

In context: Adam Schiff's dramatized version of the Trump-Zelensky call

By [Bill McCarthy](#) on Monday, September 30th, 2019 at 5:32 p.m.



Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., speaks before Acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire testifies before the House Intelligence Committee in Washington on Sept. 26, 2019. (AP/Monsivais)

President Donald Trump has been railing against Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., for the way Schiff described Trump's phone call with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky.

Trump has said Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, should [resign](#) and be [prosecuted](#) for [treason](#) over what he said during congressional testimony on Sept. 26.

"Rep. Adam Schiff illegally made up a FAKE & terrible statement, pretended it to be mine as the most important part of my call to the Ukrainian President, and read it aloud to Congress and the American people," Trump said [Sept. 30](#) in the most recent of [several tweets attacking Schiff](#). "It bore NO relationship to what I said on the call. Arrest for Treason?"

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— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) September 30, 2019

Trump's tweet misses a significant point. Schiff explicitly said that he was trying to describe "the essence" of Trump's message "shorn of its rambling character and in not so many words." He never tried to read the president's remarks in full, nor did he pretend to offer Trump's words.

The incident in question came during acting director of national intelligence Joseph Maguire's testimony about the Trump-Zelensky phone call and a whistleblower complaint describing it.

On the July call, Trump urged Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a potential challenger in the 2020 presidential election. Trump and his allies have charged, [without evidence](#), that Biden forced Ukraine to remove its [lead prosecutor](#) in order to protect his son Hunter, who worked for a Ukrainian company that had been under investigation.

During Maguire's testimony, Schiff presented a dramatized version of the call between Trump and Zelensky. Later, when Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, pointed out that what Schiff said did not match the readout of the call, Schiff said his summary was "meant to be at least part in parody."

It's worth noting that the [readout released by the White House](#) of Trump's conversation with Zelensky is "not a verbatim transcript," according to the document. Still, we wanted to look at Schiff's comments in the context of the hearing and relative to the text of the readout.

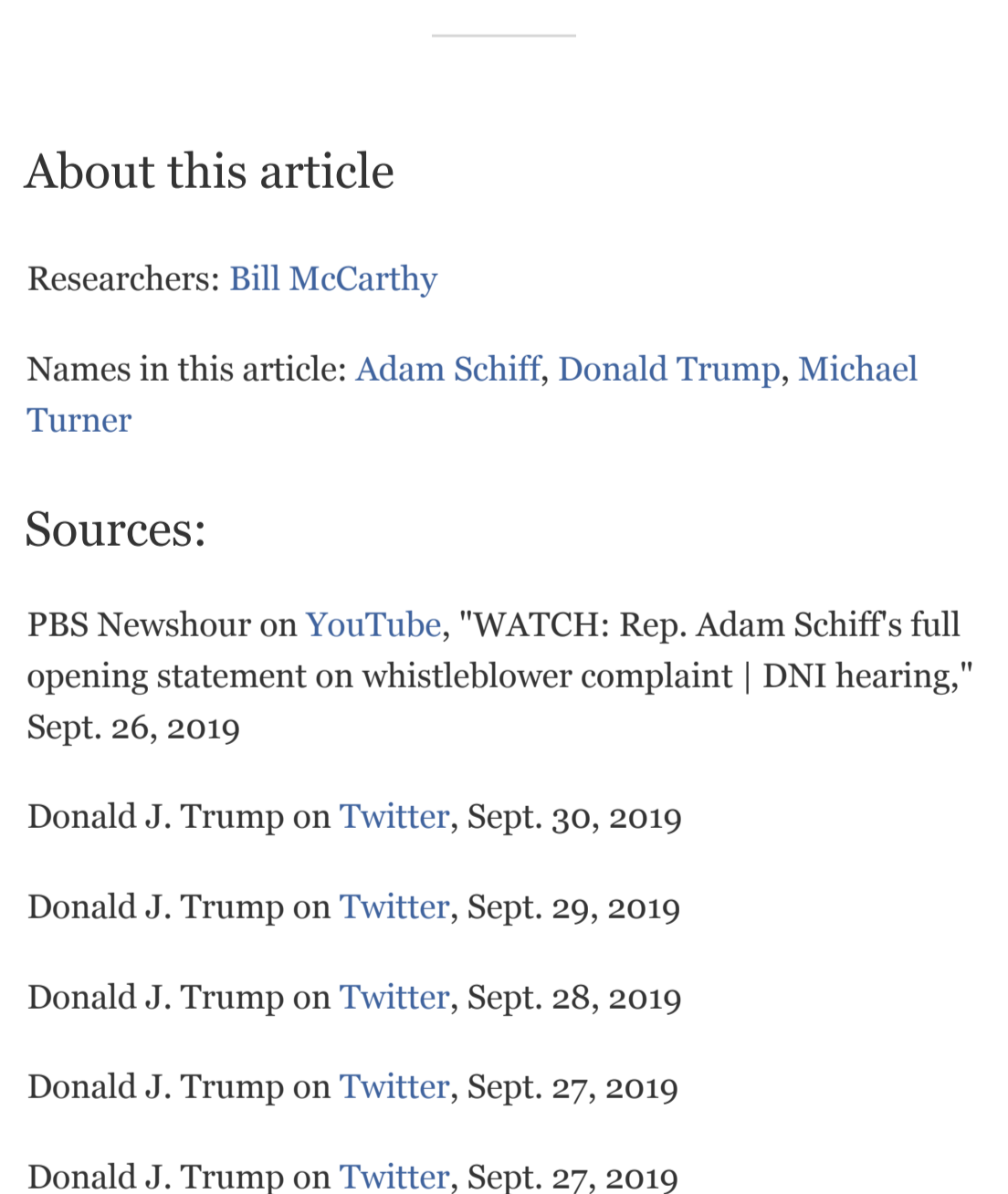
Schiff's remarks

Schiff opened [his remarks](#) by detailing how Ukraine relies on the United States for military support and providing other context about the Trump administration's relationship with Ukrainian leadership.

For example, Schiff said Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani had already "made it abundantly clear to Ukrainian officials over several months that the president wanted dirt on his political opponent."

Next, Schiff noted — accurately, according to the readout — that Zelensky began the call "by ingratiating himself" and trying to get Trump's support.

Then, Schiff [gave his interpretation](#) of what Trump said on the call, which he said "reads like a classic organized crime shakedown."



Here's what Schiff said:

"Shorn of its rambling character and in not so many words, this is the essence of what the president communicates: 'We've been very good to your country. Very good. No other country has done as much as we have. But you know what? I don't see much reciprocity here. I hear what you want. I have a favor I want from you, though. And I'm going to say this only seven times, so you better listen good. I want you to make up dirt on my political opponent, understand? Lots of it. On this and on that. I'm going to put you in touch with people, not just any people. I'm going to put you in touch with the attorney general of the United States, my attorney general Bill Barr. He's got the whole weight of the American law enforcement behind him. And I'm going to put you in touch with Rudy. You're going to love him, trust me. You know what I'm asking and so I'm only going to say this a few more times, in a few more ways. And by the way, don't call me again. I'll call you when you've done what I asked.'

"This is, in sum and character, what the president was trying to communicate with the president of Ukraine. It would be funny if it wasn't such a graphic betrayal of the President's oath of office. But as it does represent a real betrayal, there's nothing the president says here that is in America's interest after all."

Republicans said Schiff made it seem like he was reading directly from the readout of the call. Schiff repeatedly glanced down at the notes in front of him, and he did not make it clear which parts of his summary were exaggerated.

But Schiff also introduced the remarks as "the essence of what the president communicates" and described them as "in sum and character, what the president was trying to communicate."

"It was clear in context of Chairman Schiff's opening statement that he was not intentionally misleading anyone, and this is a bad faith attack by the president and his allies to distract from Trump's misconduct," Schiff spokesman Patrick Boland told PolitiFact.

What Schiff got right and wrong

Despite Trump's claims, Schiff's statement was not entirely made-up. His summary of the [readout](#) was mostly accurate save for a few strays and exaggerations.

For starters, Trump did emphasize how good the United States has been to Ukraine.

"I will say that we do a lot for Ukraine," Trump told Zelensky, according to the readout. "We spend a lot of effort and a lot of time. Much more than the European countries are doing."

"The United States has been very very good to Ukraine," Trump continued. "I wouldn't say that it's reciprocal necessarily because things are happening that are not good but the United States has been very very good to Ukraine."

Later in the call, Trump said, "I would like you to do us a favor though." Trump asked Zelensky to look into a cybersecurity company called CrowdStrike and a "server" he believes is in Ukraine. He said he would have Attorney General Bill Barr call Zelensky.

Zelensky responded that one of his assistants had spoken already to Giuliani and promised Trump that "all the investigations will be done openly and candidly." At that point, Trump steered the conversation to the Bidens and Ukraine's ousted former prosecutor general.

"I heard you had a prosecutor who was very good and he was shut down and that's really unfair," Trump said, according to the readout.

"The other thing, 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," he continued. "Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution so if you can look into it ... It sounds horrible to me."

So, Trump never explicitly asked Zelensky to "make up dirt" on Biden, as Schiff said. And he did not repeat the demand seven times — a detail Schiff [admitted](#) was exaggerated.

But Trump did, however, urge Zelensky to investigate Biden on the basis of an [unsubstantiated allegation](#). He mentioned the ousted Ukrainian prosecutor twice, and he repeatedly said he'd get Zelensky in touch with Giuliani and Barr.

Finally, Trump did not say Zelensky could not call back until he'd satisfied Trump's demands, as Schiff said. In reality, the call ended with Trump congratulating Zelensky on his election.

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