

For the People's Movement, Trump Impeachment Offers Road Map to Nowhere

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The deepening conflict over the impeachment of President Donald Trump is a struggle between factions of the capitalist ruling class and its governmental apparatus. The fight is fundamentally over which side will exercise control over the state and government with all the power and wealth that confers.

The announcement of an impeachment inquiry was made by Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi on September 24. It followed the revelation that a “whistleblower” complaint had been filed in regard to a July 25 phone call between Trump and the president of Ukraine. The “whistleblower” was later identified as a CIA operative, but the complaint is widely understood to be a collective product of numerous intelligence agents.

There is no “progressive” side in this struggle. As was the case of Nixon in 1974, the very structure of impeachment focuses all attention on what is going on inside the so-called “hallowed halls” of Congress, relegating popular movements to the sidelines.

The Trump regime is blatantly racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-environment, anti-labor, anti-homeless and more. Every day, Trump’s functionaries are carrying out assaults on hard-won people’s rights and the planet itself.

Yet instead of resisting these attacks, the Democratic party leadership in Congress is focusing all of its energy on impeaching Trump, on the grounds that he solicited foreign interference in the 2020 presidential election. The Democrat leaders see this as a kind of line of least resistance, and one that doesn’t require challenging the corporate interests that are represented by and fund both of the major capitalist parties.

What actually happened on the phone call

In a July 25 phone call with recently elected president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, Trump first complains that European Union countries are not doing enough to help Ukraine while the United States is providing support. Then he suggests that Zelensky help in an investigation of CrowdStrike, the private cyber security company that told the FBI that it was the Russians who hacked the Democratic Party National Committee servers in 2016.

Since the Mueller report was released in August 2019 and concluded that there was no evidence of conspiracy between the Trump 2016 campaign and Russia, both Trump and Attorney General William Barr have embarked on an international campaign to uncover the origins of the Russia-Trump collusion hoax. The transcript of the Trump-Zelensky phone call released by the White House on September 25 records Trump saying to Zelensky,

“I would like you to do us a favor though because our country has been through a lot and Ukraine knows a lot about it. I would like you to find out what happened with this whole situation with Ukraine, they say CrowdStrike... I guess you have one of your wealthy people... The server, they say Ukraine has it.”

After inquiring about CrowdStrike, Trump asks Zelensky to help in an investigation into Hunter Biden and his father, former Vice-President Joe Biden.

“The other thing, there’s a lot of talk about Biden’s son, that Biden stopped the prosecution [related to the corporation that gave Hunter Biden a seat on its board of directors — ed.] and a lot of people want to find out about that so whatever you can do with the Attorney General would be great. Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution so if you can look into it... It sounds horrible to me.”

The Democrats decided to launch a formal impeachment inquiry against Trump, on the eve of a presidential election, based on this call.

The Democrats didn’t object when Trump was twisting the arm, bullying and threatening other heads of state to stop buying oil from Iran or recognizing the elected government of Venezuela or importing natural gas from Russia. But we are told that his “bullying” of Zelensky constitutes an intolerable and impeachable abuse of authority. It is an abuse of authority but so was the Obama Administration’s covert and overt operations to topple the democratically elected government in Ukraine in 2014.

Trump’s request for an investigation of the Bidens’ conduct in Ukraine is clearly an abuse of authority but not likely to lead to Trump’s ouster, barring more explosive revelations. Were Trump to be impeached by a majority vote in the House of Representatives, he would then face trial before the Senate. There a two-thirds majority, 67 senators, would have to vote for conviction. There are 53 Republican and 47 Democratic senators at present.

Trump, the Bidens and Ukraine

In his July 25 phone conversation with Zelensky, Trump spoke in the style of an imperial ruler addressing a colonial subject. The subject fawned mightily, lavishly praising the ruler and assuring him that he had stayed at Trump Tower when he was in New York.

How did the government in Kiev, 5,000 miles from Washington D.C., become a U.S. dependency?

The real answer, entirely absent from mainstream media coverage, is a searing indictment of Biden and other operatives of the national security apparatus during the Obama administration for crimes in Ukraine that far exceeded “conflicts of interest” or bullying.

In February 2014, State Department personnel worked together with right-wing and outright fascist elements to overthrow the elected president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, after months of increasingly violent demonstrations in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. Yanukovich’s “crime” was seeking to to maintain a neutral position between Russia and the Western imperialist powers, a position that was entirely unacceptable to Washington.

The United States was seeking to continue the eastward march of NATO by bringing in Ukraine. Many former eastern European socialist countries and Soviet republics had already been incorporated into the U.S.-led alliance, but adding Ukraine would have been of particular importance, putting NATO bases and missiles in close proximity to Russia's western heartland.

The U.S. commander-on-the-ground of the regime change operation was Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, working closely with then-U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt. Nuland openly boasted that the United States had spent \$5 billion bringing "democracy" to Ukraine. Appointed to oversee the coup and its aftermath on behalf of President Obama was none other than his vice president, Joe Biden.

Following are excerpts from a taped phone call between Nuland and Pyatt a few weeks before the coup that took place on February 24, 2014. The subject of the call was who Washington was selecting to be the new leader of Ukraine following the planned coup.

Victoria Nuland: What do you think?

Geoffrey Pyatt: I think we're in play. The Klitschko [Vitaly Klitschko, one of three main opposition leaders] piece is obviously the complicated electron here. Especially the announcement of him as deputy prime minister and you've seen some of my notes on the troubles in the marriage right now so we're trying to get a read really fast on where he is on this stuff. But I think your argument to him, which you'll need to make, I think that's the next phone call you want to set up, is exactly the one you made to Yats [Arseniy Yatseniuk, another opposition leader]. And I'm glad you sort of put him on the spot on where he fits in this scenario. And I'm very glad that he said what he said in response.

Nuland: Good. I don't think Klitsch should go into the government. I don't think it's necessary, I don't think it's a good idea.

Pyatt: Yeah. I guess ... in terms of him not going into the government, just let him stay out and do his political homework and stuff. I'm just thinking in terms of sort of the process moving ahead we want to keep the moderate democrats together. The problem is going to be Tyahnybok [Oleh Tyahnybok, the other opposition leader, a neo-Nazi] and his guys and I'm sure that's part of what [President Viktor] Yanukovich is calculating on all this.

Nuland: [Breaks in] I think Yats [Arseniy Yatseniuk] is the guy who's got the economic experience, the governing experience. He's the ... what he needs is Klitsch and Tyahnybok on the outside. He needs to be talking to them four times a week, you know. I just think Klitsch going in ... he's going to be at that level working for Yatseniuk, it's just not going to work.

Regarding the attempt by the European Union, a U.S. "ally," to negotiate an end the stalemate in Kiev, Nuland says, "F___ the EU." [Listen to the recording here](#) or below.

After the coup and with the backing of the United States, Yatseniuk did indeed become the new President of Ukraine.

Biden continued to play a key role in the country after the coup. In August 2016, he described to Atlantic magazine how he had the country's equivalent of Attorney General removed a year earlier:

“He described, for example, a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko—whom he calls ‘Petro’—in which he urged Poroshenko to fire a corrupt prosecutor general or see the withdrawal of a promised \$1 billion loan to Ukraine. ‘Petro, you’re not getting your billion dollars,’ Biden recalled telling him. ‘It’s OK, you can keep the [prosecutor] general. Just understand—we’re not paying if you do.’ Poroshenko fired the official.”

Just a few months after the 2014 coup, Biden’s son, Hunter, was added to the board of directors of a major Ukrainian gas company, Burisma, on which he “served” for the next five years. Despite having no background in the energy industry nor Ukraine, Hunter Biden was paid \$50,000 per month. He resigned from the board when his father announced his presidential candidacy in 2018.

As the impeachment crisis heats up, the Trump administration and the Democrats are accusing each other of corruption. Both are right.

Just as the Nixon impeachment hearings in 1974 turned lifelong segregationists like Sen. Sam Ervin of North Carolina into liberal heroes, the Trump impeachment hearings are already having a similar effect. Now reactionaries are being elevated like House Intelligence Committee chair, Adam Schiff, a staunch supporter of Israel, the Iraq war, the U.S.-Saudi war on Yemen, the blockade and travel ban on Cuba, the CIA, NSA, etc. The unlikely (barring explosive new revelations) conviction of Trump would bring about the elevation of the extreme right-wing Mike Pence to the presidency.

For the people’s movement, impeachment offers a road map to nowhere.

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Featured image: Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, who they brought to power in the 2014 coup. Then-Secretary of State John Kerry stands in the background. Photo: U.S. Department of State, June 4, 2014

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