

Trump urges congressional Republicans to “take the gloves off” in impeachment crisis

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Only hours after President Trump urged them to “take the gloves off” in the fight against his impeachment, two dozen Republican members of Congress tried to force their way into a closed-door hearing at which a Pentagon official was to testify about White House directives to hold up military aid to Ukraine.

The incident Wednesday had a farcical character and did not go beyond pushing open doors and charging into the hearing room livestreaming the event with cellphones in hand, in violation of security regulations. But it was one of a series of publicity stunts carried out by Republicans on Capitol Hill at Trump’s direction against the impeachment inquiry launched by the Democrats last month.

On Monday, the House of Representatives refused by a party-line vote to take up a Republican resolution censuring Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, for his mocking portrayal of Trump as a mob boss in his opening statement to the first hearing, as well as his lying about prior contact with the CIA whistleblower whose official complaint against Trump became the pretext for the inquiry.

Trump has responded with increasing anger as official after official of the State Department defies White House orders and appears to testify before a joint hearing of the House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Homeland Security committees. The latest and most devastating testimony came from William Taylor, the acting US ambassador to Ukraine, sent there only five months ago by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Taylor testified Tuesday in great detail about Trump’s efforts to strong-arm the Ukrainian government into reopening an investigation into Hunter Biden, son of the former vice president and current Democratic presidential candidate, using a carrot-and-stick approach: the carrot was the promise of a White House visit for new Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, while the stick was the withholding of \$400 million in US military aid already approved by Congress.

The array of State Department witnesses hostile to Trump,

culminating in Taylor, confirms the real character of the impeachment drive. The Democrats are targeting Trump for removal from office, not because of his real crimes—persecuting immigrant families, embracing fascists and white supremacists, and moving in the direction of a presidential dictatorship—but because they oppose his foreign policy moves, particularly in the Middle East, and demand a more aggressive anti-Russian policy.

In this, the Democrats are giving voice to powerful sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, which see Trump’s actions, particularly his sudden pullout from Syria, as endangering the global interests of American imperialism. Hence the decision of the CIA to put forward the “whistleblower” who kicked off the impeachment drive, and the actions of a half dozen high-level State Department officials—joined Wednesday by a senior Pentagon civilian official—to defy the White House and honor congressional subpoenas.

Even Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, only confirmed in July to head the Pentagon, has expressed some willingness to cooperate with the impeachment inquiry. Interviewed on the CBS program “Face the Nation” October 13, he said that the Pentagon “will do everything we can to comply.” Asked directly if that was a “yes” to responding to subpoenas, Esper replied, “That’s a yes.” Since then, Esper has cited direct orders from the White House as the reason for not delivering Pentagon documents about the military aid to Ukraine.

There have been a number of indications of flagging support for Trump in the congressional Republican caucus. Over the weekend, Trump met with a group of “moderate” Republican representatives who objected to his plan to hold the next summit of the G7 countries at his Doral resort near Miami. Trump was forced to reverse himself, although he vented his anger over the rebuff at a cabinet session on Monday where he declared that Republicans in Congress needed to step up the fight on his behalf.

Tuesday’s private luncheon for Senate Republicans was apparently another disappointment for the White House. It

came after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell denied a claim by Trump that McConnell had told him the phone call with Zelensky was “perfect” and “innocent.” He said he had never discussed the phone call with the president. While he was adamant in his opposition to impeachment, McConnell told senators that they did not have to defend Trump over his Ukraine bullying or his sudden reversal of US policy in Syria. “This is going to be about process,” he said, according to press reports.

In other words, the Republican opposition to impeachment should focus on the alleged “unfairness” of the House inquiry, which is being held behind closed doors without White House lawyers being present. Wednesday’s demonstration by the House Freedom Caucus was along those lines.

Despite Republican complaints about a secret proceeding from which they have been excluded, there are at least 40 Republican members of the three committees who can attend the depositions, and Republican committee lawyers can pose whatever questions the representatives wish to ask. The closed-door hearings will be followed by public, televised hearings at which many of the same witnesses will be called to testify and will be asked about any contradictions that have emerged in their accounts.

The real significance of McConnell’s remark is that support for Trump among Senate Republicans has been shaken by his decision to pull US troops out of Syria, which has been denounced by warmongers like Lindsey Graham who have been among the most strident opponents of impeachment. Significantly, Graham said in an interview Sunday that if there were a “quid pro quo” involved in Trump’s pressuring the Ukraine to dig up dirt on the Bidens, that would be “very disturbing.”

Referring to the hearing with Ambassador Taylor, Senator John Thune, the Republican Majority Whip, said, “The picture coming out of it, based on the reporting that we’ve seen, I would say is not a good one.”

A canvass of Republican senators by the pro-Trump *Daily Caller* found only seven of the 53 would categorically rule out voting to remove Trump from office if the House impeaches him. Many cited their role as “jurors” in the Senate trial that would follow impeachment as the reason for declining to state how they would vote.

The real reason, however, is the near-unanimous condemnation of the Syria pullout by the military-intelligence apparatus, the corporate media, and most Republicans in Congress. Trump’s order has thrown gasoline on the impeachment fire, and even a section of Senate Republicans is contemplating removing him and replacing him with the more reliably right-wing figure of Vice President Mike Pence.

Trump effectively conceded that a section of Republicans is joining the Democratic impeachment drive, as he retweeted Wednesday an attack on Taylor, the acting ambassador to Ukraine, as a “never-Trump Republican.”

The media campaign against Trump continues to intensify. *USA Today*, the flagship of the Gannett media group, published an editorial Wednesday on the array of State Department officials testifying before the Congress, headlined, “President Donald Trump, your stonewall to the impeachment inquiry is cracking.”

The *Washington Post* published a long, sharply worded editorial the same day, citing William Taylor’s testimony, and addressed to Trump’s loudest defender in the Senate. It was headlined, “Here’s the quid pro quo proof, Lindsey Graham.”

Meanwhile, in a federal court in New York City, Trump’s personal lawyer William S. Consovoy elaborated the most sweeping possible claim that the president was above the law. Responding to efforts by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance to obtain Trump financial records from the accounting firm Mazars USA, Consovoy advanced a theory of “temporary presidential immunity” from any local, state or federal prosecution so long as he occupies the White House.

Judge Denny Chin asked incredulously about the scenario, tweeted during the campaign by Trump, that he could shoot someone in the middle of Manhattan and his supporters would still support him. He asked if such a shooting would go unpunished. “Local authorities couldn’t investigate? They couldn’t do anything about it?” he asked, adding, “Nothing could be done? That is your position?” Consovoy replied, “That is correct,” adding that the only recourse to any presidential offense was impeachment.



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