

# WITH SULEIMANI'S ASSASSINATION, TRUMP UNITES A DIVIDED IRAN

*Jim here.*

Marcy has already provided some perspective on the assassination of Qassem Suleimani, although I would double the time frame in her observations by pointing out that the Tehran embassy hostage situation began just a year before the 1980 election and provided a chance for Reagan to break many norms in his back channel negotiations during the campaign. Note that had the militias acting as Iran's proxy been successful in storming the Baghdad embassy and taking hostages earlier this week, we would have been put in the exact same situation just a year before an election 40 years later.

What I want to concentrate on here, though, is that Trump's desire for regime change in Iran, even with John Bolton now sitting on the sidelines, was showing at least a small chance of success without a need for outright military confrontation. Barely a month ago, Iran was rocked by internal unrest that led to massive demonstrations that were violently quashed. From the New York Times:

Iran is experiencing its deadliest political unrest since the Islamic Revolution 40 years ago, with at least 180 people killed – and possibly hundreds more – as angry protests have been smothered in a government crackdown of unbridled force.

It began two weeks ago with an abrupt increase of at least 50 percent in gasoline prices. Within 72 hours, outraged demonstrators in cities large and small were calling for an end to the Islamic Republic's government and the downfall of its leaders.

In many places, security forces responded by opening fire on unarmed protesters, largely unemployed or low-income young men between the ages of 19 and 26, according to witness accounts and videos. In the southwest city of Mahshahr alone, witnesses and medical personnel said, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps members surrounded, shot and killed 40 to 100 demonstrators – mostly unarmed young men – in a marsh where they had sought refuge.

But today, after last night's assassination, there are massive demonstrations mourning Suleimani and calling for a presumably united Iran to avenge the killing. This photo the New York Times put up from Shutterstock conveys the mood:



Iran's Fars News Agency tweeted more from the protests:

Iranians Pour to Streets to Mourn  
Martyrdom of Gen. Soleimani  
[pic.twitter.com/oYAhM8re5P](https://pic.twitter.com/oYAhM8re5P)

– Fars News Agency (@EnglishFars)  
January 3, 2020

Those protests against Iran's government are now gone and seem very unlikely to come back. Assassinating such a popular figure has clearly

united the country in a newly-stoked hatred of the United States. On the surface, then, it would seem that Trump's dream of regime change in Iran now has to align fully with the neocon desire to do so by means of a massive invasion.

With Trump, though, linear paths of logic never apply. Perhaps I'm being too much of a Pollyanna here, but note that Trump's M.O. in many cases is to undo a perfectly good policy, escalate the bad result, and then go back to something very akin to where we started while claiming to have broken through a situation that was previously insoluble. In that regard, let's remember that Obama sat quietly while Mossad assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists inside Iran but then a couple of years later signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Here's hoping that Trump decides to pull back from war by "negotiating" a "whole new agreement" that takes us right back to the JCPOA from which he unilaterally withdrew and takes the world back from the brink of disaster.

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## **EVEN MORE GUARANTEED FRAUD FROM PARNAS AND GIULIANI**

*Jim here.*

Just when we think we've reached a full description of the many levels of fraud associated with Lev Parnas and Rudy Giuliani, new revelations appear. Yesterday, the Washington Post reported that prosecutors in the Southern District of New York asked for Parnas' bail to be revoked because he had failed to disclose a payment of \$1 million he received just prior to his arrest. And this morning, Wall

Street Journal's Shelby Holiday is out with a new video with additional details on how Fraud Guarantee tried to raise investor money off its association with Giuliani.

First, the Parnas bail story:

Federal prosecutors in New York asked a judge Wednesday to jail an associate of Rudolph W. Giuliani who is accused of violating campaign finance laws, asserting that the Ukrainian-born businessman who is on home confinement awaiting trial had lied to court officials about his financial assets.

In a court filing, federal prosecutors asked a judge to revoke the bail of Lev Parnas because he had given three separate inaccurate accountings of his financial assets to court officials. Among the assets Parnas failed to disclose, prosecutors alleged, was a \$1 million payment in September 2019 from a Russian bank account, which appeared to have been used on personal expenses and buying a home.

The filing goes on to note that Parnas poses an exceptional flight risk, given his association with wealthy supporters in Ukraine and Russia and the fact that he had spent \$70,000 on private air travel in the month just before his arrest.

Parnas appears to have lied about everything, including how much he was paid to act as an interpreter in the Firtash case:

Among the inaccurate information Parnas provided had to do with income he was receiving for working as an interpreter for a law firm, prosecutors alleged. He told a probation officer on Oct. 15 that he earned \$50,000 annually from the law firm, but he did not disclose any income from the law firm in a signed affidavit that he submitted later that month.

Prosecutors alleged that, in fact, Parnas earned \$200,000 from the law firm between August and October, money that was held under the name of his wife, Svetlana.

Parnas's lawyers have said that he was hired to work as an interpreter for conservative lawyers Victoria Toensing and Joe diGenova, when they were hired to represent Ukrainian gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash in July.

And yet, the attorney for Parnas continues to beg Congress for him to have a chance to testify in impeachment hearings. What could possibly go wrong when putting a habitual liar on the stand?

Meanwhile, Shelby Holliday has a new report today on Fraud Guarantee and how it intended to raise money off of Rudy Giuliani's association with the company. Recall that Charles Gucciardo "invested" in Fraud Guarantee by transferring \$500,000 to Giuliani Partners in September and October of 2018. Parnas and his partner in Fraud Guarantee, David Correia, were looking for much more than just getting Rudy on board. As Holliday reports, they sent out an investor letter in September 2018 that would capitalize on Rudy's involvement even as the agreement with him was in the process of being implemented:

Just wow. In attempting to attract investors, Parnas and Correia said that they wished to "closely mirror the LifeLock model" as they paid Giuliani up to \$2 million for his involvement. This letter or something very similar to it appeared to work on Gucciardo, since his attorney referenced LifeLock in justifying Gucciardo jumping on board based on Rudy's involvement. As I noted in the comments of my Gucciardo post, the LifeLock story is a remarkable parallel to Fraud Guarantee because LifeLock's "product" was totally worthless. At least LifeLock was selling something as a product, though, because I have yet to read a report that provides detail on any kind of

software or other product that Fraud Guarantee actually intended to provide to customers.

Further, Rudy didn't become a spokesman for LifeLock until long after the hilarious thirteen or so times that its CEO had his identity stolen after running TV ads touting his Social Security number and claiming he was immune from identity theft due to his superior product. Not only that, LifeLock had also paid a huge fine for selling a worthless product before Rudy began appearing in endorsement videos in 2013:

The Federal Trade Commission dented Lifelock with a whopping \$12 million fine in 2010 for failing to deliver the identity security they promised and balking on refunds to clients.

The company was also roundly mocked after CEO Todd Davis brashly announced his Social Security number in a commercial as a sign of confidence, and then had his identity stolen repeatedly.

Still, Giuliani expressed his complete support of the enterprise after signing the consulting deal last year.

"As I continue to learn more about this crime and have assessed the current protection options available to consumers, I am convinced that LifeLock is an industry leader in identity-theft protection," he said in a press release.

Apparently, the Fraud Guarantee investor letter brushes off the LifeLock history by saying there was simply a "compliance issue" and that Fraud Guarantee has found a way to deal with that.

How in the world anyone would put significant money into this operation is a complete mystery. Even the simplest due diligence would send a real investor running for the exits rather than getting out the checkbook. Instead, it seems more likely to me that any outside money they raised on this scheme was just a bonus and that

the real reason for Fraud Guarantee was as a vessel for Parnas to get funding for his adventures in Ukraine on behalf of Trump while also funneling some of those funds to Giuliani.

Finally, I just can't try to take on the bit about the person who supplied the letter to Holliday and their scheme to get a painting of a "Third Temple" in Jerusalem (intended as a "peace platform"?) in front of Trump. I'll let you folks try to figure out what that one is all about. At any rate, on first blush, this person would appear to be just the kind of rich fool who would provide some of that bonus money into Fraud Guarantee, this time to the tune of \$250,000.

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## **AFGHANISTAN: A TRILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF LIES**

*Jim here.*

This morning, the Washington Post published The Afghanistan Papers, so-named as a tribute to Daniel Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers. It's hardly surprising that what we learn from the collection of documents is that the US has been lying about Afghanistan since the very earliest days of the war:

A confidential trove of government documents obtained by The Washington Post reveals that senior U.S. officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable.

Sadly, the war has come at an unfathomable cost:

Since 2001, more than 775,000 U.S. troops have deployed to Afghanistan, many repeatedly. Of those, 2,300 died there and 20,589 were wounded in action, according to Defense Department figures.

/snip/

Since 2001, the Defense Department, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development have spent or appropriated between \$934 billion and \$978 billion, according to an inflation-adjusted estimate calculated by Neta Crawford, a political science professor and co-director of the Costs of War Project at Brown University.

Those figures do not include money spent by other agencies such as the CIA and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for medical care for wounded veterans.

Left out of these numbers are the lives lost by Afghan civilians and the lives disrupted by those families displaced by 18 years of hostilities.



John Sopko

These documents were obtained by the Post through a three year FOIA effort aimed at



getting the raw materials generated by Inspector General John Sopko's office, the Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Sopko came into this oversight job in 2012 and he has done incredible work in trying to hold the military and the politicians directing military policy to account for what has been going on in Afghanistan.

Much of my early blogging was centered on Afghanistan, and this false narrative from the military that we were "making progress" despite being in a situation that was clearly unwinnable (and that any check of a history book would have confirmed as an impossible task) was a frequent target. The persistence with which Sopko's team documented and evaluated material coming from the military was impressive, especially as the military continually developed "new" tools for assessing progress on security and on training of Afghan troops, primarily so that they could make comparisons to previous data irrelevant. Eventually, the military essentially gave up on this approach and decided simply to classify the bulk of this sort of data so that their lack of progress would not be noted every six months as SIGAR came out with their Congressionally-mandated reports.

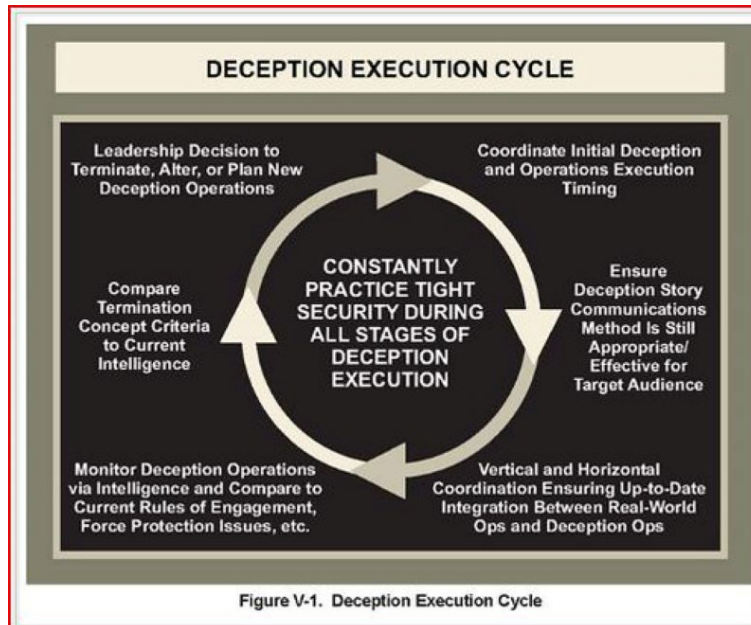
Around the time of this development, Sopko and his team embarked on a new strategy, interviewing various key figures in the military and in related efforts in Afghanistan to develop a series of "Lessons Learned" reports. The documents being released today are the raw materials from many of these interviews.

Finally, as a result of these materials, we now have extensive documentation that much of what we have been told by officials about Afghanistan is a lie:

Several of those interviewed described explicit and sustained efforts by the U.S. government to deliberately mislead the public. They said it was common at military headquarters in Kabul – and at the White House – to distort statistics

to make it appear the United States was winning the war when that was not the case.

But then, some of us have known that for a long time. Back in 2010, I came across this interesting graphic on how the military engages in military deception. It turns out there's a well-described process for it:



In the Post article, we learn that, of course, there was no lesson learned from Vietnam:

The specter of Vietnam has hovered over Afghanistan from the start.

On Oct. 11, 2001, a few days after the United States started bombing the Taliban, a reporter asked Bush: "Can you avoid being drawn into a Vietnam-like quagmire in Afghanistan?"

"We learned some very important lessons in Vietnam," Bush replied confidently. "People often ask me, 'How long will this last?' This particular battlefront will last as long as it takes to bring al-Qaeda to justice. It may happen tomorrow, it may happen a month from now, it may take a year or two. But we will prevail."

In those early days, other U.S. leaders mocked the notion that the nightmare of Vietnam might repeat itself in Afghanistan.

“All together now – quagmire!” Rumsfeld joked at a news conference on Nov. 27, 2001.

But throughout the Afghan war, documents show that U.S. military officials have resorted to an old tactic from Vietnam – manipulating public opinion.

In news conferences and other public appearances, those in charge of the war have followed the same talking points for 18 years. No matter how the war is going – and especially when it is going badly – they emphasize how they are making progress.

And yes, I was seeing that this “We’re making progress” claim was bullshit long ago. Here are posts from 2010, 2013 and 2016 on the futility of our efforts there. But there’s one more side of this that we need to bring front and center to get a feel for one of the primary driving forces for why we would flush a trillion dollars and so many lives down the toilet. Back in 2008, the New York Times documented how the military carried out an “information operation” (which would rely on military deception) on the status of the war in Iraq. A bevy of “military analysts” was rolled out to make pronouncements in the media about how well things were going (despite the reality that they weren’t) and they were described primarily as “retired military”. What wasn’t disclosed in most cases was that these same “analysts” were also lucratively employed by defense contractors.

This report from the Washington Post on lies from the military closes the loop with the report from the Times on lies from analysts in the media. Senior military figures lie about how wars are going. They eventually retire and then

get lucrative jobs with defense contractors. From these positions, they sometimes pose as “analysts” to spout similar falsehoods in the media, prolonging futile wars but enriching the contractors. I wonder if the magnitude of the lies told while in the military determines the size of the salary once they are hired by the contractors. The net result, though, is futile wars that can’t be won, but with endless spending on them anyway.

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## **TRUMP HJC DEFENDERS CLAIM UKRAINE AID WITHHELD TO FIGHT CORRUPTION WHILE RUDY ROUNDS UP FIRED CORRUPT UKRAINIANS TO HELP TRUMP**

Just as the House Judiciary Committee impeachment hearing was getting underway today, Inside Defense published yet another debunking of one of the central Republican defenses of Trump’s actions regarding Ukraine by pointing out that the Defense Department, back in May of this year, certified that Ukraine had made sufficient progress in fighting corruption so that the defense assistance funds designated for Ukraine could be released. Once they later learned that the White House had blocked the funding, they never got a good explanation:

The senior Pentagon official who certified in May that Ukraine should receive \$250 million in U.S. military aid because it had made sufficient progress combating corruption said today

he never got a “very clear explanation” from the White House as to why the funds were delayed over the summer.

“In the weeks after signing the certification I did become aware that the aid had been held,” John Rood, the under secretary of defense for policy, told reporters this morning.

“I never received a very clear explanation other than there were concerns about corruption in Ukraine,” he continued.

Rood was the person in charge of determining whether Ukraine had made sufficient progress:

Rood said he learned of the White House hold on the aid, which was part of a larger \$400 million assistance package, “significantly after May,” when he certified that Ukraine had made sufficient anti-corruption progress to receive the aid.

“It was a requirement under the law that we certify that and I was the person that certified it,” he said.

Despite the fact that this has been widely known for months, Republicans continued to claim that Trump was very concerned about corruption in Ukraine and that was the only reason he withheld the aid.

And yet, also around the time the hearing started, we also learned of yet another foreign trip for Rudy Giuliani in his world tour aimed at protecting Trump against impeachment. As usual, Marcy was way ahead of this move, asking yesterday if Yuriy Lutsenko, Viktor Shokin, and Konstantin Kulyk were the three former Ukrainian prosecutors who had provided statements to John Durham in Bill Barr’s “investigations” aimed at protecting Trump. In what can only be seen as confirmation of her suggestion, the New York

Times told us this morning that Rudy met Lutsenko yesterday in Budapest and was in Kiev today to meet with Shokin and Kulyk:

Even as Democrats intensified their scrutiny this week of Rudolph W. Giuliani's role in the pressure campaign against the Ukrainian government that is at the heart of the impeachment inquiry, Mr. Giuliani has been in Europe continuing his efforts to shift the focus to purported wrongdoing by President Trump's political rivals.

Mr. Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, met in Budapest on Tuesday with a former Ukrainian prosecutor, Yuriy Lutsenko, who has become a key figure in the impeachment inquiry. He then traveled to Kyiv on Wednesday seeking to meet with other former Ukrainian prosecutors whose claims have been embraced by Republicans, including Viktor Shokin and Kostiantyn H. Kulyk, according to people familiar with the effort.

Even Ken Vogel, who had the lead byline on this story, has to admit that these former prosecutors are corrupt:

The former prosecutors, who have faced allegations of corruption, all played some role in promoting claims about former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., a former United States ambassador to Ukraine and Ukrainians who disseminated damaging information about Mr. Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, in 2016.

Isn't that interesting? We are being asked to believe that Trump withheld aid Ukraine desperately needed in its war with Russia because of his concerns about corruption. And yet, as Team Trump is doing its best to protect

him, they feel that his best defense lies with some of the most corrupt of those Ukrainian officials who have been removed from office. They have provided statements that Bill Barr is likely depending on in his investigation and we learned in today's Times article that Rudy was also traveling with a team from a wingnut media organization to film a "documentary" providing a "Republican alternative to the impeachment hearings".

Let's take a look at just how corrupt these three OAN stars are. First, Lutsenko. USA Today reported on a criminal investigation of him on October 1:

Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigations (SBI) opened criminal proceedings against Yuriy Lutsenko over his possible abuse of power, the government agency said.

It said that Lutsenko and other former lawmakers may have conspired to "provide cover" for illegal gambling businesses in Ukraine. Lutsenko disputes the allegations.

And if that's not enough, it appears that Lutsenko was also involved in the ouster of former Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch:

The unnamed Ukrainian official referenced in a federal indictment as directing a plot to oust the then-U.S. ambassador is Ukraine's former chief prosecutor Yuriy Lutsenko, according to a U.S. official familiar with the events.

According to the source, Lutsenko is the Ukrainian official who prosecutors say urged two associates of Rudy Giuliani to push for the removal of Marie Yovanovitch, the former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine who was forced out in May.

The associates, Lev Parnas and Igor

Fruman, were arrested Wednesday night as they prepared to board a one-way flight out of the country at Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C.

So Lutsenko helped the efforts to oust a very important ambassador who was doing good work and was so corrupt in general that he not only got fired but had a criminal case opened against him, and yet he's one of the prime targets of Team Trump when they are trying to mount their final defense against impeachment.

But Shokin is even more corrupt. Recall that the false Trump claim is that Shokin was fired for investigating Hunter Biden. The truth is pretty much the opposite:

At the heart of Congress' probe into the president's actions is his claim that former Vice President and 2020 Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden strong-armed the Ukrainian government to fire its top prosecutor in order to thwart an investigation into a company tied to his son, Hunter Biden.

But sources ranging from former Obama administration officials to an anti-corruption advocate in Ukraine say the official, Viktor Shokin, was ousted for the opposite reason Trump and his allies claim.

It wasn't because Shokin was investigating a natural gas company tied to Biden's son; it was because Shokin wasn't pursuing corruption among the country's politicians, according to a Ukrainian official and four former American officials who specialized in Ukraine and Europe.

Shokin's inaction prompted international calls for his ouster and ultimately resulted in his removal by Ukraine's parliament.



It comes as no surprise then, that Shokin's "deposition" was central to John Solomon's propaganda campaign in favor of Trump.

But what about Kulyk? It turns out that Kulyk is the first person mentioned in a Washington Post story that ran on Sunday informing us on the real progress Zelensky is making against corruption and that this progress comes at the risk of angering Trump:

By the end of this month, more than 500 Ukrainian prosecutors will be out of their jobs as part of sweeping professional reviews under Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Among the prosecutors heading for the exit: a key Kyiv contact for Rudolph W. Giuliani.

/snip/

Now that Zelensky's reform push is underway, some of those Giuliani-linked officials are in the crosshairs.

A prosecutor named Kostiantyn H. Kulyk is one of the first.

Zelensky's new prosecutor general, Ruslan Ryaboshapka – "100 percent my person," Zelensky told Trump in July – last week gave a dismissal notice to Kulyk, a key player in the effort to provide Giuliani with political ammunition of dubious accuracy. Kulyk denies meeting Giuliani, but former associates say he prepared a seven-page dossier that his boss later passed along to the former New York mayor. Kulyk did not respond to a request for comment.

And so Team Trump has decided that in order to protect Trump in relation to actions that they claimed were part of a fight against corruption in Ukraine, corrupt Ukrainians are needed in order to produce a narrative that will exonerate him. The Post summed it up well:

Trump's views of Ukraine – and his demands to investigate the Biden family – were largely shaped by Giuliani, his personal lawyer. The theories and opinions that were passed to Giuliani came from some of the very officials whom Ukrainian activists claim are prime corruption culprits in their own system.

By relying on these corrupt Ukrainians to support their arguments, Trump, Giuliani and Barr are proving that under the Trump Administration, the US courts corruption in order to advance the personal and political future of its President, at great risk to the strategic interests of the US.

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## **DID GIULIANI GIVE PARNAS THE REFERRAL OF TURKEY TO BALLARD PARTNERS AS PAYMENT FOR TRUMP DEFENSE WORK IN UKRAINE?**

*Jim here.*

With so much attention focused on the dramatic impeachment hearings this week, it would be easy to overlook the announcement of an interesting set of subpoenas in the ongoing case against Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman. As the New York Times informed us on Wednesday:

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan issued subpoenas in recent weeks to several players in President Trump's fund-raising apparatus as part of an

investigation into two associates of Rudolph W. Giuliani who have been charged with violating campaign finance laws, according to people familiar with the investigation.

The subpoenas went to a lobbying firm run by a top fund-raiser for Mr. Trump, Brian Ballard, and to two people who have helped raise money for America First Action, a super PAC created to support the president and allied candidates, the people said.

Mr. Ballard and the America First fund-raisers worked to varying extents with Mr. Giuliani's associates Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, American citizens who helped Mr. Giuliani wage a pressure campaign on Ukraine that is now at the center of the impeachment inquiry into Mr. Trump.

Let's focus on the Ballard Partners part of the story. Further down in the article:

Mr. Giuliani met Mr. Parnas and Mr. Fruman as they became involved in the Republican major-donor circuit, and the recent activity by prosecutors suggests that they are interested in learning more about how the men gained entree into that world.

Mr. Parnas also developed a relationship through Republican donor politics with Mr. Ballard, whose firm, Ballard Partners, paid Mr. Parnas at least \$22,500 for referring business from the Turkish government.

The Turkish government agreed to pay Ballard Partners \$1.5 million over a year in May 2017, and renewed its contract for \$750,000 a year later, according to lobbying records.

Isn't that interesting? The Times says that Giuliani and the Ukrainian grifters met through meetings of big Republican donors, but doesn't put a date on when they first got together. As you might recall, the curiously transferred funds from Charles Gucciardo on behalf of Parnas' Fraud Guarantee company to Giuliani Partners took place in September and October of 2018. But note that the contract for Ballard Partners that earned Parnas the finders' fee was signed in May of 2017.

This Tampa Bay Times article increases the payoff to \$45,000, but puts Parnas in touch with Ballard back in 2016:

Ballard, who was introduced to Parnas at a South Florida Trump fundraiser in 2016, is one of the top lobbyists in Tallahassee and Washington and a prominent fundraiser for Trump. Ballard Partners paid Parnas a total of \$45,000 for the referral of an international client, which Taylor now identifies as the Turkish government.

It's hard to see how Parnas and Fruman, as Ukrainian "businessmen" would have the contacts to refer the Turkish government to one of the most powerful lobbying firms in the world. It seems much more likely that the referral really came from Giuliani, who had been representing the Turkish government while he was at Greenberg Traurig:

Since 2014, Greenberg Traurig has registered as an agent of the Turkish government, and its former partner Rudy Giuliani represented gold trader Reza Zarrab, who spearheaded the Halkbank conspiracy. The firm insisted that it maintained an "ethical wall" between its legal representation and its lobbying, but critics found it difficult to discern a distinction between Giuliani's representation of Zarrab and political advocacy.

Never appearing in court, Giuliani shuttled between Washington and Turkey's capital of Ankara on Zarrab's behalf. He disclosed his meetings with Erdoğan and top U.S. and Turkish diplomats in court filings. Giuliani's Oval Office meeting with Trump to try to trade Zarrab for Brunson would come to light two years later, in news reports broken by Bloomberg and matched by The New York Times and Washington Post.

Giuliani officially severed his ties with Greenberg Traurig in May of 2018 to work solely for Trump, but actually began working for Trump a month earlier. So if Giuliani did hand Parnas the referral of the Turkish government to Ballard Partners, we have to wonder if he was already suspecting in the fall of 2017 that he would be leaving Greenberg Traurig to head to work for Trump.

But did Giuliani know Parnas and Fruman that long ago? This New Yorker article, based on interviews with Parnas and his son Aaron, says yes:

"I was really never heavy into politics, never really contributed," he said. Then, in June, 2015, Parnas's teen-age son, Aaron, called his father. "Dad, I think one of your friends is running for President," he joked. Aaron told me that, after Trump announced his candidacy, he called the Trump campaign to get passes to go with his father to a Trump rally in Florida.

Parnas soon became a regular at Trump's rallies and other gatherings. "I started donating. We started to help raise money," he said. Gradually, Parnas said that he got to know other Trump donors, including Tommy Hicks, Jr., a private-equity investor in Texas who is close to Donald Trump, Jr. (Hicks has since become the co-chair of the Republican

National Committee.)“We became one big family,” Parnas said. “You got to understand, he didn’t have a real campaign, a traditional campaign. It was make-it-up, you know. Like him or not, you understand what it is. It was more, like, you know, we’d bump into each other constantly because it was all the same people, there were not that many of us.” Parnas told me that he “bumped into” Trump “plenty of times” at events in New York over the years, but that they didn’t get to know each other until the 2016 campaign.

The article continues:

On Election Night, Parnas, along with other donors, including the Blackwater founder Erik Prince, were invited to attend a gathering with Trump and his family. “We were all there,” he recalled. “I will never forget that.”

Wow, that’s interesting. But just a bit farther along, we come to Giuliani:

Parnas said that he grew closer to Giuliani after the election. “We were good friends, he’s also my counsel,” he said. “We were looking to do business together.” When Giuliani wanted to gather information in Ukraine to counter the findings of the special counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation, Parnas volunteered to help. “Because of my Ukrainian background and my contacts there, I became like Rudy’s assistant, his investigator,” he said. “I don’t do anything on my own. I don’t lobby people. I go get information. I set up a meeting. I make sure that the call went right. I make sure the translation is done right.” Parnas echoed the claims of Trump and Giuliani that the Democrats had worked with Ukrainians to dig up

dirt on Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, ahead of the 2016 vote, seeming to imply that what he and Giuliani were doing now was little different.

Note this timeline: Rod Rosenstein took over the Russia investigation on April 26, 2017. James Comey was fired on May 9. This article places the signing of the contract Ballard Partners and Turkey on May 11, 2017. Robert Mueller was appointed on May 17. We can't help wondering if Giuliani handed Parnas the Ballard Partners referral so that the \$45,000 finders' fee would act as payment for the work in Ukraine that Trump's defense would require. Also note that reports state Parnas didn't get his payoff from Ballard Partners until 2018, so we are also left to wonder if, in typical Rudy fashion, the finders' fee was arranged long after the client was found.

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## **TRUMP TEAM'S EXTORTION DEMANDS TO UKRAINE STARTED BEFORE THE APRIL 21 CALL TO ZELENSKY**

*Jim here.*

As we prepare for the release of the "transcript" of Donald Trump's first phone call to Volodymyr Zelensky, it is important to put the call into perspective with events surrounding it in the overall timeline of the Ukraine events at the center of the impeachment inquiry.

Pressure on Poroshenko Administration: January-

February 2019

First, it is extremely important to note that Rudy Giuliani, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman began their campaign to force Ukraine to re-open their investigation into Burisma and to expand it into an investigation of Joe and Hunter Biden, along with an “investigation” of Ukraine meddling in the 2016 US election, before Zelensky was elected. On Friday, the Washington Post filled us in on more details of that effort:

Two associates of Rudolph W. Giuliani pressed the then-president of Ukraine in February to announce investigations into former vice president Joe Biden’s son and purported Ukrainian interference in the 2016 election in exchange for a state visit, and a lawyer for one of the associates said Friday that they were doing so because Giuliani – acting on President Trump’s behalf – asked them to.

The Giuliani associates, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, met with then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in Kyiv, said Edward B. MacMahon Jr., a lawyer for Parnas. He said they were working on behalf of Giuliani, Trump’s personal lawyer, who was operating on orders from Trump.

“There isn’t anything that Parnas did in the Ukraine relative to the Bidens or the 2016 election that he wasn’t asked to do by Giuliani, who was acting on the direction of the president,” MacMahon said.

The article goes on to note that Ukrainian prosecutor Yuriy Lutsenko was also at this meeting, and that there had even been a meeting of Giuliani, Parnas and Fruman with Lutsenko in January.

As a result of this pressure, Lutsenko announced in March that he would investigate the Bidens.



This opened the door for the infamous Ken Vogel hatchet job on the Bidens, published in the New York Times on May 1. Buried deep into the article, Vogel did at least grudgingly admit the previous investigation by Ukraine found nothing and that re-opening the investigation was in response to “pressure”:

The decision to reopen the investigation into Burisma was made in March by the current Ukrainian prosecutor general, who had cleared Hunter Biden’s employer more than two years ago. The announcement came in the midst of Ukraine’s contentious presidential election, and was seen in some quarters as an effort by the prosecutor general, Yuriy Lutsenko, to curry favor from the Trump administration for his boss and ally, the incumbent president, Petro O. Poroshenko.

We now know, as described above, that the pressure was applied primarily through Giuliani, Parnas and Fruman rather than through official channels. Returning to the Post article, here is how those efforts worked out:

At the time of the February meeting, Poroshenko was seeking reelection and wanting an official visit to Washington. He ultimately lost and never announced the investigations that Parnas and Fruman asked about, nor did he get the Washington visit he wanted.

The February meeting was also attended by Ukrainian general prosecutor Yuriy Lutsenko, MacMahon said. Lutsenko said in March he was investigating the Bidens, only to reverse course months later.

So, although Lutsenko announced an investigation, Poroshenko never did. Clearly, to the Trump team, the announcement had to come

from the top in order to win the prize of the state visit that, at least in the opinion of the Trump team, would have tipped the election to Poroshenko. However, the Lutsenko announcement apparently was sufficient for Vogel and the Times.

Zelensky Elected April 21, 2019

The election in Ukraine took place on April 21 (although there was a preliminary round with no clear winner on March 31), with Zelensky winning in a landslide, 74% to 24% for Poroshenko.

Trump's call to Zelensky took place on April 21, shortly after Zelensky was declared the winner.

Kurt Volker noted the call:

President Trump called to congratulate Volodymyr Zelenskyy (@zeteam\_official) for his electoral victory and the Ukrainian people for a peaceful & democratic election. We will continue to support [redacted]'s efforts to restore its territorial integrity and counter [redacted] aggression. <https://t.co/ShBOWU1rga>

– Kurt Volker (@SpecRepUkraine) April 22, 2019

So, on the surface, one would expect a transcript of the call only to reflect congratulations on being elected. Volker didn't specifically state anything else was covered in the call, but did note the US supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and "counter [Russian] aggression", sentiments Trump certainly would not have put into the call or Volker's statement about it.

Of course, since it's Donald Trump we're talking about here, all bets are off on what will be in whatever Trump releases, if he does release something. Recall that Trump has called for Republicans to release their own "transcripts" of committee depositions in a very thinly veiled request for doctored transcripts:

...should give their own transcripts of the interviews to contrast with Schiff's manipulated propaganda. House Republicans must have nothing to do with Shifty's rendition of those interviews. He is a proven liar, leaker & freak who is really the one who should be impeached!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump)  
November 4, 2019

Since Trump often operates via projection, we can't help wondering whether he plans to do some editing on this "transcript" if it is released.

Pressure on Zelensky Administration Begins in May 2019, Before Inauguration

We must also keep in mind that the pressure on Zelensky's Administration to investigate the Bidens began well before the July 25 phone call and that the first enticement offered in this extortion was Mike Pence attending the inauguration. From the New York Times:

Not long before the Ukrainian president was inaugurated in May, an associate of Rudolph W. Giuliani's journeyed to Kiev to deliver a warning to the country's new leadership, a lawyer for the associate said.

The associate, Lev Parnas, told a representative of the incoming government that it had to announce an investigation into Mr. Trump's political rival, Joseph R. Biden Jr., and his son, or else Vice President Mike Pence would not attend the swearing-in of the new president, and the United States would freeze aid, the lawyer said.

/snip/

The meeting in Kiev in May occurred after Mr. Giuliani, with Mr. Parnas's help, had planned a trip there to urge

Mr. Zelensky to pursue the investigations. Mr. Giuliani canceled his trip at the last minute, claiming he was being “set up.”

Only three people were present at the meeting: Mr. Parnas, Mr. Fruman and Serhiy Shefir, a member of the inner circle of Mr. Zelensky, then the Ukrainian president-elect. The sit-down took place at an outdoor cafe in the days before Mr. Zelensky’s May 20 inauguration, according to a person familiar with the events. The men sipped coffee and spoke in Russian, which is widely spoken in Ukraine, the person said.

Mr. Parnas’s lawyer, Joseph A. Bondy, said the message to the Ukrainians was given at the direction of Mr. Giuliani, whom Mr. Parnas believed was acting under Mr. Trump’s instruction. Mr. Giuliani said he “never authorized such a conversation.”

Note Rudy’s non-denial: he says he never authorized such a conversation, but doesn’t dispute that it took place. Also note that Zelensky did not announce an investigation and Pence did not attend the inauguration.

Although it isn’t mentioned in this article, Rudy’s sudden decision not to attend the May meeting most likely was because he suddenly feared Igor Kolomoisky. From Buzzfeed:

The 56-year-old billionaire was not just a major supporter of Zelensky’s. He owned the television channel that had broadcast the comedy shows in which the newcomer had once played the part of the president of Ukraine, which had made him a household name.

Parnas and Fruman jetted to Israel in late April to meet Kolomoisky, who was living in self-exile after the previous

administration took over a bank he founded amid accusations of fraudulent loans and money laundering. (Kolomoisky has vehemently denied the allegations.)

The meeting went badly.

In an interview, Kolomoisky said he was led to believe Parnas and Fruman wanted to talk about their new export business. Instead, he said, they pushed to meet with Zelensky. "I told them I am not going to be a middleman in anybody's meetings with Zelensky," he said to reporters for BuzzFeed News and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. "I am not going to organize any meetings. Not for them, not for anybody else. They tried to say something like, 'Hey, we are serious people here. Giuliani. Trump.' They started throwing names at me."

Kolomoisky called Parnas and Fruman "fraudsters" in an interview shortly after the meeting. Soon after, a lawyer for the two men filed a claim for damages and told police in Kiev that the oligarch had threatened their lives.

"It was a threat that we took seriously," said Parnas.

Giuliani jumped into the dispute, denouncing Kolomoisky in tweets as a "notorious oligarch" who "must be held accountable for threats."

So Rudy stayed behind on the May trip, sending Parnas and Fruman on their own.

#### Bottom Line

Even if a "transcript" from the April 21 call from Trump to Zelensky is released and contains no extortion demand from Trump for Zelensky to investigate the Bidens, such a demand was indeed delivered to a Zelensky associate less than a month later by Parnas and Fruman. The threat was

then carried out when Pence did not attend Zelensky's inauguration since no investigation was announced.

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## **WHY DID GUCCIARDO PAY GIULIANI PARTNERS FOR HIS "LOAN" TO FRAUD GUARANTEE?**

*Jim here.*

I've been troubled by the New York Times' description of the funds provided by Charles Gucciardo that were used by Lev Parnas to pay Rudy Giuliani for his "consultation" for Fraud Guarantee. The most troubling bit is this:

Mr. Gucciardo, 62, a plaintiff's lawyer, has not been implicated in any wrongdoing, and there is no evidence that he was involved in the Ukrainian pressure campaign.

That may well be, but there are a number of issues that simply don't add up here. First, although Gucciardo is not accused at this time of any wrongdoing, it is clear that he engaged deeply with the same set of characters who are at the center of the Ukraine activities driving the ongoing impeachment action in the House of Representatives.

Gucciardo also had made a large donation to America First Action around the same time as the \$325,000 donation from Parnas and Fruman. From the Times article, continuing about Gucciardo:

In 2018, he made his biggest donation on record to date – \$50,000 to the pro-

Trump super PAC America First Action – and attended an event for major donors at the Trump hotel featuring appearances by the president and Donald Trump Jr.

It was there that he met Mr. Parnas and Mr. Fruman, who had recently co-founded a company called Global Energy Producers that donated \$325,000 to the PAC.

The next month, Mr. Parnas, Mr. Fruman and Mr. Gucciardo all went on a group trip to Israel, according to people who traveled with them.

There are even pictures from the trip, reproduced here by the Daily News. Note that in the lower of the paired photos (which is also the featured image of this post), we have from left to right, Joseph Frager, Anthony Scaramucci, Charles Gucciardo (see his profile photo at his website for comparison) and then Parnas.

First, we are told the funds were a loan that could be converted into a stake in Fraud Guarantee. Continuing from the Times story:

Mr. Gucciardo's lawyer, Randy Zelin, said Mr. Gucciardo invested in the company because of Mr. Giuliani's involvement.

"He understood that he was investing in a reputable company that Rudolph Giuliani was going to be the spokesman and the face of," Mr. Zelin said, comparing Mr. Giuliani's role to the one he had played for the personal data-security company LifeLock, which ran commercials featuring Mr. Giuliani. "When you think of cybersecurity, you think of Rudolph Giuliani," Mr. Zelin said.

The company being promoted by Mr. Parnas, Fraud Guarantee, was billed as a

way for investors to get insurance against the risk of being defrauded. Mr. Gucciardo's money was a loan that could be converted into a stake in the company, according to people familiar with the deal.

But, the money didn't go to Fraud Guarantee:

In an interview, Mr. Giuliani called the arrangement a "perfectly legitimate payment" for which Mr. Gucciardo received "promissory notes that were convertible into a percentage of the company."

Mr. Giuliani said he "verified the stock agreement" and "felt comfortable getting it from somebody as reputable as him," adding that, after the payments, "I've gotten to know Charles very well. He's a very honorable man, a very good man."

Mr. Zelin said Mr. Gucciardo did not pay Mr. Giuliani personally, but rather made his investment by paying one of Mr. Giuliani's consulting firms, Giuliani Partners. Mr. Gucciardo was "simply one of numerous other investors in the company and is nothing more than a passive investor," Mr. Zelin said.

Wait. What? Why would Gucciardo have paid Giuliani directly anyway? For a loan convertible to a stake in Fraud Guarantee, the money went to Giuliani Partners instead of Fraud Guarantee?

Why?

Well, that's where I no longer can buy into Gucciardo being an innocent swept up in the awesomeness of Parnas, Fruman and Giuliani. As has been pointed out many times, Fraud Guarantee mostly never existed. Certainly, by the time these funds changed hands in September and October of 2018, someone investing a half million dollars, and especially if that someone



is a high-powered attorney, would be expected to do just a bit of due diligence. For example, here's Roll Call giving dates for events related to Fraud Guarantee:

In the search for Fraud Guarantee, three names that all appear to have links to Parnas emerged: fraudguarantee.com, Strategic Global Assets LLC and Fraud Guarantee LLC.

Florida Department of State records show that Strategic Global Assets LLC registered fraudguarantee.com as a fictitious name in March 2013. Strategic Global Assets' corporate filings list Parnas and Florida businessman David Correia as managers. Correia was also among the defendants in the indictment unsealed last week. He was arrested in New York on Monday.

The Florida Department of State dissolved Strategic Global Assets in September 2016 after it failed to file an annual report, records show.

/snip/

A lawsuit was filed against Strategic Global Assets for failure to pay rent in Palm Beach County, Fla., in January 2015, and a default judgment in the landlord's favor came down in July of the same year.

Strategic Global Assets' official address on state records was changed in September 2015 to that of Correia's apartment at the time. Correia was listed as the registered agent for Strategic Global Assets in that same filing. He is identified as Fraud Guarantee's co-founder and chief operating officer on that company's website.

Florida records show that another company called Fraud Guarantee LLC was

dissolved in September 2014 for failing to file an annual report. It's not clear whether that company was associated with Parnas or Correia, but it shared the same street address that appears for Strategic Global Assets and fraudguarantee.com on Florida court records and an archived copy of the company's website.

All of that bad info should have made anyone getting ready to invest so much money run away screaming. But in putting the funds into Rudy's consulting business, they were essentially being hidden from multiple creditors owed funds by Giuliani, Parnas and Fruman.

First, as even the Times article above notes, Giuliani is in the midst of an ugly divorce, and so funds going directly to him would be contested in that ongoing proceeding.

Further, the Parnas and Fruman donation to America First Action was almost immediately the subject of a public complaint filed with the Federal Election Commission. This filing in July was public by the first investment in September of 2018. Further, although the Campaign Legal Center did not bring further attention to it until 2019, an attorney of Gucciardo's caliber should have been able to find the ongoing saga of the Pues lawsuit. Here's a description from USAToday:

A thornier case lingers from a federal judgment that Parnas owes for a movie that never got made.

The Pues Family Trust IRA filed a federal lawsuit in 2011 in New York City seeking repayment of a \$350,000 loan to Parnas. The trust's executor, Michael Pues, described the money in court documents as a bridge loan for a movie with the working title "Anatomy of an Assassin," while Parnas found more investors.

Parnas denied in a court filing that the money was a loan. Parnas said the movie, which he said was going to be called “Memory of a Killer,” fell apart because of financing problems, including Pues not contributing \$1 million as promised.

A judgment in the federal case in March 2016 ordered Parnas to pay the Pues Family Trust \$510,435 for the loan and 9% annual interest.

So, Parnas had to be careful about funds flowing through entities he controlled, because the Pues Family attorneys were watching carefully (and in fact pounced on the news of the America First Action donation) and Rudy had to be careful about not having the money go directly to him or his ex-wife would seek the funds. Shouldn’t Gucciardo have asked why the money didn’t just go to Fraud Guarantee? Shouldn’t he have asked why he had to divert funds to Rudy’s consultancy? This just doesn’t add up. Given his deep involvement with these same players, it seems much more likely Gucciardo understood the winks and nudges involved in getting funds to Giuliani in return for his “pro bono” representation of Donald Trump.

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## **MEANWHILE, THE PACE OF US WAR CRIMES IN AFGHANISTAN ACCELERATES DRAMATICALLY**

*Jim here.*

Some of you might remember that long ago, I used to blog nearly daily on the never-ending US

military misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. The issues of torture, night raids, death squads, secret prisons, and then drones all made it obvious to anyone who was paying attention that the senseless crimes carried out under cover of the US “war effort” were creating new enemies faster than our forces were removing them from the battlefield. Spencer Ackerman today noted a new report from Human Rights Watch that gave me a serious flashback to the days of following those issues closely. What I saw there was jarring. It is clear that under Trump, what Obama had tried to pretty up and hide (even though it still went on) came back into more openness than at any time. Human Rights Watch pulls no punches in labeling many of the things they found as war crimes.

In a post nearly ten years ago, I noted, as usual, that things in Afghanistan were going poorly. That post, as I’m sure many of my posts around that time did, linked to one of the most seminal pieces of work describing what was really going on in the war effort their under the Obama Administration: Anand Gopal’s piece describing how the night raids that played such a crucial role in McChrystal’s COIN programs in both Iraq and Afghanistan were hidden by moving them to raiding parties comprised of Special Operations forces often supplemented with private, CIA-trained militias:

The American troops that operate under NATO command have begun to enforce stricter rules of engagement: they may now officially hold detainees for only ninety-six hours before transferring them to the Afghan authorities or freeing them, and Afghan forces must take the lead in house searches. American soldiers, when questioned, bristle at these restrictions—and have ways of circumventing them. “Sometimes we detain people, then, when the ninety-six hours are up, we transfer them to the Afghans,” said one marine who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “They

rough them up a bit for us and then send them back to us for another ninety-six hours. This keeps going until we get what we want.”

A simpler way of dancing around the rules is to call in the Special Operations Forces—the Navy SEALs, Green Berets and others—which are not under NATO command and thus not bound by the stricter rules of engagement. These elite troops are behind most of the night raids and detentions in the search for “high-value suspects.” Military officials say in interviews that the new restrictions have not affected the number of raids and detentions at all. The actual change, however, is more subtle: the detention process has shifted almost entirely to areas and actors that can best avoid public scrutiny—small field prisons and Special Operations Forces.

And Gopal shows just what these actions do to the locals:

If night raids and detentions are an unavoidable part of modern counterinsurgency warfare, then so is the resentment they breed. “We were all happy when the Americans first came. We thought they would bring peace and stability,” said Rehmatullah Muhammad. “But now most people in my village want them to leave.” A year after Muhammad was released, his nephew was detained. Two months later, some other residents of Zaiwalat were seized. It has become a predictable pattern in Muhammad’s village: Taliban forces ambush American convoys as they pass through it, and then retreat into the thick fruit orchards nearby. The Americans return at night to pick up suspects. In the past two years, sixteen people have been taken and ten killed in night raids in

this single village of about 300, according to villagers. In the same period, they say, the insurgents killed one local and did not take anyone hostage.

The people of Zaiwalat now fear the night raids more than the Taliban. There are nights when Muhammad's children hear the distant thrum of a helicopter and rush into his room. He consoles them but admits he needs solace himself. "I know I should be too old for it," he said, "but this war has made me afraid of the dark."

So that was how, after claiming to have stopped torture and embarking on building a new shiny prison at Bagram Air Base, Obama allowed much of the same activity that bred resentment of the US presence to carry on unabated. But now we have Trump in charge, and the CIA under him was led first by Mike Pompeo and now by Gina Haspel, who first gained notoriety running the most infamous CIA torture site in Thailand under George W. Bush. Trump was not kidding when he said he was going to take of the gloves in Afghanistan.

From the HRW report:

This report documents 14 cases in which CIA-backed Afghan strike forces committed serious abuses between late 2017 and mid-2019. They are illustrative of a larger pattern of serious laws-of-war violations—some amounting to war crimes—that extends to all provinces in Afghanistan where these paramilitary forces operate with impunity.

It continues:

In the course of researching this report, Afghan officials, civil society and human rights activists, Afghan and foreign healthcare workers, journalists, and community elders all described

abusive raids and indiscriminate airstrikes as having become a daily fact of life for many communities—often with devastating consequences. Speaking to Human Rights Watch, one diplomat familiar with Afghan strike force operations referred to them as “death squads.”

Afghan paramilitary forces nominally belong to the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), the country’s primary intelligence agency. However, these forces do not fall under the ordinary chain of command within the NDS, nor under normal Afghan or US military chains of command. They largely have been recruited, trained, equipped, and overseen by the CIA. They often have US special forces personnel deployed alongside them during kill-or-capture operations; these US forces, primarily Army Rangers, have been seconded to the CIA. Afghan paramilitary strike forces generally carry out operations with US logistical support and are dependent on US intelligence and surveillance for targeting.

A big change came when, according to the report, the US in 2017 allowed Afghan special forces to call in their own airstrikes, with devastating consequences due to the lower quality of detailed intelligence on which the strikes were based.

And yes, the report details that these groups have become death squads:

In many cases, paramilitary strike forces summarily executed persons taken into custody or forcibly disappeared them, not telling their families about their fate or whereabouts. In none of the cases Human Rights Watch investigated did the civilians who were killed offer resistance or act in any

way that justified the use of force.

Ackerman closed his piece with a quote from John Sifton of Human Rights Watch:

Sifton called on the U.S. to exercise accountability over the paramilitaries it operates alongside in Afghanistan.

“If the U.S. government was functioning properly, Congress and the Department of Justice would be investigating alleged war crimes involving the participation of U.S. forces, and where appropriate prosecuting U.S. personnel implicated in war crimes,” Sifton said. “And Congress would be cutting funding to all abusive forces as it did, for example, with funding for the Contras in the mid-1980s.”

Sifton nails the issue. Our government, of course, has not functioned properly on these issues since the Bush Administration was allowed to turn 9/11 into a vendetta against Muslims. It became unpatriotic to question any part of the war effort or any of the military and civilians in charge of creating the policies surrounding it. Perhaps today there is a glimmer of hope with the House passing the formal vote to authorize the impeachment investigation of Trump, but things have gone so far downhill in those nearly two decades that it will take a long time to restore honor to anything the US does in the Middle East.

Finally, there is one last small detail to show just how bad the situation in Afghanistan has become. I used to await each of the quarterly reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, as they would be packed with data on how many regions in Afghanistan had fallen under Taliban control or wrested back under Coalition control. Also, the vaunted “training” of Afghan forces and the resulting Afghan force size was important to



track over time. Yesterday, SIGAR released its 45th (!) quarterly report (the war in Afghanistan had already been long underway before SIGAR started the reports), but the reports now have zero data of this sort. Things are so bad there that SIGAR no longer can report on these distressing statistics. I haven't checked, but I'm assuming they are now classified, which is what the military has done throughout the Afghanistan war for the most embarrassing information.

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## **ALEXANDER VINDMAN PROVES THAT WORKING WITHIN SYSTEM WORKS EVEN WHILE DEREK HARVEY WORKS TO DESTROY IT**

*Jim here.*

Last night, two very remarkable stories were published that, taken together, illustrate an extreme chasm in our defense community that receives far too little attention. To set the stage, it is necessary to go back to the early 2000's for a development that has mostly been erased from our collective memory but has had an indelible and particularly harmful and lingering effect. As the George W. Bush Administration executed its pivot from the war in Afghanistan to the invasion of Iraq, it became necessary for the Bush folks to craft a set of intelligence "facts" supporting and then sustaining the action in Iraq. A primary tool used in this effort was create a separate intelligence apparatus, since the existing intelligence agencies did not produce analyses supporting the

invasion.

A huge impact of this illegal war was that it devastated morale within the military at all ranks. Sadly, many of our highest ranking—and most ethical—officers chose retirement rather than to serve while an illegal war was being waged. With the Defense Secretary, Vice President and President clearly leading the charge for the war, it seems obvious that these officers realized that their analyses showing that the invasion was not justified were falling on deaf ears and that they would never be able to inject a dose of reality into the artificial reality on which the whole war effort rested. The result, as they had to be able to foresee, was that the Iraqi people and our enlisted forces suffered unnecessary and devastating losses, with impact continuing into the present even after “end” of US action in Iraq.

By 2006, some of these retired officers even began to speak out, calling for the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld. In a normal world, where the system of checks and balances within the military and with legislative and executive oversight functions operating properly, these officers would not have needed to retire, but instead would have been key factors in rejecting the invasion as unnecessary and based only on a set of political objectives rather than an actual need for military action to stave off harm to the region. As a trained geneticist, my feeling was that this event served as a sort of genetic selection within the military, where the population of those remaining and advancing through the ranks was enriched for those who bought into distorted politics of the invasion and a willingness to shape “facts” around a desired outcome. Our only hope, I felt, was that at least some would desire to stay within the system anyway and continue to work for the ideals of their oath to the Constitution administered when they joined the military.

So, fast forward to last night. The New York Times article on Alexander Vindman illustrates

that Vindman is indeed just that sort of person I hoped would continue to stay and work within the system. His work as the senior Ukraine analyst on the National Security Council put him into position to see the illegal plan that the Trump Administration was carrying out force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate Hunter Biden in return for the release of essential Ukraine aid that Trump had frozen. Vindman's response was by the book: document the crime and then report it up the chain of command:

"I did not think it was proper to demand that a foreign government investigate a U.S. citizen, and I was worried about the implications for the U.S. government's support of Ukraine," Colonel Vindman said in his statement. "I realized that if Ukraine pursued an investigation into the Bidens and Burisma it would likely be interpreted as a partisan play which would undoubtedly result in Ukraine losing the bipartisan support it has thus far maintained."

/snip/

"This would all undermine U.S. national security," Colonel Vindman added, referring to Mr. Trump's comments in the call.

Vindman then went on to report his concerns:

"I did convey certain concerns internally to national security officials in accordance with my decades of experience and training, sense of duty, and obligation to operate within the chain of command," he plans to say.

He will testify that he watched with alarm as "outside influencers" began pushing a "false narrative" about

Ukraine that was counter to the consensus view of American national security officials, and harmful to United States interests. According to documents reviewed by The Times on the eve of his congressional testimony, Colonel Vindman was concerned as he discovered that Rudolph W. Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, was leading an effort to prod Kiev to investigate Mr. Biden's son, and to discredit efforts to investigate Mr. Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, and his business dealings in Ukraine.

Vindman made not one, but two reports to the top lawyer in the NSC, John Eisenberg. Were it not for the whistleblower report and the impeachment inquiry stemming from it, the sad reality is that Vindman's heroic actions might have ended with his reports to Eisenberg, as Eisenberg has been shown to have been working to quash the efforts to expose Trump's illegal actions. But now that the House of Representatives has finally rediscovered the real duty of oversight (we already miss you, Elijah Cummings!), Vindman today has the opportunity provide a deposition to the three committees carrying out the impeachment investigation. Vindman's testimony seems likely to seal Trump's fate, as it is nearly impossible to see how at least one article of impeachment won't arise from the facts Vindman lays out. Whether Senate Republicans will also find their duty to truth rather than manufactured reality, of course, seems less likely, but at the very least it will be valuable to watch them squirm when the decision is laid squarely in their laps.

At almost the same time the Vindman article came out in the Times, Daily Beast detailed how a retired military officer, Derek Harvey, is working outside proper channels to disclose the identity of the whistleblower, endangering this individual and making future whistleblowers less likely to expose corruption. Harvey seems to be

a poster child for exactly the type of officer who flourished after the mass exodus of those with a conscience. Here is how Daily Beast described his background:

Derek Harvey's career has been extraordinary. As a Defense Intelligence Agency analyst, he played an important role in the 2007-8 troop surge in Iraq. David Petraeus kept Harvey aboard for an intelligence billet at U.S. Central Command. Harvey aligned with another member of the counterinsurgency coterie, DIA Director Mike Flynn, and followed Flynn onto Trump's White NSC. From there, Harvey became a crucial aide to Nunes, a pivotal Flynn and Trump ally. There is no reasonable definition of Deep State that excludes Derek Harvey from elite membership.

So Harvey accelerated his military career, and career after retiring but staying within military intelligence, by joining forces with the Petraeus effort to craft "facts" around the Iraq surge—a cataclysmic failure that Petraeus always claimed as a stunning success—and then eventually joined Mike Flynn both in DIA and the NSC. One stop in Harvey's career not on that list is detailed in Bob Woodward's "Obama's Wars" [quoted here]:

Based on what Harvey reported to General Petraeus, according to Woodward's book, Petraeus "decided to create his own intelligence agency inside CentCom" (pg. 78, "Obama's War") to offset the shortcomings of the DNI, CIA, NSA, DIA and other US intelligence gathering agencies in gathering information about the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. He asked Harvey to draft plans for an agency modeled on Harvey's approach. Reports Woodward, "Soon, Harvey was appointed director of the new Afghanistan-Pakistan Center of Excellence based at CentCom headquarters

in Tampa, Florida.”

According to Woodward, Petraeus moved over \$100 million into this project with Congress unaware of that move for several months. Harvey’s analysis that he gave to Petraeus: “the war could be won, but the U.S. government would have to make monumental long-term commitments for years that might be unpalatable with voters” (p. 79).

So Harvey clearly is essentially a ratfucker for hire, being willing to craft an intelligence set of “facts” to serve whatever master is paying him to do so. Although Woodward paints a rather admiring picture of Harvey’s diligence in approaching his intelligence gathering, comparing it to that of a homicide detective, historical context tells us that Petraeus simply didn’t like what he was getting from the existing agencies and needed his own “intelligence” to continue on his chosen path.

But, as you see above, Harvey is now working for Devin Nunes (R-Cow) and that is an especially devious team. From Daily Beast:

Derek Harvey, who works for Nunes, the ranking Republican on the House intelligence committee, has provided notes for House Republicans identifying the whistleblower’s name ahead of the high-profile depositions of Trump administration appointees and civil servants in the impeachment inquiry. The purpose of the notes, one source said, is to get the whistleblower’s name into the record of the proceedings, which committee chairman Adam Schiff has pledged to eventually release. In other words: it’s an attempt to out the anonymous official who helped trigger the impeachment inquiry.

Mark Zaid explained to Daily Beast the horrible implications of what Harvey is doing:

“Exposing the identity of the whistleblower and attacking our client would do nothing to undercut the validity of the complaint’s allegations,” said Mark Zaid, one of the whistleblower’s attorneys. “What it would do, however, is put that individual and their family at risk of harm. Perhaps more important, it would deter future whistleblowers from coming forward in subsequent administrations, Democratic or Republican.”

It’s hard to imagine two more polar opposites than Alexander Vindman and Derek Harvey. Vindman is a patriot committed to the security of the US and working within the system while Harvey is willing to sell out US security to whatever wingnut is willing to pay him and to bypass every safeguard built into the system.

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## ALEX MOONEY’S HILARIOUS SELF-OWN

*Jim here.*

Yesterday, I watched with fascination as Matt Gaetz whipped his stormtroopers into a frenzy and stormed the ramparts of the SCIF facility where Laura Cooper was scheduled to be deposed. This tweet by Scott Thuman especially caught my eye, with the video he provided:

WATCH: here’s the video of when 2 dozen GOP members, led by @mattgaetz entered the secure hearing room (SCIF) to interrupt witness testimony in the #ImpeachmentInquiry as they demand access, despite not being committee members. They’re complaining it’s a “Soviet-style process”.  
[pic.twitter.com/8KddYz3r9D](https://pic.twitter.com/8KddYz3r9D)

— Scott Thuman (@ScottThuman) October 23, 2019

What really stood out to me was that one of Gaetz's stormtroopers had his cellphone out and appeared to have his camera active as he approached the door. Based on Thuman's "entered the secure hearing room" and the way Thuman pointed his camera down as he panned to the door, I initially had the impression that this doorway the Congressmen were going through was the entry to the SCIF itself, and so I tweeted this:

Note that one of these clowns had his camera active while entering the SCIF. Was he livestreaming? If so, that facility is seriously compromised. Please help identify just which Gooper this is so we can report him to the @FBI for his violation of the law.  
[pic.twitter.com/goPOFy0X19](https://pic.twitter.com/goPOFy0X19)

— Jim White (@JimWhiteGNV) October 23, 2019

I had no idea that this would become my most viral tweet ever. At the time of this writing, the tweet has just under 95,000 impressions.

I did not yet know who this was with the phone. It has since become clear that it was Representative Alex Mooney of West Virginia. He even put up a tweet with an audio recording from inside the SCIF that he claimed came from a "secure phone".

Needless to say, I had lots of pushback and I got to see the amazing array of bots and MAGAts that swarm whenever their world view is threatened. One theme that kept coming up, though, was that this was not the SCIF itself. It turns out that is somewhat true. After 6 pm, Mooney put up this tweet, which clearly has the video he was recording as Thuman captured him



going through the door:

Here is the video of me before entering the SCIF hearing room to expose Adam Schiff and the Democrats secret impeachment hearing to demand transparency for West Virginians and the American people.

[pic.twitter.com/DGEJZHehbz](https://pic.twitter.com/DGEJZHehbz)

– Rep. Alex Mooney (@RepAlexMooney)  
October 23, 2019

Okay, this confirmed what I was beginning to suspect, that the doorway in Thuman's video is not the entrance to the actual SCIF. When a person at the entrance to the SCIF announces that cameras are not allowed, his first response is "What camera?". But upon being informed again, Mooney shrugs and turns off the phone, presumably to surrender it. Note that multiple media reports make it clear though, that not all of Gaetz's stormtroopers surrendered their devices, causing quite a serious security breach.

But Thuman's reluctance to capture video from inside the door (we see only a red carpet and a few feet) and his failure to follow Gaetz's stormtroopers made me wonder if the doorway was still in some way restricted. In fact, given the extreme security measures taken for a SCIF, it seemed reasonable to wonder if there was signage restricting electronics even beyond this point, so that detailed information of the building layout leading to the SCIF entrance would not be disseminated.

So I began searching Google images for pictures of Gaetz's stormtroopers going through the door. I hit paydirt in what turns out to be an entire New York Times article on the event. This is the banner on the front of a video the Times did:



Republican lawmakers protested outside a secure room where a Defense Department official arrived to testify in the House's impeachment inquiry.  
Erin Schaff/The New York Times

This is clearly a photo taken as stormtrooper Mooney goes through the door with cell phone blazing. Ah, but look at the sign on the other half of the double door: "Restricted Area No public or media access. Cameras and recording devices prohibited without proper authorization."

Oh my, so when stormtrooper Mooney barged through the first door, he failed to read the sign informing him that he was not to be filming his own heroic action.

As if the Times photo alone is not enough to disgrace Mooney, he had to pile on. Here is a tweet an exhausted stormtrooper Mooney put up just after 7:30, after his siege of the SCIF had ended (never mind that the deposition itself actually took place anyhow, but with a five hour delay):

I will continue to stand with President @realDonaldTrump and expose this sham impeachment process.  
[pic.twitter.com/mVxILY0rY2](https://pic.twitter.com/mVxILY0rY2)

– Rep. Alex Mooney (@RepAlexMooney)  
October 23, 2019

Mooney actually came back out the door and had a staffer film him while explaining that "this is not the SCIF" and, once they entered, "nobody was using a cell phone". The problem is that he's using as a backdrop for this explanation

the sign showing that electronics were not to be used even going through this outer door, and his entry through that door, with his cell phone going, has been documented by Scott Thuman, Alex Mooney, the New York Times and hopefully, law enforcement:

