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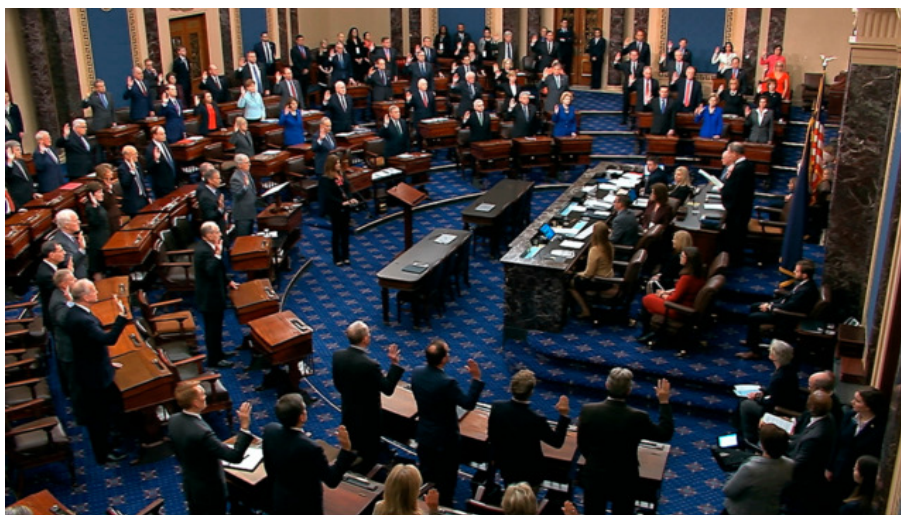
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By Patrick Martin
24.01.2020

Democrats begin Senate trial of Trump with anti-Russia diatribe

The Senate trial of President Donald Trump began hearing the arguments of House impeachment managers Wednesday, with eight hours of presentations by the seven Democrats chosen by Speaker Nancy Pelosi to lead the effort.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff gave the opening speech, droning on for more than two hours. This was followed by presentations from all of the other managers before the rotation began again with Schiff taking the floor for a second time mid-evening. By then, the broadcast networks, which had carried Schiff's initial speech live, had cut away. Most of the television audience had likely departed long before.



Presiding officer Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts swears in members of the Senate for the impeachment trial against President Donald Trump at the U.S. Capitol in Washington [Credit: Senate Television via AP]

The leaden character of the proceedings reflected the vast distance between the US ruling elite, locked in a vicious struggle largely related to the foreign policy of American imperialism, and the real concerns of tens of millions of working people.

There is enormous popular hostility to the Trump administration—to Trump’s attacks on democratic rights, his abuse of immigrants and refugees, his favoritism towards the rich and the corporate elite, his personal corruption, his attacks on climate science, and his embrace of militarism and bullying internationally.

But the Democratic impeachment case is not addressed in the slightest to this popular opposition to Trump. On the contrary, the Democrats seem to welcome the opportunity to be as soporific as possible, putting the country to sleep while they appeal to their real audience—the corporate elite and the military-intelligence apparatus—to side with them on the grounds that Trump is a danger to “national security.”

The tone was set by the opening presentation of Schiff, from which a casual observer might have concluded that the president being impeached was Vladimir Putin, not Donald Trump. After a hollow and insincere invocation of the Founding Fathers and the historic nature of the impeachment of a US president, for only the third time in 230 years, Schiff got down to business: President Trump had withheld military aid to Ukraine, an action that Schiff said “looms largest” in the impeachment trial.

“President Trump withheld hundreds of millions of dollars to his strategic partner at war with Russia to secure foreign help with his reelection,” Schiff said. Ukraine has “long enjoyed bipartisan support designed to help Ukraine to fend itself from the Kremlin’s aggression.”

He continued, “Most critically, the military aid that we provide helps to protect and advance American national security interests in the region and beyond, an interest in stemming Russian expansionism and expanding any efforts to remake the map of Europe, even as we have tens of thousands of troops stationed there. The United States aids Ukraine and its people so that they can fight Russia over there and we don’t have to fight Russia here.”

What an upside-down presentation of world reality! Russia and Ukraine were part of the same country, the Soviet Union, less than 30 years ago. A large proportion of the Ukrainian population speaks Russian as its first language, and the two contested areas, Crimea and eastern Ukraine, are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking—and long subject to attack by Ukrainian nationalists.

Far from Ukraine serving as a “bulwark against Russian expansionism,” as Schiff claimed, the longstanding policy of American imperialism is to use Ukraine as a base of operations against Russia, following the model of other former Soviet bloc territories—Poland, the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the former Soviet Georgia.

When Schiff declares that the US is arming Ukraine so “we don’t have to fight Russia here,” he is invoking the worst McCarthyite fantasies of the Cold War, when popular revolts in Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador and throughout South America were portrayed by American presidents as acts of aggression by Moscow in the Western hemisphere.

What would the American media say if Vladimir Putin gave a speech in which he justified military aid to Mexico—to fight off incursions by the US Border Patrol—so that “we don’t have to fight America” in the streets of Moscow?

There is another, and equally ominous, aspect to the anti-Russia mania being whipped up by the Democrats. Schiff mentioned in passing that “Ukraine is the testing ground for the types of hybrid warfare that the 21st century will be defined by,” referring to cyber warfare and the use of disguised or covert forces. In other words, the Pentagon sees the fighting in eastern Ukraine not only as a strategic necessity in the short term, but also as an opportunity to test out weapons and tactics for future global conflicts.

Schiff went on to hail the “courage” and “patriotism” of the State Department and National Security Council officials who testified before the House impeachment inquiry and voiced the objections of the military-intelligence apparatus to any presidential action that disrupted the long-running US operation to take political control of Ukraine and use it against Russia.

It is this interference in Ukraine, and not the supposed threat to democracy from Trump seeking foreign assistance against Joe Biden, that really concerns the national security state and its Democratic Party attorneys.

Significantly, Schiff made no attempt to address a real threat to democratic rights that has emerged out of the impeachment proceeding: Trump's assertion, through his attorneys, of essentially unlimited presidential immunity from any form of congressional oversight or legal constraints.

The *Washington Post* published a worried editorial Wednesday pointing out that the legal arguments made by the White House were so sweeping that a vote not to convict Trump, likely to take place on partisan grounds in the Republican-controlled Senate, "would gravely damage the only mechanism the Constitution provides for checking a rogue president." The editorial warned, "Mr. Trump and his lawyers are, in effect, seeking consent for an extraordinary expansion of his powers."

Instead of addressing such issues, Schiff and the impeachment managers who followed him focused on the military position of Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia and the US interest in fanning the flames of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Perhaps the most extreme expression of this was the thirty-minute presentation by Representative Jason Crow, a former paratroop commander in Iraq and Afghanistan first elected in 2018, one of those identified by the *World Socialist Web Site* as **CIA Democrats**.

Crow began his presentation by noting that on July 25, 2019, the date of Trump's now famous phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, there were 68,000 American troops deployed in Europe, "training and preparing to support our allies and defend against Russia."

Crow went on to explain in great detail, citing his own military experience as a special forces commander, the significance of the military equipment being supplied to Ukraine by the Pentagon. He gave the example of counter-battery radar, which gives advance warning of rocket or artillery attacks. This allows soldiers to dive into bunkers to escape enemy fire, which his troops used in Afghanistan against Taliban attacks. Other equipment cited by Crow included sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, command and control systems, electronic warfare systems and communications and night vision equipment.

The first full day of trial proceedings will be followed by two more days of presentations by the Democrats, followed by another 24 hours of Senate time, spread over three days, for rebuttal arguments by the lawyers assembled by the Trump White House. This will be followed by 16 hours of questions from the senators, submitted in writing to Chief Justice John Roberts, who will read them out.

Only after this interminable proceeding—currently scheduled to extend to Friday, January 31—will the Senate begin four hours of debate over whether to call witnesses or subpoena documents beyond those available to the House of Representatives. At that point, if the majority Republicans maintain a united front and block any further testimony, the Senate could proceed immediately to final debate and vote on removing Trump from office.

Trump and his closest supporters in the Senate aim to wrap up the trial before the president delivers his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress, currently set for Tuesday, February 4.

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