

Ukraine's President Says Call With Trump Was 'Normal'

By Alan Yuhas

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Ukraine's president, in his first public comments on the phone call that led to an impeachment inquiry into President Trump, said Wednesday that the call was "normal," that "nobody pushed me," and that he did not want to become entangled in American elections.

"I'm sorry, but I don't want to be involved in the democratic elections of U.S.A.," said the Ukrainian leader, Volodymyr Zelensky, speaking to reporters with Mr. Trump on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

"We had, I think, a good phone call," Mr. Zelensky added, referring to a call the leaders had on July 25, which is at the center of the inquiry. "It was normal. We spoke about many things. And so, I think, and you read it, that nobody pushed — pushed me."

Mr. Trump quickly interjected, saying, "in other words, no pressure, because you know what, there was no pressure."

Mr. Zelensky became a central figure last week in the impeachment debate in the United States over whether President Trump sought help from a foreign power against one of his domestic political opponents.

Mr. Trump and his personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, have said publicly that they believe his leading Democratic opponent, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., should be investigated in connection with his son's role in a Ukrainian energy company.

The president has also publicly accused Mr. Biden and his son of "creating to the corruption already in the Ukraine," and acknowledged raising the corruption allegations in a phone call with Mr. Zelensky on July 25. He raised allegations of corruption again on Wednesday.

[The controversy has thrust Mr. Zelensky into the center of a standoff between Mr. Trump and Democrats.]

The push toward opening a formal impeachment inquiry gained significant momentum after senior administration officials said that Mr. Trump personally ordered the suspension of \$391 million in aid to Ukraine in the days before the call. Since Russia claimed Crimea as its territory in 2014 and started backing separatists in eastern Ukraine, the government in Kiev has received tens of millions in military aid from Western nations, including from the United States under President Barack Obama and President Trump.

Mr. Trump has defended his conversation with Mr. Zelensky as “totally appropriate,” and said there had been “no quid pro quo” linking American aid to a Ukrainian investigation into Mr. Biden.

Mr. Zelensky has not announced any new investigations into Mr. Biden or his son. Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, he said Ukraine had a new prosecutor general, “a highly professional man” who would investigate “any case he considers and deems appropriate.”

“We have an independent country,” he said. “I can’t push anyone.”

Earlier on Wednesday, with the impeachment inquiry now rocketing to the center of attention in the United States, Mr. Zelensky did not make any references to Mr. Trump or even the American military aid for Ukraine in its war with Russian-backed separatists — a central element in the inquiry.

Instead, in his address to the annual General Assembly session at the United Nations, Mr. Zelensky spoke at length about the toll of wars around the world, and especially in Ukraine.

“Nobody will feel safe while Russia is waging war against Ukraine in the center of Europe,” he said. “The thought that this has nothing to do with you or will never touch your interests will be fatal.”

Mr. Zelensky also insisted that every nation had a stake in conflicts that seemed distant.

“We cannot think globally while turning a blind eye to small things, or as some may believe, to trifles,” he continued. “That is how the foundation of two world wars was laid down, and as a result millions of human lives have paid the price for negligence, silence, inaction or an unwillingness to relinquish our own ambitions.”

Mr. Zelensky, 41, vaulted into Ukraine’s highest office this year with an unconventional campaign and an even more unconventional background: He starred in a popular TV comedy about a schoolteacher who is unexpectedly elected president after a rant about corruption is posted online.

The actor adopted the name of the show, “Servant of the People,” for the name of a new political party, and the platform of his character — taking on Ukraine’s corrupt oligarchs — for a campaign platform. He proceeded to bowl over a crowded field of candidates, most of them career politicians, and roundly defeated the incumbent president, the billionaire President Petro O. Poroshenko, in the final election.

Yet Mr. Zelensky took office in a country sapped by decades of corruption and more than five years of war against Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine’s east. He has put those two issues at the top of his agenda, and this month orchestrated a prisoner swap with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, in what Mr. Zelensky called “the first step to end the war.”

On Tuesday night, Mr. Zelensky said in a statement that he planned to invite Mr. Trump to Ukraine.

“I expect us to have awesome relations with the United States,” he said in the statement. “I expect us to invite Donald Trump to visit Ukraine. I would like the leaders of the countries to come and see how great Ukraine is. One should believe not the words, but the eyes.”

He added that “the most important thing” was that “nobody forgets about Ukraine.”

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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