

Debunking Trump's Defenses: The July 25 Call Wasn't 'Perfect'—It Was Part of a Months-Long Extortion Scheme

President Donald Trump and his defenders are treating the White House's summary of his July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the only relevant piece of evidence. During the first public impeachment hearing, the Trump campaign [released a statement](#) saying that the lack of an explicit quid pro quo in the July 25 call proves that Trump did not extort Ukraine. **This mischaracterizes both the content of the call and the broader context of the ongoing extortion scheme.**

The [July 25 call](#) is impeachable in and of itself.

- According to [the summary of the call](#), Trump repeatedly suggested that Zelensky work with U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr and Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani to investigate conspiracy theories about the Bidens and Russian hacking in 2016.
- Trump's request amounted to actively inviting a foreign government to interfere in American democracy, which is [illegal](#) in and of itself.
- Trump raised the prospect of the investigations, which he [described](#) as "do[ing] us a favor," immediately after Zelensky [said](#) that Ukraine was "almost ready to buy more Javelins [missiles]," implicitly attaching "conditionality" and "pressure" to the request—two elements of a quid pro quo.
- Alex Vindman, a White House official who listened to the call, described Trump's request for an investigation as a "demand": "the power disparity between the President of the United States and the President of Ukraine is vast. ... It [the request] was a demand for him [Zelensky] to fulfill this particular prerequisite in order to get the [White House] meeting."

The White House's response clearly shows that the administration recognized that the call was improper.

- Vindman [testified](#) that he approached White House lawyers twice to express his concerns. Jennifer Williams, an aide to Vice President Mike Pence, was also on the call and reportedly [testified](#) that she found the call concerning.
- According to Vindman, the lawyers [told him](#) not to tell anyone what he had just heard and moved to place records of the call in a secret, secure server.
- Vindman also [testified](#) that the White House edited out key passages of the call, including a reference to Burisma, before releasing the summary.

The call was part of a broader extortion conspiracy.

- Before the call, the administration made clear to Ukrainian officials [at least three times](#) that a White House meeting was contingent on Zelensky announcing an investigation.
- The White House [decided to withhold aid](#) at least a week before the call occurred.
- Shortly after the call, the Department of Defense [told Ukrainian officials](#) that aid was being withheld and instructed them to contact the White House for further information.
- Multiple administration officials, including [Pence](#) and [Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland](#), subsequently informed Ukraine that aid was contingent on announcing Trump's desired investigations.

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- Meanwhile, Sondland and special envoy to Ukraine Kurt Volker, were [working with a Ukrainian official](#) to draft a statement for Zelensky to give, with input from Giuliani.
- Lev Parnas, who helped Giuliani arrange meetings in Ukraine, reportedly [claims](#) that, at Giuliani's instruction, he told Ukrainian officials as early as May 2019 that aid was contingent on investigating the Bidens. Giuliani denies that he instructed Parnas to do so.