

October 15, 2019

Since our last update, two new players have emerged in the Trump impeachment inquiry. Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European and Russian Affairs Fiona Hill and former hotelier and current US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland.

Ms Hill testified before investigators for than 8 hours on Monday October 14. News reports indicate that Ms. Hill told members of Congress that following a July meeting with Ukrainian and U.S. officials about unspecified investigations, she and John Bolton, the former national security adviser, were so concerned that Bolton directed her to alert a lawyer in the National Security Council. Hill exited the administration days before the July 25 phone call between President Trump and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky.

Ambassador Sondland was identified as a key witness after text messages were handed over to House investigators by former special US envoy to Ukraine Kurt Volker. During Volker's 10-hour deposition, text messages between US and Ukrainian officials that he provided revealed that US officials felt President Trump would not agree to a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky unless he launched a public investigation into Joe Biden's son.

Reports have emerged that either the White House or Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blocked Sondland from testifying, which has resulted in the three committees issuing a subpoena to Sondland. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Ukraine expert George Kent also did not appear for his scheduled deposition last week. Additionally, Secretary Pompeo missed his deadline to produce documents according to the request we discussed in last week's update.

Last Tuesday, the White House sent a letter to Speaker Pelosi and Chairmen Schiff, Engel and Cummings informing them that the White House will not cooperate in the ongoing impeachment inquiry. This came on the heels of a similar letter sent the prior week by House Minority Leader McCarthy asking to halt the impeachment inquiry until Speaker Pelosi publicly answers a list of questions relating to how she will involve House Republicans in the process. Republican lawmakers and the White House have raised the issue of why Speaker Pelosi decided to forego a formal House vote authorizing the impeachment inquiry. Pelosi has said that the House rules do not require a vote and has accused the Republicans of playing politics.

There was a major development on the Giuliani front. Early last week, John Dowd, a former Trump attorney representing arrested Giuliani associates Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, said that the two Soviet-born emigres would not comply with their document and deposition requests. On Thursday, October 10, Parnas and Fruman were taken into custody by federal officials prior to departing from Dulles Airport for alleged criminal violations of federal campaign finance laws. According to an unsealed indictment in the Southern District of New York, Parnas and Fruman participated in a complex scheme to funnel foreign money into the 2018 election, and engaged in a straw-donor scheme to conceal the true source of funds donated to pro-Trump super PACs in order to foster influence and access with politicians. According to reports, Parnas and Fruman were assisting Giuliani in efforts to gather information about Hunter Biden's dealings in Ukraine.

As for new subpoenas, the three House committees have issued subpoenas to the Department of Defense and the Office of Management and Budget for documents related to whether President Trump's decision to withhold military aid was associated with pressuring the Ukrainian government to investigate his political rival.

This week, committee members will hear from: Tuesday, George Kent; Wednesday, McKinley; Thursday, Sondland; Friday, Laura Cooper (new addition), who is the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia. Committee members heard from Fiona Hill Monday.

There are breaking updates on this front seemingly on a daily basis and the Dentons Public Policy Group will continue to send out updates accordingly.

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