

Impeachment hearing opens with Democratic Party blast against Russia

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5 December 2019

The House Judiciary Committee opened its first formal hearing on the impeachment of President Trump Wednesday with a statement by committee chairman Jerrold Nadler that confirmed the right-wing character of the Democratic campaign.

Nadler openly declared that the effort to impeach Trump for withholding military aid from Ukraine was a continuation of the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections in support of Trump.

He first recounted Trump's withholding of military aid to browbeat Ukraine into opening an investigation into Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joe Biden, an action that Trump hoped would benefit him in the 2020 election. Nadler then said, "Of course, this is not the first time that President Trump has engaged in this pattern of conduct."

He continued: "In 2016, the Russian government engaged in a sweeping and systematic campaign of interference in our elections. In the words of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, 'the Russian government perceived it would benefit from a Trump presidency and worked to secure that outcome.' The President welcomed that interference."

In invoking the bogus claims of massive Russian intervention in the 2016 elections—and raising the even less credible suggestion that Ukraine's actions could play a major role in the 2020 elections—Nadler revealed the essential falsehood that underlies the entire Democratic impeachment campaign over Ukraine.

The United States is not the victim of global efforts to subvert its electoral processes. The reality is just the opposite. The US government is the most active and aggressive saboteur and manipulator of democratic processes all over the world, routinely intervening to ensure that pro-American regimes are placed in power. Its intelligence agencies regularly organize political overturns, up to and including bloody military coups, in those cases where the people of a targeted country vote the "wrong" way, from the perspective of Washington.

Ukraine is one of the most prominent recent examples of this, as the CIA and State Department backed a right-wing coup against the elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, viewed as too sympathetic to Moscow. US agencies financed and

mobilized ultra-right and neo-Nazi forces who spearheaded the uprising that drove Yanukovich into exile in 2014. Since then, the US and its NATO allies have been preparing feverishly for a war with Russia in which Ukraine would serve as a key battlefield, even though such a conflict would bring with it the danger of nuclear conflict.

The Judiciary Committee's opening hearing took testimony from a panel of four law school professors on the legal and constitutional requirements for a legitimate impeachment proceeding. This was an effort to mimic the initial hearings that began impeachment proceedings against Richard Nixon in 1973-74 and Bill Clinton in 1998-99.

The three professors chosen by the Democratic majority all testified that Trump's actions constituted impeachable offenses. Each cited historical instances to demonstrate that those who drafted the US Constitution were deeply concerned about the possibility of foreign intervention into US elections, particularly as it related to the election of the president, the chief executive of the new government.

Citing these 230-year-old concerns of a small and newly independent country, in a world dominated by powerful foreign empires, only underscores the contradiction with today's power realities. The United States is the most powerful imperialist nation. It is Ukraine that has been the target of a two-decades-long campaign of subversion and manipulation by Washington, aimed at transforming the country into a base of operations directed against Russia.

As several witnesses in the previous round of hearings held by the House Intelligence Committee asserted—and as reiterated in the Democrats' 300-page impeachment report released Tuesday—the United States' client regime in Kiev is already engaged in a "hot war" with Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.

The campaign to transform Ukraine into a US subject state and military staging ground against Russia, on which the CIA, State Department and Pentagon have expended more than \$10 billion, was threatened by Trump's withholding of military aid. It was this action that sparked the retaliatory "whistleblower" complaint by a CIA officer formerly assigned to the White House, which then became the pretext for the launching of the impeachment inquiry.

Again and again, throughout the eight-hour hearing, Democratic members of the Judiciary Committee returned to the theme of alleged Russian intervention in the 2016 US elections and the ongoing US military-diplomatic operations directed against Moscow.

Eric Swalwell of California, for example, declared, “We’re here because of this photo,” while having a photograph displayed on a huge television screen showing President Volodymyr Zelensky dressed in combat gear in eastern Ukraine, where he stood on the “front line against Russia.” Swalwell added that the US was aiding Zelensky to fight Russia “so that we don’t have to fight them here,” as though Russian soldiers were about to parachute onto the streets of Washington DC.

The anti-Russian hysteria was combined with claims that Trump’s conduct in relation to Ukraine bore comparison to Watergate. One of the legal witnesses, Noah Feldman of Harvard University Law School, flatly stated, “Richard Nixon sent burglars to break into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee. This president just made a direct phone call to the president of a foreign country asking for his intervention in our election.”

Another witness, Michael Gerhardt of the University of North Carolina Law School, went even further, declaring in his opening statement that Trump’s conduct was far worse than Nixon’s in Watergate—because Nixon used American operatives against his political rivals, while Trump resorted to foreign ones.

These comparisons collapse as soon as one considers the stark difference between the current political crisis and the situation that led to Nixon’s resignation in Watergate, as well as the crisis that shook the Reagan administration in the Iran-Contra affair of the 1980s. In both these cases, the president engaged in criminal conduct in order to pursue unpopular and illegal wars—in Nixon’s case, the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos; in Reagan’s case, the “contra” war against Nicaragua.

It was the massive popular opposition to these imperialist wars that led the president in each case to resort to criminal actions. Nixon approved the formation of the “plumbers” unit of ex-CIA agents to spy on his political opponents and collect information by illegal methods, including, ultimately, the burglarizing of the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate complex.

Reagan authorized his National Security Council, with Lt. Col. Oliver North taking the lead, to organize the sale of weapons to Iran to obtain funds that could be routed to the “contra” forces engaged in CIA-backed terrorist attacks in Nicaragua, in direct violation of the Boland Amendment, which prohibited such aid.

In the case of Ukraine, it is not Trump but his Democratic opponents who are demanding a more aggressive pursuit of illegal and militaristic foreign policy objectives, including the

arming of the regime set up in the Ukraine by the CIA-backed “Maidan Revolution” of 2014. In this, the Democrats are acting as political attorneys for the CIA, Pentagon and State Department, as was made clear in the parade of national-security officials who defied Trump’s orders and testified before the House Intelligence Committee.

This embrace of the CIA-backed overthrow of an elected government in Ukraine makes nonsense of the Democrats’ claims that their concern in bringing charges against Trump is to defend democracy in America.

There would be no lack of grounds for a legitimate political indictment of Trump on charges of anti-democratic criminal actions: the forced separation of parents and children by his border Gestapo, the illegal diversion of congressionally appropriated funds to build the border wall, the “Muslim ban” on travelers from targeted countries, or Trump’s incessant appeals to racist and fascist forces.

The Democrats choose not to raise these issues because their invocations of democracy are entirely false and hypocritical. Trump’s drive towards fascism cannot and will not be fought by appealing to the CIA and State Department. These are merely two different roads to the same end: the establishment of an authoritarian regime in America.

The hypocrisy of the Democrats is demonstrated in the choice of the witness who led off the impeachment hearing. Professor Noah Feldman is not just a Harvard Law School professor. He has a long and noxious record as an apologist for American imperialist intervention, most notably serving in 2003 as a political adviser to the Iraqi Governing Council, the provisional administration set up after the US invasion.

After helping the Bush administration set up its puppet regime in Iraq at the onset of an imperialist war that has cost the lives of more than a million people and set in train a series of catastrophes in the Middle East, Feldman is hardly in a position to posture as an expert on the defense of democratic rights and constitutional processes.

Similarly, Pamela Karlan from Stanford University Law School, the second legal expert to testify, served in the Obama administration’s Department of Justice in 2014-2015, at a time when this agency was spearheading the attack on Edward Snowden and Julian Assange for exposing US war crimes and mass surveillance, and when Chelsea Manning was serving a 35-year prison term for her leaks of classified information detailing these crimes.



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