US House of Representatives votes to back impeachment inquiry

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By a near party-line vote of 232-196, the US House of Representatives voted Thursday for a resolution laying out the procedures for the impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump that was begun September 24. The resolution sets the stage for the holding of public, televised hearings and the likely drawing up of articles of impeachment in the course of the next month.

Only two Democrats out of 233 in the House voted against the resolution, Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey and Colin Peterson of Minnesota. Only one member elected as a Republican, Justin Amash of Michigan, voted for the resolution. He left the Republican Party in July because of his support for impeachment, and he now sits as an independent.

The sharp divisions over the resolution were reflected in the hour-long debate, in which Republican defenders of Trump denounced the impeachment inquiry with hysterical anticommunist rhetoric, calling it "Soviet-style" and a "show trial." Democrats wrapped themselves in the American flag—or displayed it on a large placard as they spoke, in the case of Speaker Nancy Pelosi—and denounced Trump for endangering US "national security."

The procedure laid down in the eight-page resolution, drafted Wednesday by the House Rules Committee, gives an outsized role to the House Intelligence Committee, which is to begin public hearings sometime in November at which many of the witnesses who have testified behind closed doors will be asked to do so again in front of television cameras.

The Intelligence Committee, along with four other committees conducting investigations into various aspects of President Trump's personal, business and official conduct, will report its findings to the Judiciary Committee, which would actually draw up any articles of impeachment, vote on them, and send them to the full House for final action.

The overall procedures, including provisions for extended questioning of witnesses by representatives of both the majority and minority parties, conform generally to similar measures adopted during the impeachment hearings against President Richard Nixon in 1974 and President Bill Clinton in 1998.

The main difference is that the right of the president to have his own attorneys attend and participate at sessions of the Judiciary Committee is conditional on Trump dropping his order that executive branch officials refuse to testify before the various House probes or supply documents to them.

In the event of continued presidential stonewalling of the House committees, the resolution provides that the chair of the Judiciary Committee "shall have the discretion to impose appropriate remedies, including by denying specific requests by the president or his counsel under these procedures to call or question witnesses."

In other words, if Trump continues to block testimony and evidence, his attorneys will not be allowed to cross-examine those witnesses who do appear despite the full-throated opposition of the White House. Given that many officials and former officials of the Trump administration have agreed to testify under subpoena, this could become a significant issue.

The special role of the House Intelligence Committee underscores the reactionary nature of the Democrats' impeachment drive. Trump is being targeted, not for his real crimes as president, attacking immigrants, undermining democratic rights, and asserting quasi-dictatorial powers, but for his foreign policy actions that are opposed by a substantial section of the US military-intelligence apparatus.

The witnesses testifying before the closed-door sessions of the Intelligence Committee are not immigrant mothers, cruelly and in some cases permanently separated from their children, or the victims of Trump-inspired fascist gunmen like the El Paso mass shooter. Instead, they are an array of State Department and military officials at odds with Trump's efforts to browbeat the government of Ukraine into supplying him with political dirt against former vice president Joe Biden, viewed by Trump as a likely opponent in the 2020 election.

Particularly significant in that context is the announcement that the Intelligence Committee has set a November 7 date for the testimony of John Bolton, Trump's former national security advisor. It is not clear whether Bolton will testify, but the potential alignment of the Democrats and one of the most notorious war criminals in the American government is a clear demonstration of the reactionary motives of the Democrats, who are acting as front men for rabid warmongers in the national-security state.

Already, on Thursday, the Intelligence Committee took hours of testimony from Bolton's top deputy for Russia and Eastern

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Europe, Timothy Morrison. Morrison was brought on the National Security Council by Bolton with main responsibility for White House policy on weapons of mass destruction. He spearheaded the drive by the Trump administration to withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which both he and Bolton vehemently opposed, in order to give the US military the green light to develop nuclear missiles that could target China from US bases like Guam, other US-controlled islands, and ships in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Morrison is the highest-ranking Trump aide to provide evidence to the Intelligence Committee, and he announced his impending departure from the White House on Wednesday night, hours before he was sworn in as a witness. According to leaks to the press from the closed-door hearing, Morrison largely confirmed the testimony of other witnesses, particularly Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, that there was a direct quid pro quo involved in US policy towards Ukraine: Trump demanded a public investigation into the Democratic Party and the Bidens, in return for military aid and a visit by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to the White House.

There are other indications that Bolton is playing a key role behind the scenes in the gathering storm over impeachment. Two Democratic senators have sent a letter to US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer seeking details on the Trump administration's decision not to restore Ukrainian access to the "generalized system of preferences" (GSP), a program that benefits developing countries. The letter follows a *Washington Post* report October 24 that Bolton had warned Lighthizer not to seek restoration of benefits to Ukraine because Trump would not approve it, as part of his effort to pressure the Ukrainian government to investigate the Bidens. Given the content of the article, the most likely source for the leak is Bolton or one of his top aides.

There were further indications of support for the impeachment drive—or at least for the national-security officials who have come forward to testify against Trump—from the top levels of the military and diplomatic establishment. General Joseph F. Dunford, who retired only a month ago as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a statement to CNN Wednesday defending Colonel Vindman against attacks from Fox News and other ultra-right media, calling him "a professional, competent, patriotic, and loyal officer" who "has made an extraordinary contribution to the security of our nation in both peacetime and combat."

And in testimony Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which is expected to confirm his nomination to be US Ambassador to Russia, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan defended the former ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, and agreed that she was the victim of a smear campaign by Trump's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, who helped engineer her recall from her post in Kiev because she was an obstacle to the effort to dig up dirt on the Bidens.

Asked whether it was "ever appropriate for the president to use his office to solicit investigations into his domestic political opponents," Sullivan replied, "I don't think that would be in accord with our values." Given Trump's frequent declarations that his telephone conversation with Zelensky, in which he made just such a request, was "perfect," Sullivan's statement is extraordinary. It suggests an unprecedented degree of open revolt against Trump within the national-security establishment.

The real motives of the impeachment drive were spelled out with particular frenzy in a column by neoconservative Max Boot, who, like Bolton, has been an all-out supporter of US military aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and throughout the world. Writing in the *Washington Post*, under the headline, "More Trump gifts to Russia," he declares, "Trump is bringing the United States to its knees and making Russia great again."

Boot focuses on two decisions that have most provoked the CIA-Pentagon-State Department axis of evil: holding up aid to Ukraine, thus undermining military operations against pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, and Trump's partial pullout of US forces in Syria.

He writes: "Russian soldiers are entering U.S. bases and taking up the joint patrolling duties with the Turkish army that U.S. troops had been performing until recently. The fate of Syria was settled not in Washington but in Sochi—Putin's favorite Black Sea resort. Trump has given Russia what it has sought for decades: a leading role in the Middle East. This is the biggest geopolitical shift in the region since 1972 when Egypt's Anwar Sadat expelled Soviet advisers and aligned with Washington."

Boot is, of course, a fervent supporter of impeachment, because he sees that as a step towards reversing course on foreign policy and adopting a more aggressive and militaristic US role in the Middle East. His ranting only underscores the reality of the political conflict in Washington.

Trump and his ultra-right faction seek (a very limited) pullout from Syria to accommodate a bigger US push against China. His opponents in the Democratic Party and the "deep state" want to prioritize Russia as a military-political target. Both factions are reactionary and warmongering, and deeply hostile to the interests of the American and international working class.

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