

LEV PARNAS, CREATOR OF ECHO CHAMBERS

Last night, Lev Parnas gave the first half of a very explosive interview to Rachel Maddow.

I'll go back and dig into it in more detail later. But for now, I'd like to make one observation about what the texts from Parnas released over the last few days show (though a large volume, because they're in Russian, will escape close crowdsourced analysis).

Over and over, we see Parnas feeding very well placed people links to (usually) frothy media stories, many of those stories based on false claims he is getting Ukrainians and others to tell. Parnas claims – a claim that is only partly true – that these stories are all about the Bidens, though he admits they are partly about 2016. As such, Parnas presents himself as creating, then magnifying, the stories that President Trump wants to tell. He has positioned himself to be a gatekeeper because he serves as translator for Rudy, who is mentally unstable and probably desperate for other reasons but also believes he's pursuing stories that will help his ostensible client, Donald Trump, though Trump is not the one paying to have these stories told. But he's also the translator for John Solomon. Parnas is the only one on the American side who can assess what kind of prices Rudy (and Victoria Toensing and Joe DiGenova) are paying to create these stories. Indeed, a key part of this economy involved removing the people – not just Marie Yovanovitch, but also Fiona Hill and Bill Taylor – who could warn about the costs being incurred along the way.

In short, for the last 18 months, Parnas has played a key part in creating the right wing echo chamber, one that – particularly because the addled Rudy is a trusted advisor – forms a key part of how Trump understands the world. One way Parnas did that was by recruiting Ukrainians who were, for very crass reasons, willing to

tell Trump and the rest of the frothy right what they wanted to hear, even though it was assuredly not true.

Remarkably, we really don't know why Parnas decided to play a key cog in the right wing echo chamber in the first place. He's a grifter, but even with a recent cash infusion from Dmitro Firtash, he's not getting rich. He was in a powerful position, the one sober person at Trump's hotel bar, spinning up the drunk Trump sycophants. But that "power" got him indicted for the influence peddling that first landed him in this position. Before answering why he's telling his story now, without immunity and while facing down still more charges, we'd want to understand that primary motivation, and we don't know it yet.

Last night's interview continued that grift, only he moved to spin an echo chamber for the left this time. He emphasized – and Maddow predictably responded – some of the key allegations Democrats most want to be true. Mike Pence is closely involved, Parnas revealed, and while nothing he revealed would amount to impeachable conduct, Democrats immediately latched onto the possibility it would be. Everyone was involved, Parnas confirmed, including Devin Nunes and Bill Barr. It was all about Biden, Parnas almost certainly lied.

In short, doing what he appears to be very good at, Parnas is telling us what we want to hear, whether true or not.

On key parts of his story, however, he got – with the help of MSNBC's editors – notably more reserved or deceitful. We didn't learn the full terms of his relationship with Firtash, even though Firtash is the guy paying for the defense strategy that includes telling us these stories. Parnas describes, "we were tasked" to spin these stories, leaving the subject of the tasking unknown. Parnas dubiously claims he's sorry about targeting Marie Yovanovitch, even while he shows no remorse at similar shivs in service of the grift. Parnas claims to have been more

concerned by the breakdown Robert Hyde had at Doral than he was about Hyde's claims to have Yovanovitch under surveillance and possible contract.

Parnas is telling us what we want to hear. And we listen, even though we all recognize that the stories he spun for the frothy right were false, but those false stories were all it took to work up half the country. We also recognize, though Parnas didn't lay this out and it'll take days before people have an adequate understanding of what he promised in Russian, that he made commitments on Rudy's and Trump's behalf but without any way for them to verify what he was promising.

Perhaps he's doing this to pressure Bill Barr, the one guy who can constrain what SDNY does with his prosecution, and likewise can authorize criminal targets against whom Parnas might be able to cooperate against. Perhaps he believes he'll get immunity from Adam Schiff, though as a former prosecutor, it's unlikely Schiff will make that happen. Perhaps Parnas believes Trump will panic and pardon him. Or perhaps the corrupt oligarchs and prosecutors in whose debt Parnas has put Rudy and Trump have decided that – since they didn't get what they wanted out of the deal – it's now worth their while to expose those debts.

But until we understand why Parnas is doing what he's doing – why he inserted himself into the right wing echo chamber in the first place, and why he's so insistent on telling us what we want to hear now – we would do well to exercise caution about the stories he's telling.

Update: Made some minor rewrites for clarity.

Update: Fixed location of Hyde's breakdown.