

Beat: Politics

Biden's crimes in Ukraine "" and Trump's

Comment by Greg Butterfield

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As U.S. President Donald Trump gave a bellicose speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 24, attacking Iran, Venezuela, China, and workers and oppressed people all over the world, Democratic Party House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced the beginning of an impeachment inquiry against Trump.

However, the impeachment process is not about Trump's numerous violations of international law, such as casting aside the Iran nuclear deal, abetting the seizure of Venezuela's overseas assets and its Embassy in Washington, or tightening the illegal blockade of Cuba.

Nor does it have to do with the mass violation of human rights at the U.S.-Mexico border or the imprisonment of refugees in concentration camps. It's not about his policies encouraging environmental destruction, either.

No, the impeachment process centers on a July 25 phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, in which Trump allegedly pressured Zelensky to investigate corruption charges against former Vice President and current Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden.

This "explosive" charge was made by an intelligence agent who filed a whistleblower complaint. The agent implied Trump had demanded a quid pro quo from Zelensky in exchange for continued U.S. aid.

Later, it was reported that the Trump administration had put a temporary hold on almost \$400 million in military aid to Kiev prior to the call. The military aid was later released. Trump says there was no connection between the call and his "review" of the aid.

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The official explanation, as reported by the Guardian, is that "It is illegal for a political campaign to accept ""a thing of value" from a foreign government. Democrats say an investigation into a political opponent""for which Trump appears to have been pushing""would amount to "a thing of value.""

What no one in Washington or the corporate media cares to mention are the real and deadly crimes of the U.S. government and big business in Ukraine "" under both the Democratic Obama administration in which Biden served, and now the Trump administration.

U.S. soldier aids neo-Nazis

On Sept. 23, Grayzone investigative journalist Ben Norton reported on the FBI's arrest of Jarrett William Smith, a U.S. soldier who sought to join the Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi military group in Ukraine.

"While serving in the U.S. military," Norton wrote, "this right-wing extremist gave fascist militants in Ukraine and other countries information on how to build bombs. "

"The FBI said he had also planned to travel to Ukraine in order to join the Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi militia that has for years been directly supported by the U.S. government."

This is the real story about Ukraine that should be brought to the attention of workers and oppressed people, because it gets to the far more significant crimes of Biden, Trump and the wealthy boss class they both serve:

- how the U.S. ushered in a right-wing coup regime in Ukraine in 2014 with the aid of open fascists;
- how the new government backed by Washington launched a bloody war against the people of the Donbass mining region, while also increasing military threats against neighboring Russia;
- ongoing repression against opponents of the regime, including the jailing of hundreds of political prisoners, beatings and killings by neo-Nazi groups, and the massacre of 48 people at the House of Trade Unions in Odessa on May 2, 2014;
- how austerity and privatization have benefitted big Western capitalists and banks while harming the people of Ukraine;
- and the fact that this process "which began under the Democratic Obama administration" continues under Republican Trump today.

Norton cites several earlier examples of collaboration between U.S.-based white supremacists and Ukrainian fascists. Last year, for example, members of a California group that participated in the violent, racist attacks in Charlottesville in 2017 were revealed to have attended an Azov training camp.

Azov was formed in 2014 as one of several neo-Nazi "volunteer militias" which, together with the Ukrainian Armed Forces, have waged war against the mostly Russian-speaking residents of the Donbass mining region of eastern Ukraine. In a popular referendum, the residents of Donbass voted overwhelmingly to declare independence and formed the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics.

In 2015, when some U.S. congresspeople expressed discomfort with providing support to a group that uses fascist sigils, Azov was promptly incorporated into the Ukrainian National Guard to give cover for U.S./NATO military training and equipment.

On Feb. 25, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that the number of deaths had reached up to 13,000 since the war in Donbass began in 2014, with more than 30,000 wounded. Millions of people were displaced and became refugees as a result of the war.

In order to keep a gauze of "plausible denial," the Obama administration had banned the direct sale of "lethal weapons" to Ukraine, instead facilitating those sales through third countries, like the Gulf monarchies. Trump removed that restriction.

Although Zelensky was voted into office by Ukrainians hoping he would end the war, military attacks by Kiev have increased since he took office in May.

Biden's role

From the start of the war in 2014 through 2016, Vice President Joe Biden served as the virtual colonial governor of Ukraine. He visited the country frequently, dangling carrots and swinging sticks, to make sure the motley crew of oligarchs, pro-Western politicians and neo-Nazis who took power did what Washington wanted.

On April 25, 2014, this author wrote: “The so-called “anti-terrorist campaign” [military attack on Donbass] was launched after a visit by CIA Director John Brennan to Kiev on April 12-13. Following humiliating setbacks, including the desertion of many troops the regime had believed loyal, the attack resumed immediately after U.S. Vice President Joe Biden flew to Kiev on April 22 to apply more pressure and promise more aid.”

It was Biden, more than any other figure in the Obama administration, who oversaw the brutal austerity and privatization “reforms” demanded by the big banks and the equally brutal war in Donbass.

This included privatization of Ukraine’s rich farmland and its takeover by Monsanto and other Western agribusiness corporations pushing GMOs—one of many provisions demanded by the International Monetary Fund in exchange for a \$17.5 billion bailout—and the introduction of fracking. Biden’s son, Hunter Biden, was directly involved in the latter as an executive of gas production company Burisma Holdings, along with other capitalists with close ties to the Obama administration.

The corruption charges which Trump reportedly wanted Ukraine to investigate have to do with Joe Biden’s role in the firing of Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin, who was supposed to investigate corruption. One of the entities Shokin was investigating was Burisma Holdings.

At a meeting of the Council on Foreign Affairs, Joe Biden later bragged about how he used the threat of withdrawing a billion dollar line of credit to get the prosecutor fired. All perfectly legal and normal, we are assured.

The mainstream media—and even alternative media like The Nation and The Intercept—have gone to great pains, bending and twisting pretzel-like, to justify Biden’s conduct as legal and unassailable, even if they admit an appearance of “impropriety.”

After all, this kind of conduct is business as usual for U.S. politicians and the wealthy class they serve—regardless of which capitalist party they belong to!

The austerity preacher

In December 2015, Biden spoke in the Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, lecturing his subjects on the need to “end cronyism.” He praised those who carried out the coup two years earlier and those conducting war crimes against the civilian population of Donbass.

He also warned the assembled politicians not to lose their nerve in carrying out austerity measures on the backs of the workers if they wanted to continue getting money from the U.S. and the International Monetary Fund.

“The big part of moving forward with your IMF program—it requires difficult reforms. It is to vote to raise the pension age is to write your political obituary in many places. It requires sacrifices that might not be politically expedient or popular. I urge you to stay the course as hard as it is.”

Any worker, looking at the facts here, might ask not only about the evident corruption, but about how it is “normal” and “legal” for a U.S. politician to dictate the political and economic policies, including war and peace, poverty and austerity, of another country.

Both Biden and Trump, congressional Democrats and Republicans, are playing out their struggle for power and privilege atop a mountain of bodies of children, civilians and anti-fascists killed in Donbass, and the ongoing repression of political oppositionists, journalists and ordinary workers in Ukraine.

That is the real scandal and the real story that must be exposed.

By Greg Butterfield, Struggle-La Lucha
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<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2019/09/26/bidens-crimes-in-ukraine-and-trumps/>

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