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ESSAYS

# THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

*What the effort to impeach President Trump is really about.*

by Michael Anton

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**P**EOPLE CAPABLE OF FEELING SHAME WOULD NOT HAVE IMMEDIATELY followed up the Russiagate hoax fiasco with another transparently phony—and in “substance” nearly identical—attempt to remove President Trump from office, overturn the 2016 election, and shower deplorable-Americans with contempt and hatred. But our ruling elites have

no shame.

That is not to say, however, that they are entirely cynical. The means by which they've so far tried to crush the Trump presidency may be nasty and illegitimate, but our overlords are 100% convinced of the righteousness of their cause, and of themselves. Hence they do not even need recourse to the cliché that the ends justify the means. The means are good because the end is sacred; they cannot countenance even the thought that the means might be suspect or (ahem) trumped up.

Near the beginning of his epic history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides distinguishes the “publicly voiced” causes of that conflict from the war’s “truest cause, though least in speech.” We may—indeed, must—subject the “impeachment” coup to the same bifurcated analysis.

### **Collusion?**

The Democrats, the Corporate-Left Media (CLM), the permanent bureaucracy or “administrative state,” and the “deep state” (which is not precisely the same thing), along with a few Republicans, have “publicly voiced” many causes for removing the president—a few specific but most maddeningly, yet safely, vague.

From the beginning—that is to say, from November 9, 2016—impeachment has been a cause in search of a trigger, an occasion. The president’s enemies hoped they’d finally hit pay dirt when an anonymous “whistle blower” alleged that the president made, or attempted to make, foreign aid to Ukraine contingent on that country’s government investigating his likely

2020 challenger. Or, in other words, that Trump attempted to “collude” with a foreign power to influence an American election.

Where have we heard *that* before? It only took two years, \$32 million, 19 lawyers, 40 FBI agents and other staff, 2,800 subpoenas, and 500 witnesses for a special counsel to “not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities,” according to the Mueller Report. Yet here we go again?

But let’s drill down a bit. If we are to take the current “publicly voiced” cause at face value, then we may say that the entire Washington establishment, plus most of the country’s elites, are trying to remove the president from office on the basis of an anonymous individual’s private opinion of the content of one phone call he heard about second- or possibly even thirdhand. A phone call, let’s remember, of which we have extensive notes that almost, but not quite, constitute a transcript—in other words, whose content everyone in the country can examine for himself.

That the “telcon” (national security geekspeak for what people are calling the “transcript”) does not support the “publicly voiced” cause is made plain by two facts. First, you can read it yourself and see that it doesn’t say what it is alleged to say. Second, if it *did* say what the president’s enemies want it to say, they could just quote it verbatim, which they never do, instead of deliberately mischaracterizing it, which they always do.

Only two substantive points make the phone call at all interesting. First, President Trump very plainly wants to get to the bottom of the entire, still-

obscure “election-meddling” story of 2016. That includes not just “deep state” attempts to prevent his election and to set him up for removal should the first effort fail, but also allegations of Russian hacking against American targets, including the Democratic National Committee. It appears—and the Justice Department apparently agrees—that some actors within Ukraine may have had something to do with some of this, possibly colluding (there’s that word again!) with a shady, Democrat-linked tech firm called CrowdStrike, though we as yet know nothing like the full story. Trump wants to know and asked the Ukrainian president for his help in finding out. To some, Trump’s curiosity about this wild “conspiracy theory” is alone proof of his unfitness. Because, as we all know, the complete lack of evidence that anyone in the Obama White House, Justice Department, FBI, CIA, or Office of the Director of National Intelligence colluded with each other, with the Democratic Party, with the Clinton campaign, or with a foreign spy to tar Trump with the false charge of colluding with Russia definitively proves that all “conspiracy theories” are manufactured fever dreams.

Still, you might think that those railing loudest about “foreign interference” over the last three years would also want to know, but of course we all know what a howler that is. The loudest railers are precisely those most responsible for, and most involved in, the illicit effort to spy on and sabotage candidate Trump, set him up for a non-crime he didn’t commit, abuse their power to destroy lives, and much else. So, no, they don’t want to know—or, more precisely, they don’t want *you* to know. The more that becomes known, the more legal—and possibly criminal—jeopardy they may face.

Though I admit to being somewhat puzzled by their evident alarm. Many

others have called Russiagate the “biggest political scandal in American history” and, Lord knows, I agree. The amazing thing about it, then, is how little accountability there has been. From what I can tell, two individuals—Peter Strzok and Andrew McCabe, the latter on the cusp of retirement—were removed from their jobs. That’s it. No criminal charges or anything else. What are these “deep-staters” so worried about? They run everything and take care of their own. Even with a president in office who, they allege, hates them and routinely abuses his power, they’ve—as yet—faced no consequences at all.

Just to (re-)ask one question: who leaked the highly classified details of General Michael Flynn’s December 2016 phone call with the Russian ambassador? That’s a felony. The universe of people with access to such sensitive information is very small, and the timing ensures that the crime was committed by a very senior member of the Obama Administration and/or very senior operative of the national security state. Yet I see no sign official Washington is the least bit interested in this question. Nor, despite the Trump Administration’s nominally running the federal government for almost three years (more below on who *really* runs it), have I seen indications of any action being taken to find answers. I hope that Attorney General William Barr, Special Counsel John Durham, and Inspector General Michael Horowitz will reassure me that American law has not become a tool for elites to enforce, or not, at their discretion and in their interests.

Back to the Ukraine call. The second question President Trump asked the Ukrainian president is another “publicly voiced” cause to seek his removal.

That question regarded a specific instance of a well-known Washington-insider phenomenon. It is a measure of how insouciantly our elites accept and even welcome the immense corruption of our government that they raise not a single eyebrow at the phenomenon that underlay the president's question: exactly how is it that well-connected Americans with no particular or relevant skill sets can "earn" enormous sums of money for doing, essentially, nothing?

We all know how, of course. They're not, exactly, doing "nothing." They're providing access—in some instances directly, in others prospectively. When a company or bank or hedge fund or real estate developer or foreign government slides big payments over to someone close to someone who might soon be president, they know what they're doing, and they know—from experience—that the investment is sound. Tom Wolfe coined the term "favor bank" to explain how "the law" really works in the Bronx County criminal justice system. You do favors expecting to have favors done in return. There are no written contracts or enforcement mechanisms, but the system "works" because people know it's in their interest to honor it. In modern international politics, to pay someone a few million to do "nothing" is to expect to be paid back somehow. The payees know this, and endeavor to make good, lest they risk future payments.

Understand this plainly: Trump may well be impeached, ostensibly, for *asking* about this corrupt arrangement. But no one is ever impeached for *engaging* in it. Nor can our elites, who almost all benefit from this system one way or another, muster the integrity to do, or even say, anything against it.

## Cover-Up?

Though currently central to the “publicly voiced” case, this charge is not the only one levelled. It is also insinuated that the administration somehow acted improperly by not making the telcon available within the government to a wide enough range of bureaucrats. But that’s preposterous.

Such documents are inherently products of the executive branch. They may be shown to, or withheld from, absolutely anyone the president and his senior staff want. To argue anything else is to presuppose that bureaucrats whom the president doesn’t know and likely will never see somehow are entitled—have a “right”—to review anything and everything they wish. Does this sound reasonable to anyone not out to get Trump? Would you run your business this way? Or would you try to limit information—especially sensitive information—on a “need-to-know” basis? Formally, the U.S. government insists that it operates according to the latter principle, but in reality, everyone in Washington believes himself so important that he becomes indignant when not allowed to see what he believes by right he ought to see.

Then ask yourself: assuming the president and his team *did* try to limit access to this or other documents, why would they do that? Perhaps to prevent illegal and damaging leaks? What could possibly give rise to *that* concern? I dunno—maybe because this has been, and continues to be, the most leaked-against White House and administration in the history of the United States government?

When one thinks for a second about the impact this particular document

has already had—the president *may well be impeached over it*, on the say-so of precisely such a bureaucrat from whom his team allegedly tried, but evidently failed, to withhold it—can one blame Trump or his team for trying to limit the dissemination of internal documents? A saner response is to wish they had restricted the circle even more. The detail, alleged in the press, that the “whistleblower” (more on him below) heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend, etc., does not, to say the least, suggest any kind of cover-up. Apparently, the Trump Administration’s practice of information dissemination is far closer to the Washington ideal than to the hyper-secrecy alleged by the president’s enemies.

“Cover-up” is the latest “publicly voiced” charge. A member of the National Security Council staff alleges that he attempted to include language in the telcon that others insisted on excluding. This is held to be a very serious charge.

Here’s what they’re not telling you. The document, as noted, is not a transcript; there’s no stenographer on the line and such calls are not recorded. Several people, however, will be listening and taking notes for the express purpose of creating the telcon. These will include duty officers in the White House Situation Room, who are not necessarily—and are not expected to be—experts on the country being called; rather, they are covering the call simply because it takes place during their shifts. These duty officers, with the aid of impressive but not infallible voice recognition software, prepare a first draft of the telcon. Since neither the voice recognition software nor human notetakers can catch every word perfectly, sometimes “Inaudible” appears in brackets. But ellipses—about which much



is currently being made—represent not omissions but natural pauses in the conversation. This is before we even get into the thorny issues raised by sequential translation, which is necessary for most foreign leader calls.

After the first draft of the telcon is prepared, the duty officer hands it over to the National Security Council's (NSC's) executive secretary (ExecSec), the office responsible for all NSC paper flow and records management (among other things). ExecSec then routes the telcon to specific individuals, whom the national security advisor has personally authorized to review it, for their "chop" or edits. The person responsible for shepherding the document through this phase of the process is the "country director," the NSC staffer who coordinates policy and handles documents with respect to a given country or countries. The country director will, in almost all cases, have been listening to the call. He will check the draft telcon against his notes and make corrections, even as others cross-check against their own notes. These will include the relevant senior director (the country director's boss) and others, up to and including the national security advisor.

The key takeaway here is that the country director is the not highest or final authority on the content of the call. He's *one* person who heard it; others may have heard it or parts of it differently. And the country director does not have the final say over what the telcon says. He works in a chain of command and has superiors. His senior director—who presumably was also on the call—can overrule him. If other "equities" such as classification or legal issues are affected, the senior director for intelligence programs and the legal advisor can as well. Ultimately the final say falls to the national security advisor—who, in almost all cases, would also have been listening to

the call.

The person alleging a cover-up, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, was, at the time, the country director for Ukraine. But the way he's being presented—and has presented himself—is meant to convey a much grander impression. No less than the “whistleblower,” he is being sold as a patriotic, dedicated, impartial, non-partisan, career officer simply standing up for what's right. And he may well be all or most of those things; I have no doubt that he sees himself this way.

But he is also, unquestionably, a mid-level officer in the U.S. Army working a mid-level staff job at the National Security Council, i.e., someone who as such has no standing even to serve as the final arbiter of a telcon, much less make policy or remove a president.

We actually don't know what language the country director was prevented from including in the telcon, but we do know—from those who leaked an anti-Trump account of his testimony to the *New York Times*—that “[t]he phrases do not fundamentally change lawmakers' understanding of the call.”

What a marvelous sentence! And how obviously, tautologically, base-coveringly true! Those who want to use the call as a basis for impeaching Trump are not deterred from doing so based on this testimony, and those who never thought the call amounts to what the Democrats say it does are not now persuaded otherwise. The only way, of course, to judge whose interpretation is right would be to make public the allegedly excised phrases. But if they were actually helpful for impeachment, they already would have been leaked. So don't expect to read them any time soon.

But at least the country director was actually *in* the NSC chain of command and so had some standing to weigh in on the issue. This cannot be said of the so-called “whistleblower,” who of course is nothing of the sort—not as defined by law nor in any commonsense understanding. As to the former, the statute is clear: officials qualify for legal protection if they blow the whistle on activities within their own organizations and relevant to those organizations’ official duties. There is no possible way to interpret this particular “whistle” as consistent with that standard. By definition, the president’s phone call was not conducted under the auspices of the “whistleblower’s” “home agency” (reportedly the CIA) nor did it have anything to do with intelligence matters. Which the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, a sort of federal Nocturnal Council for legal matters, affirmed in an official opinion.

As to the latter, ask yourself the following question. As noted, the “whistleblower” reportedly wasn’t on the call and never saw the telcon. Given that several—probably at least a dozen—others were and did, why didn’t one of *them* lodge a complaint? One—our country director—did complain to the NSC’s top lawyer, who could find no wrongdoing. The others? Nothing. Is it possible most of them also saw no wrongdoing? Or were too cowed to complain?

But then the question arises: complain to *whom*? Neither the NSC nor its parent organization, the Executive Office of the President (EOP), have a formal whistleblower process. If one wishes to make a complaint, one has five options: complain within your chain of command, complain to the lawyers, complain to the White House chief of staff, complain to Congress,

or complain to the press. Even our country director declined four of these five avenues, and all the others apparently declined them all. Why? Perhaps someone calculated that the optics would be better—more “disinterested,” less nakedly political—if the complaint came from somewhere else, a “patriotic career civil servant just doing his job.” This would also explain the Democrats’ head-spinning bait-and-switch about the “whistleblower,” from “This brave soul is the federal Frank Serpico of our time” to “Who? Oh, no, we don’t need to hear from him, move along” in a matter of nanoseconds. The “whistleblower” was just a tool, witting or not (I’m betting on the former) to get something new going after the ignominious collapse of Russiagate. His usefulness over—indeed, his presence in the drama now counterproductive—we are instructed to forget he ever existed.

### **Changing Policy?**

Another, deeper cause for the current show trial is less “publicly voiced” than beclouded with pretentious misdirection, because the president’s enemies know that, were they to state it clearly, the American people would scoff in their faces. Our foreign policy priesthood is 100% certain that the United States *must* take the side of Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. President Trump has expressed skepticism about the wisdom of such a commitment. He wonders why the conflict is our problem, when a not-inconsiderable number of European countries closer to the issue demand action from us but do very little themselves. He worries about the possibility of the United States getting drawn into war with Russia. And he’s concerned that, given historic corruption in Ukraine, American aid there may not be well spent.

Yet despite these eminently reasonable misgivings, the president has, for the most part, gone along with elite opinion in supporting Ukraine. It's worth pausing to note the brazen hypocrisy of Democrats on this point, given that the Obama Administration did far less for Ukraine, refusing to provide the so-called "lethal aid" that Trump, however reluctantly, approved. But apparently the latter's efforts have been insufficiently eager for permanent Washington, which finds his lack of enthusiasm and speed outrageous. How dare this man question our strategic alliance with Ukraine!

Here are some relevant—and revealing—quotations from the country director discussed above, from his publicly-released opening statement before the secret, closed-door congressional hearing:

*[A] strong and independent Ukraine is critical to U.S. national security interests because Ukraine is a frontline state and a bulwark against Russian aggression.*

This may be true, though—nothing against Ukraine—I don't think so. The country just isn't that important *to us* for the same reason that Canada and Mexico are not that important to Russia. But even if I'm wrong about that, the above statement is still fundamentally an *opinion*—the opinion of someone not entitled to make policy. He is surely welcome to state his opinion, when appropriate to do so as part of his official duties and within the chain of command, but that's it as far as his opinion goes. Actual policy—the question of whether “a strong and independent Ukraine is critical to U.S. national security interests”—is well above his paygrade, properly decided by the president, his cabinet and senior advisors, and members of

the Senate who advise and consent on cabinet secretaries and treaties. At least, that's how the parchment on which the charter of our liberties is written *says* it's supposed to work.

*The U.S. government policy community's view is that the election of President Volodymyr Zelensky and the promise of reforms to eliminate corruption will lock in Ukraine's Western-leaning trajectory, and allow Ukraine to realize its dream of a vibrant democracy and economic prosperity.*

What on earth is “[t]he U.S. government policy community”? This is not made clear in the statement, but from the context it would appear to be something like the “deep state” we are elsewhere told does not exist except in the minds of fevered “conspiracy theorists.” Elite conventional wisdom appears to have evolved into: “The deep state is not a thing—and thank God it's there to save our democracy!”

*I became aware of outside influencers promoting a false narrative of Ukraine inconsistent with the consensus views of the interagency.*

Now we're getting somewhere! The “interagency” refers to the process through which various officials from different government departments get together to debate issues, raise concerns, hammer out differences, try to reach consensus and—when and if they cannot—crisply and accurately frame their remaining disagreements for decision by higher-ups. But this last happens less often than you might think, and we may say that the whole process is designed to prevent that outcome and instead to produce

“consensus” at the lowest possible level and on up the chain. Which it mostly does: what else would you expect from a bunch of bureaucrats with similar backgrounds, educations, careers, and outlooks? Hence this “consensus” is often indistinguishable from “groupthink.”

But whether epistemologically unassailable or complete madness (in the real world, it's more likely than not to be incoherent mush), “interagency consensus” is *not* policy—or at least it's not supposed to be. It may help *inform* policy, but elected and appointed officials—and in a unitary executive, that ultimately means the president—alone get to *make* policy. The presupposition of our country director—and his like-minded peers in the deep state—is the opposite: policy is made in and by the “interagency,” whose decrees are holy writ that it is illegitimate for the president to challenge. Hence:

*The United States and Ukraine are and must remain strategic partners, working together to realize the shared vision of a stable, prosperous, and democratic Ukraine that is integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community.*

But in the immortal words of Jeff Lebowski: “Yeah, well, you know, that's just like, uh, your opinion, man.” Actually, more accurately, that's a perfect distillation of national security groupthink, replete with all the buzzwords you'd expect but easy to unravel if only you think about it. In what sense are the United States and Ukraine “strategic partners”? What interests do we really have in common politically, culturally, economically, or militarily? To what extent do we really “share” a “vision” or even see the world the same

way? And why is it so important *to us* that Ukraine be “integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community,” which seems to get more fragile and fractured every year, a process that accelerates the larger it becomes? Finally, try listening to that sentence through Russian ears. You don’t have to be a Putin sycophant to grasp its alarming character. “Integration into the Euro-Atlantic community” sounds to Moscow like “extend anti-Russian Western alliance to 2,300 kilometers of my southwestern border.” Would a neoliberal NatSec geek tolerate similar language from Russia about Canada or Mexico? Russia may be a bad actor in many ways, but to take up a cause that’s not really important to us but that Moscow considers a threat to a vital organ is pointless folly.

Yet this is the “U.S. government policy community consensus” that we’re supposed to follow uncritically and impeach a president for questioning. Do the American people feel any such urgency to arm, finance, and otherwise yoke themselves to Ukraine? Not that they necessarily feel any ill will toward Kiev. But with a broken immigration system, porous southern border, wage stagnation, rising health care costs, declining living standards and lifespans, and nearly two decades of war from which they have, to say the least, not much benefited, is *aid to Ukraine* on anyone’s top ten list? Top 100? As blogger Steve Sailer put it:

*[J]ust wait until the public realizes that this brouhaha is about the president delaying foreign aid payments to Ukraine. There’s nothing more sacred in the eyes of American voters than our national duty to pay foreign aid promptly.*



If this isn't proof positive that the "deep state" is real, then what would be? Here we have an unelected cabal trying to take down the elected president, ostensibly over an issue that the American people have never voted on and don't care about but which the "the U.S. government policy community" insists is so important that a democratic election must be overturned for its sake. Actually, to the extent that the American people *have* voted on this issue, in electing a man who very clearly promised to reduce American commitments abroad, they voted against the "U.S. government policy community consensus."

Yet the "interagency" somehow believes that its decrees *are* democracy and that it's somehow "undemocratic" to question them. This is how it's possible for so many of Trump's enemies to impugn him as an enemy of "democracy," sanctify their patently undemocratic attempts to unseat him, and portray themselves as democracy's saviors. As Christopher Caldwell put it recently in these pages, according to this understanding

*democracy [is] a set of progressive outcomes that democracies tend to choose, and may even have chosen at some time in the past. If a progressive law or judicial ruling or executive order coincides with the "values" of experts, a kind of mystical ratification results, and the outcome is what the builders of the European Union call an *acquis*—something permanent, unassailable, and constitutional-seeming.*  
["What Is Populism?" Fall 2018]

Aid to Ukraine has been decided! Debate over! No more votes and no changes! That would be "undemocratic"!

## Challenging the Consensus

The man who best sees right through this thinking is, of course, Professor John Marini. Because I have spoken at length of his thought in the *CRB* (“Draining the Swamp,” Winter 2018/19), I here offer the barest summary of the most relevant points. Beginning in the late 19th century and intensifying in the mid-1960s, elites inside and outside our government have centralized authority in a “fourth branch,” the executive branch’s agencies and bureaucracies. Marini refers to those institutions, the people in them, and their governing philosophy and methods as “the administrative state.” Administrative state rule is fundamentally anti-democratic and anti-constitutional, intended to be rule by “expert consensus.”

The experts don’t like to be challenged—especially by non-expert voters or the politicians they elect to limit administrative state power. Here, finally, we come to the “truest cause, though least in speech” of the impeachment freight train: the administrative state is striking back at a mortal threat. As Marini explained in a recent speech,

*Many great scandals arise not as a means of exposing corruption, but as a means of attacking political foes while obscuring the political differences that are at issue. This is especially likely to occur in the aftermath of elections that threaten the authority of an established order. In such circumstances, scandal provides a way for defenders of the status quo to undermine the legitimacy of those who have been elected on a platform of challenging the status quo—diluting, as a consequence, the authority of the electorate.*

And the chaser:

*The key to understanding how this works is to see that most political scandals, sooner or later, are transformed into legal dramas. As legal dramas, scandals become understood in non-partisan terms. The way in which they are resolved can have decisive political impacts, but those in charge of resolving them are the “neutral” prosecutors, judges, and bureaucrats who make up the permanent (and unelected) government, not the people’s elected representatives. To resort to scandal in this way is thus a tacit admission that the scandalmongers no longer believe they are able to win politically. To paraphrase Clausewitz, scandal provides the occasion for politics by other means.*

It is no accident or coincidence that the only three presidents who have fundamentally challenged the administrative state—and questioned its song sheet, the “U.S. government policy community consensus”—have been dogged by “scandal” and threatened with impeachment: Richard Nixon by Watergate, Ronald Reagan by Iran Contra, and now Trump. (Whatever you think of Bill Clinton’s impeachment, it was emphatically *not* driven or supported by the administrative state, which protected him at every turn.) Trump would likely take this as small consolation, but it’s a measure of how much he’s feared that his enemies are running this play against him now, rather than simply trying to defeat him next year. Which more than suggests they doubt they can.

Simply based on what we know so far, the whole thing looks engineered, like those “lawfare” cases in which clever lawyers and activists find

sympathetic plaintiffs, carefully choose friendly venues, and file lawsuits not to redress specific, genuine injustices but to force changes in policy—anti-democratically, it goes without saying. That’s the real reason nobody with firsthand knowledge came forward but left it to a distant “whistleblower” to get this train started: because those driving it understand that, by pitching the matter out to an agency covered by a whistleblower statute, with a formal whistleblower process, they could begin the transformation of this inherently political process into a technical, legal matter. This supposition only gains support from reports of “collusion” (what else can one call it?) between the “whistleblower” and Democratic congressional staff. The parade of witnesses in secret testimony also looks carefully orchestrated.

The secrecy has partly ended—but only after the Democrats gathered its fruits and shaped them into a “narrative” to spoon-feed to the public. The playbook is the same one that failed with the Russia hoax: selectively leak to create a fog, a miasma of vaguely negative-sounding “facts” or allegations that seem ominous but also too complex and in-the-weeds for ordinary folk to follow. Then publicly “confirm” those leaks as the authoritative account of the “scandal.” None of the actual facts adds up to any actual wrongdoing, but the hope is that regular people won’t notice and won’t listen to those who do. Leave it to us experts: we know wrongdoing when we see it! If the actual specifics of what we’re alleging don’t actually appear to you to amount to “treason, bribery, [or] other high crimes and misdemeanors,” as the Constitution’s Article II, section 4 requires, that’s only because you’re not an expert.

### **Three Possible Outcomes**

The worst charge thus far alleged against President Trump is that he attempted to make \$400 million in aid to Ukraine contingent on that country's government investigating possible corruption by the Bidens. This is the much hoped for "smoking gun," the "quid pro quo"—as if the foreign policy of any country in history has ever been borne aloft on the gentle vapors of pure altruism.

The central question would appear to be this: suppose that charge were abundantly substantiated by witnesses and documents—as it is not by the telcon—would that be sufficient to convince a majority of Americans, and a supermajority of senators, that Trump should be removed from office? In the latter case, possibly—Republican senators tend to be wobbly, and many want Trump gone for reasons that have nothing to do with this specific allegation, which merely offers a convenient excuse.

But in the former case, I don't see it. Especially since a) no aid was actually withheld; b) no investigation was actually launched; c) the American people don't care about Ukraine and would probably prefer to get their \$400 million back; and d) they would inevitably ask: so *were*, in fact, Joe Biden and his son on the take from a foreign government? And if it looks like they might have been, *why*, exactly, was it improper for the president to ask about it?

Trump's enemies' answer to the last question is: because the president was asking a foreign government to investigate a political opponent for purely personal gain. Really? Is potential corruption by a former vice president—and potential future president—and his family a *purely* private matter, of *no* conceivable import or interest to the public affairs of the United States?

That's what you have to insist on to maintain that the request was improper. That's the line we can expect the Democrat-CLM axis to flog, shamelessly and aggressively. But will a majority of Americans buy it? Especially since career officials at the Department of Justice already determined, and anti-Trump witnesses appearing before Representative Adam Schiff's secret star chamber reluctantly conceded, that nothing Trump did or is alleged to have done was technically, you know, illegal.

It's both infuriating and amusing to read the intellectual Left, led by the *New York Times*, pivot from Project 1619—that racist, white supremacist founding!—to founders-as-paragons-of-democratic-integrity, whose wise Constitution reserved impeachment just for such dire but foreseeable emergencies.

Impeachment, we are often reminded, is a political, not a legal, measure. That's true to the letter of the Constitution of course, but not to the way “impeachment” is being used now. If Trump's enemies had sufficient political strength—which means the support of the people—they would have already impeached him. As it is, they've held but one narrowly procedural vote and are hinting that another may not happen until next year.

They need—and they know they need—the intervening time to further the transformation of this fundamentally political assault into a legal matter, and to find, assert, or manufacture some technical violation of the law. At the end of the day, “high crimes and misdemeanors” means whatever you can get 218 representatives and 67 senators to vote for. So long as the phrase is understood politically, the latter threshold—at least—is out of reach. The hope is that forcing the public to accept a legal understanding

will bring both within reach.

And it might. It worked against Nixon. It almost worked against Reagan. But let's be clear: if it works this time, there are only three possible outcomes:

*First, deplorable-Americans will meekly accept President Trump's removal, in which case the country as a self-governing republic will be finished; the elite coup will have succeeded, their grip on power cemented. With all due respect to the vice president, this is not the way—these are not the people on the backs of whom—he should wish to enter the Oval Office. And I am confident he will not.*

*Second, deplorable-Americans will revolt at the ballot box and punish the elites in a series of elections that put in power serious statesmen intent on rooting out corruption and reestablishing democratic accountability.*

*Or, third, deplorable-Americans' attempt to set their government aright via ballots will not avail, as it has not so often in the past; they will realize that it has not, conclude that it never will, and resolve by any means necessary to get out from under the thumbs of people who so obviously hate them and wish to rule them without their consent.*

Only one of these possibilities is healthy for the continued survival of republican government as currently constituted.

Oh, and let's also be clear about something else: if the Republicans "collude" with this sham and force the removal of a president whose approval rating

within his party hovers north of 90%, and whose voters scarcely understand—much less agree with—the “case” against him, they will destroy the party forever. I don’t often make predictions, because I’m not good at it, but this one is easy. They will have removed all doubt that they are anything but ruling class apparatchiks, adjuncts, and flunkies of the administrative state from which they take orders.

And let none of them dare gaslight us with the trite dismissal that Trump’s removal would not overturn the 2016 election results because the president’s replacement was also elected. Trump’s intraparty enemies hate him, and wish to be rid of him, precisely because he is not one of them, because he stands for, and represents, something fundamentally different. Getting rid of him is, for them, a way to get back to business as usual. But there is no going back. A few of them in safely anti-Trump states or districts may survive the president’s removal but the vast majority will not. A new party—a Trumpian populist-nationalist party—will arise from the Republican Party’s ashes. More blue collar in economic orientation and less in hock to coastal and financial elites, it will do a better job of attracting Democrats and independents—possibly pointing the way to the first real national majority coalition since the Reagan era. And that new party will not welcome the traitors, who will have to make do with contributorships on CNN and MSNBC. Assuming any slots are available.

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