

Top US diplomat in Ukraine tells impeachment inquiry Trump tied military aid to Biden probe

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The United States' top diplomat in Ukraine, William B. Taylor, told the congressional committees leading the impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump that the president withheld military aid in an effort to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky into announcing that he was opening an investigation into former Vice President Joe Biden.

Taylor, who presented himself as a “nonpartisan” career State Department official, took over the top post in Kiev in June shortly after Trump removed Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, who subsequently became the first State Department official to testify in the impeachment inquiry earlier this month.

Delivered at a closed-door session on Tuesday and reportedly based on meticulous notes kept during his time in Kiev, Taylor's opening remarks to the House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, and Oversight committees were published by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* shortly after they were made.

Taylor said that over the past several months he became concerned “that our relationship with Ukraine was being fundamentally undermined by an irregular, informal channel of US policy-making and by the withholding of vital security assistance for domestic political reasons.”

He told of overhearing a staffer in the White House Office of Management and Budget relate that she was ordered by the president at a National Security Council conference call in July not to release military aid to Ukraine.

Taylor also explained how US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland insisted that there was no “quid pro quo.” Rather, Trump was just a businessman closing a deal. Taylor cited Sondland as

saying that 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.”

Taylor's testimony Tuesday contradicts that of Sondland and the Trump administration's special envoy to Ukraine, Kurt Volker, both of whom have told the impeachment inquiry that there was never any “quid pro quo” pressure to announce an investigation of the Ukrainian gas company Burisma Holdings, which had hired Biden's son Hunter Biden to sit on its board of directors, in return for the delivery of US military equipment.

The Democrats are basing their impeachment drive on appeals to disaffected sections of the military brass and intelligence establishment. They are not seeking Trump's impeachment on the grounds of his fascistic attacks on immigrants, his rejection of congressional oversight and moves to establish a personalist regime, or his threats to annihilate North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan. Rather, they are basing it on Trump's alleged “softness” toward Russia and his reluctance to maintain and expand the US military intervention in the Middle East.

It is increasingly clear that powerful sections of the national security establishment have lost confidence in Trump and are cooperating with the impeachment inquiry in an effort either to remove him outright or shift his foreign policy in a more anti-Russian direction.

The effort to impeach Trump has gained steam in the aftermath of his decision earlier this month to order the withdrawal of US troops illegally stationed in northeastern Syria, allowing Turkey to launch a military operation against Washington's erstwhile

Kurdish allies. That Russian President Vladimir Putin has since stepped into the void left by the US withdrawal to broker a deal between Turkey and the Kurds will only further enrage Trump's Democratic opponents.

Taylor served as ambassador to Ukraine from 2006 to 2009 under George W. Bush and briefly under Obama. He continued to intervene in Ukrainian affairs in the subsequent decade, urging the Obama administration to provide lethal weaponry to help Kiev suppress pro-Russia separatists in the civil war that erupted after a US-backed, fascist-led coup overthrew a pro-Moscow government in February 2014.

Taylor used his testimony to outline what the faction he represents sees as the "strategic importance of Ukraine to the United States." Employing the standard pro-democracy rhetoric that is used to cover the predatory aims of US imperialism around the world, he said that "if Ukraine succeeds in breaking free of Russian influence, it is possible for Europe to be whole, free, democratic and at peace [i.e., under US domination]. 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."

Responding to Taylor's testimony, Republican Representative Will Hurd, a former CIA agent, called for further testimony, including from Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, who was coordinating the back-channel operations in Ukraine. He also called for further clarification from Sondland.

"I think people will have to come back in," Hurd told the *Washington Post*. "I think someone we should hear from is Rudy Giuliani, to understand what he was doing and who he was talking to, and to sort all of these issues out." The *Post* reported that Hurd said his decision on impeachment would be made on a determination of whether or not Trump had violated the law in his dealings with Ukraine.

For his part, Trump provoked a backlash from both his Democratic opponents and some Republicans on Tuesday when he tweeted that the impeachment inquiry was a "lynching." Republican Senator Susan Collins pointedly criticized Trump, tweeting, "'Lynching' brings back images of a terrible time in our nation's history, and the president never should have made that comparison." House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy

also distanced himself from the tweet, telling reporters, "I don't agree with that language. It's pretty simple."



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