

# U.S. envoy says Giuliani was given role on Ukraine policy

By ERIC TUCKER AND MARY CLARE JALONICK  
Associated Press



U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland arrives Thursday for a joint interview with the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and House Committee on Oversight and Reform on Capitol Hill in Washington.

AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

WASHINGTON — The U.S. ambassador to the European Union said Thursday that President Donald Trump directed him and other envoys to work with his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, on Ukraine policy and that he disagreed with the directive.

Gordon Sondland's closed-door testimony to House impeachment investigators was aimed at distancing himself from Trump and Giuliani's efforts to pressure Ukraine into investigating Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

Sondland said he was disappointed Trump instructed him to work with Giuliani, a directive that sidestepped the role of the State Department and the National Security Council. He also said he believed it was wrong to invite a foreign government to conduct investigations to influence American elections.

The ambassador was the latest in a series of witnesses to be privately interviewed by three House committees conducting the impeachment investigation. He was one of several current and former Trump administration officials who have provided new information — and detailed diplomats' concerns — about Trump and Giuliani and their attempts to influence Ukraine.

The investigators will continue apace next week, when they have tentatively scheduled at least eight additional interviews with a mix of State Department diplomats and White House aides. Democrats believe those witnesses can shed more light on Trump's dealings with Ukraine. One of the scheduled witnesses is the current top official at the U.S. embassy in Ukraine, Bill Taylor, who exchanged

text messages with Sondland this past summer as diplomats attempted to navigate Trump's demands.

Sondland's attempts to stand apart from Trump and Giuliani are notable since, unlike other career civil servants who have testified in the impeachment inquiry, he is a hand-picked political appointee of the president who contributed \$1 million to Trump's inaugural committee. His appearance was especially anticipated since the text messages and other witness testimony place him at the center of a foreign policy dialogue with Ukraine that officials feared circumvented normal channels and is now at the center of the House impeachment inquiry of Trump.

In prepared remarks obtained by The Associated Press, Sondland aimed to untether himself from any effort by the Republican president or Giuliani to have a political rival investigated, joining other current and former administration officials who have communicated to Congress misgivings about the administration's backchannel dealings with Ukraine.

But Sondland's pivotal role in the dialogue, including discussions about a quid pro quo in which Ukraine's leader would get a coveted White House visit in exchange for satisfying Trump's push for corruption-related investigations, may make those assertions tough for House Democrats to accept.

Sondland said he was disappointed by a May 23 White House meeting with Trump, who spurned calls by the ambassador and others to arrange a phone call and White House visit for the new Ukraine leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The president was skeptical that Ukraine was serious about reform and curbing corruption and, instead of arranging the meeting his envoys wanted, directed them to talk to Giuliani, Sondland said.

"We were also disappointed by the President's direction that we involve Mr. Giuliani," Sondland said. "Our view was that the men and women of the State Department, not the President's personal lawyer, should take responsibility for all aspects of U.S. foreign

policy towards Ukraine."

The envoys, he said, had a choice: They could abandon the goal of a White House meeting with Zelenskyy, something they saw as important in fostering U.S.-Ukraine relations, or they could do as Trump asked and work with Giuliani. He said he did not know until much later that Giuliani intended to push for the Biden probe.

When the phone call finally did occur, on July 25, Trump repeatedly prodded Zelenskyy to investigate the Bidens at the same time that the U.S. was withholding hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid from Ukraine. Sondland said he was not on the call.

"Let me state clearly: Inviting a foreign government to undertake investigations for the purpose of influencing an upcoming U.S. election would be wrong," Sondland said. "Withholding foreign aid in order to pressure a foreign government to take such steps would be wrong. I did not and would not ever participate in such undertakings."

Sondland, whose name surfaced in a whistleblower

complaint in August that helped spur the impeachment inquiry, is certain to be asked about text messages that were provided to the committees earlier this month by former Ukrainian envoy Kurt Volker.

The messages show Sondland, Volker and Taylor discussing an arrangement in which Ukraine's leader would be offered a White House visit in exchange for a public statement by Ukraine committing to undertake investigations into the 2016 U.S. presidential election and into Burisma, the gas company linked to Hunter Biden. Sondland said he did not know until recently that Hunter Biden sat on the company's board.

One text exchange that has attracted particular attention involves Taylor telling Sondland he thought it was "crazy" to withhold military aid from Ukraine "for help with a political campaign." Sondland replied that Trump had been clear about his intentions and that there was no quid pro quo.

Now, Sondland told lawmakers that Trump told him by phone before he sent the text that there was no quid pro quo and that he was simply parroting those reassurances to Taylor.

"I asked the President: 'What do you want from Ukraine?'" Sondland said. "The President responded, 'Nothing. There is no quid pro quo.' The President repeated: 'no quid pro quo' multiple times. This was a

very short call. And I recall the President was in a bad mood."

Sondland testified three days after Fiona Hill, a former White House aide, said his actions so unnerved then-national security adviser John Bolton that Bolton said he was not part of "whatever drug deal Sondland and Mulvaney are cooking up," a reference to White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney.

But Sondland said that neither Hill nor Bolton personally raised concerns about the Ukraine work directly with him.

In addition to Taylor, impeachment investigators have invited several other officials to testify next. It is unclear how many of them will show up, as Trump has said his administration won't cooperate. Several witnesses, including Sondland, are appearing only after the committee issued a subpoena.

Among the witnesses invited for testimony next week, according to a person familiar with the committees' schedule: State Department officials Philip Reeker and Suriya Jayanti; Office of Management and Budget Officials Russell Vought and Michael Duffey; National Security Council officials Alexander Vindman and Timothy Morrison and Defense Department official Kathryn Wheelbarger.

The person was not authorized to discuss the committees' plans and was granted anonymity.

## Turkey has agreed to cease-fire

By ZEKE MILLER  
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Vice President Mike Pence announced Thursday that the U.S. and Turkey had agreed to a five-day cease-fire in northern Syria to allow for a Kurdish withdrawal from a security zone roughly 20 miles south of the Turkish border, in what appeared to be a significant embrace of Turkey's position in the week-long conflict.

After more than four hours of negotiations with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Pence said the purpose of his high-level mission was to end the bloodshed caused by Turkey's invasion of Syria, and remained silent on whether the agreement amounted to another abandonment of the U.S.'s former Kurdish allies in the fight against the

Islamic State.

Turkish troops and Turkish-backed Syrian fighters launched their offensive against Kurdish forces in northern Syria a week ago, two days after Trump suddenly announced he was withdrawing the U.S. from the area.

Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lauded the deal as a significant achievement, and Trump tweeted that it was "a great day for civilization." But the agreement essentially gives the Turks what they had sought to achieve with their military operation in the first place. After the Kurdish forces are cleared from the safe zone, Turkey has committed to a permanent cease-fire but is under no obligation to withdraw its troops.

In addition, the deal gives Turkey relief from sanctions the adminis-

tration had imposed and threatened to impose since the invasion began, meaning there will be no penalty for the operation.

Kurdish forces were not party to the agreement, and it was not immediately clear whether they would comply. Before the talks, the Kurds indicated they would object to any agreement along the lines of what was announced by Pence. But Pence maintained that the U.S. had obtained "repeated assurances from them that they'll be moving out."

Ankara has long argued the Kurdish fighters are nothing more than an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which has waged a guerrilla campaign inside Turkey since the 1980s and which Turkey, as well as the U.S. and European Union, designate as a terrorist organization.

## Next G-7 to be held at Trump golf resort

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House said Thursday it has chosen President Donald Trump's golf resort near Miami as the site for next year's Group of Seven summit.

The announcement to hold the event at Trump National Doral comes at the same time the president has accused Joe Biden's family of profiting from public office because of Hunter Biden's business activities in Ukraine when his father was vice president.

The G-7 summit will be held June 10-12. The idea of holding the event at Trump's resort has been criticized by government ethics watchdogs.

Trump has touted his resort, saying it's close to

the airport, has plenty of hotel rooms and offers separate buildings for every delegation.

A team looking at the sites reported it was "the perfect physical location to do this," acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney said.

He said about a dozen potential sites were narrowed to a list of four finalists before Doral was selected.

"It became apparent at the end of that process that Doral was by far and away, far and away, the best physical facility for this meeting," Mulvaney said.

Mulvaney said holding the event at Doral would be dramatically cheaper than other sites and that Trump would not be profiting from the event.

"There's no issue here on him profiting from this

in any way, shape or form," Mulvaney said.

Some watchdog groups disagreed with Mulvaney's assessment.

Trump "no longer sees fit even to pretend that he is constrained by the law or the Constitution," said Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen.

"The president is now officially using the power of his office to help prop up his struggling golf business," said Noah Bookbinder, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

When the United States has hosted the summit before, it has been held in Puerto Rico; Williamsburg, Virginia; Houston; Denver; Sea Island, Georgia; and Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland.

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