

House Democrats launch formal impeachment inquiry against Trump

Patrick Martin
25 September 2019

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Tuesday afternoon the beginning of a formal impeachment inquiry directed at Donald Trump. The investigations currently being conducted by six separate House committees will now be funneled through the Speaker's office to determine whether articles of impeachment should be drawn up against the US president.

The action marks a significant escalation in the conflict within the US ruling elite between two right-wing factions: the Democrats, aligned with sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, and the Trump White House, which is turning to ever-more personalist and dictatorial forms of rule, based on fascistic appeals to the military, the border patrol and the police.

The immediate occasion for the move towards impeachment is the revelation that Trump sought to browbeat the Ukrainian government into reopening an investigation into the activities of Hunter Biden, son of a leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, former Vice President Joe Biden.

Like all the moves taken by the Democratic Party against Trump since he took office, the impetus for the latest action comes from the intelligence agencies. An intelligence officer "whistleblower," as yet unidentified, filed a complaint against Trump August 12 over his phone call to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on July 25, as well as other unspecified actions.

The whistleblower complaint was accepted as "credible" and "urgent" by Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson, a Trump appointee from the ranks of career federal prosecutors. Atkinson sought to inform Congress of the complaint, as required by law, but he was blocked by his boss, acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire, who consulted with the Justice Department and the White House.

The fact of the complaint—but not its actual text—was leaked to the press and reported to Congress, touching off a series of media reports documenting Trump's blatant effort to use American military aid as a lever to assist his own

reelection campaign. Trump ordered \$391 million in aid to Ukraine held up while he was pressuring Zelensky to reopen a corruption investigation against a gas oligarch in Ukraine who placed Hunter Biden on the board of his company while Joe Biden was US vice president.

Trump admitted Sunday that he had raised the Biden investigation in the call to Zelensky, which he pronounced "perfect." He then declared Tuesday, under mounting political pressure, that he would release the transcript of the July 25 call today. In an indication of some weakening of Trump's congressional support, the Republican-controlled Senate voted unanimously the same day to seek the full, unredacted text of the whistleblower complaint.

In her brief public statement on seeking the formal impeachment inquiry, Pelosi cited her own 25 years as a congressional defender of the American intelligence establishment, going back to her years on the House Intelligence Committee before she became Democratic Party leader in the House. She declared Trump guilty of "betrayal" of his oath of office and his constitutional responsibilities, and she demanded that Maguire hand over the whistleblower report by Thursday or be found in violation of the law.

As late as Sunday, Pelosi was stalling on an impeachment inquiry. She sent out a letter to every member of the House of Representatives warning that Trump's continuing refusal to supply documents and produce witnesses demanded by Congress could lead to a "new stage" of the House investigations into his administration.

The tipping point was apparently reached on Monday evening when seven freshmen Democratic representatives, all of them veterans of the military-intelligence apparatus, issued a joint demand for impeachment in the form of an op-ed column published by the *Washington Post*.

The seven include six representatives from the group the *World Socialist Web Site* has labelled the "CIA Democrats." Two of them are actual ex-CIA agents, Elissa Slotkin of Michigan and Abigail Spanberger of Virginia. Four are former military officers: Elaine Luria of Virginia, Mikie

Sherrill of New Jersey, Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania and Jason Crow of Colorado.

The statement from the seven identifies them as “veterans of the military and of the nation’s defense and intelligence agencies” concerned by “unprecedented allegations against President Trump.” The statement continues: “To uphold and defend our Constitution, Congress must determine whether the president was indeed willing to use his power and withhold security assistance funds to persuade a foreign country to assist him in an upcoming election. If these allegations are true, we believe these actions represent an impeachable offense.”

The seven were joined by former CIA Director John Brennan—the overseer of widespread torture and illegal spying under Bush and Obama—who cited their statement in a cable television interview Tuesday and joined them in calling for Trump’s impeachment.

The line-up of Pelosi, Brennan and the CIA Democrats gives a glimpse of the real forces at work in the conflict within the ruling elite and the dominant role played by the intelligence agencies in the US political process.

The Democrats choose to wage their battle with Trump over his alleged misuse of military aid to further his own political interests and his attempts to suppress critics within the intelligence apparatus, and not his ceaseless attacks on democratic rights and trampling on constitutional principles. If they approve articles of impeachment, these will not relate to the separation of immigrant children from their parents, the seizure of funds appropriated by Congress for other purposes to build Trump’s border wall, or his encouragement of white supremacists and fascists.

The events in Ukraine actually demonstrate a considerable degree of agreement between the rival factions in the ruling elite. Both support the US government bullying weaker countries, with Biden traveling to Ukraine in 2016 to threaten the withholding of \$1 billion in US aid, and Trump actually withholding a lesser sum this year. Both endorse arming the fascist-backed government in Kiev against Ukrainian workers and against Russia, an ongoing policy of American imperialism. And both accept relatives of top US leaders cashing in on their family connections, as Hunter Biden did in Ukraine and China and the Trump family now does globally.

There are significant differences, but these concern the tactics and targets of US imperialist foreign policy, not whether the United States should throw its weight around all over the world. The Democratic-aligned faction of the US ruling elite seeks to maintain the vociferously anti-Russian axis of US foreign policy in the Middle East and Eastern Europe adopted in the second term of the Obama administration, while Trump has focused on a more

confrontational approach toward China.

These divisions underlay the anti-Russia campaign that the Democrats waged throughout the first two years of the Trump administration, with the bogus claim that Trump owed his presidency to Russian “meddling” in the 2016 elections or that he was a direct stooge of Moscow.

Trump called off a planned missile strike against Iran in June only ten minutes before it was to be executed. As the *New York Times* later described the decision, in a phrase that exposed the bellicosity of the *Times* and the Democrats, “as eager as he is to fight with 280 characters on Twitter, Mr. Trump has proved profoundly reluctant to fight with live ammunition on a real battlefield.”

There are as yet unclear connections between the turmoil within the Trump administration and these foreign policy disputes. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, a hawk on both North Korea and Iran, resigned in late July. Trump fired his national security advisor John Bolton September 10, just as the crisis over the Ukraine whistleblower was beginning to erupt. Bolton had been a vociferous proponent of war with Iran and opposed any slackening of US support to the regime in Kiev.

It is not at all certain which side in the conflict within the ruling elite has the upper hand. But it is absolutely clear that neither the Democrats, aligned with the CIA and Pentagon, nor the Republicans, being molded by Trump into an ultra-right and personalist formation of a distinctly fascist character, offer any alternative to the working class.

The ongoing strike at General Motors and the mounting struggles among other sections of workers show the social power of the working class. This power must be mobilized in a political struggle to stop attacks on democratic rights, oppose cuts in jobs and living standards and fight the danger of imperialist war. This means the building of a mass political movement of the working class based on a socialist and internationalist program, completely independent of and opposed to both factions of the US ruling elite and its two-party system.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact