. 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 on July 19 and in the early morning of July 20 (Kyiv time), I received text messages on a three-way WhatsApp text conversation with Ambassadors Volker and Sondland, a record of which I understand has already been provided to the

Committees 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 Zelensky to say that he will help investigation—and address any specific personnel issues—if there are any."

Later on 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 Mr. Danyliuk, during which he conveyed to me that President Zelenskyy did not want to be used as a pawn 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. Strangely, even though I was Chief of Mission 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.

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. Over 13,000 Ukrainians had been killed 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 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.

On August 16, I exchanged text messages with Ambassador Volker in which I learned that Mr. Yermak 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. referral 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 Counselor 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—amazingly, news of the hold did not leak out 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. 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, August 29, Mr. Yermak contacted me and was 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 soon 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. Indeed, 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 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 I had with Mr. Morrison, he went on to describe a conversation Ambassador Sondland had with Mr. Yermak at 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. 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 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 the Ukrainian officials to whom he spoke that 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. We also discussed 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 room in Warsaw, where Mr. Danyliuk expressed 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 Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Zagordnyuk that day.

During my call with Mr. Morrison on September 2, I also briefed Mr. Morrison on what Ambassador Sondland had told me during our call the day prior.

On September 5, I hosted Senators Johnson and Murphy for a visit to Kyiv. During their visit, 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 Ukrainian official contacts. But the 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 said 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." Ambassador Sondland said that he had talked to President Zelenskyy and Mr. Yermak and 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 with CNN.

After the call with Ambassador Sondland on September 8, 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, 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."

Before these text messages, 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, he said, the businessman asks that person to pay up before signing the check. Ambassador Volker used the same terms 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, I learned on September 11 that the hold had been lifted and that the security assistance would be provided.

After I learned that the security assistance was released on September 11, I personally conveyed the news to President Zelenskyy and Foreign Minister Prystaiko. 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.

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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 Committees are investigating, and I hope that this chronology will provide some framework for your questions.

I wish to conclude by returning to the points I made at the outset. Ukraine is important to the security of the United States. It has been attacked by Russia, which continues its aggression against Ukraine. If we believe in the principle of sovereignty of nations on which our security and the security of our friends and allies depends, we must support Ukraine in its fight against its bullying neighbor. Russian aggression cannot stand.

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 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.

Because of the strategic importance of Ukraine in our effort to create a whole, free Europe, we, through Republican and Democratic administrations over three decades, have supported Ukraine. Congress has been generous over the years with assistance funding, both civilian and military, and political support. With overwhelming bipartisan majorities, Congress has supported Ukraine with harsh sanctions on Russia for invading and occupying Ukraine. We can be proud of that support and that we have stood up to a dictator's aggression against a democratic neighbor.

It is this second story that I would like to leave you with today.

And I am glad to answer your questions.