



### President Trump Fires Two White House Staffers

President Trump fired two key witnesses who testified against him in the impeachment proceedings; Lt. Colonel Alexander Vindman and Ambassador Gordon Sondland. Vindman was the top Ukraine expert on the National Security Council, and received a purple heart after being wounded while serving in the Iraq War. Gordon Sondland was serving as Ambassador to the European Union, and was a hotel magnate before being appointed to the ambassadorship. The removal of Vindman and Sondland comes amid a clear out of advisors who were seen as disloyal to the president. They join Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, Ambassador William Taylor, and Jennifer Williams in leaving the executive branch in the fallout of the impeachment trial.

Lt. Col. Vindman and his twin brother, Lt. Col. Yevgeny Vindman were both escorted from the White House by security officials after losing the confidence of President Trump. The president had previously remarked that he was “not happy at all” with Vindman because of his testimony before the House of Representatives that he was “concerned” about the call between Trump and Ukrainian President Zelensky. It is unclear why Yevgeny Vindman was also terminated, as he had not made any public remarks about the impeachment proceedings or the telephone call between Trump and Zelensky. Alexander Vindman had reportedly hoped to continue serving in the White House, and turned up for work normally in the days and weeks following his testimony. However, he was soon ostracized by his colleagues and it became clear his position was untenable.

Similar to Lt. Col. Vindman’s termination, Ambassador Sondland resisted being removed from his role. Initially, his superiors at the State Department offered him the chance to resign, but he responded saying if President Trump wanted him out then he would have to fire him, which he quickly did. Sondland’s testimony in the House directly connected President Trump to the quid pro quo lawmakers accused him of. He said that he was working with the president’s personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, on issues pertaining to Ukraine at the “express direction of the president.” Sondland has donated large sums to Republican lawmakers’ re-election campaigns in recent years, and some of President Trump’s GOP allies in Congress urged him not to fire Ambassador Sondland.

The removal of Sondland and Vindman was denounced by Congressional Democrats, who accused the Trump administration of valuing loyalty to the president over competence. Senate Minority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer sent a letter to 74 inspectors general asking them to investigate whether the firings were lawful, or if whistleblowers were being unfairly retaliated against. Some of the president’s Republican allies in Congress defended the moves, but there were concerns from moderate members of the party that the president had crossed the line. President Trump has reiterated his desire for a staff shake-up in the aftermath of the impeachment trial, and it is likely that there will be more forced departures of staffers who are seen as being insufficiently loyal to the president.