

US Foreign Policy is up for Sale during Trump's Presidency

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin*

The first cracks in support for President Trump appeared within his own party this week after further damning revelations of corruption in US foreign policy surfaced. Trump was accused of "betrayal of his oath of office, betrayal of our national security and betrayal of the integrity of our elections" when an impeachment inquiry against him was announced on the 24th of September by the House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi. Impeachment is a power given by the United States Constitution, which says, "The President, Vice-President, and all civil Officers of the United States shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors." The power to impeach belongs to the House of Representatives and impeachment by a majority sends the case to the Senate, which must convict by a two-thirds majority. Only two US presidents have been impeached before: Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998, both of whom were acquitted by the Senate.

The Democrat party has been hoping to impeach Trump ever since he was elected president in 2016, and even before he actually took office. Evidence indicated that his campaign had illegal links with Russia and that there was collusion between Trump's team and Russian officials to subvert the 2016 election in Trump's favor. However, after two years of investigations and five guilty verdicts against Trump associates, the evidence against Trump himself was inconclusive as to whether the president himself had actually committed a crime. While Democrats were considering their next move, a bigger scandal surfaced, this time about Ukraine.

On the 25th of July, 2019, Trump congratulated the newly elected president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, in a phone call in which he also encouraged a corruption investigation of former Vice President Joseph Biden who is a leading contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. Zelenskiy was pressured to comply with Trump's request because only a few days earlier Trump had ordered the freezing of \$400 million in vital military aid to Ukraine, which had surrendered all its former nuclear weapons in exchange for broken promises that the US would guarantee security against Russian threats. As part of this campaign, Marie Yovanovitch, former ambassador to Ukraine, was sacked and told to go home "on the next plane," and she testified to Congress that she was "incredulous that the U.S. government chose to remove an Ambassador based, as best as I can tell, on unfounded and false claims by people with clearly questionable motives." Those people with questionable motives were Igor Fruman and Lev Parnas, who were clients of Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani, and who were subsequently arrested. Within days of announcing the impeachment proceedings, Kurt Volker, the U.S. special envoy to Ukraine, stepped down to have more freedom over what he could say if he were called to testify before Congress. Volker released text messages showing that US diplomats had been pressurizing Ukraine's president to investigate Biden in exchange for an invitation to the White House. On the 17th of October, Gordon Sondland, the U.S. ambassador to the E.U., testified that he was "disappointed by the president's direction that we involve Mr. Giuliani" in efforts to force Ukraine into opening an investigation into Trump's political rival. After this testimony, acting White House chief of staff Mark Mulvaney acknowledged the charges against Trump saying, "Get over it, there's going to be political influence in foreign policy."

Six specially selected committees have been set up by Democrats in the House of Representatives to interview key witnesses and study documents without allowing access to other congressional representatives, so as to control which information is released and when. Republicans have called for an official vote to authorize the proceedings, because even though they will lose the vote, it will give them equal access to the proceedings and that will help them mount a defense. Despite, the Republican Party's firm support for the president, the events of the last few days have shaken them.

Some Republicans have started to distance themselves from Trump. Republican Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell warned that the withdrawal of US troops from Syria "will leave the American people and homeland less safe, embolden our enemies, and weaken important alliances." The president was also criticized sharply by his former Defense Secretary James Mattis. These men oppose Trump's isolationist stance on ideological grounds, but others specifically have been shocked by the revelations that Trump sought to gain politically from withholding aid to Ukraine. 2020 Republican presidential candidate Bill Weld expressed support for impeachment, saying "I think it's time for the House to go ahead with their inquiry," and former Ohio Governor, and former Republican presidential candidate, John Kasich said "I think impeachment should move forward and should go for a full examination and a trial in the United States Senate".

US politics is partisan, and when a vote on impeachment is held in the House of Representatives, it will almost certainly be passed because of the Democrat majority there. However, Trump will not be found guilty by the two-thirds majority needed in the Senate, unless at least 20 Republicans vote with Democrats against the president.

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