

## International

# Trump-Zelensky transcript sheds light on world of classified conversations

## Whistleblower: White House sought to conceal Trump-Ukraine call

**WASHINGTON:** The transcript of the July 25 phone call between US President Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky raises a curtain on the generally secretive world of discussions carried out between American and global leaders. Presidents and prime ministers frequently hold camera-friendly discussions about the “close,” “great” or “special” relationship between their countries, before slinking behind closed doors for meetings that are top-secret, the contents only revealed years later.

The phone conversations of US presidents take things one step further: The White House no longer systematically publishes a list of American leaders’ calls, meaning the occurrence itself could be a closely guarded secret. Only a year ago, Bill Clinton’s library published declassified transcripts of telephone calls and bilateral meetings between the former president and his Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin dating between 1993 and 1999.

The White House said the document that it released Wednesday was a summary—not a verbatim transcript—fleshed out with notes taken by presidential advisors who are in charge of listening to the conversations from the Situation Room, the ultra-secure meeting room located in the basement of the White House. “It is a long-standing practice, intended to not only memorialize the call but to protect the President against... egregious claims about the call,” Larry Pfeiffer, former senior director of the White House Situation Room under Barack Obama, explained on Twitter.

Recording the phone conversations of US

presidents has not been a practice for a number of years, said Pfeiffer, who also served as a former CIA director’s chief of staff. He emphasized that advisors’ notes are not exhaustive and, depending on topic and a conversation’s participants, range from exact transcripts to vague summaries.

### ‘Do us a favor’

The Trump-Zelensky exchange showed the two leaders, who had not yet met in person at the time of the call, attempting to establish a personal rapport. Trump, 73, opened the conversation by telling his 41-year-old counterpart: “Congratulations on a great victory. We all watched from the United States and you did a terrific job.”

Despite Zelensky light-heartedly ribbing the US president to call him more often, the exchange reflects the asymmetrical relationship between the US billionaire and Ukrainian leader. Zelensky oscillated between obsequious, agreeing with Trump “1,000 percent” and fawning, telling the US president that the last time he was in New York he stayed at Trump Tower. The exchange’s publication provoked strong reaction in Ukraine, where some described their president’s behavior as a point of shame. The White House said that the call lasted 30 minutes, and that note takers were at work in the Situation Room.

But then things took a turn for the newsworthy. When Zelensky told Trump Ukraine was “almost ready” to buy more anti-tank Javelin missiles from the United States, the US president replied: “I would like you to do us a favor.”

as environment and natural resources minister under President Viktor Yanukovich, and he reportedly issued licenses for gas production to his own company. Yanukovich fled to Russia in 2014 after Kiev’s pro-Western, anti-corruption revolution.

### Corruption, laundering

After the revolution, there were corruption investigations into the country’s former leadership. The month Biden arrived at Burisma, London froze \$23 million in Zlochevsky’s British accounts and several investigations for money laundering were launched in the UK and in Ukraine. In Kiev, these were overseen by Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin. Joe Biden – a major proponent of Ukraine’s reforms – asked Shokin to be dismissed, citing poor results against corruption.

Donald Trump and his lawyer, former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani, accuse Joe Biden of asking for the firing to protect his son Hunter. But calls to dismiss Shokin were also made by the EU and the IMF, as well as Ukrainian activists, who accused him of covering up corruption and sabotaging reforms. —AFP

### Controversial company

A Western source in Kiev told AFP the Ukrainian business community was surprised that Biden accepted the role at Burisma, given its poor reputation. “I think the number one reason why Hunter Biden was brought on was to boost the reputation of Burisma,” the source said, while adding that the nature of Biden’s activities was not suspicious. “That’s the price you pay. You pay \$50,000 a month (in salary)” to improve its public image, the source said.

Biden was not the only international figure Burisma turned to in order to consolidate its standing abroad: Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski is also in the group’s employ. Two Ukrainian energy experts told AFP they saw no trace of Hunter Biden’s activities, suspicious or not, in Kiev. Some media said his presence on the supervisory board was a way of safeguarding against possible prosecution. Hunter Biden stayed on Burisma’s board until 2019. —AFP



**WASHINGTON:** Acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire testifies before a hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence yesterday in Washington, DC. Maguire is testifying on the whistleblower complaint, regarding communication between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. —AFP

Trump went on to say US Attorney General Bill Barr and the president’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani would be in touch about probing the Ukraine-related activities of his Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son. And now, an impeachment storm rages.

### Concealing Trump’s call

Meanwhile, White House officials sought to restrict access to the transcript of a phone call between Donald Trump and the leader of

Ukraine during which the US president sought help from Ukraine against a rival in the 2020 election, a whistleblower said in a complaint released yesterday.

“I have received information from multiple US government officials that the president of the United States is using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 US election,” the whistleblower, an unidentified intelligence community official, wrote in the complaint released by Congress.—Agencies

## Hunter Biden’s time in Ukraine

**KIEV:** Hunter Biden, the second son of former US Vice President Joe Biden, is at the centre of a scandal that has seen Democrats launch impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump. The scandal erupted after it emerged Trump had leaned on Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate the father and son over Hunter’s work in Ukraine. Here is what we know about Hunter Biden and his activities in the Eastern European country.

### Ivy League and cocaine

A lawyer by education, 49-year-old Biden is a graduate of the prestigious Georgetown and Yale universities. He works for a New York law firm and co-founded the Rosemont Seneca Partners investment consulting firm. He has also been an assistant professor at Georgetown. He joined the US Navy Reserve in 2012 but was fired in 2014 after testing positive for cocaine. US tabloids regularly report on his addiction problems and tumultuous personal life, including a relationship with his late brother’s widow.

### Ukrainian gas

In 2014, while his father was Barack Obama’s vice president and overseeing US relations with Kiev, Biden joined the board of the Ukrainian company Burisma Holdings. Burisma says it is the largest private producer of natural gas and one of the leading gas groups in Ukraine. It is registered in Cyprus, a popular tax haven for many companies in the former USSR. The group announced at the time that Biden would lead its legal unit and represent it in “international organizations”.

Biden has said he wanted to advise the group on “transparency.” Burisma was owned by controversial pro-Russian Ukrainian ex-MP and businessman Mykola Zlochevsky. From 2010 to 2012, Zlochevsky served

## Texas executes man for murdering family

**WASHINGTON:** Texas on Wednesday executed a man who murdered three family members, following a trial in which a bailiff wore a tie depicting a syringe in an apparent reference to the lethal injection procedure. Robert Sparks, 45, was pronounced dead at 6:39 pm local time (2339 GMT). He was sentenced to death in 2008 for stabbing to death his wife as well as his two stepsons aged nine and 10, before raping his 12- and 14-year-old teenage stepdaughters in their Dallas home in the middle of the night.

Shortly after the murders, he claimed he had been protecting himself from his wife, who he said was trying to poison him. His lawyers appealed his conviction to the US Supreme Court, saying that he was mentally disabled and suffering from psychosis, rendering him ineligible for the death penalty. They also stressed that his trial had been marred by the bailiff’s tie, saying it could have influenced the jury.

The Supreme Court rejected the appeal just hours before the execution. Justice Sonia Sotomayor acknowledged the bailiff’s choice was “deeply troubling,” but said there was not sufficient evidence that the jury had seen the tie. She urged judges to “intervene in future cases” by removing such clothing—or the people wearing it—from the courtroom. Sparks is the seventh person executed in Texas and the 16th in the United States since the start of the year. —AFP