

International

Democratic election hopeful Gabbard blasts Hillary over her Russia remarks

‘They have a bunch of sites and bots and other ways of supporting her so far’

WASHINGTON: Hillary Clinton warned that Russia is grooming a US Democratic candidate for a third-party run next year, prompting the accused Tulsi Gabbard to unleash an all-out attack Friday on the “queen of warmongers” ex-secretary of state. Clinton — and history from her 2016 presidential defeat to Donald Trump — suggested that the result of the Russian-backed move would be to divide the US electorate and help Trump win again in 2020.

“I think they’ve got their eye on somebody who’s currently in the Democratic primary, and they’re grooming her to be the third-party candidate,” Clinton said on the “Campaign HQ” podcast that first aired Thursday. “She’s the favorite of the Russians. They have a bunch of sites and bots and other ways of supporting her so far.” Clinton did not name Gabbard, but the Hawaii congresswoman essentially acknowledged she was the target by blasting out a stunning Twitter thread against the former first lady.

“Great! Thank you @HillaryClinton. You, the queen of warmongers, embodiment of corruption, and personification of

the rot that has sickened the Democratic Party for so long, have finally come out from behind the curtain,” Gabbard ranted at her fellow Democrat. Gabbard, 38, accused 71-year-old Clinton, long a doyenne of the Washington establishment, of leading a “concerted campaign” to destroy her reputation.

“Now we know — it was always you, through your proxies and powerful allies in the corporate media and war machine, afraid of the threat I pose,” she added. “It’s now clear that this primary is between you and me,” she sneered. “Don’t cowardly hide behind your proxies. Join the race directly.” Clinton has said she is done running for president.

Russian interference

Gabbard’s campaign is hanging by a thread. She is polling at barely one percent support in a sprawling field that includes former vice president Joe Biden and senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. Her tirade is startling given that it is from one presidential candidate to her own party’s 2016 nominee, herself the target of Russian interference that year. US media

analysis has shown that sites tied to Russia have celebrated Gabbard’s campaign launch, defended her controversial 2017 meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and attacked people who have suggested Gabbard is a pawn for Moscow.

Last week The New York Times quoted influential Republicans who said they were impressed with her. Far-right conspiracy theorist Mike Cernovich said she “seems very Trumpian.” Gabbard has rejected some of the support from rightwing or white nationalist sources, and during last week’s Democratic debate she chastised the Times for publishing “smears” and said television commentators were “completely despicable” for calling her a Russian asset.

The US intelligence community has concluded that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to help boost Trump’s chances of victory. Clinton said it was clear Russia is laying the groundwork for similar interference in 2020. In 2016, Green Party liberal Jill Stein won more votes than Trump’s victory margin in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, states that could have secured the presidency for Clinton. — AFP



WESTERVILLE: In this file photo taken on October 15, 2019, Democratic presidential hopeful Tulsi Gabbard speaks during the fourth Democratic primary debate of the 2020 presidential campaign season. — AFP

Trump, Ukraine and the impeachment: A primer

WASHINGTON: In just three weeks, the official impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump has accumulated significant testimony and documentary evidence on allegations that he illegally pressured Ukraine to help boost his own political prospects in the United States. Democrats in the House of Representatives are building a case that could produce multiple impeachment charges that Trump has abused the powers of his office, violated US election laws and illegally obstructed a Congressional investigation. Here’s where the investigation stands:

Whistleblower complaint, presidential call transcript

After his election in April, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky sought a meeting with Trump and also hoped to obtain some \$400 million in military aid. In May, Trump told US diplomats to coordinate with his lawyer Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani says publicly that he is investigating whether Ukraine colluded with the Democrats in the 2016 election, and also is looking into Democrat Joe Biden — who could face Trump in the 2020 election — over Biden’s son’s ties to a Ukraine energy company Burisma.

In September, a whistleblower complaint came to light alleging that, in a July 25 phone call, Trump pressured Zelensky to investigate both cases. The whistleblower expressed concern that “the president had clearly committed a criminal act by urging a foreign power to investigate a US person for the purposes of advancing his own reelection bid in 2020.”

The White House-edited transcript of the call shows Trump responding to Zelensky’s request for military aid — which Trump had frozen days earlier — by saying: “I would like you to do us a favor though.” Trump asks Zelensky to get information regarding the alleged help for the Democrats in 2016 and regarding the Bidens. “A lot of people want to



DALLAS: US President Donald Trump speaks during a “Keep America Great” Campaign Rally at American Airlines Center. — AFP

find out about that,” Trump said, adding: “So if you can, look into it.”

Text messages add evidence

The inquiry has found text messages between US diplomats showing awareness of what Trump and Giuliani sought. A week before the Zelensky call, Kurt Volker, the special representative on Ukraine, texted two other diplomats: “Most impt is for Zelensky to say that he will help investigation.”

Hours before the call, Volker told Zelensky aide Andrey Yermak: “Heard from White House — assuming President Z convinces Trump he will investigate/get to the bottom of what happened in 2016, we will nail down date for visit to Washington. Good luck!” On August 13, Volker texted a draft of a Ukraine statement to his colleagues that said: “We intend to initiate and complete a transparent and unbiased investigation of all available facts and episodes, including those involving Burisma and the 2016 US elections.”

Testimonies bare worries over Trump

The White House has refused House demands to provide documents related to the Ukraine dealings. But nine officials have testified to the inquiry behind closed doors. Former White House Russia expert Fiona Hill told the inquiry that her boss, Trump’s then-national security advisor John Bolton,

was alarmed by the efforts to pressure Ukraine and branded it a surreptitious “drug deal.”

Bolton also said that Giuliani is “a hand grenade who’s going to blow everyone up,” she testified. On Thursday, Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland told the inquiry in written testimony that Trump ordered diplomats in May to work with Giuliani. Giuliani “specifically mentioned the 2016 election (including the DNC server) and Burisma as two anti-corruption investigatory topics of importance for the President,” Sondland said.

Mulvaney admits quid pro quo

One Thursday, Trump’s chief of staff Mick Mulvaney stunningly admitted that there was indeed a quid pro quo: that the White House held up aid to pressure Ukraine to investigate whether the country had helped Democrats in 2016. “Did he also mention to me in passing the corruption related to the DNC server? Absolutely. No question about that,” Mulvaney told reporters. “That’s it, and that’s why we held up the money.” Two hours later Mulvaney retracted his statement, but the damage was done. “Things just went from very, very bad to much, much worse,” said Adam Schiff, the House Intelligence Committee chairman leading the impeachment inquiry. — AFP

That prompted Mayor John Tory, along with other big city Canadian mayors facing similar spikes in gun violence, to demand stricter gun controls from the federal government. Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau proposed a ban on assault rifles but stopped short of the handgun ban sought, saying only that he would help cities to restrict pistols and revolvers. “You don’t need military-grade assault weapons, ones designed to kill the largest amount of people in the shortest amount of time, to take down a deer,” he said in Toronto at the start of his re-election campaign in September.

Gangs and smuggling

Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, who is neck-and-neck with Trudeau in the polls, said he supports tougher penalties for gun crimes rather than gun restrictions. While regulation is essential and proven in Canada, researcher Adam Ellis says the political debate around guns is distracting from substantive issues.

“It’s not necessarily the gun itself that’s the problem,” he told AFP. “The problem is the masculinities that are attached to the gun.” “Let’s stop talking about the guns, let’s have a bigger real conversation about toxic masculinity in society, how we socialize young boys to feel like they have to be violent... and the only way they can prove their manhood is through a loaded gun,” he said. — AFP

Migrant caravan leaves an unexpected legacy

MEXICO CITY: A year ago, thousands of Central American men, women and children chasing the American dream arrived in Mexico in a massive caravan that has left a lasting legacy — just not the one people generally thought it would. Their arrival at the Guatemala-Mexico border on October 19, 2018, was a harbinger of the drama to come: defying the Mexican riot police sent to stop them, they forced their way through a series of barricades and flooded onto the border bridge, camping out until the authorities relented and let them cross.

Fleeing chronic poverty and brutal gang violence at home, they banded together in hopes of finding safety in numbers against the dangers of the journey, including criminal gangs that regularly extort, kidnap and kill migrants. The images made an impact around the world: carrying their meager belongings on their backs, many migrants pressed small children to their chests or held them by the hand. They hitched rides when they could, but often just walked in a giant sea of humanity, many in plastic shoes or flip-flops.

Honduran migrant Lizeth Garcia, 23, says she has mixed feelings when she looks back on the trek, which she made with her husband, Mauricio, and their then-one-year-old son. “People helped us a lot along the way, in Guatemala, in Mexico. I would ask for food for my baby, and they would always help,” she told AFP from Norfolk, Virginia, where she now works as a cleaner, wearing an ankle monitor while her asylum case works its way through court. But there are bad memories, too. “We slept in the street, for a really long time,” she said.

By the time they reached the border, her son had developed severe pneumonia and was vomiting blood. He had to be hospitalized. “My baby almost died on me in Tijuana,” Mexico, she said. Now, she and her husband are expecting their second child in two months’ time. If all goes according to plan, he will be born a US citizen.

Migrant ‘invasion’

Gearing up for crucial midterm elections in the United States that November, President Donald Trump immediately pounced, firing up his conservative base

with the rhetoric that helped get him elected in 2016. He sent nearly 6,000 troops to the border, calling the caravan an “invasion” and warning it was full of “gang members” and “criminals.”

It was not the first caravan of its kind. Activists have been organizing similar ones since 2010 to raise awareness of migrants’ plight. But it was by far the biggest, swelling to as many as 7,000 people, according to the United Nations. It inspired numerous other caravans, and seemed for a time as if it would change the face of migration in the Americas. Arguably, it did — though not in the way many people expected. “At the time, people were saying, ‘We’re seeing a change in the migrant experience,’” said Leticia Calderon, an expert on migration at Mexico’s Mora Institute. “But in the end, it didn’t create a new pattern of migration like many people thought it would.”

‘Mexico is the wall’

What there has been, instead, is a major crackdown on migration in all the countries involved. Trump got Mexico to dramatically restrict the surge of Central Americans crossing its territory. At the time of the caravan, Mexico looked set to soften its migration policy. Incoming President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador — a leftist elected in a landslide that July — talked of giving migrants opportunities and safeguarding their rights.

But then Trump threatened last May to impose steep tariffs on Mexico if the government did not curb undocumented migration. Fearing an economic crisis, Lopez Obrador acquiesced. His government struck a deal to avert the tariffs, promising to send 6,000 National Guardsmen to tighten the southern border. It has deployed many more: 12,000 Guardsmen to the southern border and 15,000 to the north.

It has also taken back more than 50,000 asylum-seekers while their cases are processed in the United States, under a policy known as “Remain in Mexico.” In a sign of how much things have changed, Mexican authorities swiftly and forcefully broke up a new caravan of 2,000 migrants earlier this month. “Mexico has turned into a great wall,” said Ruben Hernandez-Leon, a sociologist and migration expert at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Using US aid for leverage, Trump has also struck deals with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras requiring each to take in asylum-seekers from third countries who enter their territory. Such policies make it unlikely for now that there will be another caravan like the one that set out on October 13, 2018 in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and trekked more than 4,300 kilometers to the US border. — AFP

Canada election brings call to arms against gun violence

TORONTO: Long associated with gang violence, the Regent Park neighborhood of Canada’s largest city Toronto has changed. But firearms continue to claim lives, prompting calls ahead of national elections tomorrow for tougher gun controls. But those working on the ground to make the community safer and steer youths away from a life of crime say tougher laws are not enough to stem the violence.

“I’ve seen things here that you only see in movies,” said Christopher Rogers, a 35-year-old former gang member who grew up in the neighborhood and now leads a youth awareness group. “I have great memories here and I also have very sad memories here, stuff that changed my life and made me who I am today,” he adds.

Regent Park was one of the largest social housing projects in Canada when it was erected in the late 1940s, but drug trafficking, shoot-



TORONTO: Christopher Rogers, director of The Turk Foundation, poses for a photo after an interview in the Regent Park neighborhood. — AFP

ings and gang activity have since then made it synonymous with crime. Subject to an ambitious revitalization since 2005, it now looks very different, yet remains a hotbed of violence. Just last month, two young men were wounded in shootings. Since the beginning of the year, Toronto has been the scene of 370 shootings — more than twice as many as for the whole of 2014 — which killed 30 people.



TAPACHULA: A migrant woman and her baby are detained by Mexican authorities in Tapachula, Chiapas state, Mexico on October 12, 2019. — AFP