

Trump slams 'partisan' whistleblower



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The reports show the president's willingness to abuse his power and abase our country

JOE BIDEN



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky -- a former comedian -- inherited an armed conflict against pro-Russian rebels that has killed nearly 13,000 in five years



● The identity of the whistleblower and the nature of the complaint have not been publicly revealed

Washington

US President Donald Trump on Friday vigorously rejected a whistleblower's claim of wrongdoing in a call with a foreign leader, amid reports he used the conversation to pressure Ukraine's president to investigate the son of Trump's Democratic rival Joe Biden.

The whistleblower's secret complaint has triggered a tense showdown between Congress, whose Democratic leaders are demanding to review the complaint, and the executive branch which has barred them from doing so.

It has also raised concerns Trump sought to strong-arm Ukraine into providing damaging information on the president's possible 2020 challenger, which would represent dangerous foreign meddling in the US election similar to the interference blamed on Russia in 2016, when Trump defeated Hillary Clinton.

According to a report by *The Washington Post*, which cited two unnamed former US officials, the complaint stemmed from Trump's communications with Ukraine, and a "promise" allegedly made by the president.

Trump slammed the story as "ridiculous" and attacked the "partisan whistleblower," even though he said he does not know the person's identity.

Trump insisted he had a "totally appropriate" conversation, without detailing with whom, or what was said, and suggested it was Biden and his son who should be investigated for their actions in Ukraine.

Biden shot back forcefully, demanding Trump immediately release the transcript of the call and saying the reports that Trump sought to coerce his Ukrainian counterpart, if true, amounted to "clear-cut corruption."

Suspicions have focused on a July 25 call between Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, a former comedian who was elected in May.

Trump's Democratic opponents have been probing that call in connection with allegations Trump and his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani tried to pressure the Ukrainian administration.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump pressed Zelensky about eight times on

the call to investigate possible corruption involving Biden's son Hunter, who worked with a Ukrainian natural gas company.

When asked by reporters whether he discussed the Bidens with Zelensky, Trump said curtly: "It doesn't matter what I discuss." But he did not deny having done so.

Instead he urged media to "look into"

Biden's involvement in Ukraine, and his videotaped comments last year in which the former US vice president said the Obama administration would freeze \$1 billion in US loan guarantees unless Kiev did not fire its top prosecutor.

"Somebody ought to look into that," Trump said.

'Political favour?'

Biden, who according to most polls leads Trump in a head-to-head matchup, said the reports show the president's "willingness to abuse his power and abase our country."

"It means that he used the power and resources of the United States to pressure a sovereign nation -- a partner that is still under direct assault from Russia -- pushing Ukraine to subvert the rule of law in the express hope of extracting a political favor," Biden said in a statement.

Amid the swirling allegations,

Giuliani told *CNN* Thursday that "of course I did" ask Ukraine to investigate Biden.

Giuliani said he did not know whether Trump brought up Biden, but said he would have "every right" to do so.

Adding yet another layer to the controversy, congressional policymakers were concerned the Trump administration had been holding back military aid to Ukraine at the time. The aid was finally released last week.

Zelensky inherited an armed conflict against pro-Russian rebels that has killed nearly 13,000 in five years and caused serious economic difficulties.

Democratic lawmakers say a president conditioning foreign aid on providing dirt on a US election rival would amount to grounds for impeachment.

"The president can't use US aid as a weapon to serve his own political purposes," House Democrat Seth Moulton tweeted. "This is an impeachable offense if true." Clinton herself weighed in Friday with a sharp critique.

"The president asked a foreign power to help him win an election. Again," she tweeted.

The scandal has set Washington on edge, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying the whistleblower complaint raises "grave, urgent concerns for our national security."

What we know

On August 12, an unknown whistleblower in the US intelligence community filed a complaint with Michael Atkinson, the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community (ICIG), regarding a matter of "urgent concern."

The identity of the whistleblower and the nature of the complaint have not been publicly revealed

After reviewing the complaint, Atkinson determined it was "credible" and forwarded it on August 26 to the acting Director of National Intelligence, Joseph Maguire, a Trump appointee.

The Democratic-led House Intelligence Committee is demanding that the whistleblower's complaint be turned over but Maguire has declined to share it. According to *The Washington Post*, the complaint concerned a "promise" Trump made in a recent phone call with a foreign leader.

Phone call

The phone call in question, according to US media reports, was a July 25 conver-

sation between Trump and Ukraine's newly elected President Volodymyr Zelensky.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Trump repeatedly pressured Zelensky in the call to investigate Hunter Biden, the son of Joe Biden, Trump's main potential 2020 reelection rival.

Hunter Biden in 2014 joined the board of Burisma Holdings, a Ukrainian gas firm accused of corrupt practices, but he has not been personally accused of any wrongdoing.

The *Journal* said Trump urged Zelensky "about eight times" during the call to work with Rudy Giuliani, his personal attorney, on a probe into Hunter Biden.

At the time of the conversation, the United States was holding up \$250 million in military aid for Ukraine, but the *Journal* said Trump did not mention the assistance during the conversation.

Three committees in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives have demanded that the White House

Hunter Biden, the son of former vice president Joe Biden



turn over a transcript of the call.

The committees claim it may include evidence of Trump and Giuliani's efforts to "improperly pressure" Ukraine to help his reelection bid.

They accused Trump and Giuliani of trying to coerce Ukraine, in exchange for military assistance, into conducting a "politically motivated" investigation into Hunter Biden.

"If the President is trying to pressure Ukraine into choosing between defending itself from Russian aggression without US assistance or leveraging its judicial system to serve the ends of the Trump campaign, this would represent a staggering abuse of power," the Democratic committee chairmen said.

The US military aid package for Ukraine, which is battling pro-Russian separatists, was finally approved by the White House last week.

Trump and Giuliani fight back

Trump for his part has insisted there was nothing untoward about the telephone call. "Virtually anytime I speak

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DONALD TRUMP

on the phone to a foreign leader, I understand that there may be many people listening from various US agencies, not to mention those from the other country itself," he tweeted on Thursday.

"Knowing all of this, is anybody dumb enough to believe that I would say something inappropriate with a foreign leader while on such a potentially 'heavily populated' call," he said. "I would only do what is right anyway, and only do good for the USA!"

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Friday, Trump described the story as a "political hack job" and said former vice president Joe Biden is the one who should be investigated. "It was a totally appropriate conversation," he said of the telephone call. "It was actually a beautiful conversation."

Trump claimed he didn't know the identity of the whistleblower but said he was a "partisan person."

Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, also took to Twitter to defend Trump. "A President telling a President of a well known corrupt country he better investigate corruption that affects US is doing his job," he tweeted.