

As White House asserts unchecked presidential powers

Democrats double down on anti-Russia war-mongering in impeachment arguments

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The 12-day Senate impeachment trial of Donald Trump concluded Monday with four hours of final arguments, two by the Democratic House managers and two by the White House defense team. Following last Friday's 51-49 vote against admitting new witness testimony or documents, the stage is set for a party-line vote on Wednesday to acquit Trump of the two articles of impeachment passed in December by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives: one for abuse of power and the other for obstruction of Congress.

The outcome is a foregone conclusion, as conviction and removal from office require a two-thirds vote in the Republican-controlled chamber. The only question is whether any senators will defect from their partisan camps and vote with the opposing party. Late Monday, West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin presented a resolution to censure Trump rather than convict him, an initiative that has virtually no chance of succeeding. However, it suggests that the right-wing Democrat may be preparing to vote against Trump's conviction on Wednesday.

It is widely acknowledged that the Democratic impeachment drive has ended in a debacle that has only strengthened Trump. Even as the Democrats argued Monday that Trump was a menace to US national security, a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin and an aspiring dictator, they were preparing to welcome him to the House Tuesday night to deliver his State of the Union Address, with Speaker Nancy Pelosi sitting on the rostrum behind him, alongside Vice President Mike Pence.

Under these circumstances, the closing arguments had something of a farcical and perfunctory character. Opinion polls confirm that despite broad and intense opposition to Trump within the population, the Democrats' impeachment campaign has generated little popular interest or enthusiasm. Trump's poll numbers, already among the lowest of any post-World War II president, have not been negatively impacted by months of hearings in the House and the two-week Senate trial.

Meanwhile, Trump's legal team has seized on the Senate trial as an opportunity to advance legal arguments for a vast expansion of presidential authority and diminution of Congress's constitutionally mandated powers of oversight of

the executive branch. There is no doubt that Trump, who regularly "jokes" about remaining in office indefinitely and in practice rejects any congressional restraint on his actions, will take his acquittal as legal sanction for establishing a presidential dictatorship.

Harvard law Professor Alan Dershowitz argued during the trial that abuse of power and obstruction of Congress were not constitutionally impeachable offenses, and Trump's legal team as a whole defined the constitutional "separation of powers" to mean that Congress has no right to challenge presidential actions.

Thus, they asserted, Trump was absolutely in the right in declaring a blanket ban on compliance with House subpoenas for testimony by administration officials and documents as part of the House impeachment inquiry. Trump's personal lawyer, Jay Sekulow, summed up the defense case on Monday by declaring: "I simply ask this body to stand firm today to protect the integrity of the United States Senate, stand firm today to protect the office of the president, stand firm to protect the Constitution."

The Democrats' final arguments only underscored the reactionary basis of their impeachment drive, demonstrating once again that the political warfare in Washington is a conflict between two right-wing factions of the ruling class and the state, entirely divorced from and hostile to the interests of the broad mass of the American people.

In presenting their arguments, the Democrats went out of their way to appeal to the disaffected sections of the military-intelligence and foreign policy establishment with which they are allied. They chose Colorado Representative Jason Crow to lead off their summation. Crow, a former paratrooper in Iraq and Army Ranger in Afghanistan, is one of 11 freshmen Democrats in the House with intelligence, military or national security backgrounds, whom the *World Socialist Web Site* has called "CIA Democrats."

He began his remarks, perhaps unwittingly, by pointing to the depth of the political crisis wracking the American ruling class, referring to the speech by Daniel Webster urging support in the Senate for the 1850 Compromise. That measure was adopted in

an attempt to avert a civil war over the issue of slavery. Just 11 years later, the Confederate South fired on Fort Sumter, triggering the Civil War that ended with the revolutionary abolition of slavery and expropriation of the Southern slave-owning planter class.

Crow referred, as did all of the subsequent Democratic speakers, to the concocted narrative of massive Russian government intervention in the 2016 election to undermine Hillary Clinton and elect Trump. He attacked Trump for jeopardizing US national security by temporarily withholding military aid from Ukraine in an effort to bully Ukraine into announcing a corruption investigation of Joe Biden and his son, Hunter, calling this an attempt to once again solicit foreign interference, this time by Ukraine, in a US election—the presidential election to be held in nine months.

The pro-war, rabidly anti-Russian political line animating the impeachment drive was spelled out most clearly by House manager Hakeem Jeffries of New York, who chairs the House Democratic caucus. Promoting the Democrats' argument that Trump's fate cannot be left to the voters in November because, if not removed from office, he will once again collude with foreign countries to "cheat" in the election, Jeffries warned against letting "foreign powers choose our commander-in-chief."

"And what could undermine our national security more," he asked, "than to withhold from a foreign ally [Ukraine] fighting a hot war against our adversary [Russia] hundreds of millions of dollars of military aid to buy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, radar and night vision goggles? So that they may fight the war over there, keeping us safe here."

Mouthing the Cold War rhetoric that has become the stock-in-trade of the Democrats, he continued: "If we allow the president's conduct to stand, what message do we send? What message do we send to Russia, our adversary, intent on fracturing democracy around the world?"

"What will we say to our European allies already concerned with this president? About whether the United States will continue to support our NATO commitments that have been a pillar of our foreign policy since World War II?"

"What message do we send to our allies in the Free World?"

He went on to deliver a nauseating tribute to the late Senator John McCain, one of the most vicious Republican war hawks, saying: "The late Senator John McCain was an astounding man, a man of great principle, a great patriot. He fought admirably in Vietnam and was imprisoned as a POW for over five years... As you all are aware, Senator McCain was a great supporter of Ukraine, a great supporter of Europe, a great supporter of our troops."

This was followed by praise for the right-wing, anti-Russian National Security Council (NSC) and State Department officials who defied Trump's order of non-cooperation and testified in the House impeachment inquiry, including the fired US ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, her

replacement, Ambassador Bill Taylor, and NSC Ukraine desk officer Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman.

In closing the Democrats' presentation, House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff linked the authoritarian arguments of Trump's defense team directly with Trump's alleged "softness" toward Russia. "If abuse of power is not impeachable," he said, "then a whole range of utterly unacceptable conduct in a president would now be beyond reach. Trump could offer Alaska to the Russians in exchange for support in the next election..."

In an editorial Monday ("A Dishonorable Senate"), the *New York Times* made clear the emergence of Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton, a notorious war hawk and architect of the US invasion of Iraq, as the central figure in the Democrats' impeachment drive. During the Senate trial, the Democrats increasingly based their case on the demand that Bolton be allowed to testify, knowing that he left the White House after opposing Trump's maneuvers with Ukraine. Bolton also clashed with Trump over his reluctance to militarily attack Iran, North Korea and Venezuela.

The *Times* wrote: "This week began with such promise, or at least with the possibility the Senate might not abdicate its constitutional duty. Leaks [in the *New York Times*] from John Bolton's forthcoming book about his time in the White House appeared to confirm the core of the impeachment case against Mr. Trump: his extortion of Ukraine by explicitly conditioning hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid on the announcement of investigations into his political rival."

These foreign policy issues ran like a red thread through the final arguments of the Democrats. Completely absent was even a mention of Trump's real crimes against democratic rights and the American people: his mass incarceration of immigrants in concentration camps, his cuts to social programs, tax windfalls for the rich, war crimes such as the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Suleimani, incitements of violence against political opponents, support for fascist, white supremacist and anti-Semitic elements.

The entire impeachment process has underscored the central political fact that the working class must oppose Trump and fight for his removal, but that this can be done only on the basis of the expansion of the class struggle, independent of and in opposition to the Democratic Party and the capitalist system as a whole.



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