

Opening Statement of Catherine M. Croft to the House of Representatives
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Committee on Foreign Affairs, and
Committee on Oversight and Reform

October 30, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my statement today.

For the last nine years, it has been my honor to serve my country as a Foreign Service Officer. In that capacity, it has been a privilege to serve alongside colleagues of intelligence, integrity, and determination to advance U.S. interests, some of whom have already spoken to this committee. I am not sure that I have anything to add to the testimony of those who have come before me, but I will answer your questions to the best of my ability.

My work on Ukraine started in 2013, when I was posted to the U.S. Mission to NATO. My portfolio included NATO-Ukraine relations when the citizens of Ukraine took to the streets to demand a European future and an end to corruption. When Russian tanks rolled into Crimea, I was assigned to NATO headquarters in Brussels. At the time, we did not know where those tanks would stop. Russia's aggression in Ukraine posed, and continues to pose, a real and immediate threat to our national interest in a Europe free, whole, and at peace.

My firm belief in the importance of Ukraine's future to U.S. national interests led me to the Ukraine Desk. From August 2015 to July 2017, I was one of several Ukraine Desk Officers at State Department headquarters. In my portfolio, I focused on security assistance, arms sales, and defense reform. But like all desk officers, my work also included supporting efforts to combat corruption in Ukraine and holding leadership accountable for a lack of high-level prosecutions.

In July 2017, as the Trump Administration was considering overturning the ban on providing Ukraine defensive weapons, I was asked to join the National

Security Council Staff at the White House. As the Director covering Ukraine, I staffed the President's December 2017 decision to provide Ukraine with Javelin anti-tank missile systems. I also staffed his September 2017 meeting with then-President Poroshenko on the margins of the UN General Assembly. Throughout both, I heard—directly and indirectly—President Trump describe Ukraine as a corrupt country.

During my time at the NSC, I received multiple calls from lobbyist Robert Livingston, who told me that Ambassador Yovanovitch should be fired. He characterized Ambassador Yovanovitch as an “Obama holdover” and associated with George Soros. It was not clear to me at the time—or now—at whose direction or at whose expense Mr. Livingston was seeking the removal of Ambassador Yovanovitch. I documented these calls and told my boss, Fiona Hill, and George Kent, who was in Kyiv at the time. I am not aware of any action that was taken in response.

I left the NSC in July 2018 and started studying Arabic at the Foreign Service Institute in preparation for a tour in Baghdad. That plan was cut short in May 2019, when I was asked to take over as Ambassador Volker's Advisor. I spent the month of June embedded in our Embassy in Kyiv to prepare and then spent the week of July 8 overlapping with my predecessor, Christopher Anderson. That week was the first time I became aware that Ambassador Volker was in touch with Rudolph Giuliani. However, Ambassador Volker's conversations with Giuliani were separate from my work, and I was generally unaware of when they spoke or what they spoke about. I have never had contact with Rudolph Giuliani.

On July 18, I participated in a sub-Policy Coordination Committee video conference where an OMB representative reported that the White House Chief of Staff, Mick Mulvaney, had placed an informal hold on security assistance to Ukraine. The only reason given was that the order came at the direction of the

President. I had heard about the hold before that date, but do not remember the specific date.

During the July 25 phone call between President Trump and President Zelenskyy, I was traveling with Ambassador Volker in Kyiv. I did not listen in on the call. I accompanied Ambassador Volker in meetings with Ukrainian officials and to the Line of Contact between Ukrainian armed forces and the Russia-led forces in eastern Ukraine. The only readout I got of July 25 call was based on what President Zelenskyy told Ambassadors Volker, Taylor, and Sondland about the call at a meeting on July 26. The focus of the call, as I understood it, was to schedule a face-to-face meeting between President Trump and President Zelenskyy. We hoped that such a meeting would help undo President Trump's long-held view of Ukraine as a corrupt country.

Since July, my sole focus has been supporting efforts to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Zelenskyy's election and his mandate to tackle corruption ignited new energy into stalled talks. Right now, even as Ukrainians face casualties nearly every day in defense of their own territory against Russian aggression, the sides are making progress disengaging at key crossing points. Zelenskyy has shown a willingness to take political risk to bring Russia back to the table. His best chance at success is with our support along with our European partners. It is my hope that even as this Committee's process plays out, we do not lose sight of what is happening in Ukraine and its great promise as a prosperous and democratic member of the European community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and I welcome your questions.