Trump, Democrats dig in as impeachment drive escalates

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Having suggested that his impeachment could provoke "civil war" and threatened to arrest the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee on treason charges, President Donald Trump on Tuesday tweeted a map of the 2016 election results with the words "Try to impeach this" written across it.

The map, a county-by-county presentation of the presidential election results, shows a solid mass of Republican red, with isolated blue (Democratic) patches on the west and east coasts. Trump won 2,626 counties to Hillary Clinton's 487, according to the Associated Press, covering the vast bulk of the country's territory. However, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2.8 million ballots, as her support was concentrated in heavily-populated urban areas while Trump's was based largely in sparsely populated rural and semi-rural regions.

The tweet was yet another implied threat by Trump to resist by extra-constitutional means any attempt to remove him from office, aimed at inciting the far-right and fascist elements in his political base.

In recent days, Trump has also singled out freshmen congresswomen with foreign or minority ethnic backgrounds and two Jewish chairmen of House committees investigating the White House and denounced them as "savages." On Friday, three days after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced the formal launching of an impeachment inquiry, he met with the far-right head of the National Rifle Association to discuss how the organization could support him in the impeachment battle.

The Trump reelection campaign has to this point played the leading role, outside of Trump himself, in countering the impeachment drive. Speaking of a campaign ad released on Friday, a campaign spokeswoman said, "The American people see this for what it is: yet another attempt by Democrats to disenfranchise the American people by removing a duly elected president that they disdain."

The Democrats have moved rapidly to request depositions and documents from Trump administration officials and aides, subpoenaing Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who was Trump's go-between with Ukraine, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was among the officials who listened in on the July 25 phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that is at the center of the impeachment drive.

The three House committees conducting investigations—Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Oversight—have scheduled depositions this week with five State Department officials involved in the Ukrainian affair. These include the former US ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, who was sacked by Trump in May; Kurt Volker, the administration's special envoy to Ukraine, who resigned suddenly on Friday; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent; US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland; and State Department Counselor T. Ulrich Brechbuhl.

However, Pompeo sent a bellicose letter Tuesday to Eliot Engel, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, declaring that the five State Department officials would not show up for the scheduled depositions. Pompeo accused the committee of attempting to "intimidate, bully and treat improperly" the officials, and declared that he would "not tolerate such tactics."

The inspector general of the intelligence agencies, Michael Atkinson, who has played a central role in exposing the July 25 call and triggering the impeachment drive, is still scheduled to appear on Friday at closed-door hearings with House Democrats.

The impeachment drive was initiated by a faction within the intelligence agencies that has lost confidence in Trump's ability to prosecute the global interests of US imperialism. A new and explosive stage in the internal ruling class struggle that has been raging since Trump's inauguration nearly three years ago, primarily over foreign policy questions, the impeachment drive has intensified the crisis of the entire political order.

The Democratic Party has from the beginning been aligned with anti-Trump factions within the military/intelligence establishment, basing its opposition to the fascistic Trump on its own reactionary agenda of intensified war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights, beginning with the censorship of left-wing and anti-war views on the internet.

The framework for this right-wing campaign has been the fraudulent narrative of massive Russian government intervention in the 2016 elections to undermine Clinton—a hardliner against Moscow—and secure the election of Trump, who opposed the confrontational Obama administration policy toward Moscow in order to focus more directly on isolating and attacking China.

This campaign was revived, following the inconclusive completion of the Mueller investigation into Trump's supposed collusion with Russia, by seizing on Trump's July 25 phone call with the newly elected Ukrainian President Zelensky. In that call, Trump pressured Zelensky to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading Democratic candidate in the 2020 race, and his son, Hunter, in connection with the latter's lucrative position

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on the board of a Ukrainian gas company that was under investigation for corruption. Trump focused on Biden's role in pressuring Ukraine to fire the prosecutor.

Trump also pressed the Ukrainian leader to investigate the supposed role of Ukrainian officials in backing the Democrats' claims that Russia, working in collusion with the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks, had hacked into Democratic emails during the election campaign. The transcript of the phone call, released last week, indicates that Trump suspended a military aid package to Ukraine and sought to use the prospect of unblocking the aid as leverage on Kiev.

The scandal over the phone call was triggered by a "whistleblower" complaint filed with the inspector general of the intelligence agencies in August by a CIA agent assigned to the White House. The complaint charged Trump and other administration officials with undermining national security by subordinating foreign policy to personal political interests.

Pelosi and House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff, both of whom have long and close ties to US intelligence, had opposed proceeding with a formal impeachment inquiry. It was only after the *Washington Post* revealed the existence of the whistleblower complaint and seven freshman Democratic House members with backgrounds in the CIA and the military published a column in the same newspaper calling for impeachment that Pelosi and Schiff switched their positions and backed a formal impeachment drive.

They are seeking to do this on the narrow and right-wing basis of Trump's suspension of military aid to Ukraine against Russia and his unreliability in conducting US imperialist foreign policy. The intention is to wrap up the impeachment process by Thanksgiving, hold as few public hearings as possible, and exclude any of the issues of social conditions and democratic rights—Trump's war on immigrants, his tax cuts for the rich and attacks on social programs, his efforts to establish an authoritarian presidency, his support for far-right and fascistic elements—that animate the hatred for Trump among wide layers of the working class. The Democrats are fearful, under conditions of an auto strike and a growth of the class struggle more generally, that the impeachment could fuel social opposition, something they want to prevent at all costs.

These aims have been made clear by Pelosi, who recently instructed House Democrats that the 2020 election campaign "will not be run on impeachment." In an op-ed piece published Monday, Charles Blow, the *New York Time's* chief ideologue of racial politics, attacked Trump and congressional Republicans for being "unpatriotic," writing: "There must be some patriots, at least a handful, in the Republican Party."

The politics behind the Democrats' impeachment campaign were laid out by Obama-era national security adviser Susan Rice in a *Times* column Tuesday. She wrote:

> Mr. Trump further pressured Mr. Zelensky to pursue an unsubstantiated allegation that Ukraine, not Russia, was the country that interfered in the 2016 election and that the hacked Democratic National Committee servers are hiding somewhere in Ukraine. This fantastical charge serves only to benefit Russia and to contradict the central findings of the intelligence community and the Mueller report. It was Russia that interfered in our democratic process.

She added that Republicans "should care that [Trump] is undermining our national security by advancing policies that clearly benefit an adversary, Russia, while undermining our electoral process."

Many within the ruling class are taking Trump's talk of civil war as a serious threat. The *Washington Post* published an editorial Tuesday warning, "President Trump is promising a civil war within the union he is supposed to lead."

The Democratic congressman from Texas and twin brother of presidential candidate Julian Castro, Joaquin Castro, told Jake Tapper on CNN Tuesday, "That's the type of language that could lead to civil unrest in this country."

The *Times* posted a column on Tuesday by Kara Swisher advocating that Twitter close down Trump's account and declaring that topics at "fancy-pants" Washington dinner parties include the prospect of Trump losing the 2020 election and tweeting "that people should rise up in armed insurrection to keep him in office."

Interviewed on the MSNBC cable news network Tuesday, Jeffrey Engel, co-author of a recent book on impeachment, said he was worried that Trump might respond to impeachment by calling on his supporters to take up arms and head for Washington DC.

The political warfare in Washington has reached an explosive and potentially violent stage, with ominous implications for the working class. It is a conflict between two right-wing factions within the ruling class.

There is no democratic content to the Democratic Party-CIA impeachment drive, which, if successful in removing Trump, would only bring to power a government more directly controlled by the CIA and the military, and committed to a more aggressive military policy in the Middle East and against Russia.

Its is imperative that working people not allow themselves to be channeled behind either of these factions and instead develop and expand its independent struggle against the entire ruling elite and all of its political representatives.

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