

Testimony: How Trump helped Ukraine

by Byron York | November 07, 2019 01:52 AM

One notable and little-reported conclusion emerging from the House Democratic impeachment proceedings is a consensus among some foreign policy professionals that President Trump's Ukraine policy has been an improvement over President Barack Obama's.

Ukraine was an occasionally hot issue in the 2016 campaign for all the wrong reasons. At the Republican convention, a [false headline](#) in the *Washington Post*, "Trump campaign guts GOP's anti-Russia stance on Ukraine," gave birth to a [false narrative](#) that candidate Trump, desperate to appease Vladimir Putin, would undermine U.S. support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression.

Then Trump became president, and his administration enacted a new policy that not only continued a broad range of assistance to Ukraine but also expanded that aid to include the provision of Javelin anti-tank missiles — the so-called "lethal aid" that the Obama administration had declined to provide.

The Trump aid program has significantly helped Ukraine defend itself against Russia, according to three career foreign policy officials whose impeachment investigation testimony has been released in recent days: William Taylor, the highest-ranking American diplomat in Ukraine; Kurt Volker, the former U.S. special envoy for Ukraine; and Marie Yovanovitch, the former ambassador to Ukraine who was recalled by Trump in May.

Start with [Taylor](#). Questioned by Republican lawyer Steve Castor, Taylor called Trump administration policy a "substantial improvement" over what came before.

"Once you joined the administration in Kiev, were you happy with the package of aid?" asked Castor.

"I was happy that we were providing aid," Taylor said. "It could always be more. But I was glad if it was coming. I would've been very unhappy if it didn't come."

"But the Trump administration had a package of aid to the Ukraine?"

"Yes."

"Including lethal defensive weapons?"

"Yes."

"Financial assistance?"

"I was very happy about that."

"And was that an improvement [over] years prior?"

"It was."

"Was it a substantial improvement?"

"It was a substantial improvement, in that this administration provided Javelin anti-tank weapons," Taylor explained. The shoulder-fired missiles, he said, "successfully deter Russians from trying to grab more territory."

"They were also a very strong political message that said that Americans were willing to provide more than blankets," Taylor continued. "I mean, that was the previous. And these weapons are serious weapons. They kill Russian tanks. So these were serious weapons. It was a demonstration that we support Ukraine."

The "provide more than blankets" line was a clear reference to the Obama administration's refusal to provide lethal aid to Ukraine. There is much commentary today slamming Trump for temporarily delaying the delivery of aid over the summer — that is the core of the Democrats' impeachment case — but the fact is, when it comes to lethal aid, Trump provided what Obama did not.

Then there was [Volker](#).

"There has been U.S. assistance provided to Ukraine for some time," he told the House. "Under the Bush administration, Obama administration, and now under the Trump administration. I was particularly interested in the security assistance and lethal defensive weapons. The reason for this is this was something that the Obama administration did not approve. They did not want to send lethal defensive arms to Ukraine. I fundamentally disagreed with that decision."

"I thought that this is a country that is defending itself against Russian aggression," Volker continued. "They had their military largely destroyed by Russia in 2014 and 2015 and needed the help. And humanitarian assistance is great, and nonlethal assistance, you know MREs and blankets and all, that's fine, but if you're being attacked with mortars and artilleries and tanks, you need to be able to fight back."

"And has the lethal defensive arms that have been provided to date, has that been helpful?" asked Castor.

"It has been extremely helpful."

"And ... you can see materially that this is helping the country of Ukraine?"

"Absolutely."

[Yovanovitch](#), removed from her post by Trump, was less inclined to give the president credit for anything. But even she admitted that her preferred policy in Ukraine — lethal aid — became reality under Trump.

"Can you testify to the difference the changes in aid to Ukraine with the new administration starting in 2017?" Castor asked. "The different initiatives, you know, as far as providing lethal weapons and — "

"Yeah, well, I think that most of the assistance programs that we had, you know, continued," Yovanovitch answered, "and due to the generosity of the Congress actually increased."

"In terms of lethal assistance," she continued, "We all felt it was very significant that this administration made the decision to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine."

"Did you advocate for that?"

"Yes."

"And did you advocate for that prior to the new administration back in 2016?"

"Well, yeah."

Despite Yovanovitch's advocacy, that aid never came from Obama. From Trump, it did. Amid all the accusations flying around in the Democratic impeachment campaign, it's important to remember that basic fact.