

# AP

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## With impeachment over, critics see Trump 'retribution tour'

### *З завершенням імпичменту, критики спостерігають «тур відплати» Трампа*

*На тиждні з моменту виправдання за обвинуваченнями імпичменту повністю звільнений президент Дональд Трамп демонструє свою рішучість затвердити залізну владу над урядом, підштовхуючи міністерство юстиції послабити тиск на свого давнього друга, використовуючи важелі президентських повноважень для розплати над реальними і мнимими ворогами. Д. Трамп заявив своїй команді, що у останні дні він відчуває себе виправданим і підбадьореним, вважаючи, що республіканці згуртувалися навколо нього безпрецедентним чином. З тих пір Д. Трамп і його помічники поспішили очистити свою адміністрацію від тих, кого він вважає недостатньо лояльними, ще з часів розслідування колишнього спеціального радника Роберта Мюллера у втручання Росії у вибори 2016 року.*

*Демократи і сторонні аналітики заявляють, що Трамп демонструє прагу помсти після імпичменту, яка вийшла за рамки норм і потенційно може завдати тривалий збиток установам. Деякі республіканські сенатори, зокрема, від штату Теннессі Ламар Олександр і Мейс Сьюзен Коллінз та від Аляски Ліза Мурковські, заявили, що вважають намагання Д. Трампа здійснити тиск на Президента України Володимира Зеленського недоцільним.*

*Але вони також висловили сподівання після його виправдання, що Трамп засвоїв урок з цього епізоду. "Цілком очевидно, що президент США засвоїв урок: тепер він може робити все, що завгодно, коли завгодно, і може зловживати своїм службовим становищем; і він ніколи не буде притягуватися до відповідальності перед цим Сенатом", - сказав сенатор Шеррод Браун, штат Огайо, демократ.*

<https://apnews.com/e613b755f0750a1df4127f054561d7d6>



*President Donald Trump smiles during a meeting with Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno in the Oval Office of the White House, Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)*

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the week since his acquittal on impeachment charges, a fully emboldened President Donald Trump is demonstrating his determination to assert an iron grip on government, pushing his Justice Department to ease up on a longtime friend while using the levers of presidential powers to exact payback on real and perceived foes.

Trump has told confidants in recent days that he felt both vindicated and strengthened by his acquittal in the Senate, believing Republicans have rallied around him in unprecedented fashion while voters were turned off by the political process, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Since then, Trump and his aides have moved with haste to clear his administration of those he sees as insufficiently loyal, reaching all the way back to the time of former special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Democrats and outside analysts are raising red flags that Trump is exhibiting a post-impeachment thirst for vengeance that's gone beyond bending norms and could potentially cause lasting damage to institutions.

Some Republican senators, including Tennessee's Lamar Alexander, Maine's Susan Collins and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, said they found Trump's effort to pressure Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy inappropriate. But they also expressed hope following his acquittal that Trump had learned a lesson from the episode.

Murkowski acknowledged Wednesday that "there haven't been very strong indicators this week that he has."

After Trump vented on Twitter this week about federal prosecutors recommending up to nine years in federal prison for his confidant Roger Stone, the Justice Department abruptly announced that it would reevaluate the recommended sentence. Justice officials insisted the timing was coincidental; they'd already been planning to pull the recommendation.

Stone was convicted in November of tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election. The Justice Department move to back away from the sentencing recommendation prompted the four attorneys who prosecuted Stone to quit the case. One left the Justice Department altogether.

In recent days, the White House has yanked a senior Treasury Department nomination away from a former Justice Department official who supervised the prosecutions of several of Trump advisers. The administration also fired an EPA official who claims he was ousted because he was deemed too friendly with Democrats.

Trump even suggested this week that the Pentagon investigate and potentially discipline former White House aide Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who provided damaging testimony about the president in the impeachment inquiry.

That came after White House officials last week told Vindman and his twin brother, also an Army officer who had been detailed to the White House National Security Council, that their services were no longer needed and that they would be reassigned to new duties by the Pentagon. Security then escorted the brothers off White House grounds.

"We are witnessing a crisis in the rule of law in America — unlike one we have ever seen before," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor Wednesday. Schumer called for the Justice Department's independent inspector general to probe the department's action in the Stone case. Later, House lawmakers announced Attorney General William Barr would come before them next month to answer questions.

Former Justice Department officials struggled to recall a precedent, describing it as norm-shattering turmoil that raises troubling questions about the apparent politicization of an agency meant to function independent of White House sway.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Michael Bromwich, a former federal prosecutor and Justice Department inspector general who has been representing former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe in a criminal investigation before the same U.S. attorney’s office.

Trump turned testy during an Oval Office appearance when reporters asked him about interfering in the Stone case and whether he learned anything from his impeachment ordeal.

He slammed the four prosecutors who recommended the stiff sentence for Stone and asserted they “ought to apologize for a lot of the people whose lives they’ve ruined.”

He described the lesson he gleaned from being just the third president to endure an impeachment trial: “Democrats are crooked. ... They’re vicious, they shouldn’t have brought impeachment and that my poll numbers are 10 points higher because of fake news.”

Trump said he did not order Justice Department officials to change Stone’s recommended sentence, though he claimed he would have had the “absolute right to do it” if he had wanted to. He used Twitter early Wednesday to congratulate Barr “for taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not even been brought.”

As Democrats called for an investigation, several Republican lawmakers strained to defend Trump’s actions.

“Certainly the president is entitled his opinion, and there would have been nothing wrong with the president picking up the phone, as I understand it, and talking to Justice,” said Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican. “But I think this is a situation where the tweet was very problematic.”

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and Trump confidant, said he agreed the sentencing recommendation was excessive, but didn’t think the president should have tweeted about an ongoing case.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has shown he doesn’t like to wait for anything, let alone the end of a criminal case. But at moments, he has been willing to show restraint.

Early in his presidency, aides say, it took Trump an extraordinary measure of restraint to hold back on firing Attorney General Jeff Sessions in the months after he recused himself from the Russia investigation. The president reluctantly heeded the advice of his advisers and Republican allies not to dismiss the former Alabama senator until after the 2018 midterm elections.

But on the night of the election, as Republicans held onto the Senate but lost the House, Trump turned to those at a campaign party and said, simply, “I’m doing it now.” Sessions was asked to resign the next day.

Similarly, Trump knew that the likely outcome of his impeachment trial would be acquittal at the hands of the GOP-controlled Senate. Reluctantly, he acquiesced to the advice of his aides and agreed to wait to retaliate for the probe, which he deemed a conspiracy conjured up by Democrats and the so-called Deep State, until the official verdict was reached.

Now, though, Trump is once again unleashed.

Some of his targets are far out of the public eye. Trump this week withdrew the nomination of Jessie Liu, a former U.S. attorney who oversaw federal prosecutions in the District of Columbia, for a senior Treasury Department post.

Liu had supervised the prosecution of several cases inherited from Mueller’s probe into Russian interference into the 2016 election. Among those prosecuted under Liu’s watch were Stone, 2016 deputy campaign chairman Rick Gates and former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Last week, a spokeswoman for former national security adviser John Bolton charged that the White House was “suppressing” the publication of Bolton’s memoir about his time in the Trump administration with invalid claims that the manuscript includes classified material.

Bolton, according to excerpts of the manuscript leaked to the media during the Senate impeachment trial, says Trump told him he was conditioning the release of military aid to Ukraine on whether its government would help investigate Joe Biden and his son.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, accused Trump of being on a “retribution tour” and suggested that Senate Republicans — with the exception of Utah’s Mitt Romney, who voted with Democrats to convict Trump on the abuse of power count — encouraged the president by turning a blind eye to his conduct.

“It’s pretty clear the president of the United States did learn a lesson: the lesson he can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, he can abuse his office, he’ll never ever be held accountable by this Senate,” Brown said. “

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*Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro, Deb Riechmann, Mike Balsamo, Eric Tucker and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.*