

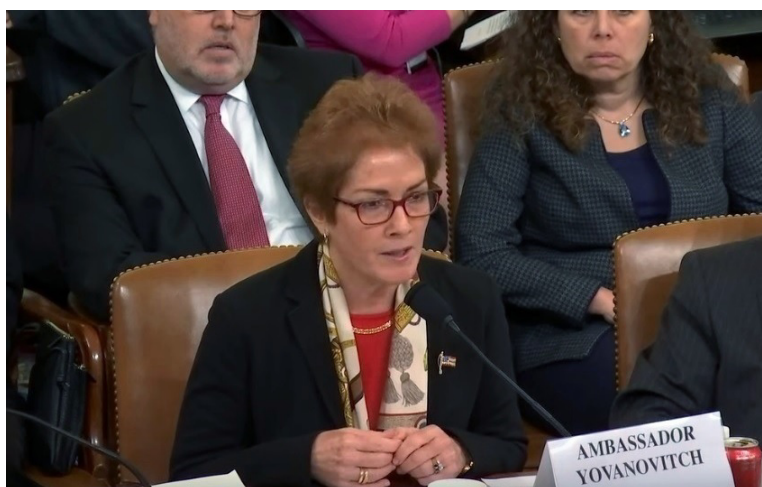


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Marie Yovanovitch

Opening Statement to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

delivered 15 November 2019, Washington, D.C.



[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Ambassador Yovanovitch: Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Nunes, and other Members of the Committee --

Chairman Schiff: And ambassador you'll need to speak very close to the microphone.

Ambassador Yovanovitch: Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to start with this statement, to reintroduce myself to the Committee, and to highlight parts of my biography and experience.

I come before you as an American citizen, who has devoted the majority of my life, 33 years, to service to the country that all of us love -- love.



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Like my colleagues, I entered the Foreign Service understanding that my job was to implement the foreign policy interests of this nation, as defined by the President and Congress, and to do so regardless of which person or party was in power. I had no agenda other than to pursue our stated foreign policy goals.

My service is an expression of gratitude for all that this country has given to me and to my family. My late parents did not have the good fortune to come of age in a free society. My father fled the Soviets before ultimately finding refuge in the United States. My mother's family escaped the USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution, and she grew up stateless in Nazi Germany, before also eventually making her way to the United States. Their personal histories, my personal history -- gave me both deep gratitude towards the United States and great empathy for others -- like the Ukrainian people -- who want to be free.

I joined the Foreign Service during the Reagan Administration and subsequently served three other Republican Presidents, as well as two Democratic Presidents. It was my great honor to be appointed to serve as an ambassador three times-- twice by George W. Bush and once by Barack Obama.

There is a perception that diplomats lead a comfortable life throwing dinner parties in fancy homes. Let me tell you about some of my reality. It has not always been easy. I have moved 13 times and served in seven different countries, five of them hardship posts.

My first tour was Mogadishu, Somalia, an increasingly dangerous place, as that country's civil war kept grinding on and the government was weakening. The military took over policing functions in a particularly brutal way and basic service -- services disappeared.

Several years later, after the Soviet Union collapsed, I helped open our Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. As we were establishing relations with a new country, our small Embassy was attacked by a gunman, who sprayed the Embassy building with gunfire.



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I later served in Moscow. In 1993, during the attempted coup in -- in Russia, I was caught in crossfire between presidential and parliamentary forces. It took us three tries, me without a helmet or body armor, to get into a vehicle to go to the Embassy. We went because the Ambassador asked us to come. And we went because it was our duty.

From August 2016 until May 2019, I served as the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine. During my tenure in Ukraine, I went to the Front Line approximately ten times during a hot war: to show the American flag, to hear what was going on -- sometimes literally as we heard the impact of artillery -- and to see how our assistance dollars were being put to use.

I worked to advance U.S. policy, fully embraced by Democrats and Republicans alike, to help Ukraine become a stable and independent democratic state, with a market economy integrated into Europe. A secure, democratic, and free Ukraine serves not just the Ukrainian people, but the American people as well. That's why it was our policy -- continues to be our policy to help the Ukrainians achieve their objectives -- they matched our objectives.

The U.S. is the most powerful country in the history of the world, in large part because of our values. And our values have made possible the network of alliances and partnerships that buttresses our own strength. Ukraine, with an enormous landmass and a large population, has the potential to be a significant commercial and political partner for the United States as well as a force-multiplier on the security side.

We see the potential in Ukraine. Russia sees, by contrast, sees the risk. The history is not written yet, but Ukraine could move out of Russia's orbit. And now, Ukraine is a battleground for great power competition, with a hot war for the control of territory and a hybrid war to control Ukraine's leadership. The U.S. has provided significant security assistance since the onset of the war against Russia in 2014. And the Trump Administration strengthened our policy by approving the provision to Ukraine of anti-tank missiles known as Javelins.



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Supporting Ukraine is the right thing to do. It's also the smart thing to do. If Russia prevails and Ukraine falls to Russian dominion, we can expect to see other attempts by Russia to expand its territory and its influence.

As critical as the war against Russia is, Ukraine's struggling democracy has an equally important challenge: battling the Soviet legacy of corruption, which has pervaded Ukraine's government. Corruption makes Ukraine's leaders ever-vulnerable to Russia, and the Ukrainian people understand that. That's why they launched the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 demanding to be a part of Europe, demanding the transformation of the system, demanding to live under the rule of law. Ukrainians wanted the law to apply equally to all people, whether the individual in question is the President or any other citizen. It was a question of fairness, of dignity.

Here, again, there is a coincidence of interests. Corrupt leaders are inherently less trustworthy, while an honest and accountable Ukrainian leadership makes a U.S.-Ukrainian partnership more reliable and more valuable to the United States.

A level playing field in this strategically-located country bordering four NATO allies, creates an environment in which U.S. business can more easily trade, invest, and profit. Corruption is also a security issue because corrupt officials are vulnerable to Moscow. In short, it is in America's national security interest to help Ukraine transform into a country where the rule of law governs and corruption is held in check. It was -- and remains -- a top U.S. priority to help Ukraine fight corruption. And significant progress has been made since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity.

Unfortunately, as the past couple of months have underlined, not all Ukrainians embraced our anti-corruption work. Thus, perhaps, it was not surprising that when our anti-corruption efforts got in the way of a desire for profit or power, Ukrainians who preferred to play by the old, corrupt rules sought to remove me. What continues to amaze me is that they found Americans willing to partner with them and, working together, they apparently succeeded in orchestrating the removal of a U.S. Ambassador.



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How could our system fail like this? How is it that foreign corrupt interests could manipulate our government? Which country's interests are served when the very corrupt behavior we have been criticizing is allowed to prevail? Such conduct undermines the U.S., exposes our friends, and widens the playing field for autocrats like President Putin. Our leadership depends on the power of our example and the consistency of our purpose. Both have now been opened to question.

With that background in mind, I'd like to briefly address some of the factual issues I expect you -- you may want to ask me about, starting with my timeline in Ukraine and the events about which I do and do not have first-hand knowledge.

I arrived in Ukraine on August 22nd, 2016 and left Ukraine permanently on May 20th, 2019. There are a number of events you are investigating to which I cannot bring any first-hand knowledge.

The events that pre-dated my Ukraine service include: [a] the release of the so-called "Black Ledger"; and [b] Mr. Manafort's subsequent resignation from President Trump's campaign; and [c] the departure from office of former Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin.

Several other events occurred after I returned from Ukraine. These include: [d] President Trump's July 25th, 2019 call with President Zelenskiy; [e] the discussions surrounding that phone call; and [f] any discussions surrounding the delay of security assistance to Ukraine in the summer of 2019.

As for events during my tenure in Ukraine:

I want to -- to reiterate first that the allegation that I disseminated a "Do Not Prosecute" list was a fabrication. Mr. Lutsenko, the former Ukrainian Prosecutor General who made that allegation, has acknowledged that the list never existed.



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I did not tell Mr. Lutsenko or other Ukrainian officials who they should or should not prosecute. Instead, I advocated the U.S. position that rule of law should prevail and Ukrainian law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges should stop wielding their power selectively, as a political weapon against their adversaries, and start dealing with all consistently and according to the law.

Also untrue are unsourced allegations that I told unidentified Embassy employees or Ukrainian officials that President Trump's orders should be ignored because "he was going to be impeached" or for any other reason. I did not and would not say such a thing. Such statements would be inconsistent with my training as a Foreign Service Officer and my role as an Ambassador.

The Obama Administration did not ask me to help the -- the Clinton campaign or harm the Trump campaign, nor would I have taken any such steps if they had. Partisanship of this type is not compatible with the role of a career Foreign Service Officer.

I have never met Hunter Biden, nor have I had any direct or indirect conversations with him. And although I have met former Vice President Biden several times over the course of our many years in government service, neither he nor the previous Administration ever raised the issue of either Burisma or Hunter Biden with me.

With respect to Mayor Giuliani, I have had only minimal contact with him -- a total of three; none related to the events at issue. I do not understand Mr. Giuliani's motives for attacking me, nor can I offer an opinion on whether he believed the allegations he spread about me. Clearly, no one at the State Department did. What I can say is that Mr. Giuliani should have known those claims were suspect, coming as they reportedly did from individuals with questionable motives and with reason to believe that their political and financial ambitions would be stymied by our anti-corruption policy in Ukraine.



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After being asked by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs in early March 2019 to extend my tour until 2020, the smear campaign against me entered a new public phase in the United States. In the wake of the negative press, State Department officials suggested an earlier departure, and we agreed upon July 2019. I was then abruptly told just weeks later, in late April, to come back to Washington from Ukraine "on the next plane." At the time I departed, Ukraine had just concluded game-changing presidential elections. It was a sensitive period with much at stake for the United States, and called for all the experience and expertise we could muster.

When I returned to the United States, Deputy Secretary of State Sullivan told me there had been a concerted campaign against me; that the President no longer wished me to serve as Ambassador to Ukraine; and that, in fact, the President had been pushing for my removal since the prior summer. As Mr. Sullivan recently recounted during his Senate confirmation hearing, neither he nor anyone else ever explained or sought to justify the President's concerns about me; nor did anyone in the Department justify my early departure by suggesting I had done something wrong. I appreciate that Mr. Sullivan publicly affirmed at his hearing that I had served "capably and admirably."

Although then and now, I have always understood that I served at the pleasure of the President, I still find it difficult to comprehend that foreign and private interests were able to undermine U.S. interests in this way. Individuals, who apparently felt stymied by our -- our efforts to promote stated U.S. policy against corruption -- that is, to do our mission -- were able to successfully conduct a campaign of disinformation against a sitting Ambassador, using unofficial back channels. As various witnesses have recounted, they shared baseless allegations with the President and convinced him to remove his Ambassador, despite the fact that the State Department fully understood that the allegations were false and the sources highly suspect.



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These events should concern everyone in this room. Ambassadors are the symbol of the United States abroad. They are the personal representative of the President. They should always act and speak with full authority to advocate for U.S. policies. If our chief representative is kneecapped, it limits our effectiveness to safeguard the vital national security interests of the United States. This is especially important now, when the international landscape is more complicated and more competitive than it has been since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Our Ukraine policy has been thrown into disarray, and shady interests the -- the world over have learned how little it takes to remove an American Ambassador who does not give them what they want. After these events, what foreign official, corrupt or not, could be blamed for wondering whether the U.S. Ambassador represents the President's views? And what U.S. Ambassador could be blamed for harboring the fear that they can't count on our government to support them as they implement stated U.S. policy and protect and defend U.S. interests?

I'd like to comment on one other matter before taking your questions. At the closed deposition, I expressed grave concerns about the degradation of the Foreign Service over the past few years and the failure of State Department leadership to push back as foreign and corrupt interests apparently hijacked our Ukraine policy. I remain disappointed that the Department's leadership and others have declined to acknowledge that the attacks against me and others are dangerously wrong.

This is about far, far more than me or a couple of individuals. As Foreign Service professionals are being denigrated and undermined, the institution is also being degraded. This will soon cause real harm, if it hasn't already. The State Department as a tool of foreign policy often doesn't get the same kind of attention, or even respect, as the military might of the Pentagon. But we are, as they say, "the pointy end of the spear." If we lose our edge, the U.S. will inevitably have to use other tools, even more than it does today. And those other tools are blunter, more expensive, and not universally effective.



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Moreover, the attacks are leading to a crisis in the State Department, as the policy process is visibly unraveling, leadership vacancies go unfilled, and senior and midlevel officers ponder an uncertain future. The crisis has moved from the impact on individuals to an impact on the institution itself. The State Department is being hollowed out from within at a competitive and complex time on the world stage. This is not a time to undercut our diplomats.

It is the responsibility of the Department's leaders to stand up for the institution and the individuals who make that institution still today the most effective diplomatic force in the world. And Congress has a responsibility to reinvest in our diplomacy. That's an investment in our national security; it's an investment in our future and our children's future.

As I close, let me be clear on who we are and how we serve this country. We are professionals. We are public servants who by vocation and training pursue the policies of the President, regardless of who holds that office or what party they affiliate with. We handle American Citizen Services, facilitate trade and commerce, work security issues, represent the U.S., and report to and advise Washington, to mention just some of our functions.

And we make a difference every day.

We are people who repeatedly uproot our lives, who risk, and sometimes give, our lives for this country.

We are the 52 Americans who, forty years ago this month, began 444 days of deprivation, torture, and captivity in Teheran.

We are the dozens of Americans stationed at our embassy in Cuba and consulates in China, who mysteriously and dangerously, and in some cases perhaps even permanently, were injured and attacked from unknown sources several years ago.



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And we are Ambassador Chris Stevens, Sean Patrick Smith, Ty Woods, and Glen Doherty -- people rightly called heroes for their ultimate sacrifice to this nation's foreign policy interests in Libya, eight years ago.

We honor these individuals. They represent each one of you here and every American. These courageous individuals were attacked because they symbolized America.

What you need to know, what Americans need to know, is that while, thankfully, most of us answer the call to duty in far less dramatic ways, every Foreign Service Officer runs the same risks. And very often, so do our families. They serve too. As individuals, as a community, we answer the call to duty to advance and protect the interests of the United States.

We take our oath [of office] seriously, the same oath that each one of you take, "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic" and to "bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

I count myself lucky to be a Foreign Service Officer, fortunate to serve with the best America has to offer, blessed to serve the American people for the last 33 years.

I thank you for your attention. I welcome your questions.