

The Trump impeachment and US policy in Ukraine

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16 November 2019

The first two days of televised hearings in the impeachment of Donald Trump have made clear the character of the conflict gripping Washington. While the Democrats frame their charges against the president around accusations of “bribery” and “obstruction,” the testimony makes clear that they are using the instrument of impeachment to fight out differences over foreign policy.

The first three witnesses, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent, Ambassador William Taylor and Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, have all played major operational roles in the efforts by American imperialism over the past 15 years to install a pliant stooge regime in Ukraine, formerly the second-largest component, after Russia, of the Soviet Union.

The initial US intervention in Ukraine took the form of the 2004 “Orange Revolution,” which led to the ouster of a pro-Russian regime headed by Viktor Yanukovich and his replacement by the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. But Yushchenko and his corrupt prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, dubbed the “gas princess” for her role in stealing a fortune from that industry, soon lost the support of the population. In 2010, Yanukovich made a political comeback, won the presidential election, and reestablished closer ties with Moscow.

In 2013-2014, Washington tried again, this time with a campaign dubbed the “revolution of the Maidan,” named for the central square in Kiev occupied by anti-government protesters. A notorious leaked phone call between Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt documented Washington’s role in directing the right-wing campaign that ultimately drove Yanukovich into exile. Nuland boasted that the United States had expended \$5 billion in Ukraine to promote its interests.

Kent, Taylor and Yovanovitch, hailed as paragons of virtue and professionalism by the media and members of the House Intelligence Committee, Democratic and Republican alike, are the heirs and continuators of this longstanding criminal imperialist enterprise. It has two principal purposes:

to open up Ukraine, a country of more than 40 million people with vast natural resources, to exploitation by US multinational corporations; and to undermine Russia strategically by creating a pro-American bastion on its southern flank, as part of the broader effort by Washington to confront Russia throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East and cement a dominant American position on the Eurasian land mass.

This utterly reactionary, pro-imperialist role was demonstrated Friday in the tribute that Yovanovitch paid, in the course of her testimony, to Arsen Avakov, the Ukrainian interior minister (head of the domestic police) under both the current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, and his predecessor Petro Poroshenko. Avakov is a principal sponsor of fascist militias such as the Azov Battalion, which glorify the Ukrainians who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II against the Soviet Union. In other words, the State Department officials being celebrated in the media for defending American democracy are actually working with the fascists in Ukraine.

While Yovanovitch hailed Avakov, Kent cited as his heroes among immigrants who have rallied to the defense of the United States Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger, two of the biggest war criminals of the second half of the twentieth century.

In the opinion of these front-line operatives for American imperialism, together with the intelligence agencies in whose interests the Democrats speak, Trump is endangering the already very shaky position of the United States in Ukraine. This applies not merely to his bullying shakedown of Zelensky to obtain political ammunition against Biden and the Democrats, but to Trump’s overall policy in the region.

He has said that Putin should be invited to the next G7 summit (where the US is host), essentially reconstituting the G8 from which Russia was expelled in 2014, and suggested that he might visit Moscow next May for the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. Even more dangerous, in the eyes of the military-

intelligence apparatus, was his praise for Russian cooperation in the US special operations assassination of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, immediately following Trump's order for a US pullout from northeast Syria, allowing Turkey, Russia and the Assad regime to move into positions formerly occupied by American special operations troops.

At her press briefing Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi emphasized the foreign policy focus of the impeachment drive. She said that Trump's actions were far worse than the Watergate scandal that forced the resignation of President Richard Nixon, effectively committing the Democrats to bring articles of impeachment to a vote in the House and force a Senate trial.

Pelosi repeated the phrase, "All roads lead to Putin," meaning that Trump's foreign policy decisions—including withholding military aid from Ukraine—have a common thread of being favorable to the Russian president. In other words, she was reviving, under a new guise, the anti-Russia campaign that was based on bogus claims of a massive intervention by Moscow in the 2016 presidential election.

The Democratic leadership is determined to exclude from the purview of the impeachment inquiry any of Trump's real crimes, limiting it entirely to his conflict with the national-security establishment over foreign policy differences related to Russia, Ukraine and the Middle East. Pelosi herself has repeatedly declared that any differences with Trump over his persecution of immigrants, his attacks on democratic rights, his tax cuts for the wealthy and his efforts to build up a racist and fascist movement can wait until the 2020 election. Only his break with the anti-Russian foreign policy consensus in Washington requires the more drastic remedy of impeachment—whose purpose is not so much to remove Trump, as to force a change in policy on this critical issue.

The connection between the impeachment drive and differences on foreign policy was spelled out Friday on the front page of the *New York Times*, in an analysis by the newspaper's senior foreign policy specialist, David Sanger, a frequent mouthpiece for the concerns of the CIA, State Department and Pentagon, under the headline, "For President, Case of Policy vs. Obsession."

Sanger contrasted the current impeachment drive to those carried out against Nixon and Bill Clinton, presenting it as involving far more serious issues because neither Watergate nor the Clinton sex scandal "touched on America's national interests in the weightiest geopolitical confrontations of their eras."

This assessment is nonsense in relation to Nixon and Watergate, which arose directly out of the defeat of American imperialism in Vietnam and Nixon's frantic

efforts to suppress antiwar sentiment through massive political spying, the attempt to prevent publication of the Pentagon Papers, and finally the burglarizing of the offices of the Democratic National Committee.

But Sanger goes on to spell out, in remarkably blunt terms, the real foreign policy issues at stake in the Trump impeachment. He writes, "In an otherwise divided Washington, one of the few issues of bipartisan agreement for the past six years has been countering Russian President Vladimir V. Putin's broad plan of disruption. That effort starts in Ukraine, where there has been a hot war underway in the east for five years ..."

Trump, according to Sanger, has betrayed the anti-Russia policy outlined by his own administration in a Pentagon strategic assessment which declared that the "war on terror" had been superseded as the top US priority by "great-power competition," particularly directed at China and Russia. He sacrificed this policy to his own personal, electoral interests, as expressed in the comment by the US ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland: "President Trump cares more about the investigation of Biden" than about the military conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

There is not the slightest democratic content to the impeachment campaign against Trump. This is not an effort to overturn a single one of Trump's reactionary attacks on working people and democratic rights. It is a conflict between two reactionary factions of the American ruling elite, the fascistic Trump and the CIA-backed Democrats, over the direction of imperialist foreign policy.

American workers cannot line up behind either of these factions, but must advance their own alternative to the foreign policy of imperialist domination, subversion and plunder, rooted in the fight for the international unity of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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