



Aaron Maté on U.S. Involvement in Venezuela and Ukraine and "America First" Contradictions

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Michael Tracey (MT): All right. Our next guest is Aaron Maté. A household name to many of you, I'm sure. Definitely close to my heart. And, we're going to get him to comment on his impressions of my Fred Fleitz interview, among other things. So let's go to Aaron. Aaron, how's it going?

Aaron Maté (AM): Hey, Michael. How are you doing?

MT: So, did you listen to that? And if so, what do you make of it? What are some of your impressions?

AM: Well, first of all, like all your interviews, you did a great job. And I just want to say on behalf of the System Update community, there's a contingent of us who are inspired by Kamala Harris, a new generation taking the reins, replacing the stale old generation, and maybe it's time for regime change also at System Update, I'm just saying.

MT: Aaron, I've already sent a warning. I've already formally warned Glenn that there's a growing clamour for me to oust him, just as Kamala ousted Joe. So he better watch his back.

AM: Yeah.

MT: You never know what might happen.

AM: I fully support you.

MT: People are demanding for Glenn to pass the torch.

AM: Yes. Well, I'll be marching with them. My impressions of the interview. Well, look, first on Venezuela. What I find just fundamentally wrong about all the discussions of Venezuela, or any country targeted by US regime change, is who elected Donald Trump or Joe Biden or Mike Pompeo, or Fred Fleitz to make a decision on behalf of the Venezuelan people, in this case who should rule their government, and specifically trying to change their government by destroying their economy?! I can't think of anything more autocratic. The complaint about

Venezuela is that Maduro is an autocrat. I mean, first of all, it ignores that the US has been trying to overthrow Venezuela's government even before Maduro, Going back more than two decades. Who elected these people in Washington to decide who should rule over Venezuela? If we cared about the Venezuelan people, we'd mind our own business, let them run their own country. But as you talked about in that Washington Post article, the Trump administration knew that it was consciously destroying Venezuela's economy, because it wanted people to flee, because it wanted to pressure the government to collapse. John Bolton admits that to the Washington Post. And then Trump goes and rails against undocumented immigrants while he's responsible for creating millions of them in Venezuela alone and everywhere else targeted by these sanctions. So just the arrogance that we have the right to destroy other people's economies because their governments are disobedient, and because their governments have successfully resisted our regime change efforts going back many years, to me, that has to be called out first. And, you know, if we truly cared about America First, why not focusing on our own country and stop trying to destroy other people? It never makes sense to me.

MT: And then the other thing, Aaron, is that using the regime changers' own logic, right? They never achieve their desired outcome, or they very seldom do. So even if you did want to oust Maduro, it seems pretty clear that the strategy of saddling Venezuela with these massive sanctions on the oil sector, the gold reserves, and other elements of the economy, it's been a catastrophic failure in terms of actually ousting him. So I'm not even saying that ousting him is something that ought to be pursued, but if that is what you're pursuing, and over and over again, this tactic of inflicting as destabilising and crippling sanctions as possible doesn't achieve the desired result, you would think maybe you would re-examine it, but as the Washington Post series, which were actually very good – sort of an unusual thing or unexpected thing to appear in the Washington Post, but hey, I celebrate it – this addiction to sanctions, and you've covered it with respect to Syria and other places, it very seldom seems to provoke any fundamental re-evaluation of the efficacy or utility of that policy program. So I couldn't get Fred Fleitz to even really acknowledge that the policy had been a failure, when how could you say it's not a failure, even by your own terms, if Maduro is still in power, and is declaring he's going to be there again for another six years at minimum?! So, yeah, it's very difficult to get people who are invested in the kind of mainline national security paradigm to admit that one of these main tools in their arsenal actually tends to produce far more failure than it "does success", quote unquote.

AM: Well, let me say, though, in defence of our neocon friends, I do think they still achieve at least some of their goals. One of the goals is to teach a lesson that if your government is going to defy us, defy the so-called rules based international order, then you're going to suffer. And that has had success. People have suffered in Cuba, in Syria, in Venezuela, in Iran. In Nicaragua, after a decade long dirty war in the 1980s, people did finally vote out the Sandinistas after they were basically told, if you vote for these people again, you're going to starve. So it did work there. And also, in a new book by my colleague Anya Parampil called *Corporate Coup*, which is all about the regime change effort in Venezuela, she points out that there was a major success from the point of view of US coup plotters and the Trump

administration and their Venezuelan allies, and that they basically expropriated the US assets of Venezuela's oil company Citgo, which was basically stolen from Venezuela and transferred to Venezuelan allies of the US. And the aim there was to basically weaken Venezuela's economy, weaken its power, and take away one of its most valuable assets. And at least the US element of Citgo was seized, expropriated in a very Cuban or Soviet style action I should say. For all these people talk about how they love the free market, they love capitalism, they're the biggest interventionists in the market in the world. I mean, that's what sanctions and asset seizures are. It's massive state intervention, which is an irony that doesn't get discussed here. So they have achieved some of their aims. If not outright regime change, at least they can impart the lesson: If you defy us – as Venezuela has and many other disobedient governments – your people will suffer.

MT: Yeah. So Aaron, I want to play you a clip. I did many wonderful interviews as you might have seen at the Republican National Convention a week or so ago. And I want to play a clip for you from one of them. This is me interviewing Congressman Mike McCaul of Texas. He's the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. So let's play this.

Mike McCaul (MM): I think President Trump is kind of the guy. Like, let him take the gloves off, give him everything they need to win.

MT: So sorry. We're talking about Ukraine. When McCaul is saying, let him take the gloves off, we're referring to Ukraine. I should have specified that. Go ahead.

MM: You know, Jake Sullivan has been restricting the Ukrainians from day one with weapons systems. I had to write in ATACMS in the supplemental. And even now he's restricting their use across borders, where all the bases are, where these glide bombs or bombers are coming across. He saw the one that killed the children at the hospital in Kyiv. That's no way to manage a war. And that's one reason the American people are not supportive if they see it mismanaged like that. My view has always been like General Jack Keane's, you either get into win, all into win, or get the hell out of there. And Jake Sullivan...

MT: The National Security advisor, if viewers aren't aware.

MM: Correct. And I think he's hurting the Ukrainians. I've met with Zelensky's team, and they tell us these restrictions are not allowing us to – I think the goal here is to push the Russians out as far as they can, have a ceasefire and then negotiate settlement. My hope is that President Trump will allow that to happen and then call for a ceasefire. And he's a master of the...

MT: Okay, so Aaron, it seems like the emerging consensus among self-described America First Republicans is that Trump is going to take the gloves off with respect to Ukraine; that's how he's going to force Putin to accept some kind of settlement. Fred Fleitz, who we just interviewed, produced this policy paper that was submitted to Trump that, among other things, says the US should continue arming Ukraine, it should further entrench a bilateral US-Ukrainian military architecture as a bulwark against Russia, and it should basically

continue bringing Ukraine into the, maybe not NATO full membership, but some international security architecture. And there's McCaul saying, look, America First Republicans view Trump as wanting to remove the constraints from Ukraine so that the war could come to an end, I guess, by escalating in order to de-escalate. You know, there's something called deterrence theory in nuclear doctrine called escalate to de-escalate, where the idea is if you take the gloves off, and not necessarily even in the realm of nuclear policy, but in any kind of you know, high stakes warfare, you take the gloves off and that kind of batters your nemesis into submission. And with Trump never saying with any specificity what he would actually do to solve the war in 24 hours, and you have people around him in his orbit under the banner of America First, suggesting drastic escalation, I find it a bit ominous. What about you?

AM: I find it very ominous, too. One of the biggest cons that I think has ever been waged on the US public is this idea that Trump and Biden have radically divergent policies when it comes to Ukraine. It serves both of them. You know, Biden can then frame any opposition to his Ukraine proxy war policy as being Trumpian and by association because of Russiagate, people associate that with appeasement to Russia. And Trump, meanwhile, can continue to claim he's a foe of the deep state, he's against intervention, which was a message that helped them win in 2016. The problem is, it's a complete con. Trump's policies helped fuel Russia's invasion. Trump likes to claim that Biden's weakness fuelled Russia's invasion. In fact, Trump's bellicosity towards Russia helped fuel the invasion. Trump pulled out of the INF treaty, which was a landmark Cold War treaty that had eliminated an entire class of really dangerous weapons pointed at each other between the US and Russia. Trump removed that treaty, and that's one of the issues that Russia tried to address before it invaded Ukraine, because Ukraine was being integrated into the NATO military infrastructure. And a major new component of that that fuelled the danger was that there were no longer restrictions on these really dangerous missiles. So Putin tried to address that before invading, which the Biden administration refused to engage with, therefore continuing the Trump policy. Trump also did nothing to advance the Minsk Accords, which was the peace deal brokered back in 2015 to end the war in the Donbas, which began after a coup backed by the Biden administration.

MT: Let me stop you there because one of the talking points and Fred Fleitz repeated this, that you hear from Trump supporters is that Russia was too scared to invade Ukraine under Trump. But Russia did take aggressive action under Bush and then Obama and then Biden. So they're trying to distinguish Trump as this exemplar of striking fear into the heart of Russia and preventing them from taking any adventurous military action. And they neglect that Trump and Ukraine maintain essentially the policy status quo that became untenable, at least in the eyes of Putin eventually, and then precipitated the invasion. But what do you make of that talking point? Like Putin was frozen into compliance under Trump, unlike he had been under Bush and Obama and then Biden.

AM: The one thing you could argue is that Biden certainly became more bellicose after taking office. Biden encouraged Zelensky to crack down on the opposition in Ukraine that

was actually second in the polls, the second highest polling party. It was very close to Russia. And Zelensky basically arrested their leader and took their opposition TV channels off the air. And Biden, the so-called huge defender of democracy, cheered that move and encouraged it. And then also, I think, encouraged Zelensky to keep attacking the Donbas rather than do what I was saying before, which is implement the Minsk Accords, which is the peace deal reached in 2015 to end the war in the Donbas that began after the coup, backed by the Obama-Biden administration back in 2014, which Trump did nothing to advance. Now, the one thing I'll say in defence of Trump is that to the extent Trump had any sincere desire to end the conflict in Ukraine, he was handcuffed by Russiagate, where he was framed as a Russian agent, and by calling him an agent of Putin, Democrats basically use that to coerce Trump or incentivise him to be more bellicose toward Russia, maybe more than Trump wanted to be. Because Trump in 2016 did talk about how he wanted to cooperate with Russia and how he didn't want to fight a World War Three over Ukraine. So Russiagate was used to basically constrain whatever diplomatic inclinations Trump may have had. And I'm not saying he actually had them, but to the extent he had them, Russiagate certainly undermined that. And then Trump also had a neocon cabinet, Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, who all encouraged him to increase militarism inside Ukraine. And so there was nothing done to advance the Minsk Accords. And therefore, when Biden took office, he basically seized – and by the way, the one time Trump did something concrete, the weapons to Ukraine, he was impeached. And that solidified a consensus that we should...

MT: But he never actually paused them. I mean, the one of the funnest facts of that whole first impeachment saga, that I feel like I'm the only one who knows, and maybe you know it as well, Aaron, because you're a little bit peculiar, just like me, is that there were there was never actually a weapons shipment that was unsent, right? I mean, there was never a weapons shipment that was on schedule to be delivered to Ukraine, that went unsaid, right? And yet Trump was impeached rather over this kind of inconsequential, superficial delay that actually didn't amount to anything, that's a pretty good kind of emblematic symbol of the superficiality with which Trump was attacked by Democrats: Oh, impeach him for delaying, but then eventually sending within the prescribed period of time, by statute, the weapons shipments to Ukraine. But that gets all lost in the memory hole now. So maybe I'm dwelling on ancient history, but I don't know. It's still crazy to me.

AM: Well it is. And imagine if there had been that much effort into promoting the Minsk Accords, which was the peace deal reached to end that war. Instead there was a bipartisan consensus illustrated by Adam Schiff getting up on the Senate floor during Trump's impeachment trial and saying that the United States aid Ukraine and their people so that we could fight Russia over there, we don't have to fight Russia here. So that was Adam Schiff declaring the bipartisan policy that we want to use Ukraine to fight Russia over there. And two years later we got our result. Russia invaded Ukraine to end the fight. Now Fred Fleitz's paper, I scanned it as he was speaking because I wanted to see. Does he mention the Minsk Accords? The pact that could have resolved all this? No he doesn't in that article. He also doesn't mention that in Istanbul in the spring of 2022, after Russia invaded, there were really serious talks between Ukraine and Russia, and they came very close to reaching a deal. But

now we know from multiple sources that Boris Johnson came over and told Zelensky that we're not going to back you up if you make a peace deal with Russia. And Ukraine needed Western backing because it wanted security guarantees to underpin any peace with Russia. And Boris Johnson basically gave the marching orders that: Sorry, we're not going to give you that and you should keep fighting Putin. And now here we are, more than two years later, hundreds of thousands of people dead, and neither political party is willing to go back and stand up for the fundamental solution here, which is to embrace diplomacy with Russia. Both parties have coalesced around undermining that, using Ukraine instead for a proxy war. And they advance this by pretending as if they have radically divergent policies when they're totally in concert with the other.

MT: So I'm glad you brought up Boris Johnson, Aaron, because I want to show on screen, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump were uniting at the Republican convention in Milwaukee. There they are giving a beautiful thumbs up in good spirits, and I would love to have been a fly on the wall for that meeting. That's Boris Johnson trekking to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which I hear is where he spends his summer vacations ordinarily. So he would just happen to be in the area. It was funny because there was like, this oddball crew of random UK politicians who were at the Republican convention, and I spotted Liz Truss, who was the prime minister for about a month and a half, Nigel Farage, and we were told that Boris Johnson was also gallivanting around. I didn't see Boris Johnson myself, but I wish I had because I would have been basking in his glow. So I want to bring you up a column that Boris Johnson wrote in the Daily Mail after having met Trump in Milwaukee. And Boris Johnson says he is "more convinced than ever that Trump has the strength and bravery to save Ukraine and end this appalling war". He says having talked to Trump this week, he's more convinced than ever that Trump has the strength and bravery to fix it and to save Ukraine. He says: "Whatever some other Republicans may have said about Ukraine in the past, I believe that Trump understands the reality: that a defeat for Ukraine would be a massive defeat for America. It is not just about the extinction of freedom and democracy, those cardinal American values, and the enslavement of the Ukrainian people – though that result would be grim in itself. Trump could simply do what's natural to him – end the bureaucratic dither and delay; give the Ukrainians the permissions that they need; and then, when Putin has once again been pushed back, he could offer the deal". So that's Johnson basically echoing what a lot of these other people in the America First orbit seemed to be suggesting that Trump would undertake to do when he's back in power, which is take the gloves off, at least for a period of time, in order to give Ukraine the most ideal, you know, negotiating position, which, by the way, is functionally what the Biden administration has always at least claim that their policy was, like Blinken and Sullivan and people, they're not opposed on principle to there being a negotiated settlement, right?! They're just saying we need to give the Ukrainians the maximum leverage as they enter any forthcoming or future negotiated settlement and that requires having Ukraine be given the ability to beat back Russia in much of the territory that Russia has seized. But that's Boris Johnson, who has now entered into like the folklore as the person who went to Kyiv, and it was April of 2022, right? And then delivered what was perceived to be a message on behalf of also the Biden administration for Ukraine to keep fighting. They're going to get all the supplies they need. They're going to have the full

throated support of the US and the UK and EU to wage the war in perpetuity and don't agree to any concessions. Now, maybe if Ukraine was radicalised enough at that point, that it would have been almost politically untenable for them to accept the deal, it's hard to say. We only, for the first time, fairly recently got like the draft documents out of that Istanbul accord. And I think there were portions of it where Russia may have actually inserted some maximalist demands that could have also contributed to the undermining of those negotiations. But it was a confluence of factors. Boris Johnson was there, delivered the message, and now he's meeting gleefully again with Trump. They're giving the thumbs up together. And I also want to now play you, this is Boris Johnson in May on CNN. So he's on American TV telling of Trump's role in the passage of that National security supplemental bill that included the \$61 billion for Ukraine. So let's play that.

Boris Johnson: Who was the guy who actually gave the Ukrainians the Javelin anti-tank weapons, which was so vital in that initial defence of Kyiv, when Putin thought that his tanks were going to roll in within a matter of days and take the Ukrainian capital? It was Donald Trump who gave the Ukrainians those weapons. And you remember in 2014, the Obama White House actually didn't really do very much to support Ukraine. So actually the paradox is that I think Donald Trump has a good record on Ukraine. And when it came to the 61 billion to the supplemental and, you know, again, I paid tribute to the United States of America, my understanding of what happened is that President Trump, played a very important role in reassuring congressional figures that this was a sensible thing to do. Because it was structured as a loan like the Lend-Lease loan to Britain in the Second World War. And my understanding, and you're correct, I've of course, been talking to politicians across the United States about this issue, and I wouldn't want to go into the details of it, but my understanding is that the president was very important in that respect.

MT: So Aaron, that's Boris Johnson saying that Trump is totally aligned with Boris's preferred policy prospectus on Ukraine. Boris Johnson is probably one of the most messianic interventionists when it comes to Ukraine. He is celebrating, heralding Trump for having armed Ukraine initially in 2017, 2018, which is true. Trump did that. And now he's meeting with Trump, you know, with all smiles at the Republican convention and proclaiming that Trump is basically, once again, totally aligned with Boris Johnson on what the ideal policy approach is for Ukraine. And yet you have like America First Republicans on the internet and also screeching MSNBC liberals who, can't wrap their heads around this, and that's why the narrative gets so buried, like the more reality based narrative around Trump is just chronically buried because it doesn't serve anybody's short term political interests, so it just gets ignored. And it falls to heroes like me and you to shed light on it. So yeah, what do you make of the Trump and Boris relationship?

AM: Well, I mean, as you documented, Trump was instrumental to the passage of that extra \$60 billion for Ukraine proxy war funding. Mike Johnson came down to Mar-A-Lago, Trump gave him his blessing. And Biden didn't give him credit, but Mitch McConnell did. And there you have Boris Johnson doing it as well. And in terms of the efficacy of the strategy: Look, this has been the policy. Recall a year ago was the summer of Ukraine's so-called

counteroffensive, which was the product of months and months and months of heavy training, planning, the US and Britain, their top military leaders heavily involved in planning Ukraine's military offensive. This was going to be the big game changer. Ukraine is going to take back all this territory. What happened? It was a massive failure. Actually Ukraine ended up losing a net loss in territory for the year. So this idea that somehow a new injection of weaponry and taking the gloves off is going to yield Ukrainian success. It's a complete fantasy. That has been the strategy, and it has seen Russia take about 20% of Ukraine. And right now it's taking even more. And the reason why, it's not hard, Russia's such a bigger country and they have such a more advanced military industrial complex than actually either Ukraine or the US does, because it's heavily state integrated. The best counterargument to this was made back in...

MT: And also, Aaron, I mean, Russia has converted to a war economy, essentially. A huge percentage of their GDP is now devoted to defence, it's in part why the Russian economy has actually performed much better than people might have thought, due to the imposition of the sanctions, because you're having this like World War Two style infusion of state expenditures into the military industrial sector, which provides a kind of stimulus and then that filters and other elements of the economy.

AM: Yes. Another result of the genius Biden strategy, where Biden was bragging that the ruble was going to be reduced to rubble. And now you have Russia's economy growing more than many European states. But as I was saying, back in 2015, somebody made a very good counterargument to this claim that arming Ukraine could put it in a better position to take back its territory. This was the quote: "If you're playing on the military train in Ukraine, you're playing to Russia's strength because Russia is right next door". It has a huge amount of military equipment and military force right on the border. Anything we did as countries in terms of military support to Ukraine is likely to be matched and then doubled and tripled and quadrupled by Russia. Who said that? Antony Blinken, back then when he was working for Barack Obama and Obama after backing the coup in 2014, which started all this, he got cold feet. Because he realised he was fuelling a really dangerous proxy war. And also he was worried about some of the weapons going to the neo-Nazi militias that are incorporated into Ukraine's military. So Blinken was making a very, I think, convincing argument that putting aside the morality here, whether it's wise to have a proxy war with Russia and Ukraine, whether we want to do that, just in terms of strategically, it's a fool's errand because Russia is just so much bigger and can, as Blinken said, double and triple and quadruple whatever the US does. And that's why there's always been the option of diplomacy. There was the Minsk Accords, which were undermined before Russia invaded, and to Johnson's claim that Trump's Javelins stopped Russia from taking Kyiv, if you look at the size of Russia's force that entered Ukraine, I don't think it was enough to take Kyiv. I don't think Russia ever seriously tried to take Kyiv. I think the point of Russia's invasion was to compel the diplomacy that Ukraine was refusing to engage in by refusing to implement the Minsk Accords. And that's why within days of Russia invading Ukraine and Russia immediately sat down, like three or four days later, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators already met in Belarus. This escalated into the peace talks in Istanbul. And look, you don't have to take my word for it. A top Ukrainian

negotiator said that they reached a real compromise. He said that Putin did everything possible to make peace. Another Ukrainian negotiator said that Russia's central demand was simply that Ukraine accept neutrality, that it not join NATO, which again, was not a radical demand. Right now in the US that treats it as an act of appeasement, neutrality is enshrined in Ukraine's declaration of state sovereignty back in 1990. So Russia asking for this was not some radical Kremlin demand. It was actually enshrined in Ukraine's foundational documents. The people who are opposed to that were neocons in Washington from both parties, who saw an opportunity to use Ukraine to bleed Russia, and a very small but powerful minority in Ukraine, the Ultrationalists, like the Azov battalion, who don't want to accept the rights of people in Ukraine, who identify with Russia, who want to speak Russian, who want to engage in Russian culture, who are concentrated primarily in the Donbas, who felt disenfranchised by a coup in 2014, backed by the US, which overthrew the president that they voted for Yanukovich, who had overwhelming support in the East. And funnily enough, Boris Johnson in that article that you cited in the Daily Mail, he says that under any new peace deal, there should be some sort of accommodation to protect the rights of Russian speakers inside of Ukraine. So therefore he's tacitly admitting that actually the rights of Russian speakers in Ukraine were being infringed upon, if he's now saying that they should be protected. Which was another major reason for this conflict to begin with. So the point is there are opportunities for diplomacy. They've been there before. Whether Russia will engage in anything now, I don't know. The opportunity might be lost, but certainly it's a complete fantasy to believe that more of this doubling down on more of the same, which is using Ukraine to bleed Russia, using its people as cannon fodder, will lead to anything positive, especially for the people of Ukraine.

MT: Yeah. So finally, Aaron, I know that you identify as a strong America First Republican. So I just want to get you to explain what you think of this current bizarre dynamic where everybody in the Republican Party nowadays has to at least nominally identify with this concept or slogan of America First, right? Because everybody has to associate with the Trump branding, and that's part of the Trump branding. At the Republican convention last week, you know, I just whenever I would interview a Republican, like member of Congress, there was just an unstated assumption that they would have to be defending America First or explaining the value of that term, because obviously they're supporting the Republican nominee. I mean, Trump's like the big kingpin of the Republican Party, undisputed at this point. So you can't really deviate from his preferred terminology. But really, what seems clear is that America First, it's incredibly fluid. There's no real boundaries for what that even means. You can just appropriate whatever you want under the America First umbrella. And nobody can really challenge you because, like what, like who determines what America First is? Nobody. It's just like something that you can project. Because, like what you want to say America Second? No. Everybody likes the idea of America being first, even if it means militarily and economically imposing your will by force all around the world. That could be America First, theoretically. And so, like everybody who I talked to at the Republican convention or even with Fred Fleitz tonight, they would all have this idea of America First, which seamlessly incorporates their preferred military adventurism, their punitive sanctions policies, name your aggressive American policy measure. That's all under the rubric of

America First, potentially. So I just wonder what you make of that dynamic at this point.

AM: Well, your interviews from the RNC were fascinating because first of all, the theme throughout them, especially when you talk about Israel, is the religious component where all these people really believe there's some sort of divine need, that like basically God has demanded that we provide Israel with unfettered military support and that there's something like divinely mandated by that. And so the religious extremism of the so-called America First-ers, as illustrated by your interviews with them, is just off the charts. It was stunning to hear it in interview after interview. And that's why presumably they're giving Netanyahu dozens of standing ovations. I mean, they're worshipping this foreign country, while calling themselves American First-ers. And also they're talking about upholding Christian values by arming a state that's committing mass murder. And doing all these things I don't think Jesus would approve of.

MT: The thing is, I think how they would describe it, is, or how they would explain their rationale is they don't even view Israel as a foreign country so much as an extension of the United States with which it has this joint divine mandate. I'm not even exaggerating. This is what they believe. Because the United States and Israel are both founded on the same Judeo-Christian values, and they're both the bulwarks against these encroachments of Islamism throughout the world. And they're defending shared values and that they have a joint destiny. Because, I mean, a lot of these people very plainly believe that in order for there to be a second coming of Christ, the United States has to defend Israel, because Jerusalem is where Christ will return to, to rule over Earth. So it's a sprawling theocratic vision that I don't feel like gets enough attention in the mainstream media. And all we have to do is ask them about it. They're happy to talk, as you saw from my interviews, right? And it's a pretty obvious and palpable driver of their worldview on this stuff.

AM: I mean, the one thing I think they have right, is that if they're banking on Israel to hasten the apocalypse or Armageddon, or the rapture, I mean, I do think I can see why, because Israel is such a, to me, such a crazy state; committing mass murder, armed to teeth with nuclear weapons, constantly threatening and attacking its neighbours. Today in Israel, there are riots of people who are trying to defend the right of Israeli soldiers to rape and sexually assault Palestinian prisoners. It's off the charts in its extremism. So from the point of view of someone who wants to bring in Armageddon, I can see why you have your ships on Israel, because it is kind of an Armageddon state. But in terms of how it benefits ordinary Americans to be funding all this, I mean, I'd love to see someone make that argument. Again, they have to turn to the biblical prophecy that they believe in. And, it's just shocking to hear. And I really thank you for the interviews you did, because it really brought that out. And I want to say, too, about Ukraine. Think of, you know, for Republicans from a partisan angle. Ukrainian officials interfered in the 2016 election to undermine Trump, because they were worried that Trump was going to make a deal with Russia and end the war in the Donbas. And, you know, let Eastern Ukraine speak Russian and have some autonomy, which is what the Minsk Accords called for. So Ukrainian officials actually interfered in the election. They leaked, I think, fake claims about Paul Manafort to get him fired, which was successful. And

then recently we learned from The New York Times in that long article about all these CIA bases that have been built up in Ukraine since 2014, we learned that Ukrainian intelligence played a pivotal role in generating the Russian hacking claims that were at the heart of Russiagate. And then, of course, you have Trump's first impeachment, which was about Ukraine. So from a partisan point of view, Ukraine has been used to actually undermine Trump and constrain his presidency. But yet Trump and his allies are all lining up under the name of America First to fuel the proxy war in Ukraine and pursue very similar policies to the Democrats.

MT: Ultimately I think, preserving and expanding American primacy is paramount to the America First crowd, right? Or, you know, that's the prevailing ideology of both parties. And they have like rhetorical or other kinds of image related differences in terms of how they present it. But does Trump strike you as somebody who wants to relinquish American power? Right? I mean, and with Ukraine functioning as a source of American power in Eastern Europe to project against Russia or wherever else, I think you'd be hard pressed to find Trump just being willing to voluntarily exceed that. Which is always why I found the liberal historical critique of Trump to be so batty, like he's going to destroy the liberal international order, or the rules based international order is going to crumble under Trump; this is like the David Frum think tank critique, he's going to sabotage NATO. Like, why would Trump sabotage NATO? So he has vastly diminished power economically and militarily on the international stage to promote American privacy?! Does that strike you as something that's intuitively pleasing to Trump, to like have less power? It never made any sense.

AM: There's nothing in Trump's record to suggest he would undermine US hegemony. He advanced it through, as we talked about, pulling out of arms control treaties with Russia, sending weapons to Ukraine that Obama would not send. And just to keep him in line, just to make sure they framed them as a Russian agent. And that's why we had Russiagate. Or a major function of Russiagate was to constrain whatever possible sort of diplomatic inclinations Trump may have had toward Russia, because sometimes he did talk about cooperating with Russia. And I think just the fact that Trump said it out loud, that that is what set off so many national security state officials who just couldn't tolerate a president possibly talking about cooperation with Russia and making peace with Russia. So just to make sure, they participated in this multi-year campaign to frame him as a Russian agent, which did successfully keep him in line. I don't know what's in his head. Sometimes he just blurts out the truth. He does talk about how, you know, we kill people too, which really offended liberals like David Frum; when Trump dared to say that Putin was not alone in killing people that we are killers as well. So they don't like Trump, not because I think of his policy differences, but because sometimes he blurts out the truth and he's hard to keep in line, and they don't see him as a suitable steward of the US war machine. And so that's why we had scams like Russiagate, just to make sure that he stayed in line. And I think it succeeded to a tee.

MT: Okay, Aaron, anything you'd like to promote other than your gorgeous face as we wrap up here?

AM: I'd like to promote the coup effort underway System Update to install Michael Tracy as the permanent host. And also my podcast, Useful Idiots, with Katie Halper and thegrayzone.com, where I do regular streams with Max Blumenthal.

MT: Aaron, my only conundrum at this point is to identify who would be the Nancy Pelosi in this ouster scenario. So she was the person working behind the scenes to force Joe out.

AM: Yes.

MT: And I can't figure out who would be Nancy Pelosi. Maybe you, maybe Lee Fang, maybe like Donald Trump Jr.

AM: If we list Tucker Carlson.

MT: Yeah, that would be good...

AM: He is pretty influential, supposedly.

MT: That's a plausible one. I'll fire off some texts and try to figure out who could be the craven, political conniver to get me installed and to power over Glenn. We even have him, maybe, we even maybe cancel his passport or something and prevent him from returning to Brazil.

AM: Well, there's a precedent for that. You know, with the Snowden case.

MT: I was just going to say.

AM: Obviously.

MT: Give him a taste of his own medicine.

AM: Yeah, exactly.

MT: All right. Aaron Maté, thank you very much for joining, as always. And, we'll talk soon.

Glenn Greenwald: Thanks for watching this clip from System Update, our live show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. eastern exclusively on Rumble. You can catch the full nightly shows live or view the backlog of episodes for free on our Rumble page. You can also find full episodes the morning after they air across all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and Apple. All the information you need is linked below. We hope to see you there.

END

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