

MMITM Ep 012 – Dan Caldwell: Impeachment and International Relations

Announcer: From Curtco Media, what are you gonna do about.

Mike Thomas: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Politics. Meet me in the Middle. I'm senior producer Mike Thomas, filling in for our chief curator, Bill Curtis. Joining me is our co-host, Pulitzer Prize winning historian, world renowned lecturer and author of the forthcoming book Franklin and Washington, the Founding Partnership, university professor at Pepperdine University, Ed Larson. Thanks for being here, Ed.

Ed Larson: Great to be back.

Mike Thomas: And I'm pleased to introduce our guest. Dan Caldwell is a distinguished professor of political science at Pepperdine University. Professor Caldwell earned his A.B., M.A. and PhD degrees at Stanford University and a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He has taught at the Naval Postgraduate School, Stanford, UCLA and Brown University. Dr. Caldwell has received a number of teaching and research awards, including Professor of the Year at Pepperdine, a Pew Faculty Fellowship in International Affairs at Harvard University and the United States Institute of Peace Fellowship. He's the editor of five books and the author of five, including two international relations textbooks, most recently Vortex of Conflict, U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. Dan is also co-author with Robert E. Williams Jr. of Seeking Security in an Insecure World and is a frequent contributor to CNN. Welcome, Professor Caldwell.

Dan Caldwell: Thanks very much. Good to be here.

Mike Thomas: So let's jump right in this week about the time we're recording this, the House has sent articles of impeachment to the Senate. So let me start with you, Dan. Bring us up to date.

Dan Caldwell: Well, it's a process that is only generally described in the Constitution, and we're in the process now of having the articles of impeachment passed by the House Representatives delivered to the Senate. So both the House has appointed its

representatives to basically prosecute the case. And the White House has just appointed three of its representatives to defend the President and the Senate for essentially a judicial hearing on the part of the Senate.

Mike Thomas: Ed,

Ed Larson: If you try to equate it to criminal law, what the House does is similar to an indictment. And what an indictment is, is to bring a criminal case a prosecutor has to go before a grand jury. You've probably all seen it in various television shows. In fact, if you watch the old Perry Mason, everything in Perry Mason occurred in that early stage. What happens then is you go to trial and at trial, then the defendant comes in with their lawyers, which, as Dan has pointed out, is what the President's now appointed, a team that includes a former professor at Pepperdine, Ken Starr, and that they then organize their defense and the prosecution is free, normally in a criminal trial, to bring in now all the evidence. Now, in theory, there should be a full trial, and that's what's happened before. They've been two presidential indictments before. And new witnesses are brought in. Both sides can present their case. The idea is this is supposed to be a trial of the fitness of Donald Trump to be president.

Mike Thomas: In the normal world of court. There are witnesses brought and there is a chance to rebut what they're saying. That's not necessarily the case here.

Ed Larson: Well, that has been the case in every prior presidential impeachment trial that both sides can bring any witnesses they want or bring witnesses that the Senate approves. So there is a difference that here the senators are basically running the show and making the decision. But what would be normal in a trial and what has happened in all prior presidential impeachment trials is they present evidence through witnesses at the trial. There were there were dozens and dozens of witnesses at Andrew Johnson's trial.

Mike Thomas: Dan Caldwell, what effect does this have on our international relations?

Dan Caldwell: I think it obviously raises the question of the strength of American leadership in international relations. If our leader is being, as Ed pointed out, if he's being tried for high crimes and misdemeanors, which is comes from the Constitution on

the basis of the two articles of impeachment, I think that raises questions about the credibility of the President to lead in international relations.

Ed Larson: I would add, though, that in this particular case, there is such a widespread assumption that the President will not be convicted and removed from office and from a historian, I point out, never did a single senator from the accused president's party vote to remove Andrew Johnson. Not a single Democrat voted against Andrew Johnson and not a single Democrat voted for removing President Clinton. So if that history holds up, President Trump will not be removed from office. And I do think the foreign powers are factoring that presumption in. And I throw it back to Dan.. I don't think it weakens him that much, given that overall factor.

Dan Caldwell: But the interesting question is whether four senators from the Republican side will vote with the Democrats providing for a simple majority vote against President Trump. And I think that would increase the questioning of the president's credibility if there's a majority that votes against the President staying in office, even without removing him as a result of the two thirds requirement.

Ed Larson: I think it goes to the question of whether what President Trump is accused of doing and what he's admitted doing, frankly, trying to influence the election through getting Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden, whether that is normalized. And if there hadn't been an impeachment hearing, they would have, the obvious conclusion would've been, this is OK, we can do this. But if you do get a majority, if you get enough that it's a majority, it's gone a step toward not normalizing that behavior.

Mike Thomas: What are other countries saying? You know, what are they viewing? You know, what are they? Is this no big deal or is this damaging to, you know, our role in the international community?

Dan Caldwell: I think when we look at international relations allies for the United States who've been key to American power ever since the end of World War Two, starting with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, that is probably the strongest alliance in history. I think the attack and killing of General Suleimani in Iraq, Iranian General, also causes allies to question the United States leadership. So I look upon alliances as a

force multiplier for the United States and for American power. And that force multiplier has been significantly decreased.

Ed Larson: When I listen to broadcasts out of Europe, they seem to take it more seriously. They seem to suggest that, wow. He's been impeached and now there's going to be a real trial. And people are going to look at this because they look at, say, Brazil recently removed the president by impeachment and then removal. They look at it differently. But just from listening, they seem to actually take it more seriously. Whether that undermines President Trump in those countries. Well, yes, it does. But they don't like him anyway.

Mike Thomas: What effect, if any, is the impeachment, you know, having on those nations who we would consider enemies?

Dan Caldwell: Well, if the president is weakened, then he's going to have a weaker hand in negotiations with any international leader, Kim Jong Un. I think probably feels in a much better position in terms of negotiations now than he did six weeks ago before the impeachment. So if we think of it as a poker game, Donald Trump is coming in with a much weaker hand today than he had just weeks ago.

Mike Thomas: Where is Israel in this? Where is Saudi Arabia in this, in that area,.

Dan Caldwell: Well Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu was very positive toward the assassination of General Suleimani. And I think that it opens the door for Israel to take stronger actions against the Iranian backed terrorist group, Hezbollah. My concern is that it might even open the door, particularly if Iran continues down the road to develop nuclear weapons technologies, that might open the door and make it more attractive for Israel to attack Iran preemptively. I think Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf countries are quite concerned about the rising power of Iran, because with the weakening of Iraq, which was a kind of balance to Iran, I think Saudi Arabia is quite concerned about that. So there's a real cascading effect. If Iran goes down the path of it's already withdrawn from the Iran nuclear agreement, if it starts up its centrifuges again. I think there'll be a temptation of Israel to preemptively attack. And secondly, for Sunni countries to want to develop or obtain nuclear weapons from, in Saudi Arabia's case, from Pakistan.

Ed Larson: We've got a very difficult situation here, just like we have in North Korea. Very difficult situation, what do you do in North Korea? How do you deal with that situation, which does have atomic weapons, many more than when President Trump came into office? And you do have to wonder, why wouldn't a country want to go ahead and develop these atomic weapons? Because they're more likely to survive than if they agree, as Libya did in Iraq did, to stand down.

Mike Thomas: Is this a case where the United States administration has decided that old school didn't work? Let's go this direction now. Reestablishing America as a strong superpower and using that might to enforce their will in that region.

Dan Caldwell: Traditional arms control what, Mike, you referred to as old school, has worked. It's worked and that's a result of negotiations. So today we have nine countries in the world that possess nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, President Kennedy's nightmare is that there would be 25 or 30 countries that had nuclear weapons. So by that standard, the Non-Proliferation Treaty has been relatively successful. So there are a number of accomplishments that negotiations in arms control have achieved. And sadly, the one remaining Russian-American strategic nuclear arms control agreement still in effect is the new START treaty that President Obama signed. So that's of great concern to me is that we're entering a period of a new arms race and new nuclear arms buildup.

Ed Larson: There's actually been countries that through negotiations and through the activity of multi-lateral activities, have pulled away. So you do have examples where this sort of negotiation works. But of course, you need to work both with your allies and negotiate, as Reagan did, with the Soviet Union. And if you toss that aside, it's hard to see that the United States alone can enforce its will, even on a pipsqueak little country like North Korea.

Mike Thomas: We're going to wrap up this first segment. We'll be right back.

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Mike Thomas: Welcome back to Politics. Meet me in the Middle. I'm senior producer Mike Thomas. Joining me is historian Ed Larson and our guest, professor of political science at Pepperdine University, Dan Caldwell. Ed, we're going to start with you. Well, let's talk a little bit about American influence in other governments. Where did we start being the police force of the world?

Ed Larson: We began influencing, some might say, mucking around, really ever since the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere. And then it has expanded worldwide, partly beginning maybe after World War One, but worldwide in a major way after World War Two. Because before that, Americans trusted Britain to do that, meddling around in places like the Middle East or in Africa. After World War Two, a lot of that fell to the United States, such as in Iran or in Saudi Arabia or in Africa.

Mike Thomas: Dan Caldwell, let's pick that up. Let's talk about the U.S. influence, either militarily or diplomatically in the Middle East.

Dan Caldwell: Let me make a general point. That is that American foreign policy is similar to a pendulum throughout its history, that it swings from one end of isolationism to the other end of international involvement. And generally the points at which that pendulum swings the other way follows war. The United States, unlike any other victorious power in world history at the end of World War Two, actually demobilized on an incredible scale. But the challenges of the Soviet Union caused the United States to respond to that. In the Middle East case. The United States supported the creation of the state of Israel in May of 1948. The United States has also supported Saudi Arabia primarily for access to oil. And so the sort of pragmatic goals of access to oil and the more idealistic goals of supporting the sole democracy in the Middle East, that is Israel, have been a kind of constant battle in American foreign policy.

Mike Thomas: So, Dan, tell me, what role has Russia played in all of this?

Dan Caldwell: Russia has been the one to really benefit from the controversy over Russian interference in the American elections in 2016. There is no doubt, as all of the major U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded, that Russia interfered not only in the Presidential election, but also in the state elections in the United States in 2016. In

addition to that, every major leader of American intelligence agencies has testified that Russia is continuing those efforts, as well as some other countries like Iran, North Korea and China. So Russia, I think, is on the move. It is rebuilding its military capabilities, and I think it's continuing its efforts to subvert American democracy.

Ed Larson: What benefit, what goal does Russia have? What do they gain by undermining American government among our democracy? What would we look as markers of success from their program.

Dan Caldwell: Weakening in the United States of America. I think Putin has what game theorists would call a zero sum view of the world, and it was characteristic of earlier Bolshevik leaders. And I think Putin really reflects that view that my gain is your loss. So if the United States is weakened, that strengthens Russia and vice versa.

Ed Larson: So what are they trying to gain? Trade advantages, economic advantages, military clout over over Poland? What would be certain things they would get?

Dan Caldwell: Oddly enough, Russians and Americans are similar in the fact that both are enormously proud of their respective countries. And when the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, most Russians were humiliated by that because Russia became really a second, if not a third rate power. As a result of the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Putin becomes president following Yeltsin and promises, to coin a phrase, to make Russia great again. And in many respects, he's done that. So I think, though, the effort to strengthen Russia and return it to an equivalent position as the United States has been an objective of Putin and it is overwhelmingly supported by Russians.

Mike Thomas: To your point about Putin, you know, making Russia great again. And the parallels to this country, another country falling under that isolationism is better, Brexit. Where do you see that falling?

Dan Caldwell: I think the supporters of Brexit were making the case that withdrawing from the European Union would make the United Kingdom great again. I think it's going to have quite the opposite result of that. But I think that that's what the Brexit leaders were arguing and what the British electorate supported.

Ed Larson: When you compare these two, though, you could see how Trump's goal to make America great again is very compatible with Putin's goal to make Russia great again. Because if Russia's goal is internationalist, if we judge Russia's great again in their mindset by controlling more other countries, America is just the reverse. Because Trump's view of making America great again and what he is advocating is isolationist. The part of making America great again to him is the stock market's going up. He talks about pulling out of other countries as part of his rhetoric.

Dan Caldwell: That's the rhetoric, though. The reality is that the United States has actually increased the number of troops now in the Middle East than when President Trump first entered office. So there's a real, I think, disjunction between what the president says and what the president orders. And I think the increased number of troops sent to the Middle East in the aftermath of General Suleimani's killing illustrates that clearly.

Mike Thomas: What can this president or this administration gain by an isolationist approach?

Dan Caldwell: Well, in the case of General Suleimani, one terrorist leader was removed. We know from previous terrorist organizations and countries that that leader will be replaced by someone else. And it's far better to work with allies, to work even where there is common interests with potential enemies, as the United States was doing with Iran. And oh, by the way, General Suleimani against ISIS in northern Syria.

Mike Thomas: Once again, you know, if you're gonna take that approach, they're going to take out this bad guy. I'm going to do whatever this is. What's the game here? I don't see that next step.

Dan Caldwell: I think that's a problem that there's a total focus on short term tactics and no focus or idea on what the long term strategy is, what the long term game plan to further American interests in the Middle East, the rest of the world. General Mattis, as secretary of defense has gone H.R. McMaster, The administration is on its fourth national security affairs advisor. So there aren't the strategic thinkers that have

contributed to long term American strategy and exactly what you're talking about, Mike. They aren't left in the administration.

Mike Thomas: It's kind of interesting because I used to be whether you believed it or not, there was an altruistic reason for America to do some things that it did. You know, even if it were, we need to fight, you know, communism by going into Vietnam. We can't let this part of the world fall to these forces. That doesn't seem to exist anymore.

Dan Caldwell: Mike, I think you're quite right that we've gone from an emphasis on idealism to an emphasis on pragmatism and what's going to make us money. What's going to narrowly further our interests overseas as opposed to a broader conception of how we can promote human rights? Probably Woodrow Wilson and Jimmy Carter were the two foremost presidents who emphasized human rights in American foreign policy.

Mike Thomas: You mentioned those two presidents. And I think from an historic perspective, they're pretty weak presidents.

Ed Larson: Well, they're presidents, I would agree. I don't know if they were weak. I don't know if Woodrow Wilson was weak. But they aren't marked with much success. There was an enormous backlash of what all those wonderful noble ideas that Wilson had probably led to more horror and refugees and chaos. And in many ways, the settlement of World War 1 led to World War 2. And you look at Jimmy Carter's record and sure, he did a lot of good in Argentina. But then you can look at a lot of other places where Afghanistan didn't work out too well. So you have this mix, but you do have and I totally agree with Dan. You have this tension in American history that goes all the way back to Washington and Jefferson, where you have this tension between idealism and realism and pragmatism. And even when you look at the current administration, you do see maybe not from the President, but some people in this administration who seem to actually want to promote Christianity and protect Christian refugees from these countries. And we want to promote religious freedom in other countries. So even with this administration, you find actors in it who are taking, in some sense, a human rights approach, and then you've got other people who seem to be pure realpolitik.

Mike Thomas: So let's wrap up this segment. We've got the Iowa caucuses coming up. And you gentlemen have come up with something you call the unity campaign. Let's talk about those things.

Dan Caldwell: Ed and I are quite concerned about the increasing polarization of American politics, because both the Democratic as well as the Republican Party seem to be moving to the outer edges of the party, both on the left and the right. And so we are tentatively proposing, of course, this will depend upon the results of the primary, but we're tentatively proposing that if Joe Biden gets the presidential nomination, that he would pre-announce his vice presidential candidate. And we're again tentatively proposing. Amy Klobuchar. And then he would announce his prospective cabinet that would consist of both progressive Democrats and moderate Democrats and also, very importantly, some moderate Republicans.

Ed Larson: You go back to Lincoln, who tried to bring us together famously at the end of the Civil War. He got rid of his existing vice president from Maine and went instead with a Democrat, with a member of the other party, unionist Democrat from Tennessee. Senator Johnson, and made him his vice president. So you have examples. And if you look back, both Obama and Bush, George W. Bush, both of them included in their initial cabinet, members of the other party.

Mike Thomas: Are the party machines willing to see that and is the financial complex that we now live in? Are they willing to support that middle?

Dan Caldwell: I think the party machine in this case, the Democratic Party machine, would be reluctant to accept a Republican vice presidential nominee because essentially that would be handing the White House over to the Republican Party at the end of four years or eight years. And just to add to what Ed said, John Kennedy had several prominent Republicans in his cabinet. So I think we need to recapture what presidents in the past have practiced.

Ed Larson: And look at during World War Two. Famously, FDR, he brought his opponent in the nineteen forty election in as a key player. Certainly World War Two was a tremendous challenge to America. Today is a tremendous challenge to America. So and you have some Republican leaders who you, look at the governor of Maryland, you

look at the governor of Vermont. You look at the governor of Massachusetts. All are real. They're real Americans. They're real statesmen. And you talk about the title of this program is Meet Me at the Medal. Well, that defines it.

Dan Caldwell: We may steal the title of your program for the new title of our article.

Mike Thomas: I want to thank you both. I think this has been another enlightening conversation. And Dan, how can people find you? How can they read your books and get to know you a little better?

Dan Caldwell: Well, if they go to my Web site at Pepperdine, they can find my books, articles listed, things like that. So. And I welcome any questions they might have.

Mike Thomas: Well, Dan, it's been a pleasure. Thanks so much. I hope you hope you come back. Come back and join us. Ed Larson, you are a plethora of historical perspectives and thank you. That's it for this episode of Politics. Meet me in the Middle. Thanks, everybody.

Mike Thomas: If you like what you hear, please leave a review and we'd appreciate it if you'd subscribe to Politics. Meet me in the Middle on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or wherever you listen to your favorite podcast. This episode was produced and edited by Mike Thomas. Audio engineering was by Michael Kennedy. The theme music was composed and performed by Celeste and Eric Dick. Thanks for listening.

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