

Giuliani Renews Push for Ukraine to Investigate Trump's Political Opponents



Rudolph W. Giuliani attending a rally for President Trump in Manchester, N.H., last week. Mr. Giuliani has recently been in touch with a Ukrainian official, pushing for probes that could help Mr. Trump's re-election campaign. Anna MoneyMaker/The New York Times

By Kenneth P. Vogel and Andrew E. Kramer

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WASHINGTON — Months after backing out of a trip to Ukraine amid criticism that he was mixing partisan politics with foreign policy, Rudolph W. Giuliani, President Trump's personal lawyer, has renewed his push for the Ukrainian government to pursue investigations into political opponents of Mr. Trump.

Over the last few weeks, Mr. Giuliani has spoken on the phone and held an in-person meeting, in Madrid, with a top representative of the new Ukrainian president, encouraging his government to ramp up investigations into two matters of intense interest to Mr. Trump.

One is whether Ukrainian officials took steps during the 2016 election to damage Mr. Trump's campaign. The other is whether there was anything improper about the overlap between former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s diplomatic efforts in Ukraine and his [son's role with a gas company there](#).

Mr. Giuliani said he was acting on his own as a private citizen, with the knowledge and assistance of the State Department. He would not say whether Mr. Trump approved — or is aware of — the effort.

But his outreach is the latest chapter in a remarkable effort by Mr. Giuliani, who conducts [private business around the world](#), to use his status as Mr. Trump's lawyer to try to influence another country's affairs to help his client politically.

His previous efforts to pressure the Ukrainians had drawn condemnation from Democrats. And during a trip to Washington last month, Mr. Giuliani's Ukrainian contact was urged by an aide to Representative Steny H. Hoyer, the Democratic majority leader, not to work with Mr. Giuliani on the issues, according to people familiar with the meeting.

The conflicting directives from the two parties in the United States highlight the tricky calculus facing Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian who was elected president of Ukraine in April by a wide margin after campaigning on promises to root out corruption and to seek a settlement to the war with Russian-backed separatists that has killed 13,000 Ukrainians.

The situation in Washington poses an early — and potentially significant — test for Mr. Zelensky and his fledgling government. Relations with the United States are pivotal for Ukraine. Its army has been fortified by American military aid, including soldiers deployed as trainers, and Ukrainian officials want that to continue. Mr. Zelensky is also appealing for greater American diplomatic backing in peace talks.

Mr. Zelensky's handling of the requests to investigate the two politically charged matters is likely to upset either Mr. Trump and his Republican supporters, or top Democrats, including allies of Mr. Biden, a leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.

A Ukrainian news site [asserted](#) that “if Ukraine supports the current president and sells out Biden, it would become a cause of deep and irreversible processes which later will circle back on Ukraine in a very unpleasant manner.”

Mr. Giuliani's efforts have inflamed the situation, said several government officials who handle foreign policy in the United States and Ukraine. Speaking anonymously to avoid running afoul of Mr. Trump or his allies, they blamed Mr. Giuliani for complicating efforts to arrange a visit by Mr. Zelensky to the White House, and for creating a perception that such a meeting would be contingent upon the new Ukrainian government demonstrating support for the investigations.

While Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky have spoken on the phone, they have yet to meet in person. Meetings are possible next month, either on the sidelines of the United Nations meeting in New York or when Mr. Trump attends a World War II commemoration in Poland.

But the Ukrainians covet a White House meeting as a symbolic show of support from a president who has often [passed up opportunities to aggressively condemn Russia](#) for its aggression.

In an interview on Tuesday, Mr. Giuliani cast his efforts as intended to help Ukraine advance its long fight to root out corruption across its government, [including among prosecutors](#). But he did not totally reject the suggestion that he was complicating relations between the two governments.

“I can't really evaluate that — whether my involvement in it makes it worse or better,” he said. “I can't see how advocating for an investigation of two alleged crimes puts too much pressure on them, other than to do the right thing.”

He acknowledged that he had “strongly urged” the Ukrainian official, Andriy Yermak, a close ally of Mr. Zelensky, to “just investigate the darn things.”

A former mayor of New York and federal prosecutor, Mr. Giuliani conceded that Mr. Zelensky is in a difficult position, but, he said, “When you have a decision like that, you're going to piss off somebody, so you might as well make the right decision, right?”

He said he came away from his interactions with Mr. Yermak “pretty confident they're going to investigate it.”

In interviews this month, Mr. Yermak, a lawyer and former television producer who has known Mr. Zelensky for years, said he discussed with Mr. Giuliani both the possible heads of state meeting and the investigations. But he said they did not discuss a link between the two.

“He said he's very interested in seeing the new Ukrainian government being open and openly investigating all these cases,” said Mr. Yermak.

He said he told Mr. Giuliani and, separately, congressional staff with whom he met last month in Washington that the new government was committed to fairly investigating possible crimes, but all decisions would have to wait until the Ukrainian parliament confirmed a new top prosecutor, no earlier than next month. Mr. Yermak said he did not interpret his conversation with Mr. Hoyer's staff as a warning to avoid investigating the Biden matter.

Mr. Yermak was dispatched to Washington by Mr. Zelensky last month to build relationships with American officials, discuss possible American sanctions on a Russian oil pipeline and set the stage for a Trump-Zelensky meeting, for which Mr. Yermak said “we are waiting impatiently.”

Mr. Yermak said it was not clear to him whether Mr. Giuliani was representing Mr. Trump in their talks.

Mr. Giuliani said he explicitly stated that he was not.

The White House referred questions about Mr. Giuliani's role to the State Department, which did not respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Giuliani said he briefed State Department officials on the back-channel communications. They were arranged with assistance from the State Department, including Kurt D. Volker, the United States envoy to settlement talks in Ukraine's war with Russia, who met at the White House last month with Mr. Yermak, another Ukrainian official and [top Trump administration officials](#).

Mr. Volker declined to comment on the Giuliani-Yermak talks.

Mr. Yermak said he asked Mr. Volker to arrange the talks, and people familiar with the effort said it was intended at least partly to turn down the temperature around the issue.

Mr. Giuliani was widely criticized after [it was reported](#) that he and his associates had been working to advance the investigations with Ukrainian prosecutors who had been appointed under Mr. Zelensky's predecessors and who had been accused of corruption.

The prosecutors had been pushing investigations into the gas company for which Mr. Biden's son Hunter worked and the oligarch who owned it. The prosecutors had also been pushing investigations into Ukrainian officials accused of improperly trying to damage Mr. Trump's 2016 campaign.

The criticism of Mr. Giuliani escalated after The New York Times [revealed that he planned to travel to Kiev](#) in May to encourage Mr. Zelensky, who had yet to take office at that point, to press ahead with the investigations.

Amid the uproar, Mr. Giuliani, who has [done business in Ukraine, canceled the trip](#), accusing Democrats of misrepresenting his efforts and suggesting that some members of Mr. Zelensky's team never intended to give him a fair hearing and were in fact trying to lure him into a “set up.”