

US impeachment campaign escalates with claim of second whistleblower

By Patrick Martin
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The conflict between President Trump and congressional Democrats escalated over the weekend, with attorneys for the CIA officer who triggered an impeachment inquiry declaring that there were other “whistleblowers” coming forward to provide testimony in support of his allegations against Trump.

Like the first whistleblower, the additional witness or witnesses were said to be intelligence officials. At least one has been interviewed by Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson, who declared the initial complaint against Trump, over his efforts to get the president of Ukraine to provide derogatory material on former Vice President Joe Biden and his son, to be “credible” and “urgent.”

Andrew Bakaj, the lead attorney for the first whistleblower, tweeted Saturday, “I can confirm that my firm and my team represent multiple whistleblowers.” Mark Zaid, another attorney for the first whistleblower, said the second intelligence official had firsthand knowledge of some of the allegations made in the initial complaint.

A second whistleblower, whether he or she made an independent complaint or merely bolstered the first whistleblower, would mark a further intensification of the efforts by sections of the national security apparatus either to remove Trump outright or to shift US foreign policy in a direction even more hostile to Russia.

The most direct expression of the role of the intelligence apparatus in the Democratic Party impeachment drive was the appearance Sunday of former CIA Director John Brennan on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” The CIA director under Obama now receives a fat paycheck as “senior national security and intelligence analyst” for the television network.

Brennan was asked by host Chuck Todd to “assess the stability of the American government” as the CIA would assess another country. Brennan answered, “We would look at it as a very corrupt government that is under the sway, right now, of this powerful individual who has been able to just corrupt the institutions and the laws of that country.”

“I think it’s no longer, you know, a democracy,” Brennan continued, referring to Trump as “an autocrat,” and concluding, “there’s just tremendous political instability here ... which is consuming the government now. And it’s not able to take care of the issues that it needs to address, whether it be on the domestic front or the national security or the foreign policy front.”

This is a remarkable declaration by an official who is one of the most bloodstained figures in recent American history. Brennan directed drone missile assassination strikes from the Obama White House before returning to the CIA to oversee its worldwide operations of murder, political subversion and plots against democracy. With the support of the Obama White House, he sought to suppress the Senate investigation into the torture program run by the CIA during the George W. Bush administration.

Brennan is voicing the views of powerful sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, which oppose Trump not only on specific foreign policy decisions in relation to Russia and the Middle East, but regard his administration as too erratic and too much driven by narrow personal and political considerations to effectively advance the interests of American imperialism as a whole.

While Trump is appealing to racism and anti-immigrant bigotry and seeking to mobilize sections of the police and military and outright fascists in his defense, his Democratic Party opponents are operating on a completely right-wing basis, working as the front men for a section of the national security apparatus.

Speaking on CNN’s “State of the Union” Sunday, a Democratic senator and presidential candidate, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, cited her trips to Ukraine with two Republican warmongers, Lindsey Graham and the late John McCain. She repeated the litany of the US foreign policy elite since the 2014 US-backed ultra-right coup in Ukraine, saying, “they need our country by their side as they deal with a foreign entity, as in Russia, that shot planes down over their country, that’s annexed Crimea in their own country. They need us. And President Trump knows that.”

The handful of Republican senators who have distanced themselves from Trump have also done so on a right-wing basis. Three Republicans criticized Trump's public appeal on Thursday for the Chinese government to investigate the activities of Biden and his son Hunter, who has extensive business operations in China. In making this statement in front of the television cameras, Trump was doubling down on his bullying of the Ukrainian government for an anti-Biden probe, carried out secretly in a July 25 phone call to President Zelensky.

Senator Mitt Romney said Trump's appeal was "wrong and appalling," and Susan Collins of Maine called it "a big mistake" and "completely inappropriate." Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska resorted to outright redbaiting. "Americans don't look to Chinese commies for the truth," he told the *Omaha World-Herald*. "If the Biden kid broke laws by selling his name to Beijing, that's a matter for American courts, not communist tyrants running torture camps."

Other Republican senators followed the lead of Marco Rubio of Florida, another vicious anti-communist, who claimed that Trump's invitation to China was merely a joke—presumably like Trump's musings about extending his time in office, serving three or four terms, in defiance of the US Constitution, or his claims that his political opponents are guilty of treason.

Nowhere in the US political establishment, either Democratic or Republican, is there any genuine opposition to Trump's real crimes: his attacks on immigrants (including the most recent revelation that he wanted US agents to shoot refugees who attempted to cross the border), his building up of a personalist, authoritarian regime, and his continuous favors to big business, from scrapping regulatory enforcement to gargantuan tax cuts.

There were further developments this weekend on the legal front. A federal judge in Washington ordered the White House to preserve records of Trump's "meetings, phone calls, and other communications with foreign leaders," acting in a lawsuit filed by several groups last May that charged the administration was failing to follow the Presidential Records Act, which governs the official records of the US chief executive.

The lawsuit is not directly related to impeachment, but the records ordered preserved could be subject to subpoena by the House of Representatives and used against Trump in a future impeachment or Senate trial.

Top Republican leaders acknowledged that the House is likely to vote in favor of impeachment. Trump himself said as much Friday, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in a video released by his reelection campaign, boasted, "The way that impeachment stops is with a Senate

majority with me as majority leader." He claimed that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is "in the clutches of a left-wing mob that finally convinced her to impeach the president."

Representative Jim Himes of Connecticut, the number two Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said the invective from the White House against committee Chair Adam Schiff and Speaker Pelosi was unwarranted because the charges against him were emanating from White House staffers, not Congress.

Appearing on the CBS program "Face the Nation," Himes said, "His problem is not with the Democrats. It's not with people like me. We're sort of sitting here watching the information flow out of the White House ... professionals who are in the Oval Office, who are in the situation room, are watching what is happening and finally saying, 'My God, this cannot happen anymore.' And they are coming forward either as whistleblowers or... leaking."

In substance, Himes is correct: it is the "professionals," i.e., the military-intelligence officials, who are driving the impeachment investigation, which Pelosi embraced only reluctantly, fearful that a full-blown political crisis in Washington could destabilize the US political system as a whole.

Even more significant was the warning on the same program by Bob Woodward, the former Watergate journalist who is completely plugged in to the concerns of the military-intelligence apparatus. Woodward is old enough to remember years like 1968, when the American political landscape was thrown into turmoil by political assassinations and other forms of violence. He said, "The Democrats need to be really careful about how they let this play out... suppose something happens... I mean, let's hope it's not a bloody 2020."

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