Ukraine and the Whistleblowers

- **Post Reprint:** “Five Myths About Ukraine”
- **Post Reprint:** “We aid Ukraine to help it fight Russia. By holding back support, Trump helped Putin.”
- **Map It:** Ukraine
- **Student Activity:** Ukraine, Whistleblowers and the President
A region colonized by Greeks and Romans, overrun by Huns and Mongols, and conquered by Ottoman Turks, Ukraine emerged in the spotlight in 2019. Not because of the thousands who have lost their lives in the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula, but because of a phone call of U.S. President Donald Trump to newly elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

This guide gives an introduction to Ukrainian geography, history and modern politics. Begin with the map of Ukraine and quick facts. The Post series of Five Myths in late September chose Ukraine for its focus — and a little more detail. Discussion of why the U.S. gives aid to other countries, and the Ukraine in particular, can begin after reading “We aid Ukraine to help it fight Russia. By holding back support, Trump helped Putin.”

Bringing together the different elements in this curriculum guide and the impeachment inquiry, “Ukraine, Whistleblowers and the President” provides ten questions to stimulate research into the individuals, the basis in law and differing points of view. Teachers may wish to add additional questions. Be sure students know what Ukraine has got to do with it.
Myths About Ukraine

By Nina Jankowicz

Ukraine has been thrust into the news, but not for its two historic elections this year or progress made by its new comedian-turned-president. No, Ukraine is on America’s mind because a whistleblower in the U.S. intelligence community alleged that President Trump pressured the new president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to investigate former vice president Joe Biden, using nearly $400 million in military aid as leverage. A White House memorandum outlining the leaders’ call shows Zelenskyy asking for more military aid, to which Trump responds, “I would like you to do us a favor though,” before turning to a possible investigation of his political enemies. As impeachment proceedings over the scandal begin, Ukraine — and misinformation about it — will continue to be a mainstay of the news.

1 It’s called ‘the Ukraine.’

Many Americans — including Trump and his lawyer Rudolph W. Giuliani — regularly call Ukraine by an outdated name: “the Ukraine.” CNN’s Chris Cuomo also referred to it that way while interrogating Giuliani, opening a line of questioning by asking the former New York mayor, “Did you ask the Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden?” It is true that the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was commonly known as “the Ukraine” in English, but even then, the term was a shorthand. The fraught definite article is rooted in a traditional translation choice that has geopolitical implications. In Russian, the word “Украина” means “borderlands” and takes the preposition “на.” Using the phrase “на Украине” to describe the sovereign nation of Ukraine in Russian is derogatory, akin to saying “in the sticks” in English. It implies that Ukraine is not an independent state but simply a “borderland” on Russia’s outskirts. Ukrainians (and Ukraine’s Russian-speaking supporters elsewhere) use a different preposition when speaking about the country: “в.” The proper English translation of this preferred construction would
Crimeans want to be part of Russia.

In 2014, just after the Sochi Winter Olympics, “little green men” — military personnel without insignia on their green uniforms, later revealed to be Russian troops — rolled into Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula and began wresting control of military installations and administrative resources from local authorities. A few weeks later, Russia organized an unconstitutional referendum to secure the peninsula’s new affiliation. Moscow claimed that 97 percent of Crimean voters chose to be incorporated into the Russian Federation rather than maintain the peninsula’s autonomous status within Ukraine. Later, during the 2016 presidential campaign, then-candidate Trump told ABC’s George Stephanopoulos that “the people of Crimea, from what I’ve heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were,” a claim he has repeated since assuming office.

But the reality of what Crimeans want is not so cut-and-dried. Both the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe condemned the March 2014 referendum as illegitimate. The Kremlin has restricted access to the peninsula since its annexation, making it difficult to assess people’s true sentiments. It has also targeted independent media outlets and imprisoned at least 110 local journalists and activists for their work. Several leaders of the Crimean Tatar ethnic group, which considers the peninsula its ancestral home, are among them.

They are lucky to have their lives; other critics of the annexation have been kidnapped, disappeared or killed. A 2019 report from the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights found that Russia carries out “pervasive human rights violations such as restrictions on freedoms of religion, opinion and expression and association, as well as the intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, disproportionately affecting Crimean Tatars.” Many residents have fled the peninsula since the annexation, contributing to the more than 1.4 million internally displaced people in Ukraine. In short, the Kremlin’s argument that Crimeans “want to be part of Russia” rests on an illegal sham election and the systematic oppression of dissent.

Ukraine is fighting a civil war.

The war in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region that has been going on for more than five years and claimed more than 13,000 lives is a confusing one; Russia has purposely made it that way. In addition to its stolen and illegal annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin secretly funds, outfits and supplies troops to separatists in Eastern Ukraine, so calling the conflict a “civil war” — as Russian-owned British newspaper the Independent has done since the fighting broke out — is incorrect. Global Security Review has similarly described the situation as a “civil war,” claiming that it will “remain frozen for the foreseeable future,” and the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently complained after a Hungarian official used the term.

Not only has the Russian government sent its soldiers to fight in Ukraine, as a 2015 investigation by journalist Simon Ostrovsky revealed, but a Russian missile launcher brought down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014, killing all 298 aboard. An international probe of the disaster established Moscow’s direct military command over the separatists, suggesting that Moscow’s role in directing and shaping the conflict is much greater than the Kremlin admits. The Donbas war was started and is perpetuated — through funding, heavy weaponry, supplies and troops — by Russia. It is not a civil war.

Ukraine is hopelessly corrupt.

“Why would you give money to a country you think is corrupt?” Trump recently responded when questioned about his administration’s decision to delay almost $400 million in
military aid to Ukraine. As vice president, Biden told the Ukrainian parliament in 2015, “You cannot name me a single democracy in the world where the cancer of corruption is [more] prevalent” than in Ukraine.

Four years later, corruption remains Ukraine’s greatest reform challenge. But the government has also made important progress. It has implemented an online procurement system for government tenders. It has established an online wealth declaration system for all public officials, including the president and prime minister, that is fully transparent and accessible to the public. Ukraine’s new parliament voted to strip its members of immunity, which had long protected lawmakers from prosecution for crimes including corruption. And just this past week, Zelenskyy signed a new law clarifying that the president of Ukraine can, in fact, be impeached. Ukraine still has a long way to go — its court system, in particular, requires serious reform — but the progress since the rejection of the corrupt Yanukovych regime in 2014 is unmistakable.

Joe Biden lobbied to fire a prosecutor on behalf of his son.

Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Giuliani have all alleged, without evidence, that as vice president, Biden threatened to withhold a $1 billion loan guaranteed Ukraine if then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko did not fire a prosecutor investigating corruption in gas company Burisma. President Trump alleges that Biden did this to protect Hunter Biden, the vice president’s son, who sat on the company’s board. According to a White House memo recounting Trump’s phone call with Zelenskyy, Trump told him, “I heard you had a prosecutor who was very good and he was shut down and that’s really unfair.” Trump goes on to say that Biden “stopped the prosecution.”

In reality, Shokin, who had a long record of incompetence, was an impediment to anti-corruption work in Ukraine. The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine in 2015, Geoffrey Pyatt, lambasted Shokin for his office’s role in getting a British investigation into Burisma dismissed. Anti-corruption activists in Ukraine regularly protested Shokin’s behavior. And, along with an international coalition including the European Union that pushed for further anti-corruption reform in Ukraine, Biden lobbied Poroshenko for Shokin’s firing, while also insisting on other anti-corruption reforms the country needed to pursue to continue receiving U.S. aid. Finally, according to Ukrainian officials and anti-corruption activists, the investigation into Burisma had been shelved long before Biden made his request. By lobbying for Shokin’s dismissal, Biden invited more scrutiny of his son, not less. He was pressuring Ukraine to crack down on corruption, not contributing to it.

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Five Responses

1. Explain how knowing the Russian language name for Ukraine can explain political attitudes.
2. Prepare a timeline of events in the Crimean Peninsula and Ukraine since 2014.
3. What are the two prominent points of view about military activity in eastern Ukraine?
4. a. What is corruption?
   b. How is the current parliament of Ukraine facing corruption?
5. What arguments do Nina Jankowicz present concerning Joe Biden’s activities in Ukraine while vice president?
We aid Ukraine to help it fight Russia. By holding back support, Trump helped Putin.

During my Defense Department tenure, I saw how critical Ukraine is to protecting allies and checking an adversary.

BY EVELYN N. FARKAS

On several consecutive mornings in early 2014, I woke up with one agonizing plea: Please, Lord, let the Ukrainian service members still be alive. I feared that while I slept, Russians might have slaughtered thousands of outgunned and outnumbered Ukrainians trapped on their own air and naval bases.

Hostilities between Russia and Ukraine began in that year with Russia’s lightning-quick occupation of Crimea, a region coveted by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Within hours, Ukrainian service members at various military installations were trapped on their own soil by Russian forces. If they had fought back, almost certainly they would have died. If they didn’t resist, it was unclear how they would fare. My job, as deputy assistant secretary of defense, was to lead a team drafting proposals for then-
Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and President Barack Obama, outlining options for the United States to help Ukraine defend itself against further Russian aggression.

The situation was urgent: Viktor Yanukovych, the corrupt, Russia-friendly president of Ukraine whose election was aided by Paul Manafort — Donald Trump’s future campaign chairman and, as of last year, a felon — had overseen years of government plunder. His military was underresourced and gave up without a fight. The Russians seized dominance of the air and sea, illegally took over Crimea and started a separatist war in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine that persists today. At the outset, Ukraine’s government sought both lethal and nonlethal aid from Western nations. The Obama administration announced a $53 million nonlethal aid package later that year.

Republicans in Congress criticized Obama for not providing weaponry. They praised President Trump after he approved arms sales to Ukraine in 2017, including the Javelin antitank systems mentioned by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the July 25 call with Trump that’s at the heart of the House’s impeachment inquiry. Now, though, Trump is accused of delaying nearly $400 million in military aid at around the same time he encouraged Zelenskyy to look for compromising information about one of Trump’s political rivals, former vice president Joe Biden, whose son Hunter Biden was on the board of directors of the Ukrainian gas company Burisma.

In the context of Ukraine’s shooting war — and the political war between the United States and Russia — Trump’s alleged actions suggest his contempt for his constitutional duty and his lack of stewardship of American military and diplomatic resources. But they’re also a reminder of his persistent flirtation with prerogatives claimed by Putin, unquestionably a U.S. adversary. Trump’s motivation may have been domestic politics, but Putin’s machinations made Ukraine vulnerable to Trump’s apparent push in the first place.

In 2016, Ukrainian officials found a ledger that catalogued payments made to Manafort by Ukraine’s government. Around the same time, Manafort was denying reports that he had played a part in weakening language in the Republican Party platform regarding assistance to Ukraine in its war against Russia.

Before and after that, Ukrainians have died fighting Russia-supported military elements that the Kremlin has denied sending. This year, three Russians and a Ukrainian were charged in the Netherlands in the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine with a Russian-made Buk missile, killing 298 people. Russian-backed forces have not pressed all the way to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, mostly content to let the fighting stalemate in the east.

This has continued for five years. During that time, the United States has provided more than $1 billion in defense-related aid to Ukraine. The European Union and Western allies have given billions in loans and millions in other forms of aid. Meanwhile, the war drags on — in a report from February, the United Nations tallied more than 13,000 deaths. Ukrainians, rightly, continue to insist that Russia has no right to their territory or to determine their political fates.

We are supporting Ukraine to stop Putin. If Russia succeeds in Ukraine, Moscow will use military aggression again. Eventually, Russia could move against a NATO ally, which would almost automatically require us to go to war pursuant to NATO’s Article 5 principle and provision that “an attack against one” is “an attack against all.”

This summer, Ukrainians elected Zelenskyy, a 41-year-old entertainer and political newcomer, on the basis of his anti-corruption platform. Zelenskyy has also signaled that he wants to make peace with Russia. If anything, Trump should have been increasing support to Ukraine so as to strengthen Zelenskyy’s negotiating hand with Putin. Instead, as we’ve learned from Trump’s own statements, from news accounts and from the rough transcript of the July 25 call, he and his administration held up vital military assistance to Ukraine and pushed for an investigation of Biden, as well as the investigation into 2016 election.

Imagine if our president hinted to a NATO ally under attack — let’s say Britain — that he would come to its defense only if Prime Minister Boris Johnson did him a favor. Conversely, imagine if another ally’s leader, such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin
Netanyahu, were to tell Trump that he would help us defend ourselves only if Trump helped him politically. It’s this kind of scenario that Trump stands accused of now. If his apparent actions had remained secret, it could have kept aid from flowing to Ukraine; Ukraine’s government could have been able to blackmail our president by threatening to publicize his request. Any other country with access to this conversation, via espionage, might have been able to do so as well. Trump’s actions, then, could simultaneously amount to a betrayal of public trust, a fraudulent manipulation of allocated funds, a roadblock to U.S. policy and a counterintelligence risk. Most government employees with a security clearance would have it revoked over an episode like this. Trump, though, says his call with Zelenskyy was “perfect.”

Now, praise the Lord (and the brave, principled whistleblower), the secret is out. While lawmakers investigate Trump, a unified Congress and executive branch must demonstrate to Putin and the world that in the war with Russia, the United States is on Ukraine’s side. We should join European nations in pressuring Moscow to implement the Minsk Agreements, designed to protect Ukrainian sovereignty, and make clear that Ukraine isn’t a bargaining chip — either on the geopolitical chessboard or for the political gain of the American president.

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Ukraine

**Official Name:** Ukraine  
**Continent:** Asia  
**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential republic  
**Capital:** Kyiv (Kiev)  
**Population:** 43,952,300 (July 2018 est.)  
**Official Language:** Ukrainian  
**Independence Day:** August 24, 1991 (from the Soviet Union)  
**Money:** Hryvnia (UAH)
Ukraine, Whistleblowers and The President

Events and revelations of September and October 2019 brought together diverse laws, countries, members of Congress and the president of the United States and the new president of Ukraine. Questions seeking answers abound.

Select one of the following questions. Do some research and prepare to share your answer.

1. Colonized by Greeks and Romans, overrun by Huns and Mongols, conquered by Ottoman Turks. How did Ukraine, a region with a long history of subjugation, gain independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union?

2. From an annexation in 1783 to arena of the Crimean War (1853-1856) and autonomous Russian republic after 1921, Crimea has been the subject of Russia’s desire. Why is the Crimean peninsula of the southern Ukraine of such interest to contemporary Russia?

3. Who is the recently elected president of Ukraine? What experience and promises did he bring as he took office?


5. Does Congress have sufficient evidence against Donald Trump for impeachment? What make impeachable offenses? Include different points of view and details.

6. What charges were brought against presidents John Tyler, Richard Nixon and William Jefferson Clinton in their impeachment inquiry? What was the House vote on each one?

7. How much will the impeachment inquiry cost the American taxpayer? Others? Include known expenses for advertising campaigns.

8. What role did one or more whistleblowers play in the decision to begin an impeachment inquiry?

9. Why does the Whistleblower Protection Act exist and what are its main provisions? According to the Act, should the public and the one accused of wrongdoing know the whistleblower’s identity? Explain the reasons.

10. What are President Donald Trump’s main arguments against impeachment? Relate these to the U.S. Constitution’s provisions for impeachment — inquiry and trial.