

Impeachment Drama Is Fraught with Traps for Sane Observers

by Conrad Black



It is painful to take issue with my blessed friend Peggy Noonan, and also painful to read both that she has effectively joined the disreputable impeachers of Donald Trump and has invoked a disingenuous argument in support of that position.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on November 2, she asserted that it is clear President Trump used his office to ask the president of Ukraine to destroy Joe Biden politically and that he used U.S. financial assistance to Ukraine as an incentive, and the withholding of it as a threat to incite such activity. And she wrote that the only remaining argument is whether that constitutes an article of impeachment that warrants removal from office.

In fact, there is no evidence that there was a direct connection between Ukraine investigating Biden and the

assistance involved. There is no evidence that Trump was asking for more than the facts of Biden and his son's exposure in Ukraine—if the Bidens' conduct was unexceptionable that finding would have fully satisfied Trump's request to know what happened. The entire United States should want to know if Biden's son was influence-peddling in Ukraine, China, and Romania—as has been alleged—and it should equally wish to know if the charges are unfounded.

Peggy Noonan posed the question in her *Wall Street Journal* column, "Can we prove through elicited testimony, that the president made clear to the leader of (Ukraine) . . . that the U.S. would release congressionally authorized foreign aid only if the foreign leader publicly committed to launch an investigation that would benefit the president in his 2020 reelection effort?" Her answer: "We all know that."

We don't know anything of the kind. The absence of evidence that information on Biden and aid were connected and that the president was directing President Zelensky to produce a condemnation of Biden and his son is precisely why this spurious Star Chamber conducted by the most chronically dishonest person in American public life (Adam Schiff, though only by a nose over House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler, both Democratic congressmen), should not even get to the Senate.

If there were convincing evidence on these points, that Trump was saying to Zelensky: "If you want any assistance from this country, give me an investigation of the Bidens' activity in your country that demonstrates their corruption," then there would be an issue that justified being enacted as an article of impeachment. The question Peggy Noonan posed of whether this justified the president's removal from office would then be the subject of a Senate trial.

Unfortunately, this astounding column on Saturday, from one of America's most judicious and generous-hearted columnists, also

poisoned the waters further. She asked if our esteem for Franklin D. Roosevelt would decline if we now discovered that when he sent Britain 50 moth-balled destroyers in September 1940 and created and persuaded the Congress to enact the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, (giving Britain and Canada effectively anything they asked for and they could pay for it when they were able, and in the meantime would lease some naval and air bases to the U.S.), he had said to Winston Churchill: "We'll lend you the ships and the aid if you announce your government is investigating that ruffian Wendell Willkie."

It is shocking to me that this writer would exploit the unfamiliarity of the average *Journal* reader with how absurd is the alleged simile with what really happened nearly 70 years ago.

Roosevelt released the destroyers in the middle of his campaign for a third term on the advice of future Secretary of State Dean Acheson that he didn't need congressional approval. Churchill was leading a country under intense air bombardment and attempted submarine strangulation by Hitler's Nazi regime, the most evil and dangerous threat to Western Civilization there has ever been. Willkie, the Republican presidential candidate in 1940, was friendly with Roosevelt, supported his foreign policy, and went to Britain just prior to the Lend-Lease vote in Congress on behalf of the president, and returned to the United States to testify in favor of Lend-Lease in congressional hearings.

All of civilization as we would define it rested almost entirely and solely on Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt between the fall of France in June 1940 and the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Roosevelt's policy of "all aid short of war" to Hitler's enemies is generally regarded as one of the sublime moments of American statesmanship. The analogy with this Ukraine charade is almost unimaginably spurious.

Noonan goes on to urge John Bolton, the former national security advisor, to give the Schiff committee the evidence it needs to secure the removal from office of this president, (regardless, in effect, of what the facts John Bolton knows may be). Noonan clearly has had problems throughout this presidency with what she perceives of Donald Trump's character, as well as having been often and perhaps almost constantly appalled by what she regards, not altogether incomprehensibly, to be his uncouth personality. Fair and magnanimous person that she is, she has until now stopped short of publicly joining the ranks of the president's enemies. During the 2016 campaign, she perceptively noted and reported how effectively Trump struck a responsive chord in a great many voters, long before more than a few prominent commentators had noticed. She also wrote very thoughtfully about the 2017 inauguration, with particular sensitivity for Melania Trump. (Disclosure practices probably require me to mention that we have exchanged some thoroughly good-natured emails about candidate and President Trump over the last three years.)

Peggy Noonan rose to prominence when her marvelous English composition and phrase-making as President Ronald Reagan's chief speechwriter united with that president's almost hypnotic powers as an orator. We are all unlicensed psychiatrists and I have surmised that this president's less gentlemanly, less kindly, and less philosophical traits have contrasted so vividly with her warm recollections of her close collaboration with President Reagan that this may have exacerbated her disenchantment with the incumbent. That would be understandable, but I had hoped that her recollections of how quickly much of the media assaulted President Reagan over the Iran-Contra affair and predicted, with some relish, that his administration would disintegrate, would cause her to have a little sympathy with this president over the Ukraine events, which on what we know, are less legally controversial and much less embarrassing to the president than the matter of cycling

aid to the Nicaraguan Contras via Israel and Iran in contravention of pertinent legislation was to President Reagan.

I don't believe the amendment that was violated then was constitutional, but the whole project was insane and the president was sorely embarrassed, had to declare lapse of memory under oath approximately 140 times, and his national security adviser, Admiral John Poindexter, took the legal bullet for him. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was indicted by the typically overzealous prosecutor and was rightly pardoned (along with Democratic former defense secretary Clark Clifford in an unrelated matter) by President George H.W. Bush. I believe a veteran of the Iran-Contra fiasco owed more sympathy to this president, whatever the lack of rapport between them personally.

I have no standing to judge Peggy Noonan (and I like and admire her very much). But she has given us another demonstration of how fraught these times are, like Hillary Clinton accusing Representative Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) and Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein of being "Russian agents." Sane partisans become insane and the most open-minded of commentators become white-washers of the unspeakable Schiff-Nadler outrages. This impeachment controversy is a sham from A-to-Z and the sooner it is thrown out by either house of Congress the better, for the Democrats as much as for the Republicans.