

**LEV PARNAS, RUDY GIULIANI ASSOCIATE, IS INTERVIEWED ON MSNBC'S
"THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW"**

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SPEAKERS:

LEV PARNAS, RUDY GIULIANI ASSOCIATE

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RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: And thanks to you at home for joining us this hour.

Last night, on the eve of the impeachment articles against President Trump being conveyed from the House to the Senate for the start of the Senate trial that will decide whether or not President Trump is removed from office, last night, the committees that conducted the impeachment investigation added a bonus round to the materials that they planned to convey to the Senate.

Alongside the articles of impeachment, they added new evidence. These newly obtained documents and text messages from a man named Lev Parnas. Lev Parnas is a Soviet-born, Russian-speaking U.S. citizen who worked closely with President Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, on the scheme in Ukraine, for which the president has now been impeached.

The scheme to pressure Ukraine into announcing investigations of Vice President Joe Biden, and the concurrent use of U.S. military aid and visits with U.S. government officials, and other things that the Ukrainian government desperately wanted basically as cudgels to try -- try to force them into announcing those investigations about Biden.

Well, now, tonight, as the articles of impeachment have been walked over to the Senate by the impeachment managers, actually basically right as that was happening, the impeachment committees in the House, simultaneously to this moment, released some additional phone records from Mr. Parnas, which have revealed yet further information about who was involved in this scheme and how it worked.

Well, today in New York City, I met with Lev Parnas, and with his lawyer Joseph Bondy. And so, tonight, we're going to present this exclusive interview.

Mr. Parnas has never before spoken in a televised interview. He has not spoken to reporters at all since his name surfaced in conjunction with a scandal and since he was arrested on October 9th,

with a one-way ticket out of the country at Dulles Airport. He was charged with federal felony counts for funneling illegal donations to Republican candidates and campaigns.

Now, Mr. Parnas is under indictment. He's awaiting trial in the Southern District of New York. He has pled not guilty.

He agreed to speak with me today on the condition that his lawyer, Joseph Bondy, would be seated alongside him throughout the interview. That's a condition that I agreed to.

To be honest, because I agreed to that condition, I fully expected that it would be Mr. Bondy, the lawyer, who did most of the talking in this interview, but it did not work out that way.

Mr. Parnas, as you will see here, is absolutely here to speak for himself, and he is more than capable of doing so. He and his attorney have made clear in recent days and weeks that Lev Parnas really does want to testify to the impeachment investigation.

That said, I can't stress enough that he right now is out on bond awaiting trial in federal court on serious felony charges. So, the decision for him to do this interview with me today is very unusual. People in that circumstance, in terms of federal felony charges, don't typically do media interviews, but they agreed to sit down with me today, and we did it. Let's get right to it.

I will tell you just in advance, to set the stage, that in this interview, you will hear Lev Parnas make some bombshell assertions about the involvement and knowledge of President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence in the Ukraine scandal. He will make a specific allegation about the president's unique role in holding up the U.S. aid to Ukraine as an additional lever of pressure against the Ukrainian government.

You will also hear fairly explicit allegations by Mr. Parnas about Attorney General William Barr. He also makes some allegations about several other members of the cabinet. We'll talk about some of those tonight, and we're saving some to talk about tomorrow so we can do some additional reporting around them.

But on top of all of that, as Mr. Parnas, you'll see, makes clear, right off the bat, right at the top of our interview, he knows that in addition to all of the things he's telling you tonight and that have been revealed in these documents, in conjunction with the impeachment investigation, in addition to all of that, he says he still has yet more to share.

All right. Here with go.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Mr. Parnas, Mr. Bondy, thank you both for agreeing to do this. I know that this is a leap of trust to speak publicly in this way for the first time. Thanks to both of you for agreeing to do it.

JOSEPH BONDY, ATTORNEY: Thank you.

LEV PARNAS, RUDY GIULIANI ASSOCIATE: Thanks for having us here.

MADDOW: Lev, let me ask you first, Lev, did you know that these materials that you had handed over to the Intelligence Committee were going to be released publicly last night? It's landed with quite a splash. It's very provocative material.

Were you aware that it was going to be made public?

PARNAS: No, I didn't. It was -- yes, it was an incredible day. I mean, it was a godsend that we were able to -- with Joe's help and being able to get that in time, because we didn't think we're going to make it because we stayed up until I think 2:00 in the morning transferring over stuff to the House that night.

MADDOW: And what was the deadline in terms of the time pressure?

PARNAS: I mean, Joe --

BONDY: The deadline was trying to get these things to HPSCI, the Intelligence Committee, before the transmission of the articles of impeachment.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

BONDY: As with the articles go -- goes the record, and we had reason to believe certain pieces of what we were turning over would be put into the public record. We just weren't sure when that would be, and we had no idea what it would be.

MADDOW: Let me ask you in terms of what we have seen and what they released publicly. Not everything was released publicly. Some was held back, but in terms of what we have seen publicly, is it all look authentic to you? Does any of it seem to be doctored? Does it -- is it all what you were expecting to see in terms of what you handed over?

PARNAS: Yes.

BONDY: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Are you still putting together more information to give to Congress, or do you essentially feel that the deadline has passed now that this information is going to the Senate?

BONDY: No, we're going to continue making productions, as we get materials from Southern District and anything that we can possibly continue to find on our own, through the cloud or whatever it may be.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

BONDY: We're going to continue to provide things until we're told not to.

MADDOW: Lev, why do you want to testify to the impeachment investigation?

PARNAS: I want to get the truth out because I feel it's important for our country. I think it's important for me. I think it's important for the world to know exactly what transpired and what happened, because I think a lot -- there's a lot of things that are being said that are not accurate. And I just want to make sure that they're accurate because things happened that need to get out, and I think the world needs to know.

MADDOW: What do you think is the main inaccuracy or main lie that's being told that you feel like you can correct?

PARNAS: That the president didn't know what was going on. President Trump knew exactly what was going on. He was aware of all my movements. He -- I wouldn't do anything without the consent of Rudy Giuliani or the president.

I have no intent, I have no reason to speak to any of these officials. I mean, they have no reason to speak to me.

Why would President Zelensky's inner circle or Minister Avakov -- or all these people, or President Poroshenko meet with me? Who am I?

They were told to meet with me. And that's the secret that they were trying to keep. I was on the ground doing their work.

MADDOW: In terms of the president and what he has said about you, he said about you and Mr. Fruman, Igor Fruman: I don't know those gentlemen. I don't know about them. I don't know what they do.

You're saying that was not a true statement from the president?

PARNAS: He lied. I mean, we're not friends. I mean, when you say friends, I mean, me and him didn't watch football games together, we didn't eat hotdogs. But he know exactly who we were. He know exactly who I was especially because I interacted with him at a lot of events.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: I had a lot of one-on-one conversations with him at gatherings or they have (ph) special like these roundtables, where there are only six people at the table. We have several of those.

And basically, I mean, I was with Rudy more than -- I mean, four or five days out of the week. I mean, I was in constant contact with him. So -- and I was with Rudy when he would speak to the president, plenty of times. I mean, so it's just ludicrous.

MADDOW: You've been with Mr. Giuliani when he was on the phone with the president?

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: And how would you know that he was on the phone with the president? It would be on speakerphone? Or you would just hear him?

PARNAS: Well, several times, it would be on speakerphone, where he would like start the conversation on speakerphone and then take it off, and then go somewhere else to talk to him.

But a lot of times, it would be on the golf course when we were golfing together -- especially I remember during the Mueller times where Rudy I remember said something that he didn't appreciate -- was taking out of context and he was screaming at him so loud. That's when I watched the impeachment and I saw the testimony about the Sondland (ph), that I reiterate (ph) - I could understand that you could hear President Trump talking next to -- like I heard him several times when he was with Rudy.

MADDOW: Because he speaks loudly on the phone?

PARNAS: Very loudly, yes.

MADDOW: When you say that the president knew about your movements and knew what you were doing, are you saying specifically -- and I want to sort of drill down on that -- that the president was aware you and Mr. Giuliani were working on this effort in Ukraine to basically try to hurt Joe Biden's political career? He was -- he knew about that?

PARNAS: Basically. Yes, it was all about Joe Biden, Hunter Biden, and, also, Rudy had a personal thing with the Manafort stuff, the black ledger.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: And that was another thing they were looking into, but it was never about corruption. It was never -- it was strictly about Burisma, which included Hunter Biden and Joe Biden.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: It's all about the Bidens. It was never about corruption. Strictly about Joe Biden, Hunter Biden.

In terms of the involvement of the president here, Mr. Parnas went out of his way to note, to assert, that not only was President Trump aware of what he and Mr. Giuliani were doing on his behalf in Ukraine, trying to gin up this investigation to hurt Joe Biden, Mr. Parnas says that the fact that he was working for President Trump is a point that was made explicitly over and over again in a very formal way, in his dealings in his meetings in Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Your attorney told the federal court in New York that you were both Rudy Giuliani's clients and you were working for Mr. Giuliani in his capacity as personal attorney to the president.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Which, by the transitive property, makes it seem like you were working for the president of the United States as part of this legal defense.

PARNAS: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

MADDOW: And so, did anybody in the U.S. government or Mr. Giuliani actually conveyed to officials in Ukraine that you were there as a representative of President Trump?

PARNAS: Absolutely. To each one of those officials, that -- you know, the -- I put Rudy on the phone with Mr. Avakov, Minister Avakov several times, Ivan Bakanov, Yuri Lutsenko at the time was the attorney -- general.

The first thing I did is to introduce myself and tell them, I'm here on behalf of Rudy Giuliani and the president of the United States, and I'd like to put you on speakerphone for he'd know (ph) to confirm them, which we did. We put Rudy on the phone. Rudy relayed to him basically that we were there on behalf of the president of the United States.

MADDOW: That you were there to speak on President Trump's behalf.

PARNAS: Correct, exactly, those exact records.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Mr. Parnas says that when he was taking meetings to advance this scheme, taking meetings with various government officials in Ukraine, he says it was a regular occurrence, it was the way those meetings started.

He would put Rudy Giuliani on phone, on the speakerphone in the room, and he would say explicitly, Mr. Giuliani would say explicitly that as the president's personal attorney, he could affirm that Lev Parnas was there at that meeting in Ukraine to speak on behalf of the president of the United States, Donald Trump.

In May of last year, May 2019, Mr. Giuliani started speaking with reporters about his plans to travel himself to Ukraine to try to enlist the Ukrainian government's assistance to help his client, President Trump, basically in his reelection effort. He said he was going to Ukraine to try to get them to announce investigations into Vice President Biden, because that would be very helpful to his client.

In the resulting firestorm of criticism, Mr. Giuliani's trip was called off in May. When he called off the trip, Mr. Giuliani made public statements criticizing the new government of Ukraine, saying that Ukraine's new president was surrounded by enemies of the United States.

And for Ukraine, that was a really big deal, right? Ukraine is at war with Russia, is a country very dependent on both of the reality and the perception of them having strong support from the United States government.

And so, when Mr. Giuliani, as the president's personal attorney, started making public claims that the new Ukrainian president was surrounded by enemies of the United States of America, that's why he wasn't going to Ukraine, at that point, the Ukrainian government kind of freaked out, right? That kind of criticism from the new U.S. administration for their new president in Ukraine, that's a potential death sentence for their country.

So, at the time that happened, Lev Parnas was in Ukraine, he was in Kiev at the time all that happened, and he told me today that he was tasked by Rudy Giuliani in that moment to crank up the pressure on the government of Ukraine, to make even more insistent and obvious, and even more onerous, this threat and this demand that Ukraine must announce investigations into Joe Biden or else.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Did you meet with the Ukrainian official Sergey Shaffer (ph)?

PARNAS: Yes, I did.

MADDOW: Sergey Shaffer is a very senior aide to President Zelensky.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: It has been reported as far as we understand, from public reporting, that you conveyed to Mr. Shaffer the exact quid pro quo, that you wanted Zelensky to announce investigations into Joe Biden or military aid would not be released to Ukraine. Is that accurate?

PARNAS: It was a little bit more than that. Basically, the message that I was supposed -- that I gave Sergey Shaffer was a very harsh message. I was told to give it to him in a very harsh way, not in a pleasant way.

MADDOW: Who told you to give it to him a harsh way?

PARNAS: Mayor Giuliani, Rudy, told me after, you know, meeting with the president at the White House. He called me. The message was, it wasn't just military aid, it was all aid. Basically their relationships would be sour, that he would -- that we would stop giving them any kind of aid that --

MADDOW: Unless?

PARNAS: -- unless that there was announcement made -- it was several things. There were several demands at that point. A, the most important was the announcement of the Biden investigation.

MADDOW: Did you also convey to him that the U.S. government would stop showing support for Mr. Zelensky, that they wouldn't attend the inauguration? Or that --

PARNAS: That was -- that was the biggest thing, actually. That was -- that was the main -- it wasn't -- because at that time, you have to understand the way Ukraine is.

For President Zelensky, winning on that platform, being a young president, and not really having any experience, the number one thing -- and being at war with Russia at the time, the number one thing was not even aid, and I know it sounds crazy, but it was more support from the president.

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: By having a White House visit, by having a big inauguration, by having all the dignitaries there. That was the key.

At that time, they were already aware because of their conversations with the -- I guess with the embassy that -- Vice President Pence was supposed to come to the inauguration. It was already discussed. And they were planning it out. They were just working on days that would be good for him.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: At our meeting, I was very, very stern. It was a heated conversation from our part to him, basically telling him what needs to be done. I mean, basically me.

And at the -- at -- in the conversation, I told him that if he doesn't -- the announcement was the key at that time because of the inauguration, that Pence would not show up. Nobody would show up to his inauguration.

MADDOW: Unless he announced an investigation into Joe Biden, no U.S. officials, particularly Vice President Pence would not come --

(CROSSTALK)

PARNAS: Particularly Vice President Mike Pence.

MADDOW: So, the day after that meeting that you had with Mr. Shaffer --

PARNAS: This was Sunday, Sunday the 12th.

MADDOW: I believe it was the following day that, in fact, Vice President Pence's visit to the inauguration was canceled.

PARNAS: It was after my phone call. The conversation I laid out to Mr. Shaffer was basically what I was told to do by Giuliani and the president. And then, afterwards, I relayed back to them saying that he's going to get back to me later that tonight and we're supposed to meet.

Then around 8:00, or 9:00 at night, I texted them back again saying, any word? What's the situation? And at that point, because on WhatsApp when a person like disconnects you, and he disconnected me, our conversation, he basically was --

(CROSSTALK)

MADDOW: He blocked you?

PARNAS: He blocked me. I understood that was a no. So, I called back and said no-go, and he - I remember Rudy going, OK, they'll see.

Basically, the next day, Pence, to my awareness, Trump called up and said, to make sure Pence doesn't go there.

So --

MADDOW: So, you believe that Mr. Pence's trip to the inauguration was canceled because they didn't agree --

PARNAS: Oh, I know, 100 percent.

MADDOW: -- to announce an investigation into the Bidens?

PARNAS: Oh, because there's other -- the chain of events, that was key to where we are today, because after that, what left -- take a look at what transpires.

Next, within the next couple of days, all of a sudden, they realize that now they get word, because obviously, when Pence cancels, they get word that Pence is not coming. So, now, they realize that what I -- what I was telling them is true.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Now they realize when I was threatening them on behalf of the White House, that if they didn't announce the Biden investigation, that Vice President Pence wouldn't come to the inauguration, they realize now when Pence, in fact, canceled his inauguration when I said he would, they knew I was legit. That's essentially what he's saying.

I love the line there that he quotes Mr. Giuliani saying, OK, they'll see. Like they'll see what they get for telling you no, when you demanded those investigations, they'll see.

And in fact, Vice President Pence does cancel his trip to the inauguration within 24 hours.

But for Mr. Parnas, that was a key moment for him in terms of being able to continue to work on this effort in Ukraine with credibility, because Mike Pence cancelling his trip to the inauguration was a validating moment. It made clear to the government of Ukraine at the highest level, this is a senior aide to the new president, this made clear to them at the highest levels that Lev Parnas was legitimately representing the president of the United States and the White House in this shakedown.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: So Vice President Mike Pence has his planned trip to the inauguration canceled after you were unable to get the Ukrainian government to commit to announcing investigations into Vice President Biden.

Do you know if Vice President Pence was aware that was the quid pro quo, that that was the trade, and that that in fact is why his inaugural visit was called off?

PARNAS: I'm going to use a famous quote by Mr. Sondland, everybody was in the loop.

MADDOW: You believe that Vice President Pence knew what he was -- knew that his trip to the inauguration was contingent on those investigations being announced?

PARNAS: Again, I mean, I know he went to Poland also to discuss this on Trump's behalf. So, he couldn't have not known, absolutely.

MADDOW: Let me -- let me ask you about it. So, that's -- after the inauguration, September 1st, Vice President Pence goes to Poland and actually takes a meeting with President Zelensky of Ukraine.

One of the unusual revelations we've had since the impeachment investigations was a Defense Department e-mail that was made public through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, that Defense Department emails from the chief of staff to the defense secretary. He tells someone else at the Pentagon, don't worry about it, this Ukraine aid -- I'm paraphrasing -- this Ukraine aid problem is all going to be sorted as soon as Vice President Pence meets President Zelensky in Poland on September 1st. That should clear this up.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Do you understand why a Defense Department, somebody working in the secretary of defense's office might have believed that about that meeting?

PARNAS: Oh, I understand what was going on. So, it makes sense to me because what was transpiring was every time, like I said to you, at every meeting, either Giuliani or I would have, or somebody from the Trump's government would have with the Ukrainians, they would always

agree that they were going to make some sort of -- that they were on board, that they're going to make an announcement, and then they would walk it back.

So, after certain instances, Trump was supposed to meet him -- President Trump was supposed to meet Zelensky in Poland himself. But then he used the excuse of the hurricane, but it wasn't because of the hurricane. It was because he was angry that Zelensky still didn't make any attempt or effort to make any announcement before he was going to meet him and he wasn't --

MADDOW: How do you know that was an excuse and that wasn't the real reason?

PARNAS: Because I spoke to Rudy. Rudy would talk to me to -- I mean, we spoke about this every day. I mean, everything that was going on was discussed between me, Victoria, Rudy, I mean, the team.

MADDOW: So, President -- President Trump is supposed to go, he decides not to go. Vice President Pence will go instead --

(CROSSTALK)

PARNAS: He sends them instead, yes, and basically he was supposed to go there and get it straightened out that Zelensky was supposed to make another announcement. And that didn't happen.

That's when Bolton, Secretary Bolton, went over there. And I think he has a lot to say.

I'm not going to talk on this (ph) -- but I think he's a key witness to his conversation with Zelensky, and when he came back and why he left, or got fired, or however you want to look at that.

MADDOW: Let me make sure I understand what you're saying. When Vice President Pence went over there in September 1st, again in President Trump's stead, you believe -- you have reason to believe that Vice President Pence was tasked at that meeting with getting President Zelensky to announce investigation of Joe Biden specifically?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: And to tell him that they wouldn't get their aid until they --

PARNAS: I don't know exactly what he was -- but it was all --

(CROSSTALK)

MADDOW: To demand an investigation.

PARNAS: Like I said, the aid itself was something that I think the president decided to do -- what's it called? But it was I think a reaction that there was no announcement being made after so many attempts and so many promises.

MADDOW: So, holding the aid was the president's own sort of innovation to add to the leverage --

PARNAS: I think so.

MADDOW: -- to add to the pressure that people like you, and the vice president, and Mr. Giuliani --

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: -- and everybody else involved in this effort was putting on Ukrainians.

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: When you say that Mr. Bolton may have something to say about this, did Mr. Bolton know that Vice President Pence was supposed to secure that agreement from Zelensky, that he'd announce these investigations?

PARNAS: I don't know exactly what Mr. Bolton know, but I know Mr. Bolton was definitely involved in the loop because of the firing of Maria Yovanovitch. Also, his interactions with Rudy Giuliani. They started butting heads, and he was not agreeing -- I mean, from Venezuela to Ukraine, Bolton didn't agree with Giuliani on the way of dealing with it.

So, there was tension there. There was -- there was definitely tension there.

MADDOW: But you believe he knows what the administration was pressuring Ukraine to do?

PARNAS: Bolton?

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: A hundred percent. He knows what happened there.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Lev Parnas in an exclusive interview with me today in New York City.

We've contacted Vice President Pence's office tonight on this allegation that his visit to the Zelensky inauguration was canceled because Ukrainian official wouldn't announce investigation into Joe Biden. Also, the allegations that Vice President Pence was tasked with getting that commitment about announcing these investigations in his follow-up visit where he did meet with President Zelensky on September 1st in Poland.

We have asked for comment from Mike Pence's office on those matters. We have not heard back. We'll let you know if that changes.

For his part, of course, national security advisor John Bolton has made clear that he would testify to the Senate impeachment trial if subpoenaed to do so. He has made public remarks to the effect that he has relevant information about the impeachment investigation, that he knows things that other people don't know.

In terms of the president and this allegation from Mr. Parnas that the president explicitly authorized Mr. Parnas to act in his behalf in Mr. Parnas' interactions with Ukrainian officials, that Mr. Giuliani explicitly told Ukrainian officials, that on the authority of the president of the United States, they should listen to Mr. Parnas essentially as a spokesperson for the president, that he was conveying the full authority of the president's legal representation -- this allegation from Mr. Parnas in addition that the president was fully aware of and involved in all his efforts to push Ukraine to announce these investigations -- we have asked the White House for comment on Mr. Parnas' remarks tonight. We have not yet heard back. Again, we will let you know if that changes.

But next, here comes the part about them going after Ambassador Maria Yovanovitch. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: There were notes that were released to the Intelligence Committee that were now released publicly, and I want to -- if you don't mind, I ask you about some of these.

PARNAS: Sure.

MADDOW: Were these notes that you took -- I'll show them to you here, obviously they're on Ritz Carlton Vienna letterhead -- this is your handwriting?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: Were these notes from a meeting in which other people were present? Or were these your notes taken from a conversation -- a phone conversation that you had with someone else?

PARNAS: This was a phone conversation I was having with Mr. Giuliani, and basically discussing certain things that -- because after that, I would have had a conversation with somebody in the Zelensky team.

PARNAS: This was a phone conversation I was having with Mr. Giuliani, and basically discussing certain things that -- because after that, I would have had a conversation with somebody in the Zelensky team. I was making notes for myself what was important to get (ph).

MADDOW: And you were from Vienna at the time you were taking these notes?

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: So, this first note -- get Zelensky to announce that the Biden case will be investigated, that's Mr. Giuliani tasking you, that you should get that commitment from Zelensky?

PARNAS: That was always the main objective. Correct.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: That was always the main objective: get them to announce they were investigating Joe Biden. That's Lev Parnas speaking with me today in New York City.

One of the many dark hearts of this impeachment scandal is the virulent, and scurrilous and ultimately successful effort to get the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine fired. Ambassador Maria Yovanovitch.

Lev Parnas told me today a lot about that effort, including at one point, apologizing for it, expressing regret. But he also made crystal clear why Yovanovitch was targeted the way she was.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Do you believe that part of the motivation to get rid of Ambassador Yovanovitch, to her out of post was she was in the way of this effort to get the government of Ukraine to announce investigation of Joe Biden?

PARNAS: That was the only motivation.

MADDOW: That was the only motivation?

PARNAS: There was no other motivation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: If Ambassador Yovanovitch was, in fact, targeted by Lev Parnas and Rudy Giuliani and President Trump and others involved in this effort to get her out of post, to get her out of way of the bogus Joe Biden effort -- well, our public understanding of that campaign which conducted allegedly for that purpose, our public understanding of that campaign against her took a very dark turn last night, when information that Lev Parnas turned over to impeachment

investigators revealed menacing text messages from a Republican congressional candidate named Robert Hyde, who happened in these texts to be reporting in to Lev Parnas about surveillance of Ambassador Yovanovitch, asking Lev if he wanted her out and purporting to have a contact inside her security team who could facilitate such a thing.

I asked Lev Parnas about those menacing text messages today. He told me he did not take Robert Hyde seriously, either in general or in relation to those messages. He agreed that the messages were disturbing, but says he never believed Mr. Hyde's assertions about this purported surveillance nor did he believe that Ambassador Yovanovitch was actually in danger.

Watch.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Who is Robert Hyde?

PARNAS: He's a -- he's just -- I don't know how to explain him. He's --

MADDOW: You can say whatever you mean, I can bleep you if you need to swear.

PARNAS: He's a weird character. He's a weird individual.

MADDOW: You met him where?

PARNAS: I met at the -- I think at the Trump Hotel. Yes, at the Trump Hotel. He was a regular at the bar.

MADDOW: So we now have your text messages with Mr. Hyde that get into some dark territory when it comes to Ambassador Yovanovitch.

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: Why did -- at least from the string of text messages that we've seen, it seems that is sort of starts, at least what we've got you texting him what appears to be anti-Yovanovitch information.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Why were you sending him that text (ph)?

PARNAS: I saw the text, they did not go to the beginning of our texts. This was just some of the WhatsApp stuff, which is very little.

But Robert Hyde was like -- I don't want say, hang -- is somebody who would hang around, because he did know like all these -- he didn't know the president, and he didn't know Rudy

Giuliani, but he did know like McCarthy, he know Roger Stone, he know like all these -- I mean -- because it was like a breeding ground at the Trump Hotel.

So, every event, we'll be there, so everybody would hang out there afterwards, everybody, while the meetings would be there. So, basically, you would see the same people every day, all the same congressmen that supported the president would be there, nobody else.

So he was a fixture on sight. He was always there, but he was always drunk.

MADDOW: You struck up enough of relationship with him to be texting with him.

PARNAS: Well, yes, it was more of -- Igor had more relation with him. Igor -- he just couldn't speak with Igor, so he would text him because they were like -- usually after we were done for the night, you know, the bar scene was happening, and I don't drink, but -- so they would hang out, have a drink at the bar.

MADDOW: Let me ask, I mean, the -- the text messages that he sends to you --

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: -- about Ambassador Yovanovitch are disturbing.

PARNAS: Very dark (ph).

MADDOW: What is the context of these text exchanges? He appears to be giving you specific information about the ambassador's movement, about her location, about her security situation, calls her the B-word over and over again, very hostile to her and seems to be monitoring her whereabouts.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: What -- why did those exchanges happen? What was he trying to tell you?

PARNAS: Well, I don't believe it's true. I think he was either drunk or he was trying to make himself bigger than he was, so I didn't take it seriously, and I was trying to -- if you see, I didn't respond most of the time. If I did, it was something look, LOL, OK or great, or, you know, something like that, just to -- because I wouldn't respond for a long time, and I didn't want him to get rowdy if I saw him the next time, why didn't you text?

I would just amuse him until eventually as you could see, I cut him off because what happened is when he sent me those, I got disturbed. I was, like, oh, this is crazy. Like, is this guy off the wall?

So I called up I think it was Joe Ahern (ph), who was my contact at the super PAC America First --

MADDOW: OK.

PARNAS: -- that knew of him also, because he knew all the donors.

And I asked him, I said, well, is this guy off the loonies? He told me, stay away from him, because he's just got into something with Greg Pence, Mike Pence's brother, and thinking that the Secret Service is after him, and somebody wants to kill him.

And I don't know what happened, but that was my end of -- once he started texting me that, that was the end of our relationship.

MADDOW: But the texts where he was supposedly reporting on the whereabouts of the ambassador went on for a week. I mean, it wasn't like one drunken night.

PARNAS: Of course.

MADDOW: This went for seven days. He couldn't have been drunk the whole time.

PARNAS: He was drunk the whole time. He wakes up and he's drunk -- he starts at 6:00 -- I mean, I've never seen him not drunk.

MADDOW: So you thought this was him making it up. You didn't believe he actually had the ambassador under surveillance?

PARNAS: Absolutely not.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: I asked Mr. Parnas several times over the course of our interview if those text messages from Robert Hyde indicated a real threat to Ambassador Yovanovitch. I asked him about it with as many different angles I could come up with, I was insistent in asking, he was adamant in his response.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, it's clear that you didn't take Mr. Hyde seriously in terms of the factual (ph) claims that he was making. But are you clear on whether or not there was ever as an actual physical threat or a threat of personal intimidation against Ambassador Yovanovitch?

PARNAS: Never from my side or anybody I know.

MADDOW: You didn't worry that she was actually in physical danger.

PARNAS: No, never, never.

MADDOW: Because you didn't believe Mr. Hyde.

PARNAS: No, I didn't believe Mr. Hyde, no.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: We contacted attorneys for Ambassador Yovanovitch tonight to let them know about these statements from Mr. Parnas, about this possible threat to their client. They are not commenting tonight, but we've got more ahead, including what ends up being a very difficult conversation about the attorney general of the United States, William Barr.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Did Rudy Giuliani tell you he had spoken to the attorney general specifically about Ukraine?

PARNAS: Not only Rudy Giuliani. I mean, Victoria and Joe, they were all best friends. I mean, Barr was -- Attorney General Barr was basically on the team.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Small point of personal privilege. One of weird things for me over the past few moments is that right at the time the House announced impeachment proceedings against President Trump, I right then, that week, was publishing a book called "Blowout" about the oil and gas industry.

And in the book, I used the story that I thought was an interesting sidebar up story about a natural gas tycoon named Dmytro Firtash. I used him in my book as the vehicle to tell one story about Russia was deliberately corrupting countries like Ukraine that they want to keep in their orbit and they were using energy to do so.

And then as the book was coming out, none other than Dmytro Firtash was revealed to be one of the forces at work in this corruption scheme in Ukraine to try to smear Vice President Joe Biden and fire the U.S. ambassador, and withhold U.S. aid to that country and hurt them in their fight against Russia and the whole thing.

It was just -- it was uncanny, it was totally unintentional on my part. It was like a little bit of an -- like academic news world car crash.

But now, today, the Dmytro Firtash factor has at least become a little less mysterious. Dmytro Firtash, like Lev Parnas, the man who interviewed today, is under federal indictment. Mr. Firtash's case is under indictment on multiple serious felony corruption charges. He's fighting extradition to the United States. He's currently under house arrest in Vienna.

Federal prosecutors in the Firtash case have called him an upper echelon associate of Russian organized crime.

The reason I say this got a little less mysterious today is that in my interview with Lev Parnas this afternoon in New York City, he spelled out basically what this oligarch, Dmytro Firtash, was doing in the middle of this impeachment scandal, with Rudy Giuliani and the Fox News friendly attorneys, Victoria Toensing and Joe diGenova, and how it all ultimately brings us to the desk of the attorney general of the United States, William Barr.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: So, at some point we had a meeting at our -- in our BLT office on the second floor.

MADDOW: At the Trump hotel?

PARNAS: At the Trump hotel.

At that meeting with Rudy and Victoria and Joe, John brought up saying he had some incredible information from Firtash camp, which later we found out it was I think Lenny Davis gave it to him, but that it was -- basically what showed that Andrew Weissmann was doing some legal stuff, and offering a deal, and it could blow up the smaller investigation up the kazoo.

MADDOW: Can I stop you there for a second?

So, the allegation, as you understood it, was that Andrew Weissmann, one of the prosecutors working on the Mueller team, had made -- had had an interaction with Dmytro Firtash, who's under indictment by the Justice Department, who's fighting extradition here, and that interaction Mr. Solomon (ph) was saying would be something scandalous that would discredit the Mueller investigation.

PARNAS: Correct. So, we were tasked basically with trying to establish a relationship and --

MADDOW: Specifically to get information to try to discredit the Mueller investigation.

PARNAS: Absolutely, yes. And basically, we went to -- I was given certain documents by John Solomon that would validate to Dmytro Firtash that I was in the loop and that I knew what was going on, because Mr. Firtash is a gentleman that just doesn't see anybody, and that's -- you know, it's impossible to even to get to meet with him.

For us to be able to receive information from Firtash, we had to promise Firtash something.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: So, for Firtash, it was basically telling him we knew his case is worthless here and that he's being prosecuted for no reason and that basically it could get taken care of. That --

MADDOW: That was your offer to Mr. Firtash.

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: That we can get this prosecution of you dropped.

PARNAS: Your extradition case, correct, yes.

So, that was basically the situation at that point.

MADDOW: So the exchange with Mr. Firtash was going to be, you provide us information that would be detrimental to the public perception of the Mueller investigation, and we in turn will get your case dropped at the DOJ, so you won't get extradited to the United States anymore?

PARNAS: That's how it began.

MADDOW: Mr. DiGenova and Ms. Toensing were going to become lawyers to effectuate this trade?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: And you were supposed to broker this?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: And what's this \$100,000 a month?

PARNAS: That was expenses for them, because --

MADDOW: That's what you were supposed to negotiate that this is what they were getting paid?

PARNAS: Yes, correct.

MADDOW: Are you getting paid in these interactions?

PARNAS: Mine is not this there. That was -- they were getting a million dollars plus \$100,000 a month on expenses. Mine was \$200,000.

MADDOW: And what is this here? What's that next line? Is that the founder of Burisma?

PARNAS: Zlochevsky is a Ukraine -- and the Ukraine ledger (ph), yes. Zlochevsky and Burisma and (INAUDIBLE) --

MADDOW: What are you supposed to be getting from about Burisma and the Ukrainian ledger from Lanny Davis and Mr. Firtash?

PARNAS: Well, supposedly, John Solomon said there was stuff (ph), there's case about that.

MADDOW: Aha. So, that's why this was all one conversation with Mr. Rudy Giuliani.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: The -- announcing the Biden investigation and talking about getting Firtash off from this Department of Justice prosecution, these were connected?

PARNAS: It was all connected. I mean, it was all -- at the end of the day, it was all -- the agenda was to make sure that the Ukrainians announced the Biden investigation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, a conservative journalist, John Solomon, and two Fox News lawyers, Joe diGenova and Victoria Toensing, and Rudy Giuliani and Lev Parnas are all involved, in Mr. Parnas telling, in an effort to enlist the help of a billionaire, Kremlin-connected, allegedly mobbed up oligarch, to help them pressure the Ukrainian government that they must announce investigations of Joe Biden.

And the oligarch and his team tells this motley crew that he can help with that, with getting that from the Ukrainian government. He can also help them discredit the Mueller investigation.

They say, that would be great. What we have to offer you in exchange is we can help stop you from being extradited to the United States to face felony corruption charges from the U.S. Department of Justice.

"The Washington Post" just this afternoon records that Mr. Giuliani's involved with Mr. Firtash, and Mr. Firtash's sort of team, appears to be an ongoing concern that appears to be live.

Lev Parnas said today that his group's advocacy to get the case dropped against Mr. Firtash did go all the way to Attorney General William Barr, and he says that Attorney General Barr was more widely read in on what they were doing.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Did you ever meet with or speak with or have any interaction with Attorney General William Barr?

PARNAS: I personally did not speak to him, but I was involved in lots of conversations that Joe diGenova had with him in front of me, Rudy had with him in front of me, and setting up meetings with Dmytro Firtash's team. I was involved in that.

MADDOW: Do you know if Rudy Giuliani was ever in contact with Mr. Barr, specifically about the fact that he was trying to get Ukraine to announce these investigations into Joe Biden?

PARNAS: Oh, absolutely.

MADDOW: Mr. Barr knew about it?

PARNAS: Mr. Barr had to have known everything. I mean, it's impossible.

MADDOW: Did Rudy Giuliani tell you he had spoken to the attorney general specifically about Ukraine?

PARNAS: Not only Rudy Giuliani. I mean, Victoria and Joe, they were all best friends. I mean, Barr -- Barr was -- Attorney General Barr was basically on the team.

MADDOW: When President Trump and President Zelensky spoke in July, we know from their White House notes of the call, that President Trump told Mr. Zelensky that he should contact William Barr about these investigations --

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: -- that he wanted him to do, including into Joe Biden --

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: -- that struck a lot of people as strange. Attorney General Barr was reportedly upset, and didn't know why he would be mentioned in this context, but it sounds like it makes sense to you that --

PARNAS: Absolutely, because we knew about the Durham investigation, and that was going to be part -- I mean, that Attorney General Barr wanted to get to the bottom of the Biden stuff and everything. I think he might have got upset that Trump talked -- the president ousted him, maybe, he didn't want to be in the public eye (ph) that he was doing it, but it was known internally that he was investigating the investigators.

MADDOW: Do you know if Attorney General William Barr ever spoke with any Ukrainian officials?

PARNAS: I don't recall at this moment. I'd have to look at my text messages and see.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: We contacted the Justice Department for comment on Mr. Parnas' remarks tonight. Spokeswoman Kerri Kupec at the Justice Department did give us a response. It is a two-word response -- I guess technically one number and one word.

She told us, quote, 100 percent false. And we could attribute that to her. We appreciate the comment.

We'll be right back. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Today, the impeachment articles were conveyed from the U.S. House to the U.S. Senate. Senate trial is due to formally start tomorrow. One of the awkward revelations in this saga is that while the Intelligence Committee in the House was leading the investigation of the impeachment scandal, it emerged that the top Republican member of Congress on that committee, Congressman Devin Nunes of California, appeared himself to have been connected to the people involved in the scandal and potentially to the scandal itself.

Because Congressman Nunes has been publicly very vague and defensive about whether he remembers any of his own communications with Lev Parnas during the time this Ukraine scheme was underway, I asked Mr. Parnas today if he remembers any interactions with Congressman Nunes.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Do you know Congressman Devin Nunes?

PARNAS: Yes, I do.

MADDOW: What's been your relationship with him?

PARNAS: We don't have too much of a relationship. We met several times at the Trump hotel, but our relationship started getting basically where it expanded was when I was introduced to his aide, Derek Harvey, and the reason why Derek Harvey was more -- I understood, I was told at that time because Devin Nunes had an ethics, something to do with an ethics committee, and he couldn't be in a spotlight.

He was kind of shunned a little bit and that he was looking into this Ukraine stuff also, wanted to help out. And Devin Nunes -- they gave me Derek Harvey to deal with.

MADDOW: You told Mr. Harvey what you and Mr. Giuliani were working on in Ukraine, trying to get Ukraine to announce this investigation?

PARNAS: He was aware of that already. He knew everything.

MADDOW: He already knew that by the time he talked to you.

PARNAS: He had a lot of information already.

MADDOW: Do you believe he'd gotten that information from Mr. Giuliani?

PARNAS: No. I think that they -- like I said, there was other people doing like this op research or whatever.

MADDOW: Oppo research.

PARNAS: I don't know what you call it, but it was coming from different sides, yeah.

MADDOW: Given that interaction that you just described with Congressman Nunes and his aide, Mr. Harvey, does it strike you as unusual or inappropriate that Devin Nunes would be one of the lead investigators into this scandal on the House Intelligence Committee? He's obviously the top Republican on that committee?

PARNAS: I was in shock when I was watching the hearings and when I saw Devin Nunes sitting up there, and then there was a picture where Derek Harvey was in back over there sitting. I texted my attorney I said I can't believe this is happening.

MADDOW: Because?

PARNAS: Because they were involved in getting all this stuff on Biden. I mean, Derek Harvey had several interviews -- Skype interviews I set up with different prosecutors like Haladitsky (ph), which the anti-corruption prosecutor of Ukraine, Kostiantyn Kulyk was one of the major guys that's had this whole Biden stuff.

So, it's hard to see them lie like that when you know it's like that scary because you know, he was sitting there and making all these statements and all that when he knew very well that he knew what was going on. He knew what's happening. He knows who I am.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Again, Congressman Devin Nunes is the top Republican on the Intelligence Committee, which is the committee that investigated the Ukraine scandal. Lev Parnas says that Mr. Nunes and his top staffer were actually involved in the Ukraine scandal in the sense that they were involved in the effort to try to gin up a corruption scandal for Joe Biden in Ukraine. Mr. Parnas says he helped them in that effort.

We contacted Congressman Nunes's office for comment tonight. We did not receive any reply before air time. We'll let you know if that changes before we're off the air. More ahead, stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: You raised the issue of Ambassador Yovanovitch to President Trump telling him that he should get rid of her?

PARNAS: Yes, well, I didn't say get rid of her. I don't know my exact words (INAUDIBLE) but I told him she's bad mouthing him and she's saying bad things about him.

MADDOW: Do you actually believe that she did bad-mouth him and say bad things about him, or do you think this was part of this disinformation campaign to make her look bad?

PARNAS: I don't believe it. That's why I want to apologize to her because, you know, at that point I believed it, but I don't believe it now after re-evaluating and seeing everything that transpired, looking at the documentation again.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: I did not expect that Lev Parnas wanted to use this interview today to apologize to Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch for his role in the effort to smear her and get her fired, but he did that.

The broader context Mr. Parnas was just talking about there is what he says was a personal interaction he had with President Trump in which he says he witnessed president Trump personally ordering the firing of Marie Yovanovitch. We will have more on that in part two of the Lev Parnas interview tomorrow night.

We'll also have more for you tomorrow night on what Mr. Parnas alleged about -- alleged today about former Energy Secretary Rick Perry and current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. We're doing a little more reporting on those allegations and claims. We're looking, in fact, at some of the new information that bolsters Mr. Parnas's case which was just released tonight by the Intelligence Committee.

So again, more on that tomorrow in part two of this interview. I do just before I go want to bring you some news we just got moments ago while we have been on the air tonight in the past couple of minutes, we got a response from former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to something Mr. Parnas told us in today's interview. You saw Mr. Parnas say on the air that Giuliani had made introductions for him with Ukraine officials in which he told the Ukrainian officials that Mr. Parnas spoke as a representative of President Trump. Mr. Giuliani denied to us that he ever did that. Asked whether Mr. Parnas was speaking on behalf of the president in Ukraine, Mayor Giuliani told us tonight, quote, never. He also called Mr. Parnas a, quote, sad situation.

This was one big day. Tomorrow will be another.

See you again tomorrow.

Now it's time for "THE LAST WORD WITH LAWRENCE O'DONNELL".

Good evening, Lawrence.

RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: Thanks to you at home for joining us this hour.

Tonight, we will present part two of my interview with Lev Parnas.

Now, as I said before the first part of the interview last night, and I want to reiterate it now, Mr. Parnas is under federal indictment. He was one of four defendants charged in early October with multiple felonies related to an alleged scheme to funnel foreign and otherwise illegal donations to various Republican candidates and campaigns, including more than \$300,000 in an allegedly illegal donation to the main super PAC supporting the president's reelection.

Mr. Parnas is under indictment. He says he would like to cooperate with the impeachment investigators. He says he would also like to cooperate with the federal prosecutors who have charged him in the Southern District of New York. But he's right now out on bond awaiting trial.

And I will just mention at the outset that I am cognizant of the fact that we are presenting the second part of this interview tonight rather than just diving right in to some of the other momentous and historic news of today, including the start today of the Senate trial of President Trump. Today marks only the third time in U.S. history that an American president has faced an impeachment trial in the Senate.

And it was a solemn beginning today. The administering of the oath to the chief justice of the Supreme Court, the administering of the oath to all U.S. senators, all of the senators individually signing their names to the oath, one by one, in alphabetical order.

It's a solemn thing. It's a sobering thing. This is a big deal. And it's worth, you know, the massive headlines that it's getting all over the country. It is absolutely worth marking this day in history.

It is also worth noting that the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office today issued a ruling that it was illegal for President Trump to withhold aid to Ukraine as part of this scheme, that what he did there was against the law, for that to be arriving today, that ruling from the Government Accountability Office on the day that the Senate impeachment trial starts -- I mean, this is all a big deal.

But it's also becoming clear that what happens next in the impeachment of President Trump in this Senate trial may depend in part on the additional evidence and witnesses who are still coming forward as the Ukraine scheme is coming more fully to light, and so -- onward, here's part two.

All right. One of the main questions, a lot of different people have asked, I myself have asked, and have wondered, main question asked about Mr. Parnas' decision to give this first public interview is why he would speak out publicly while he's out on bond awaiting trial, right? That is atypical behavior to say the least for a federal criminal defendant, particularly one who has a sentient lawyer.

I mean, the common wisdom is that public remarks and remarks to the media could really only disadvantage a defendant in his or her dealings with federal prosecutors, right? If you speak out

publicly, if you speak to the media, it's going to hurt your criminal case. That is the common wisdom for all federal defendants in all kinds of criminal trials.

So why is Mr. Parnas doing it?

Well, in this case, Mr. Parnas says that he has a significant fear of the Justice Department. And specifically he has a significant fear of Attorney General William Barr. For him, that is not reason to be quiet. That is part of the reason why he's making his case now to the public.

My understanding from spending a long time Mr. Parnas doing this interview is that he believes he's safer putting this stuff out in the public sphere than he is keeping his mouth shut while the Justice Department knows what he was involved in and they know what he knows and they have his fate in their hands.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

LEV PARNAS, INDICTED GIULIANI ASSOCIATE: My only objective is to get the truth out because I never thought I was doing anything wrong. I still, you know, I regret certain things that I did, because, like, you know, hurting the ambassador, you know?

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: Because that was not something, but it was part of -- it's like, when you're in a war, you think like casualties and stuff like that. It's bad to say, but it was -- and I keep saying it was like, you know, being in a cult. I mean, and -- and when they say organized crime, I don't think Trump is like organized -- I think he's like a cult leader.

And right now, the scary part, and that's what I keep mentioning and people don't understand is, there's a lot of Republicans that would go against him. The only reason -- if you'll take a look, and you know very well because you have been following, the difference between why Trump is so powerful now, and he wasn't as powerful in '16 and '17 --

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: -- he became that powerful when he got William Barr.

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: People are scared. Am I scared? Yes, and because I think I'm more scared of our own Justice Department than of these criminals right now, because, you know, the scariest part is getting locked in some room and being treated as an animal when you did nothing wrong and -- or when you're not, you know, and that's the tool they're using.

I mean, just -- because they're trying (ph) to scare me into not talking and with God's help, and with my lawyer next to me that I know will go bat for me no matter what, with the truth --

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: -- and I'm taking a chance.

My wife is scared. My kids are nervous.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: When he says, "They're trying to scare into not talking," Mr. Parnas is referencing something specific actually that I asked him about in more detail in a different part of the interview that I'm going to show you in just a moment.

But what Mr. Parnas describes there as a sort of -- what he says is a cultish environment, him saying getting out of that cultish environment around the president now makes him regret some of his actions, that thing that he's saying about it being like a cult that he regrets some of his behavior there, that applies as well to the central claim at the heart of the impeachment scandal, which was this concerted effort that Mr. Parnas was involved in to accuse former Vice President Joe Biden of wrongdoing and to get Ukraine to announce investigations of Vice President Biden.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: In terms of the information, the allegations against Vice President Biden, Mr. Shokin makes allegations against Mr. Biden. Mr. Lutsenko also makes allegations against Mr. Biden. Do you believe that those allegations were true?

PARNAS: When we were dealing with it, when I was in the middle of the thick of things, I think I was kind of -- I keep saying it's a cultish environment being around President Trump because I mean, like, I've been in D.C. for two years, I never left the Trump Hotel type of situation.

So, I truly believe seeing different information that was handed to us at that time that Joe Biden was doing something illegal, not so much Hunter Biden but more Joe Biden.

But after analyzing all the evidence and sitting back and really -- what's it called -- understanding what's going on, I don't think -- I don't think Vice President Biden did anything wrong. I think he was protecting our country and getting rid of probably a crooked attorney general.

And people used this to their advantage. A lot of rich people in Ukraine have their own agenda. And they use us here for their own political stuff. So I think this is -- was a big one.

MADDOW: In terms of the material that was handed over to intelligence, on March 22nd, Mr. Lutsenko texts you in Russian, there's a translation that's provided by the committee.

It says: It's just that if you don't make a decision about madam, you are bringing into question all my allegations including about B.

So when he says "madam" is he talking about --

PARNAS: Ambassador Yovanovitch.

MADDOW: -- Ambassador Yovanovitch?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: And when he says, all my allegations including about B --

PARNAS: Burisma.

MADDOW: -- is that about Burisma and Biden?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: OK. Do you know if it's Burisma or Biden? I guess --

PARNAS: It was always Biden. Burisma, it was just -- I mean, nobody cares about Burisma or Zlochevsky. It was -- the concern was Biden, Hunter Biden.

MADDOW: In that text message to you, is Mr. Lutsenko saying in effect, listen, if you want me to make these Biden allegations, you're going to have to get rid of this ambassador?

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Was he threatening if you didn't get rid of the ambassador, he might withdraw his Biden allegation?

PARNAS: He actually did. He withdrew it several times.

MADDOW: He wanted Ambassador Yovanovitch ousted for his own career reasons. He had clashed with her, in her anti-corruption efforts that had butted up against him and his efforts.

PARNAS: Absolutely, yes.

MADDOW: Lutsenko and Shokin both had an interest in getting rid of U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch.

PARNAS: Yes, and it's funny because they both don't like each other.

MADDOW: Shokin and Lutsenko don't like each other.

PARNAS: Shokin hates Lutsenko, and even though Lutsenko used to be his underling. But they consider -- listen, it's a different environment over there. And it's -- unless you live it, unless you do business there, unless you visit there and understand it, bribery and -- it's just a way of life.

I mean, regular people at the store do it. They'll bribe the butcher to get a better piece of meat and it's normal. You know, or get better seats at a concert.

So, it's like a way of life over there. So, the way the structure is set up, that's why everybody's hoping that Zelensky changes it, but I don't know how much he can change with one series (ph) - like, it's already embedded.

This is where once you become -- in America, it's like you become a politician to serve your country not to make money, because you can't make money while you're -- in Ukraine, it's the opposite. You -- some of these people pay millions of dollars to get a seat as a politician because once --

(CROSSTALK)

MADDOW: Because they can use it to make so much more money.

PARNAS: Right. So, once they get there. So, it's all about the money and it's all about power.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Lev Parnas, a key fixer and figure in the effort to fit up Vice President Joe Biden with accusations of wrongdoing in Ukraine, to force the Ukrainian government to announce investigations into Mr. Biden, to force out the U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch who was in the way of that effort.

Mr. Parnas now apologizing to that U.S. ambassador, Ambassador Yovanovitch. We aired that last night.

And as I just showed you, Mr. Parnas also says he now does not believe that Vice President Biden did anything wrong in Ukraine. And that Vice President Biden's actions there which Mr. Parnas helped try to turn into a scandal, in his words now, he says "Mr. Biden's actions were taken to protect our country and get rid of a crooked attorney general."

By confirming the nature of his own communications with that official he refers to as a crooked attorney general, Mr. Parnas also makes clear that the removal of Ambassador Yovanovitch was a demand from the key accusers that he and Mr. Giuliani and the president and others have been using to make this false case against Biden.

The accusers, including both Lutsenko and Shokin wanted Yovanovitch gone. Lutsenko explicitly demanded to Parnas that the ambassador be removed or his allegations against Biden might be at risk. Shokin and Lutsenko wanted Ambassador Yovanovitch removed in Lev Parnas'

telling because they were corrupt and she was a force against corruption in Ukraine and so they wanted her out of their way, too.

Think about the collateral damage that was caused not only in our own country but around the world and in Ukraine by this scheme to aid the president's re-election effort. That gives you a pretty clear sense of what that might be in Ukraine when it comes to anti-corruption.

President Trump's alleged personal role in trying to remove Ambassador Yovanovitch before she was ultimately recalled, we're going to have more on that coming up this hour as well.

But before we get to that, there's one other piece of this I want to foreground here that isn't specifically about President Trump. It's about another senior member of the Trump administration who Lev Parnas says stepped in to play a role in the Ukraine scheme at a very key moment. The new president of Ukraine elected on this anti-corruption platform, right, engaged in an ongoing war with Russia, he's inaugurated in May. As the new leader of Ukraine, he somewhat desperately needs a show of support, a strong show of support from the United States government, that's key to the U.S. -- to the Ukraine in terms of its fight with Russia among other things.

On the eve of Zelensky's inauguration, Mr. Parnas told me in the portion of the interview we played yesterday that he was directed by Rudy Giuliani who had spoken to President Trump about it, he was directed to really turn up the pressure on Ukraine. To demand to the Ukrainian government that unless they announced a Biden investigation, the Ukrainian government would lose not only all U.S. military aid, they would lose all the U.S. aid and Vice President Pence would not come to the inauguration of the new president.

Vice President Pence's plans to attend the inauguration at that point were in full swing. The threat was that that would be canceled, that Pence wouldn't come unless they met the Biden investigation demand. We played this portion of the interview last night, but here's just a little squib from it to refresh your memory.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: In the conversation, I told him that if he doesn't -- the announcement was the key at that time because of the inauguration, that Pence would not show up, nobody would show up to his inauguration.

MADDOW: Unless he announced an investigation into Joe Biden, no U.S. officials, particularly Vice President Mike Pence, would not come to the Zelensky inauguration.

PARNAS: Particularly Vice President Mike Pence.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, that conversation as Mr. Parnas describes it, he says that was in May of last year, May 12th specifically, a meeting he says with a top aide to the incoming president-elect in

Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky's top adviser. He says that that demand that he made that they needed to announce the Biden investigation was rebuffed. The Ukrainians did not agree to announce a Biden investigation despite the threat Mr. Parnas was making there on behalf of the White House.

And when they rebuffed his demand and they did not provide that announcement of the investigation, in fact, the following day, the White House made good on their threat and Vice President Mike Pence did cancel his planned trip to the Zelensky inauguration.

That's as far as we got in the interview with Mr. Parnas as of last night, but the way it went down thereafter is that after Vice President Pence canceled his trip to the Zelensky inauguration, within a few days the U.S. government decided they would send another senior official in his place.

So, let's pick up the story there.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: That's when we flew to Paris, and in Paris, we met Rudy before -- and when we were in Paris with Rudy, basically, that's when I found out that Perry was going to the -- they decided to send Perry there instead.

MADDOW: Energy Secretary Rick Perry would be going.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Did you -- you learned that from Mr. Giuliani?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Was Mr. Perry, to your knowledge, aware of what you and Mr. Giuliani were trying to do in Ukraine of terms of getting these investigations announced?

PARNAS: I don't know to what extent he was told about me. I don't know what he was told. Definitely he knew about Rudy because he was told -- he called Rudy on his way there to ask him what to discuss and Rudy told him that to make sure to give him the message.

MADDOW: Mr. Giuliani told Secretary Perry what you need to convey to the Ukrainian government they need to announce an investigation into Joe Biden.

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Do you know if part of the message that Mr. Giuliani conveyed to Secretary Perry was also that Ukraine would lose their military aid, they'd lose their U.S. aid, if they didn't announce those investigations?

PARNAS: I don't recall them having a specific conversation about that.

MADDOW: OK.

PARNAS: It was more of just telling him what he needs to do to announce it. I don't know what other conversation they could have had prior or after.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: But I know that there was another conversation that Perry called after the inauguration telling him that he spoke to Zelensky and Zelensky's going to do it.

MADDOW: Perry says, I spoke with Zelensky and I got him to agree.

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: I got him to agree to announce the investigation.

PARNAS: Yes, and they did an announcement but they didn't announce that.

See, this was the whole key. They would kind of say every time somebody would meet Zelensky, they would, like, agree and then they would walk it back.

So they announced something about corruption that he's going to get corruption but Giuliani blew his lid on that saying that's not what we discussed. That it wasn't supposed to be a corruption announcement. It has to be about Joe Biden and Hunter Biden and Burisma.

MADDOW: He said the name, Biden, needs to be spoken, was his insistence?

PARNAS: Always, always.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: They did not want them to announce corruption investigations or anti-corruption efforts. That was not it. It had to be about Biden. They had to say Biden.

Lev Parnas alleging that former Energy Secretary Rick Perry who we know from impeachment hearing testimony was tasked by the White House as one of three officials along with Kurt Volker and Gordon Sondland who were taking the lead for the Trump White House on Ukraine policy. This was the three amigos.

According to Lev Parnas, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry was directed by Rudy Giuliani to deliver the message to the Ukrainian government that they needed to announce investigations into Joe Biden. He says, Mr. Parnas says, that Mr. Perry phoned Mr. Giuliani, contacted Mr. Giuliani, and said that he had been in touch with the Ukrainian president, that he had conveyed the message, and that, in fact, the Ukrainian government had agreed to make that announcement.

Now, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry has denied playing any role in this scheme, but he did crash out of the Trump cabinet just as this scandal started to come to the surface. It was October 16th when "The Wall Street Journal" reported that, in fact, Secretary Perry did call Rudy Giuliani to talk about Ukraine. He did so at the direction of President Trump.

The following day, October 17th, Rick Perry tendered his resignation to the president as energy secretary. The day after that, October 18th, Secretary Perry announced that he would not comply with a subpoena in the impeachment investigation.

Whether he would comply now with a subpoena to testify to the Senate trial of the president, that remains to be seen. We'll be right back with more.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: I know that there was another conversation that Perry called after the inauguration, telling him that he spoke to Zelensky and Zelensky's going to do it.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: Did you ever have any communications with the counsel to the president, Jay Sekulow, during the time that you were involved in all this?

LEV PARNAS, INDICTED GIULIANI ASSOCIATE: Several conversations. One, in particular, which I would have to refresh my memory by looking at my text messages with him, but had to do with -- I think it was Viktor Shokin's visa, or something to do with Ukraine. And Rudy was busy at the time and basically told me that Jay was aware of everything, that he brought him up to speed, that I could call him and he was on top of it.

MADDOW: Was -- by that did he mean that Mr. Sekulow was part of this effort to try to get Ukraine to announce investigations?

PARNAS: Oh, absolutely. One of the things I think was the best quote ever was when Mr. Sondland said everybody's in the loop and --

MADDOW: You believe that everybody was in the loop?

PARNAS: I don't believe. I know.

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: I know they were in the loop. I was witness of conversations and -- you know, between them. And everybody was in the loop.

Everybody didn't agree with the loop. I mean, Jay Sekulow didn't agree with what Rudy was doing, but knew what he was doing.

MADDOW: How do you know that he didn't agree with it?

PARNAS: Because I heard them talk about it.

MADDOW: And was his objection?

PARNAS: He didn't want to be involved in the Ukraine stuff. He -- I don't know what his -- you'd have to ask him, what his (INAUDIBLE). My feeling from the conversations, and watching the way Jay approached that situation was he just didn't want to be a part of it, and wanted to stay away from it.

MADDOW: You mentioned that you were trying to get Mr. Shokin a visa to come to the United States.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Why were you trying to do that?

PARNAS: Well, after the conversation Mr. Shokin had with Mr. Giuliani that we had on Skype, they had discussed on the range they were going to have Mr. Shokin come here, and Mr. Giuliani wanted to debrief him here in front of Mr. Lindsey Graham, and -- certain other people like the attorney general.

MADDOW: Because Mr. Shokin was going to say what?

PARNAS: He was basically going to testify and say that Joe Biden basically forced him out because he was going to investigate Hunter Biden and Burisma.

MADDOW: Was the president, himself, ever involved in the effort to get this visa from Mr. Shokin? In the text messages that were released, Mr. Giuliani appears to tell you he's going to get number one involved in this effort to get Mr. Shokin into the U.S.

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Was that a reference to the president?

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Did the president ever work on it?

PARNAS: Of course.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Lev Parnas stating that President Trump, himself, was aware of and involved in efforts to try to bring at least one Biden accuser from Ukraine to the United States to, among other things, brief Senator Lindsey Graham and Attorney General William Barr.

We believe that accuser, former Ukrainian prosecutor Viktor Shokin, had his visa to visit the United States blocked by the U.S. embassy in Kiev because it was the official U.S. government view of him that he was way too corrupt as a public official to be allowed a U.S. visa.

But it's also noteworthy that Mr. Parnas says that he believes that counsel to the president, Jay Sekulow, was aware of everything that was going on in this Ukraine scheme but that he disapproved of it. Mr. Parnas' words, he said Mr. Sekulow wanted to stay away from all this stuff involving Ukraine.

I should note at this point that Mr. Sekulow is expected to be one of the main defense counsels for President Trump in his impeachment trial which convened today in the senate. I should also note that Mr. Parnas says Mr. Sekulow was, however much he disapproved of the whole Ukraine scheme, he says Mr. Sekulow was directly involved in advising him not to cooperate with the investigation into the Ukraine scheme and with signing him up with some other lawyers who Lev ultimately fired but who also told him not to cooperate with the investigation into Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: How did you end up with Mr. Downing and Mr. Dowd representing you when the impeachment inquiry had contacted you for testimony?

PARNAS: That's a good question, Rachel.

First of all, what happened was we were in Vienna when we got notified that we had a congressional, what's it called --

MADDOW: Request.

PARNAS: Request.

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: And I was there with Victoria Toensing and Joe DiGenova working on the Dmytro Firtash case. And first people came to was them, and I said, what do I do? They said, call Rudy.

I called Rudy, what do we do? Rudy's first response was, I don't worry about it, forget it. I was like, what you mean don't worry about it? You're an attorney. Please help me get an attorney. Rudy came back and said, oh, I have a great, John Dowd.

And we were like, OK. We got excited. I didn't know who John Dowd was. But I knew he was the president's attorney. It was a very, like, you know, exciting situation even though it was, you know, all this going on. It's still, you know, like in the Looney Tunes.

But I would I called John Dowd, introduced myself like Rudy connected us and at first everything was good. Then, like, 15 minutes later I get a call from him saying, we have a problem that I'm not going to probably be able to represent you.

I said, what happened? He goes, I've been speaking with Jay Sekulow, and, you know, because I was the president's attorney, I'm still kind of doing work for the president, there's a conflict of interest unless he wants to waive it. I don't think the president is going to waive that conflict.

Because at that point, John Dowd didn't know who I was also. He didn't think I had any relationship with the president. And I responded to him, I said I think he will. I said --

MADDOW: You think the president will waive the conflict.

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: And let Dowd represent you.

PARNAS: Absolutely. I said, give Rudy a call, I'm sure we can work this out, I said because this is very important.

About 15, 20 minutes later I got called back from John Dowd. He said, you're one lucky guy, I just got called from Jay Sekulow, I got the permission and I'm getting it in writing shortly.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: You are one lucky guy. I just want to interrupt here for a moment to show you that, in fact, what Mr. Parnas is talking about here is corroborated by some of the documentation that he has handed over to the House Intelligence Committee. This letter from Jay Sekulow saying that he, Jay Sekulow, got President Trump's expressed permission for Lev Parnas to be represented legally by John Dowd. That was, in fact, a letter that Mr. Parnas turned over to the impeachment investigators and now has been conveyed to the Senate.

So, Jay Sekulow talked to the president about you, Lev Parnas, and I have received his permission to let you use John Dowd as your lawyer. Mr. Parnas thinks he is very lucky. This is great. It shows that the president is willing to help him out. It also shows he's getting the president lawyer, which is wonderful.

Mr. Parnas went on to say in the interview that he was advised by his new lawyer who he's very excited about, John Dowd, in consultation with Jay Sekulow at the White House and Rudy Giuliani, that he should not cooperate with the investigation into Ukraine. the impeachment investigation that's brewing in congress.

He's been asked by the impeachment investigators to give information. He says he is advised by his new legal team in communication with the White House, with the president's counsel, Jay Sekulow, that he shouldn't cooperate even though he says he personally would have been happy to.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: You got a request from Congress to come -- for you and Mr. Fruman to come testify to the impeachment investigation.

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: You were inclined to say yes.

PARNAS: Absolutely, I had nothing to hide. We were not doing anything illegal.

MADDOW: Your lawyer, John Dowd, however, advised you not to cooperate and said the president would give you cover for not cooperating?

PARNAS: It was a little more than that. I was brought into John Dowd's house and he got Jay Sekulow on the phone and also Rudy and Victoria, then basically they came up with a situation that said that because I worked for Rudy and because I worked for Victoria and because Rudy worked for the president, we had three-way privilege and that basically Pat Cipollone was going to be writing a letter to Congress telling them to -- that nobody's cooperating, and that would protect us under the same order and he would follow up with that.

Again, this was the president of the United States -- so, I mean, I thought, OK. I said if -- here's all the information I have. I did my duty. I gave him whatever paperwork I had.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Mr. Parnas says that he disagreed with this decision to not cooperate with the congressional investigation into the Ukraine scheme. He said he was inclined to hand over whatever he had, but he says the president, himself, approved Mr. Parnas using this lawyer who the president, himself had use himself, had used. Mr. Dowd. Mr. Sekulow and the White House was part of the team giving him advice that he should not cooperate. He figured it was probably fine. Since, I mean, all of this appeared to be coming down to him from the president of the United States and all of these people who worked with the president.

But then Lev Parnas got arrested and that's when things went quite pear-shaped.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Mr. Dowd was your attorney for a time and then you changed attorneys.

PARNAS: I fired him in jail.

MADDOW: You fired him when you were in jail?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: What happened there?

PARNAS: And Mr. Downing.

Basically, when we were arrested, obviously, I had nowhere else to call. I didn't know -- we just retained Dowd and Downing. So I called Downing to come there and I started seeing in the process of the bail stuff the way things were going on that they were more concentrating on -- I didn't feel that they were trying to get me out, and at that point, I had a meeting with John Dowd and Downing inside the jail.

And John Dowd just instead of comforting me and, you know, trying to calm me down, telling me, like, it's going to be OK, like, don't worry, basically start talking to me like a drill sergeant and telling me, giving me orders, like, you know, be a good boy, like, you know.

MADDOW: He said "be a good boy"?

PARNAS: No, I don't -- I don't want to quote him exactly on what the words, what he used in that because it was a while ago. I don't remember exactly.

But it was -- it was his condescending attitude toward basically, like, who do you think you are telling the president or Giuliani or anybody to, like, come out and because I -- one of the things I said, I said, I can't believe nobody is coming out in our defense and saying we didn't do anything wrong, we're good citizens, you know, we work.

And basically word for word, and then I said, if you don't get out of here right now, something bad is going to happen because I don't want to see the two of you.

And at that point, Downing hit the emergency button and the security took me out and took them out.

MADDOW: This is a very heated confrontation. You told Downing and Dowd to get out.

PARNAS: I threw them out.

MADDOW: Were they telling you to sacrifice yourself in order to protect the president?

PARNAS: That's what I felt.

MADDOW: Is the implication of this story of the lawyers that you feel, that people loyal to the president and close to the president were trying to influence your defense and your case in a way that was against your interests but in the president's interests?

PARNAS: Absolutely. I think they tried to keep me quiet.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Lev Parnas, again, should be noted is out on bond awaiting trial on multiple felony counts for allegedly funneling foreign and otherwise illegal donations to Republican candidates and campaigns including the super PAC that is supporting President Trump's re-election effort.

In terms of the lawyers he was talking about here, Kevin Downing was the main defense lawyer for the president's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, who is currently serving more than seven years in federal prison. John Dowd was one of the president's defense counsels on the Russia investigation.

Both Mr. Downing and Mr. Dowd have since been fired by Lev Parnas in the situation that you just heard him describe there, that jailhouse confrontation. As for Jay Sekulow, the gentleman on your right side of your screen here -- screen here, he will be representing President Trump as one of his defense counsels in the U.S. Senate in the president's impeachment trial.

Speaking of the president, more ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: We've got one last piece of the Lev Parnas interview to bring you tonight. And it is one that, I'll tell you in advance, it raises more questions than it answers. The person who can answer those questions is not Lev Parnas, however, but rather Secretary of State Mike Pompeo or, perhaps, other State Department officials who know about the actions of Secretary Pompeo and the State Department at this time.

When you hear people gnash their teeth about the fact that the administration hasn't handed over any documents to the impeachment investigation, that the State Department won't hand over a single document to explain its own role and its own behavior during the scandal, this is why. This is an example of why.

OK. One of the mysteries that still lingers from the Ukraine scandal is about that smear campaign that was carried out against the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, and that smear campaign, of course, was aimed at getting her removed from the embassy, removed from her post.

Ultimately, she was removed, of course. She was told to get on the next plane out. She got a call at 1:00 in the morning saying your security is at risk, get on the next plane out. That was in late April.

Her departure was announced by the State Department shortly thereafter in terms that said that it was, you know, normal and long planned when it was actually anything but.

But in addition to lying about the circumstances of her departure, one question that has always nagged about the State Department and the role of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is why the smear campaign was necessary.

After all, if Marie Yovanovitch was in the way of the president's pressure campaign to get the Ukrainian government to help him with his re-election effort, or if the president was unhappy with her for any other reason, for that matter, either made up or real -- well, he's the president. He could just fire her. He could just have her recalled from her post. Why did they have to go through this public humiliating drama?

Well, in my interview with Lev Parnas, Mr. Parnas told me that President Trump tried to fire Ambassador Yovanovitch several times and it, for some reason, didn't work.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: The president kept firing her and couldn't (ph) -- and she wouldn't leave. So nobody could understand what was going on.

MADDOW: Public information, she was removed, at the time that she was removed, she was back in the United States at the end of the April, you're saying that the president tried to fire before that.

PARNAS: He fired her probably at least, to my knowledge, at least four, five times. He even had a breakdown and scream, "fire her" to Madeline (ph), his assistant, the secretary, before he fired her. He said, Mr. President, I can't do that.

MADDOW: He was directing the State Department to remove her and the State Department was refusing?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: But the basis of your belief that the president had tried to remove Ambassador Yovanovitch multiple times and it for some reason didn't work is because you talked to the president about that?

PARNAS: About firing her, I spoke to the president once about that, or twice. Once or twice. Once directly at our dinner when he fired her actually at the dinner which was the most surprising thing ever I --

MADDOW: Tell me -- tell me more.

PARNAS: Basically, at that dinner, we had a conversation, there was, like, six of us there, it was an intimate dinner.

MADDOW: At the White House?

PARNAS: It was -- no, it was a Trump Hotel. It was a private -- like area there. Looks like a little White House.

MADDOW: And the president was there?

PARNAS: Oh, absolutely. The president was there, his son, Don Jr., was there. I don't know how the issue is -- the conversation came up, but I do remember me telling the president the ambassador was bad-mouthing him and saying he was going to get impeached, something to that effect.

And at that time, he turned around to John DeStefano, who was his aide at the time, and said, "fire her". And we all -- there was a silence in the room. He responded to him, said Mr. President, we can't do that right now because Pompeo hasn't been confirmed yet. That Pompeo is not confirmed yet and we don't have -- this is when Tillerson was gone, but Pompeo was confirmed, so they go, wait until (INAUDIBLE).

So several conversations he mentioned it again. I don't know how many times at that dinner, once or twice or three times. But he fired her several times.

MADDOW: He reiterated that she should be fired then he was ordering her to be fired.

PARNAS: Correct.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Now, a couple things here. First we should say that Lev Parnas told me in this interview that he no longer actually, himself, believes that Marie Yovanovitch as ambassador actually was bad-mouthing President Trump or saying he was going to be impeached.

He now says he recognizes that was part of the disinformation campaign. He regrets participating in it even though he believed it at the time. He apologized to the ambassador in my interview with him. We aired that last night. He says he regrets believing those things about her and participating in the effort to get her fired.

The other thing to note here, though, is the meeting that Mr. Parnas is describing he says took place on April 30th, 2018, and from what he's describing about where the meeting happened and who was at that meeting, we believe that there was a meeting of that type on April 30th, 2018, at the location that Mr. Parnas is describing.

On April 30th, 2018, Mike Pompeo had, in fact, been Senate confirmed just a few days before. Mike Pompeo, however, had not yet been sworn in officially as secretary of state so, perhaps, that was the source of confusion saying we can't do it yet, Mr. Pompeo isn't formally in place yet. We don't know.

But aside from that detail, I think you would take from Mr. Parnas' account there that there was, perhaps, an expectation in the White House, perhaps an expectation around the president, that

once Mike Pompeo was fully in charge at the State Department, once Trump had his guy in there as secretary of state, Ambassador Yovanovitch would be fired.

In the end, it would be another year before that actually happened.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: That was not the only time he fired her because he fired her at least four other occasions that Rudy Giuliani went to the White House, had conversations with him and then came back and then informed me, Victoria, and Joe about what transpired. He fired her when he gave an order to Mike Pompeo once, which he didn't do, Secretary Pompeo didn't fire her.

Then Rudy came back and he told him, go speak to Pompeo. Rudy went to speak to Pompeo. They got into it.

Then they had another meeting at the White House where he told Bolton to fire her. Bolton didn't want to fire her. Tell Pompeo to fire her.

Rudy got into it with all of them again. And at one point, he told Madeleine (ph) to fire her.

So, I mean, that was becoming comical because I couldn't understand, you're the president -- that's one of the things -- when I say comical, it's not more comical, but at that point, it was more of affirmation to me that there was people against the president of the United States if they're not listening to his orders.

So that's where I think the smear campaign started coming about. I think it was like a boost to them to help him if the media started, like, egging him on, that there was really something there, then he would just tweet and fire her.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: They couldn't get it done through normal channels, even with the president, himself, being involved in those somewhat normal channels, and so they started the smear campaign to try to create media agitation against Ambassador Yovanovitch and maybe that would make it possible for the president to evade or elide direct channels and do it with the support of the conservative media who would advance these claims?

I mean, this is fascinating, right? According to Lev Parnas, the smear campaign against Marie Yovanovitch was not meant to convince president Trump she was bad. He was already onboard with that. Happy to believe that.

The smear campaign against the ambassador was meant to help his efforts to fire her. Now, maybe get him so riled up, he would fire her by tweet, make it public that way instead of just yelling it out to random people at random meetings and dinners.

But this narrative also presents us with a sort of mixed, complicated, picture of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in this scandal. I mean, on the one hand, Secretary Pompeo refused to support Ambassador Yovanovitch publicly when she was being attacked as part of the smear campaign, and it was his office that ultimately removed her from her post with no evidence that he actually believed or that the State Department actually had any substantial reason, any real reason, to get her out.

We also know that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was in contact with Rudy Giuliani who was running the whole Ukraine operation including the Yovanovitch smear campaign, including when Lev Parnas, who was inseparable from Rudy Giuliani, was exchanging alarming text messages with a Republican congressional candidate who purported to have Ambassador Yovanovitch under physical surveillance and appeared to be raising the prospect of some physical harm or intimidation being carried out against her.

I should also mention that the material Lev Parnas turned over to the Intelligence Committee includes in the latest batch released last night these text messages involving Rudy Giuliani and Victoria Toensing, a Fox News lawyer working with Giuliani and Parnas in their scheme to get Yovanovitch fired.

In these texts about three months before Yovanovitch was finally recalled, Toensing asks Giuliani, "is there absolute commitment for her ," her, all caps, her, meaning Yovanovitch "to be gone this week?" Giuliani responds, "Yes. Not sure how absolute. We'll get a reading in the morning and call you."

Pompeo, misspelled Pompei, "Pompeo is now aware of it, talk to him on Friday."

The next month, the conservative journalist, John Solomon, wrote to Lev Parnas and Victoria Toensing and her husband Joe DiGenova, saying that he, John Solomon, needed State Department help on, quote, Hunter Biden contacts. What's what State Department help did John Solomon expect to get? Why did he think Lev Parnas and friends could get it for him? Is that how the State Department runs?

I mean, all of that points to Mike Pompeo's State Department being an ally, being sort of part of the team for President Trump and his associates on the Ukraine scheme. But it's unclear, I mean, you also have Lev Parnas describing Mike Pompeo as ostensibly blocking the firing of Marie Yovanovitch at several points.

As late as September of last year when national security adviser John Bolton left the White House, just as the Ukraine scream was being exposed, texts from Mr. Parnas suggested that Mike Pompeo was not in good standing with this group. Parnas writing to a friend, quote, Bolton is out. Pompeo is next.

But the mixed contradictory picture like that, I have a lot of questions for Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. I imagine, impeachment investigators do, too.

We reached out to the State Department for comment both last night and tonight. We haven't heard back. We'll let you know if that changes.

But as the president's trial on this scandal gets under way in the Senate, a key question about the conduct of the trial is whether Secretary Pompeo will be called under oath to answer questions about what really is his very, very, murky role in all of this.

We'll be right back.