

Volker: Trump said Ukraine 'tried to take me down' and was influenced by negative information from Giuliani

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(CNN) — Former US special envoy to Ukraine [Kurt Volker](#) explained in his opening statement to Congress that he connected the President's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani with Ukraine's leadership in an effort to convince Giuliani — and, through him, President Donald Trump — there was new leadership in Ukraine that could be trusted.

In Volker's statement, which was delivered during his closed-door testimony Thursday and obtained by CNN, the US diplomat portrays himself as someone who was seeking to divert Giuliani's influence on the President and help Trump see that the new government was serious about reform.



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Volker said that Trump was "skeptical" of Ukraine's leadership, which he said was understandable given the country's history of corruption, but he also added that the President suggested that Ukraine "tried to take me down," a reference to the unproven allegations that Ukraine was involved in the 2016 election meddling.

"He said that Ukraine was a corrupt country, full of 'terrible people,'" Volker said of Trump. "He said they 'tried to take me down.' In the course of that conversation, he referenced conversations with Mayor Giuliani. It was clear to me that despite the positive news and recommendations being conveyed by this official delegation about the new President, President Trump had a deeply rooted negative view on Ukraine rooted in the past. He was clearly receiving other information from other sources, including Mayor Giuliani, that was more negative, causing him to retain this negative view."

Volker's testimony adds new context to the explosive text messages he provided Congress with his testimony. The texts were released Thursday by the House Intelligence Committee. They show that the push from Trump and Giuliani for Ukraine to launch an investigation was linked to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's desire to have a face-to-face meeting with Trump.

"Heard from the White House -- assuming President Z convinces trump he will investigate/'get to the bottom of what happened' in 2016, we will nail down date for visit to Washington," Volker said via text to the Ukrainian adviser on the morning of July 25.

That July 25 phone call between Trump and Zelensky is at the heart of the Democrats' impeachment inquiry, following a whistleblower complaint alleging that Trump solicited foreign interference to dig up information on a political rival and the White House tried to cover it up.

Volker testified that he was not aware of any effort to urge Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden — and he made a point to distinguish investigations into Biden with investigations into Burisma, the energy company where Hunter Biden was hired as a board member.

But Volker added he was not aware that Biden was mentioned on the July 25 call until the transcript was released.

Democrats have seized on the text messages as further evidence that Trump was seeking to have Ukraine interfere in the 2020 election, and that he was using the prospect of a meeting and military aid to push Ukraine to investigate.

unconnected to Giuliani's push for an investigation.

Volker testified that he became aware that the foreign aid to Ukraine was being held up but at the same time that he was connecting Ukrainian leadership aides with Giuliani, but he said he "did not perceive these issues to be linked in any way."

The text messages released Thursday, however, suggest there was concern the two issues were linked.

"Are we now saying that security assistance and WH meeting are conditioned on investigations?" Bill Taylor, a senior US diplomat in Ukraine, texted US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland on September 1.

"Call me," Sondland responded.

Taylor later texted it was "crazy to withhold security assistance for help with a political campaign," which Sondland then responded was "incorrect about President Trump's intentions."

Volker testified that as accusations against the Bidens began to be aired publicly earlier this year, he cautioned the Ukrainians to distinguish between efforts to fight corruption domestically and doing anything that could be interpreted as interfering in US elections. "To the best of my knowledge, no such actions by Ukraine were ever taken, at least in part, I believe, because of the advice I gave them," he said.

Volker made a point to praise Biden in his testimony, saying the suggestion he would be influenced by his son's position at Burisma "simply has no credibility to me."

"I know him as a man of integrity and dedication to our country," Volker said.

The former special envoy also made a point in his testimony to praise former US Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, who was recalled earlier this year and has been criticized by the President.

"I have always known her to be professional, capable, dedicated to the national interest, and of the highest integrity," Volker said.

Volker said that he told Giuliani the allegations coming from then-Prosecutor General Yuri Lutsenko about Ukraine's meddling in the 2016 elections and Burisma were not credible. He said that Giuliani had urged the Ukrainians to draft a statement about investigating corruption, and that the Ukrainians were already planning to do so. But, as CNN reported Thursday, Giuliani wanted the statement to include "Burisma" and "2016," and the Ukrainians did not feel comfortable doing so.

Ukraine's presidential adviser "said that for a number of reasons -- including the fact that Mr. Lutsenko was still officially the Prosecutor General -- they do not want to mention Burisma and 2016," Volker testified. "I agreed -- and further said that I believe it is essential that Ukraine do nothing that could be seen as interfering in 2020 elections."

This story has been updated with additional developments on Friday.



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