

Democrats frame impeachment drive as defense of “national security”

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The decision by the Democratic leadership of the House of Representatives to begin formal impeachment proceedings against President Trump has intensified the political crisis in Washington.

In a letter to House Democrats September 27, Speaker Nancy Pelosi emphasized that the impeachment probe “will be centered” in the House Intelligence Committee, which will hold hearings and collect testimony throughout the two-week congressional recess, during which the House leadership will conduct “a series of conference calls” to provide updates.

Having the House Intelligence Committee take the lead on impeachment, rather than the Judiciary Committee, which has handled all previous impeachments, underscores the direct collaboration between the Democratic Party and the intelligence apparatus, which is spearheading the attack on Trump.

Pelosi’s letter is just the latest indication that the Democrats are seeking a “narrow” impeachment, focusing only on Trump’s conflict with the intelligence agencies and his manipulation of foreign policy to serve his own personal political interests, rather than his attacks on democratic rights, particularly directed against immigrants, Muslims and other minority populations, or his financial skullduggery.

There is not the slightest democratic content to the impeachment inquiry. The Democrats are not opposing the attacks of the Trump administration on the living standards and democratic rights of broad masses of working people. On the contrary, they seek to suppress such issues for fear of the emergence of social opposition from below that would threaten not only Trump, but the entire financial aristocracy that both Trump and the Democrats represent.

Under conditions of a growing movement of the working class, expressed above all in the General Motors strike, workers must beware of being drawn in behind either side in the political war in Washington. Both the Democrats, the representatives of the intelligence agencies, and Trump, who seeks to develop a fascist movement, are deadly enemies of the working class.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff suggested that obstruction of justice or “obstruction of Congress” might be a second charge against Trump if the

administration continued its refusal to respond to subpoenas and document requests from House committees. This would be especially true in relation to requests directly linked to the impeachment inquiry, Schiff said.

The Intelligence Committee is seeking the testimony of five State Department officials with detailed knowledge of US-Ukraine relations. These include special envoy Kurt Volker, who resigned Friday, as well as former ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, fired by Trump in May, as well as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent, State Department counselor T. Ulrich Brechbuhl, and Gordon Sondland, US ambassador to the European Union.

Four of the five, all but Kent, are mentioned in the complaint sent by the CIA whistleblower whose actions triggered the impeachment probe. Kent is the ranking State Department official in charge of relations with the countries of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine.

The committee will also hold a closed-door meeting with the Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson, whose favorable review of the whistleblower complaint was a key step in bringing the matter before Congress.

In the course of his appearances Sunday on several network television interview programs, Schiff sought to link his committee’s investigation to the long-running investigation into Trump’s alleged ties with Russia conducted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. He said that he would be demanding records not only of Trump’s calls to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, but also of his calls to Russian President Vladimir Putin, which Schiff said might raise additional “national security” concerns.

More detailed reporting on the origins of the whistleblower complaint demonstrates that it is not the action of a courageous individual—as declared by the media and officials such as Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire—but an operation mounted by the intelligence agencies, which have been opposed to Trump on foreign policy grounds from the time he took office.

An account published in the *Washington Post* Saturday under the headline “CIA officer painstakingly built report that would shift political landscape,” bears this out. The article begins by observing, referring to the whistleblower, that “the document

he delivered reveals almost as much about the investigative mission he carried out in stealth as it does about the alleged abuses of power by the president.”

The article goes on to gush that the CIA agent, who was on assignment at the White House, “has by some measures managed to exceed what former special counsel Robert S. Mueller III accomplished in two years of Trump: producing a file so concerning and factually sound that it has almost singlehandedly set in motion the gears of impeachment.”

It characterizes the agent’s description of events he did not personally witness as “eerily accurate,” and concludes that by naming some witnesses and identifying others by area of responsibility, “The report lays out investigative leads for Congress or other authorities.”

While a CIA agent started the ball rolling toward impeachment by filing the complaint with the inspector general, two former CIA agents, now sitting in Congress, played a critical role in pushing the Democratic leadership to shift its position from adamant opposition to impeachment to acquiescence. One of those CIA Democrats, Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, was interviewed on CNN’s “State of the Union” program Sunday, a role filled by Schiff on other networks.

Against the Democratic Party-CIA attack, Trump is seeking to mobilize support from ultra-right and fascistic layers of the population, working through his right-wing media supporters on talk radio and at Fox News, as well as groups like the National Rifle Association. On Friday he held a White House meeting with NRA boss Wayne LaPierre, described by both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* as an effort to gain the gun lobby’s support against the impeachment probe.

While the newspapers reported this meeting as purely a matter of mobilizing political support, it should be recalled that during the 2016 campaign, candidate Trump suggested, when his electoral victory was considered in doubt, that his followers might find a “Second Amendment solution” to the policies of a future Hillary Clinton administration—a reference to the use of firearms against his Democratic Party opponents. The NRA claims five million armed members.

Trump took to Twitter Saturday morning to denounce his Democratic opponents as “savages,” listing by name Adam Schiff and Jerrold Nadler, chair of the Judiciary Committee, and “AOC Plus 3,” a reference to four liberal Democratic congresswomen, all from minority backgrounds: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley.

It was widely noted in the media that Trump had chosen to target two Jews and four women of color as “savages,” a word with longstanding racist connotations that he has generally reserved for Central American gang leaders. His tweets will undoubtedly be followed by a new volley of threats of violence from Trump’s ultra-right supporters directed against the targeted Democrats.

There were indications of increasing desperation underlying

Trump’s imprecations, as his support within the Republican Party seems less solid than previously indicated. Two Republican governors—albeit “moderates” elected in heavily Democratic states—Phil Scott of Vermont and Charlie Baker of Massachusetts indicated their support for impeachment.

While only Senator Mitt Romney of Utah, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, was viewed as openly sympathetic to impeachment, a half dozen Republican senators have indicated that they found Trump’s soliciting of support from the president of Ukraine against a potential Democratic 2020 rival to be questionable. Senator Susan Collins of Maine said that Trump’s comments about treating whistleblowers like “spies and traitors” (i.e., executing them) was a “gross mischaracterization of whistleblowers.”

The second-ranking Republican, Majority Whip John Thune of South Dakota, said he didn’t “like seeing that... I know this president operates in different ways... but you know, obviously, like I said before, it's not something I would bring up.”

Former senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, a frequent critic of Trump, told NPR that as many as 35 of the 53 Republican senators would vote to remove Trump from office if the vote were a secret ballot, rather than public. “Anybody who has sat through two years, as I have, of Republican luncheons realizes that there’s not a lot of love for the president,” he said.

There were also reports of infighting in the White House over how to handle the impeachment probe, with particular criticism directed at Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney. CNN published a report that Mulvaney was “on shaky ground” because he “did not have a strategy for defending and explaining the contents” of documents like the summary of the Trump-Zelensky phone call and the text of the whistleblower complaint.

Compounding the crisis in the White House is the sheer volume of attacks on Trump’s personal finances. No less than six court cases are currently under way over efforts by House Democrats or prosecutors in New York City and California to obtain financial records and tax returns.

Trump must file a response Monday to a House Democratic lawsuit seeking his federal tax returns, answer lawsuits in New York City and California on the same issue, and respond to subpoenas in both Washington DC and New York City for financial records, including tax returns, in the possession of Deutsche Bank and Capital One, the main lenders to the Trump Organization, and Trump’s longtime accountants, Mazars USA.



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