

Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) told POLITICO that the security assistance was released on Wednesday night. | J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

BUDGET

Trump administration backs off hold on Ukraine military aid

By **CAITLIN EMMA, JACQUELINE FELDSCHER, WESLEY MORGAN** and **CONNOR O'BRIEN** | 09/12/2019 01:30 PM EDT | Updated 09/12/2019 02:49 PM EDT

The Trump administration has lifted its hold on \$250 million in military assistance to Ukraine following intense bipartisan backlash from lawmakers who argued that the funding is crucial for warding off Russian aggression in the region.

POLITICO [first reported](#) last month that President Donald Trump asked his national security team to review funding for the program, known as the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, in order to ensure the money is being used in the best interests of the United States.

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A senior administration official confirmed on Thursday that the funds are now available. The official didn't provide any information on the results of the administration's review.

Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) told POLITICO that the security assistance was released on Wednesday night. The Illinois Democrat offered an amendment during Thursday's Senate markup of annual defense spending legislation that would have held back money in the Pentagon's budget in order to prevent the Trump administration from once again withholding military aid for Ukraine during the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

"I heard about it first thing this morning," Durbin said, referring to the release of the aid. "It's beyond a coincidence that they released it the night before our vote in the committee."

The White House hold on the funds incensed lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, including Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), one of Trump's top allies and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations and Appropriations committees.

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The administration also found little support from the Pentagon. A senior Defense Department official told POLITICO last month that "the department has reviewed the foreign assistance package and supports it."

Democrats announced an [investigation](#) this week into whether the holdup was connected to efforts by Trump's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, to persuade the Ukrainian government to investigate business dealings by the son of former Vice President Joe Biden.

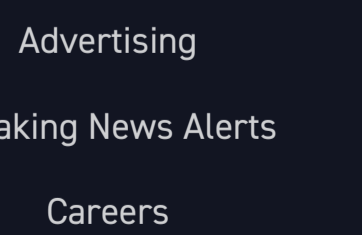
Trump and Giuliani "appear to have acted outside legitimate law enforcement and diplomatic channels to coerce the Ukrainian government into pursuing two politically-motivated investigations under the guise of anti-corruption activity," House Foreign Affairs Chairman Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) and Oversight Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) wrote in letters this week.

Separately, the State Department is preparing to give \$141.5 million in aid to Ukraine. The aid, which Congress was notified about on Wednesday, includes about \$115 million to help the Ukrainian military build capabilities and \$16.5 million specifically for maritime security in the Black Sea. The funds could be sent to Ukraine as early as the end of the month.

"We're talking about security assistance that includes OCO [Overseas Contingency Operations] funding," Clarke Cooper, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs, told reporters Thursday morning, adding that the package does not include any direct arms sales. "That's what we did notification on. I'd anticipate that we'll do further notification."

"This was not FMS [Foreign Military Sales]. This was just security assistance," he added.

"Our policy on Ukraine has not changed," a State Department official said. "The international community, including the United States, strongly supports Ukraine in the face of Russia's ongoing aggressive actions."



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