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By Patrick Martin
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Impeachment crisis: Trump, Democrats exchange threats and warnings

At dueling news conferences Wednesday, President Trump and leading House Democrats exchanged warnings that the impeachment inquiry begun by the House of Representatives could quickly escalate into a constitutional confrontation.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff held a morning press briefing at which they denounced statements from Secretary of State Pompeo objecting to their plans to take testimony from five current and former State Department officials about Trump's effort to induce the Ukrainian government to revive a corruption probe that could implicate Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joe Biden, and thus undermine his father's campaign for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

"We are deeply concerned about Secretary Pompeo's effort now to potentially interfere with witnesses whose testimony is needed before our committee," Schiff said, saying that many of these witnesses were named in the complaint filed by a CIA whistleblower with Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson.



President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto at the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2019. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Schiff threatened that any delay in producing witnesses or documents in response to the demands of the Intelligence Committee, which has been given the lead responsibility on impeachment instead of the Judiciary Committee, would result in additional charges of “obstruction of Congress” being leveled against the president. Such delays would also be cited as evidence in favor of the underlying charge of abuse of power, he said.

Pelosi’s comments at the press conference underscored the reactionary character of the Democrats’ effort to impeach Trump not for his crimes against democratic rights or his brazen efforts to incite fascist violence, but for offending the intelligence agencies and seeking foreign assistance against Biden, the leading Democratic presidential hopeful.

The House speaker flatly ruled out raising any charges in the impeachment inquiry except those related to the efforts of Trump, his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, and other officials to bully Ukraine into cooperating with the anti-Biden operation.

She declared: “Any other objections people may have [to Trump and his policies] have no place in this discussion, in terms of, is he too cowardly to protect children from gun violence, is he too cruel to protect Dreamers, is he too in denial to understand climate change, the list goes on. Save that for the election.”

No reporter at the press conference asked about the overnight report in the *New York Times* that Trump had urged his anti-immigrant henchmen to shoot border-crossers in the legs and dig moats that would be filled with snakes and alligators, among other inhuman measures to halt the influx of desperate asylum seekers.

Pelosi added that any Democratic-led investigation would be “worthy of the sacrifice ... of our men and women in uniform.” In other words, impeachment will be conducted entirely within the “national security” framework laid down by the military-intelligence apparatus and will exclude Trump’s real crimes against the democratic rights of immigrants, Muslims and other minorities, and his brazen defiance of constitutional restrictions on arbitrary executive power.

The House speaker began the press conference with a plea to Trump and congressional Republicans to collaborate with the Democrats on issues such as the ratification of the US-Mexico-Canada trade deal and a plan that would supposedly limit the spiraling rise of prescription drug prices. In response to an obviously incredulous question about how she could offer such cooperation to a president “as you are actively considering whether to remove him,” Pelosi blandly replied, “They have nothing to do with each other.”

At his own press conference four hours later, conducted with the visiting president of Finland, President Trump lashed out at his Democratic Party opponents with some of the harshest language of his presidency. This followed a three-day period in which he had warned that his impeachment could provoke “civil war,” threatened Schiff with arrest for treason, a capital offense, and denounced as “savages” four freshmen congresswomen of minority ethnic backgrounds and two Jewish chairmen of House committees investigating him, one of them Schiff.

Asked if he would cooperate with subpoenas of documents and witnesses by the House Democrats, Trump said that he would, but then attacked the impeachment inquiry as a “hoax,” declared his phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to be “perfect” and reiterated his claim that Schiff was guilty of “treason” for mocking Trump’s call to Zelensky as resembling that of a mafia boss.

He confirmed that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and many other officials were on the line for the July 25 call to Zelensky and claimed that the CIA whistleblower had given an inaccurate account of the call in his complaint to the inspector general.

Trump went on to cite a *New York Times* article, which had just been posted on the newspaper’s website, reporting that the whistleblower had contacted the House Intelligence Committee before filing his complaint. Schiff “helped to write it, too,” Trump went on to claim.

The article does confirm the close coordination between the intelligence agencies and the House Democrats in the effort either to force Trump out of office or compel him to

conform to the foreign policy dictates of the military-intelligence apparatus, particularly in relation to policy towards Russia, the Middle East and Afghanistan.

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It is significant that the impeachment drive was set in motion after a series of major foreign policy debacles, including the failed political coup in Venezuela, Trump's pulling back from launching missile strikes on Iran, his unsuccessful nuclear negotiations with North Korea, his on-again, off-again "peace" talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and his escalating trade war with China.

Trump boasted about his ability to survive nonstop attacks by the Democrats and the media, particularly around the Russia investigation headed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, while threatening that new investigations mounted by Attorney General William Barr at his direction would find out who instigated the Mueller investigation and how. "We will get to the bottom of it," he warned, "and then there will be a total reversal."

When one reporter asked about his use of the word "treason," Trump defended it and repeated his denunciations of Schiff for mockingly comparing him to a mafia boss—a characterization that obviously stung him.

The reporter, Jeff Mason of Reuters, followed up by asking him what he had wanted President Zelensky of Ukraine to do in relation to Biden, but Trump evaded the question with a long-winded account of the supposed great accomplishments of his administration.

When Mason persisted, Trump seemed even more infuriated. "Biden and his son are stone cold crooked," he roared. "His son walks out with millions of dollars. The kid knows nothing. You know it, and so do we."

This is accurate both as a description of Hunter Biden and of Trump's own far wealthier offspring, one of whom, daughter Ivanka, holds a top position in the Trump White House, along with her husband Jared Kushner.

When Mason continued to press for an answer to the question of what Trump wanted to obtain from Zelensky in relation to Biden, Trump launched into an attack on the "fake news media." This dovetails with Trump's frequent Twitter rants against the press as "enemies of the people," and his incitement of violence against reporters during campaign rallies and other appearances.

The Democrats are heading up, in the form of an impeachment inquiry, an operation mounted by the CIA and other intelligence agencies that have been at war with Trump

over foreign policy questions since his 2016 election campaign. By limiting their inquiry entirely to the issue of US “national security,” a euphemism for US imperialism’s global interests, the Democrats are opposing Trump on the most reactionary basis possible. They are essentially asserting the authority of the CIA, NSA, FBI and other spy and police agencies over the government.

They are deliberately seeking to separate their impeachment operation from Trump’s attacks on democratic rights and working-class living standards for fear of stirring up the broad opposition that exists to Trump and the growing working-class resistance to social inequality reflected in the current auto strike.

Trump, on the other hand, by denouncing impeachment as a conspiracy by elements in the state in alliance with the Democrats and large sections of the media, is making a calculated political appeal to his political base, including ultra-right and fascistic elements.

The interests of working people have nothing in common with either of these factions of the ruling class, which are in fundamental agreement on a policy of escalating war abroad and intensified austerity at home.

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