

Acting US Homeland Security secretary refuses to appear before congressional committee

By Jacob Crosse
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In a further assertion by the Trump administration of quasi-dictatorial executive powers, the acting secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Chad Wolf, notified the House Committee on Homeland Security on September 8 that he would not appear for testimony at a September 17 hearing on “Worldwide Threats to the Homeland.”

Wolf, along with the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Christopher Wray, and the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Chris Miller, were scheduled to testify at the annual hearing, which is meant to exemplify congressional oversight of the intelligence agencies. As of this writing, Wray and Miller are still set to testify.

On September 11, Representative Bennie Thompson (Democrat of Mississippi), the chairman of the committee, issued a subpoena for Wolf to testify at the September 17 hearing. In issuing the subpoena, Thompson included a statement that read: “From the coronavirus pandemic to the rise of right-wing extremism to ongoing election interference, there are urgent threats requiring our attention. Mr. Wolf’s refusal to testify—thereby evading congressional oversight at this critical time—is especially troubling given the serious matters facing the Department and the Nation.”

Later that day, Wolf appeared as a guest on “Fox News with Brett Baier” and said he would not honor the subpoena.

Wolf has been serving as acting secretary of DHS since November 13, 2019. However, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report from August found that Wolf and his deputy secretary, Ken Cuccinelli, were both part of an “invalid order of

succession” and therefore not legally appointed to their positions.

Last Friday, a federal judge in Maryland, Paula Xinis, temporarily barred the enforcement of asylum restrictions Wolf put in place in August on the grounds that he was likely unlawfully serving as head of the DHS, the parent agency of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Wolf has played a central role not only in the Trump administration’s vicious persecution of immigrants, but also in its fascistic attacks on demonstrators protesting against police violence, particularly in Portland, Oregon and Kenosha, Wisconsin.

In July, Wolf dispatched a militarized special operations unit of CBP known as BORTAC, or Border Patrol Tactical Unit, as part of a collection of federal police agencies under the DHS that essentially invaded Portland, in defiance of publicly stated opposition from the mayor and the governor.

Trump’s federal police and paramilitary forces occupied a federal courthouse that had become a focal point of protests and brutally attacked peaceful protester with CS tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper bombs, flash bang grenades and sonic weapons.

They carried out arbitrary beatings and arrests and deliberately sought to provoke a violent response from the demonstrators. This was the prelude to the Republican National Convention in August, during which Trump and other speakers portrayed the protests against police violence as mobs of rampaging anarchists and socialists looting, burning and terrorizing cities and wealthy suburbs.

Wolf oversaw the use of his uniformed thugs to

kidnap people off the street, in the manner of Latin American police states, throw them into unmarked cars and secrete them in locations for hours of interrogation, all without charges or due process.

Similar tactics were employed in Kenosha last month following the police shooting of Jacob Blake. There, local police, backed by the National Guard and federal agents, coordinated with far-right vigilantes, leading to the fascist murder of two unarmed protesters.

The police-state operations culminated earlier this month in the targeted assassination of anti-fascist protester Michael Reinoehl in Portland by a task force led by US Marshals, one of the agencies under Wolf's DHS.

In previous congressional testimony, Wolf has defended the kidnapping of protesters as a "common de-escalation tactic," necessary to put down "mobs of lawless and violent anarchists," who, in his telling, have been enabled by "local political leaders [who] refuse to restore order to protect their city."

On September 9, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (Democrat of California) announced that the committee would be looking into a complaint filed by whistleblower Brian Murphy, until recently the head of intelligence analysis at DHS, who accused Wolf, Cuccinelli and other Trump officials of pressuring him to alter intelligence reports to bolster Trump's domestic and foreign policies.

The complaint alleged that Wolf and Cuccinelli instructed Murphy to modify domestic terrorism threat assessments to downplay the threat from white supremacists and exaggerate the supposed threat from left-wing groups like Antifa. It also alleged that Trump officials ordered him to "cease providing intelligence assessments on the threat of Russian interference in the United States and instead start reporting on interference activities by China and Iran."

The Democrats and the bulk of the media have played up the allegations of pro-Russian interference and downplayed the claims of shielding far-right forces and demonizing left-wing opponents of the administration.

Wolf's defiance of Congress is only the latest in a string of actions by the Trump White House asserting unlimited presidential powers and rejecting congressional oversight. In February 2019, Trump declared a "national emergency" at the US-Mexico

border in order to override Congress and allocate \$8 billion to build his border wall, in violation of the Constitution, which reserves to Congress the "power of the purse." The Democrats not only offered no serious opposition, they eventually voted to provide funding for Trump's war on immigrants.

In October of 2019, the White House declared that it would not cooperate in any way with the House impeachment inquiry, asserting essentially unchecked presidential powers. Once again, the Democrats capitulated. The eventual articles of impeachment made no mention of Trump's unconstitutional power grabs and instead focused solely on his alleged cave-in to Russia in relation to Ukraine.

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