

The Trump-Biden and the Russia-Ukraine Saga: The Game is About Eurasia

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Global Research, December 26, 2019

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On December 23rd, the Washington Post ran a piece exploring the possible motivations behind US president Donald Trump's decision to pause US military aid to Ukraine on July 12th last year. On September 28th 2018 and February 16th respectively, President Trump had signed into law 2 bills from Congress which approved a combined \$391 million in military aid to Ukraine, including the provision of lethal weaponry.

The question is extensively explored in the Washington Post article, as in other articles on the issue, as to whether or not Trump's July 12th decision to withhold the military aid violated the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act, which states that once Congress appropriates funds and the president signs the relevant spending bill, then it is not within the president's legal power to withhold those funds.

The Washington Post and other media have also tentatively explored the unresolved question as to what connection, if any, Trump's July 12th decision to withhold the funds might have had to his subsequent July 25th telephone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, which became central to arguments for his impeachment. Was Trump using the withholding of aid in order to pressure Zelensky into launching investigations into Hunter Biden's Ukrainian business-interests, and those of other senior figures in the US Democratic Party? To be fair, the Washington Post article, and a surprisingly high proportion of the other media-coverage of these questions, have been soberly analytical. Refreshingly, the coverage has managed to avoid the worst excesses of liberal Trump Derangement Syndrome.

I believe that the legal debate is largely incidental to what is really happening, and that any moral debate on this issue is even more superfluous than the legal debate. However, before we set the complex legal issues aside, it should be briefly stated that they are not unimportant. Even if we understand that 99% of everybody's motivations for getting entangled in the legal debate are politically partisan, it is at least conceivable that a person might wish to ask these questions from a non-partisan, purely legal point of view, and that purely juridical concern should not be dismissed out of hand.

Regarding the Bidens' role in this fiasco, one surprising aspect is that it took so many years for the controversy regarding Burisma Holdings to go viral, even in alt-media. The facts that not only Hunter Biden but also Devon Archer, a former John Kerry campaign manager, sat on Burisma's board of directors, and that Burisma was extensively invested in shale-gas extraction in the vicinity of the Donbas war-zone, had been public knowledge in the Russian-speaking world ever since 2014.

However, in order to understand what is really happening at the deeper systemic level, we need to also set the endless cycle of allegations and counter-allegations aside. The petty political or financial agendas of the Bidens, or Trump, or this or that member of Congress, are incidental to the big systemic picture. Sure, all the players have their own self-interested petty motivations, but the sum of all those motivations does not amount to an explanation of why the game is being played in the first place. Politicians, and occasionally their wastrel offspring, are merely unwitting instruments of history, not agents of history. The parameters of the game are determined by a core geo-strategic logic.

What vital geo-strategic interest does the United States have in Ukraine?

Back in 2014, there was certainly hope in US business circles that Ukraine could be a profitable colony, and some US companies including Monsanto have profited from their expansion into Ukraine. However, for most US commercial interests, it quickly became clear in the immediate post-coup period that Ukraine was simply too much of a self-destructive black hole to hope that it might ever become a profitable colony. Ukraine's culture of blatant kleptocracy was simply too pervasive and ingrained for most western concerns' money to be safe there.

So rather than the economic exploitation of Ukraine, the United States' vital geo-strategic interest in Ukraine centrally stems from the point that the maintenance of permanent instability in Ukraine presents developmental and security-challenges to Russia. Furthermore, the maintenance of perpetual Ukrainian hostility toward Russia is useful to larger US geo-strategic interests. We need to remember Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1997 statement that "without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire." Brzezinski had identified 3 "geo-strategic pivots" on the Eurasian land-mass which were vital to the task of protecting broader and more global US interests – Iran, Turkey and Ukraine. We have to admit that, as badly as the US foreign policy establishment miscalculated in Ukraine, they still got a piece of what they wanted. The loss of Ukraine's potential membership was a major blow to the Eurasian Customs Union's potential for economic reach.

Furthermore, Ukraine's geography renders it a perfect instrument to drive an economic wedge between Germany and Russia. The trajectory of Russian-German economic integration which has developed steadily over the past 20 years was unquestionably contrary to the decaying hegemon's interest. Ever since the late 19th century, American geo-strategists have morbidly feared the economic synthesis of Germany's technological resources with Russia's human resources and natural resources.

In this regard, all of the legal allegations and counter-allegations regarding Trump and the Bidens are merely incidental noise, and the attached moral arguments are even more absurd.

Here's what's really happening:

Trump's role as a political outsider in Washington is, in this context, manifested in the point that he still thinks like a businessman, not like a geo-strategic planner. As Ukraine is simply too dysfunctional to be turned into a profitable US colony, Trump simply has no meaningful interest in Ukraine. Trump has most probably never bothered reading Halford Mackinder or George Kennan. His critics and political enemies will argue that, as a mere businessman, Trump doesn't understand is that the game is not about "Ukraine" – the game is about Eurasia.

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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