

Debunking Trump's Defenses: Trump Did Extort Ukraine

With no way to defend him on the substance, President Donald Trump's defenders have instead [argued](#) that Trump did nothing wrong and that therefore, there are no grounds for an impeachment inquiry. A [memo](#) from House Republicans noted, "U.S. security assistance flowed to Ukraine ... without Ukraine investigating President Trump's political rivals." This absurd argument holds that, since Trump ultimately released the military aid he initially withheld from Ukraine, there was no extortion. **This just isn't true.**

At Trump's order, the government withheld crucial military aid to Ukraine, in violation of U.S. law.

- In July, the Department of Defense (DOD) [informed](#) the White House that if military aid wasn't released by August 6, "it would not be able to spend it all by the end of the fiscal year" as required by federal law. The Pentagon even prepared a [legal analysis](#) challenging the decision.
- The White House [did not](#) release the aid by the DOD's deadline. Missing this deadline made it clear that the White House was willing to unlawfully deny Ukraine aid to get what it wanted.
- The order came from the top: Trump [directed](#) his acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, to withhold the aid. Office of Management and Budget officials then informed the State Department and the DOD about the directive. [Mulvaney](#) and [William Taylor](#), the top U.S. diplomat in Ukraine, have both confirmed this.

Trump only released the aid once he was caught and the scheme was exposed.

- The White House [released](#) the aid on September 11. By then, both [Congress](#) and the White House [already knew](#) a whistleblower had filed a complaint about Trump's extortion of Ukraine.
- Congress was also [pressuring](#) the White House to release the aid.
- Two days before Trump [released](#) the aid, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland reportedly "told Trump that concerns were being raised that the President's actions amounted to a quid pro quo."

Ukraine knew the aid was being withheld and was aware that it was being extorted.

- According to *The New York Times*, Pentagon officials [informed their Ukrainian counterparts](#) about the hold in the first week of August. National Security Council official Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman was also [contacted](#) by Ukraine about the hold in mid-August.
- On August 28, *Politico* [reported](#) that the administration was withholding \$250 million in military aid to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky aide Andrey Yermak [texted](#) the article to U.S. special envoy to Ukraine Kurt Volker, confirming that Ukraine knew aid was being withheld, and asked to talk.
- Vice President Mike Pence met with Zelensky in Warsaw on September 1. According to Taylor's [testimony](#), Pence told Zelensky that the [aid](#) was being withheld and that Ukraine would need "to do more to fight corruption." Taylor also testified that in Warsaw, Sondland informed Yermak "that the security assistance money would not come until President Zelenskyy had committed to pursue the Burisma investigation."
- By September, Zelensky's aides [had accepted](#) that, in order to receive the aid, Zelensky needed to publicly announce the investigations and planned for him to do so on CNN on September 13.
- Zelensky's government understood why aid was being withheld and would have complied with Trump's demands had congressional pressure not forced the White House to release the aid.