

Rough Transcript of Trump's First Phone Call With Ukrainian Leader Released

The White House's release of a memo about the call does not mention "corruption," which appeared in an earlier description of the conversation.



By Mark Mazzetti and Eileen Sullivan

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WASHINGTON — President Trump on Friday released a memorandum of an April telephone conversation he had with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine that differed from a summary of the call released by the White House months ago.

The memorandum of the call, which took place after Mr. Zelensky won a landslide presidential election, shows the two men praising each other's political acumen and predicting an era of warm relations between the United States and Ukraine. There is no mention of Mr. Trump's determination to have Ukraine's government investigate his political rivals — one subject of a July phone call that has become the focus of an impeachment inquiry in Congress.

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But a White House readout of the call in April offers a different account. In that summary, provided to reporters shortly after the call took place, the administration said that Mr. Trump promised to work with Mr. Zelensky "to implement reforms that strengthen democracy, increase prosperity and root out corruption."

A White House spokesman, Hogan Gidley, gave no explanation for the discrepancy but said "it is standard operating procedure for the National Security Council to provide readouts of the president's phone calls with foreign leaders. This one was prepared by the N.S.C.'s Ukraine expert," an apparent reference to Lt. Col Alexander Vindman, who has given damaging testimony about Mr. Trump in a closed-door deposition and is scheduled to testify in public next week.

Colonel Vindman declined to comment. A person familiar with White House preparations did not know why language about corruption was included in the news release about the April phone call but said that talking points given to Mr. Trump before the call specifically mentioned corruption and the president chose not to discuss the issue with Mr. Zelensky.

National Security Council aides had prepared the briefing materials and the news release together, an administration official said. But when Mr. Trump ignored their suggestion to bring up corruption, long a widespread issue in Ukraine, no one updated the release before the White House sent it to reporters, added the official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

On April 21, Mr. Zelensky, an unseasoned politician who promised to rid the country of its endemic corruption, won the presidency in a stunning victory. When he spoke with Mr. Trump that day, he said he admired Mr. Trump's outsider victory in 2016 and studied some of Mr. Trump's tactics.

In the memorandum of the call released on Friday, Mr. Trump said, "I have no doubt you will be a fantastic president," invited Mr. Zelensky to the White House and heaped praise on Ukraine.

"When I owned Miss Universe, they always had great people," Mr. Trump said, referring to the beauty pageant.

The rough transcript released Friday was of a telephone call three months before a July conversation Mr. Trump had with Mr. Zelensky. During that call, Mr. Trump appeared to condition American military aid to Ukraine on whether Mr. Zelensky agreed to pursue investigations into the Biden family and he claimed that Ukrainians tried to undermine the Trump campaign in 2016.

Last month, the acting White House chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, confirmed that Mr. Trump was indeed offering a quid pro quo during that July 25 call, but dismissed the controversy and said people needed to "get over it."

Mr. Mulvaney took back the declaration later that day.

Mr. Trump has argued that the tenor of both phone calls was appropriate, but Colonel Vindman, who listened to both conversations, has told impeachment investigators that Mr. Trump's tone was noticeably different during the call this summer.

"The tone in the call on the 21st of April was very positive, in my assessment. The call, the tone of the call on July 25 was not," he told investigators during the closed-door deposition.

"I'm struggling for the words, but it was not a positive call. It was dour," Colonel Vindman said. "The difference between the calls was apparent."

At the time of the April call, the White House had been buffeted by revelations contained in the special counsel's report on Russia's interference in the 2016 election — which revealed a pervasive Russian campaign and a vigorous effort by Mr. Trump to thwart the special counsel's work.

"How do you impeach a Republican President for a crime that was committed by the Democrats? MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!" Mr. Trump tweeted that evening.

Maggie Haberman and Kenneth P. Vogel contributed reporting from Washington, and Danny Hakim from New York.

Common Questions About Impeachment

- **What is impeachment?**

Impeachment is charging a holder of public office with misconduct.

- **Why is the impeachment process happening now?**

A whistle-blower complaint filed in August said that White House officials believed they had witnessed Mr. Trump abuse his power for political gain.

- **Can you explain what President Trump is accused of doing?**

President Trump is accused of breaking the law by pressuring the president of Ukraine to look into former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., a potential Democratic opponent in the 2020 election.

- **What did the President say to the president of Ukraine?**

Here is a reconstructed transcript of Mr. Trump's call to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, released by The White House.


- **What is the impeachment process like?**

Here are answers to seven key questions about the process.

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