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David Smith

## Ukraine knew of stalled aid far earlier than White House claims, official testifies

New evidence from impeachment inquiry witness Laura Cooper knocks down key pillar of Trump's defence

*Україна знала про затримку допомоги набагато раніше, ніж заявляє Білий дім, свідчить чиновник*

*Л. Купер, заступник помічника секретаря оборони Росії, України та Євразії, свідчить у справі імпичменту президента США. Конгресмен від демократів Е. Свауелл сказав, що її свідчення «руйнують два стовпи захисту президента» - що Україна не знала про заморожування допомоги і що Трамп є лідером з боротьби з корупцією.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/nov/20/trump-impeachment-testimony-laura-cooper-ukraine-aid>

Ukraine raised concerns about a hold on military aid on the same day as Donald Trump's infamous phone call with its president, a Pentagon official told the impeachment inquiry on Wednesday.

The evidence from Laura Cooper, a deputy assistant secretary of defence, knocks down a key pillar of the White House's defence: that Ukraine was unaware of the suspension of nearly \$400m in security assistance until a much later date.

Cooper told the House intelligence committee that her staff received an email on 25 July from the state department saying that Ukraine's embassy and the House foreign affairs committee were asking about military aid.

"On July 25th, a member of my staff got a question from a Ukraine embassy contact asking what was going on with Ukraine security assistance," Cooper testified. "Because at that time we did not know what the guidance was ... I was informed that the staff member told the Ukrainian official that we were moving forward but recommended that the Ukraine embassy check in with state [department]".

Asked later if the question referred specifically to the suspended aid, Cooper confirmed: "There was an awareness of that and there was an expression of concern."

On the morning of 25 July, Trump spoke by phone with the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, asking for a "favour" and seeking investigations into a gas company linked to the former vice-president Joe Biden's family and a debunked conspiracy theory about Ukrainian meddling in the 2016 election.

A day earlier, on 24 July, the special counsel Robert Mueller had testified to Congress about the findings of his report on Russian election interference, after which Trump tried to claim vindication. A day later, on 26 July, Trump was overheard talking about "investigations" on a phone call to the US ambassador to the EU, Gordon Sondland, who was meeting Ukrainian officials in Kiev.

Cooper's evidence, of which she was not aware when she testified behind closed doors, is significant because Republicans have claimed that Ukraine was only aware of the hold on military aid for two weeks before it was lifted on 11 September. It suggests that the Ukrainian president might have felt pressure to announce investigations from the day of the phone call onward.

The Democratic congressman Eric Swalwell told the witness her testimony "destroys two of the pillars of the president's defence" – that Ukraine did not know about the aid freeze and that Trump is a champion of anti-corruption efforts.

Cooper also testified that she had never discussed a hold on security assistance for Ukraine with Trump himself and never heard from him directly on the matter.

As the hearing went on with Cooper and David Hale, under secretary of state for political affairs, Trump remained defiant. ‘If this were a prizefight, they’d stop it!’ he tweeted.

## Key witnesses tell of concern over Trump's 'inappropriate' Ukraine call

Kurt Volker, witness requested by Republicans, says the investigations Trump requested amounted to ‘conspiracy theories’

[Tom McCarthy](#) in New York and [Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington

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Trump impeachment inquiry: key moments and revelations from day three of hearings – video

Two witnesses in the impeachment inquiry have described their concern over an “unusual” call between [Donald Trump](#) and the Ukrainian president in July, in which Trump ignored official talking points about fighting corruption to instead “demand” an investigation tied to Joe Biden.

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“What I heard was inappropriate and I reported it,” said Lt Col Alexander Vindman, a [Ukraine](#) adviser on the National Security Council. “I did so out of a sense of duty.”

Vindman and Jennifer Williams, a foreign policy adviser to the vice-president, Mike Pence, became the first public witnesses to offer a direct description of the 25 July call in which Trump asked [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) for a political “favor”.

“It was improper for the president of the United States to demand a foreign government investigation of a US citizen and a political opponent,” Vindman said.

In a further blow to Trump and his defenders, a witness requested by Republicans, the former Ukraine envoy Kurt Volker, said the investigations Trump requested of Zelenskiy were based on “conspiracy theories” and that “the allegations against Vice-President Biden were self-serving and not credible”.

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Zelenskiy: Ukraine tired of hearing about company at centre of impeachment inquiry - video

The House intelligence committee questioned the witnesses at the opening of a blockbuster week in which nine witnesses are expected to testify about the suspension last summer of US military aid for Ukraine and [Trump administration](#) attempts to get Zelenskyy to announce political investigations.



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Trump has said the request for investigations sprang from a desire to address corruption in Ukraine. That excuse was eroded badly on Tuesday, as Vindman testified that in the July phone call with Zelenskyy and an earlier call, Trump ignored talking points steering him to bring up anti-corruption efforts in Ukraine.

“The president can choose to use the talking points or not, he’s the president,” Vindman said. But what Trump spoke about instead on the second call – investigations of Biden and the gas company Burisma – sparked Vindman to action.

“Without hesitation, I knew that I had to report this to the White House counsel,” he said. “I had concerns and it was my duty to report my concerns to the proper people in the chain of command.” Before he saw an account of the call, Volker said, he thought he and others were pursuing an investigation of Burisma that did not involve a Biden angle. “In retrospect, I should have seen that connection differently,” Volker said, “and had I done so, I would have raised my own objections”. “I don’t think that raising 2016 elections or Vice-President Biden, these things that I consider to be conspiracy theories ... they’re not things that we should be pursuing as part of national security strategy with Ukraine.”

Republicans have argued that the Trump administration never directly tied military aid or the prospect of a White House visit to the announcement of investigations. But Vindman and Volker also provided the first public testimony about a scene in which Gordon Sondland, the ambassador to the European Union, did just that.

The former national security adviser John Bolton cut short a 10 July White House meeting with Ukrainian officials that Vindman also attended, Vindman said, “when Sondland started to speak about delivery of investigations”.

Sondland continued to press the request for investigations of “2016 elections, Biden and Burisma” in a second meeting, Vindman said.

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“I stated to Ambassador Sondland that this was inappropriate and had nothing to do with national security,” he said.

Volker and Tim Morrison, a senior National Security Council (NSC) official, testified in the afternoon. All four witnesses were previously deposed in closed-door meetings with the House intelligence committee, which is leading the investigation.



### ***Impeachment witness: I've never heard anything like Trump-Sondland Ukraine call***

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Trump has denied wrongdoing and attacked the witnesses on Twitter, baselessly calling both Vindman and Williams “Never Trumpers”, meaning dyed-in-the-wool Trump critics.

The Connecticut Democrat Jim Himes asked Vindman if he would call himself a “Never Trumper”. “I’d call myself ‘never partisan’,” Vindman said.

An active-duty army officer who came to the US from the Soviet Union at age three, Vindman appeared in his dress uniform, bearing a combat infantry badge and a Purple Heart medal, bestowed when he was wounded in [Iraq](#).

In a dramatic opening statement – with his twin brother Yevgeny, who serves on the National Security Council, seated behind him – he said his ability to testify about the president without fear for his life spoke to his father’s wisdom to move the family to America.

“Dad, this is proof that you made the right decision 40 years ago,” he said. “Do not worry. I will be fine for telling the truth.”

Answering the New York Democrat Sean Maloney’s question about why he wasn’t worried, Vindman said: “Congressman, because this is America. This is the country that I have served and defended, that all of my brothers have served. And here, right matters.”



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The former special envoy to Ukraine Kurt Volker exits following his testimony. Photograph: Sarah Silbiger/Getty Images

The White House press secretary, Stephanie Grisham, released a statement saying the Democrats were “blinded by hatred”.

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“We have learned nothing new in today’s illegitimate ‘impeachment’ proceedings,” she said.

Paul Rosenzweig, a senior fellow at the R Street Institute, who was senior counsel to Kenneth Starr in the Whitewater investigation during the Clinton administration, told the Guardian that Republicans had been struggling to mount an effective defense.

“The factual development is continuing to put the Republicans in a position of defending a difficult set of facts, and they haven’t figured out a way to do that yet,” Rosenzweig said.

Trump appeared pleased by the testimony offered by Volker and Morrison, who were more skeptical than previous witnesses have been of the assertion that the president had engaged in wrongdoing.

“A great day for Republicans, a great day for our Country!” Trump tweeted after the hearing, which ended nearly 12 hours after it began and just over 12 hours before Wednesday’s hearing – expected to be the most consequential of the week’s events – was due to begin.

“Good night,” Nunes told the emptying room after disparaging the inquiry. “See ya tomorrow.”