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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Trump tries to force Ukraine to meddle in the 2020 election

By **Editorial Board**

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UKRAINE'S NEOPHYTE president, Volodymyr Zelensky, took a big step this week toward proving that he will be, as he promised, the most pro-reform president in Ukraine's history. On Monday, he laid out a breathtakingly ambitious five-year plan including virtually every measure the International Monetary Fund and Western governments have urged on Ukraine in recent years, from land reform to the privatization of state companies to a cleansing of the judiciary.

That ought to be cause for celebration in Washington, where successive Democratic and Republican administrations have tried to draw Ukraine away from Vladimir Putin's Russia and into the ranks of Western democracies, only to be frustrated by the fecklessness and corruption of the country's political leaders. Yet Mr. Zelensky has so far failed to win the backing of President Trump. Not only has Mr. Trump refused to grant the Ukrainian leader a White House visit, but also he has suspended the delivery of \$250 million in U.S. military aid to a country still fighting Russian aggression in its eastern provinces.

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Some suspect Mr. Trump is once again catering to Mr. Putin, who is dedicated to undermining Ukrainian democracy and independence. But we're reliably told that the president has a second and more venal agenda: He is attempting to force Mr. Zelensky to intervene in the 2020 U.S. presidential election by launching an investigation of the leading Democratic candidate, Joe Biden. Mr. Trump is not just soliciting Ukraine's help with his presidential campaign; he is using U.S. military aid the country desperately needs in an attempt to extort it.

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The strong-arming of Mr. Zelensky was openly reported to the New York Times last month by Mr. Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, who said he had met in Madrid with a close associate of the Ukrainian leader and urged that the new government restart an investigation of Mr. Biden and his son. Hunter Biden served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company, while Joe Biden, as vice president, urged the dismissal of Ukraine's top prosecutor, who investigated the firm.

Mr. Giuliani also wants a probe of claims that revelations of payments by a Ukrainian political party to Mr. Trump's 2016 campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, were part of a plot to wreck Mr. Trump's candidacy. In other words, Trump associates want the Ukrainian government to prove that Ukraine improperly acted against Mr. Trump in the 2016 election; but they also want it to meddle in his favor for 2020.

Mr. Zelensky is incapable of delivering on either demand. The revelations about Mr. Manafort came from a Ukrainian legislator who was fighting for domestic reform, not Hillary Clinton. And the Biden case, which has already been investigated by Ukrainian authorities, is bogus on its face. The former vice president was one of a host of senior Western officials who pressed for the dismissal of the prosecutor, who was accused of blocking anti-corruption measures.

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The White House claims Mr. Trump suspended Ukraine's military aid in order for it be reviewed. But, as CNN reported, the Pentagon has already completed the study and recommended that the hold be lifted. Yet Mr. Trump has not yet acted. If his recalcitrance has a rationale, other than seeking to compel a foreign government to aid his reelection, the president has yet to reveal it.

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