

Opening Statement of Timothy Morrison

Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the House Committee on Oversight and Reform

October 31, 2019

Chairman Schiff and Members of the Committees, I appear today under subpoena to answer your questions about my time as Senior Director for European Affairs at the White House and the National Security Council ("NSC"). I will give you the most complete information I can, consistent with my obligations to the President and the protection of classified information. I do not know who the whistleblower is, nor do I intend to speculate as to who it may be.

Before joining the NSC in 2018, I spent 17 years as a Republican staffer, serving in a variety of roles in both houses of Congress. My last position was Policy Director for the then-Majority Staff of the House Armed Services Committee.

I. The Role of the National Security Council

From July 9, 2018 to July 15, 2019, I served as a Special Assistant to the President for National Security and as the NSC Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense. In that role, I had limited exposure to Ukraine, focusing primarily on foreign military sales and arms control. On July 15, 2019, I became Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security. In this role, I serve as the lead interagency coordinator for national security issues involving Europe and Russia.

It is important to start with the role of the NSC. Since its creation by Congress in 1947, the NSC has appropriately evolved in shape and size to suit the needs of the President and the National Security Advisor it serves at the time. But its mission and core function has

fundamentally remained the same: to coordinate across departments and agencies of the Executive Branch to ensure the President has the policy options he needs to accomplish his objectives and to see that his decisions are implemented. The NSC staff does not make policy. NSC staff are most effective when we are neutral arbiters, helping the relevant Executive Branch agencies develop options for the President and implement his direction.

In my current position, I understood our primary U.S. policy objective in Ukraine was to take advantage of the once-in-a-generation opportunity that resulted from the election of President Zelensky and the clear majority he had gained in the Ukrainian Rada to see real anti-corruption reform take root. The Administration's policy was that the best way for the United States to show its support for President Zelensky's reform efforts was to make sure the United States' longstanding bipartisan commitment to strengthen Ukraine's security remained unaltered. It is easy to forget here in Washington, but impossible in Kyiv, that Ukraine is still under armed assault by Russia, a nuclear-armed state. We also tend to forget that the United States had helped convince Ukraine to give up Soviet nuclear weapons in 1994. United States security sector assistance (from the Departments of Defense and State) is, therefore, essential to Ukraine. Also essential is a strong and positive relationship with Ukraine at the highest levels of our respective governments.

In my role as Senior Director for European Affairs, I reported directly to former Deputy National Security Advisor, Dr. Charles Kupperman, and former National Security Advisor, Ambassador John Bolton. I kept them fully informed on matters that I believed merited their awareness or when I felt I needed some direction. During the time relevant to this inquiry, I never briefed the President or Vice President on matters related to Ukrainian security. It was my job to coordinate with the U.S. Embassy Chief of Mission to Ukraine William Taylor, Special

Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker, and other interagency stakeholders in the Departments of Defense and State of Ukrainian matters.

My primary responsibility has been to ensure federal agencies had consistent messaging and policy guidance on national security issues involving European and Russian affairs. As Dr. Fiona Hill and I prepared for me to succeed her, one of the areas we discussed was Ukraine. In that discussion, she informed me of her concerns about two Ukraine processes that were occurring: the normal interagency process led by the NSC with the typical department and agency participation and a separate process that involved chiefly the U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. Dr. Hill told me that Ambassador Sondland and President Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, were trying to get President Zelensky to reopen Ukrainian investigations into Burisma. At the time, I did not know what Burisma was or what the investigation entailed. After the meeting with Dr. Hill, I googled Burisma and learned that it was a Ukrainian energy company and that Hunter Biden was on its board. I also did not understand why Ambassador Sondland would be involved in Ukraine policy, often without the involvement of our duly-appointed Chief of Mission, Ambassador Bill Taylor.

My most frequent conversations were with Ambassador Taylor because he was the U.S. Chief of Mission in Ukraine and I was his chief conduit for information related to White House deliberations, including security sector assistance and potential head-of-state meetings. This is a normal part of the coordination process.

II. Review of Open Source Documents in Preparation for Testimony

In preparation for my appearance today, I reviewed the statement Ambassador Taylor provided this inquiry on October 22, 2019. I can confirm that the substance of his statement, as it relates to conversations he and I had, is accurate. My recollections differ on two of the details, however. I have a slightly different recollection of my September 1, 2019 conversation with

Ambassador Sondland. On page 10 of Ambassador Taylor's statement, he recounts a conversation I relayed to him regarding Ambassador Sondland's conversation with Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Yermak. Ambassador Taylor wrote: "Ambassador Sondland told Mr. Yermak that security assistance money would not come until President Zelensky committed to pursue the Burisma investigation." My recollection is that Ambassador Sondland's proposal to Mr. Yermak was that it could be sufficient if the new Ukrainian prosecutor general—not President Zelensky—would commit to pursue the Burisma investigation. I also would like to clarify that I did not meet with the Ukrainian National Security Advisor in his hotel room, as Ambassador Taylor indicated on page 11 of his statement. Instead, an NSC aide and I met with Mr. Danyliuk in the hotel's business center.

I also reviewed the Memorandum of Conversation ("MemCon") of the July 25 phone call that was released by the White House. I listened to the call as it occurred from the Situation Room. To the best of my recollection, the MemCon accurately and completely reflects the substance of the call. I also recall that I did not see anyone from the NSC Legal Advisor's Office in the room during the call. After the call, I promptly asked the NSC Legal Advisor and his Deputy to review it. I had three concerns about a potential leak of the MemCon: first, how it would play out in Washington's polarized environment; second, how a leak would affect the bipartisan support our Ukrainian partners currently experience in Congress; and third, how it would affect the Ukrainian perceptions of the U.S.-Ukraine relationship. I want to be clear, I was not concerned that anything illegal was discussed.

III. White House Hold on Security Sector Assistance

I was not aware that the White House was holding up the security sector assistance passed by Congress until my superior, Dr. Charles Kupperman, told me soon after I succeeded Dr. Hill. I was aware that the President thought Ukraine had a corruption problem, as did many

others familiar with Ukraine. I was also aware that the President believed that Europe did not contribute enough assistance to Ukraine. I was directed by Dr. Kupperman to coordinate with the interagency stakeholders to put together a policy process to demonstrate that the interagency supported security sector assistance to Ukraine. I was confident that our national security principals—the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the head of the National Security Council—could convince President Trump to release the aid because President Zelensky and the reform-oriented Rada were genuinely invested in their anti-corruption agenda.

Ambassador Taylor and I were concerned that the longer the money was withheld, the more questions the Zelensky administration would ask about the U.S. commitment to Ukraine. Our initial hope was that the money would be released before the hold became public because we did not want the newly constituted Ukrainian government to question U.S. support.

I have no reason to believe the Ukrainians had any knowledge of the review until August 28, 2019. Ambassador Taylor and I had no reason to believe that the release of the security sector assistance might be conditioned on a public statement reopening the Burisma investigation until my September 1, 2019 conversation with Ambassador Sondland. Even then I hoped that Ambassador Sondland's strategy was exclusively his own and would not be considered by leaders in the Administration and Congress, who understood the strategic importance of Ukraine to our national security.

I am pleased our process gave the President the confidence he needed to approve the release of the security sector assistance. My regret is that Ukraine ever learned of the review and that, with this impeachment inquiry, Ukraine has become subsumed in the U.S. political process.

IV. Conclusion

After 19 years of government service, I have decided to leave the NSC. I have not submitted a formal resignation at this time because I do not want anyone to think there is a connection between my testimony today and my impending departure. I plan to finalize my transition from the NSC after my testimony is complete.

During my time in public service, I have worked with some of the smartest and most self-sacrificing people in this country. Serving at the White House in this time of unprecedented global change has been the opportunity of a lifetime. I am proud of what I have been able, in some small way, to help the Trump Administration to accomplish.

Thank you for your attention.