

**Episode 2,349: Trump Indicted: What Does the Future Hold?**

**Guest: Dan McCarthy**

**WOODS:**  So, I want to talk about just some things that you've been writing about lately. But before we do that, let me start with kind of an oddball topic, but you've written a number of times for the *New York Times*, and you've become kind of an ongoing panelist for them when a new – well, sometimes when various news items hit.

But in particular, in recent weeks and months when a new GOP candidate enters the field, they've been asking a range of people, what's your opinion about this person's candidacy? And so, Chris Christie, former governor of New Jersey, recently entered the race.

And so, you, I believe, were part of that round table talking about the significance of that. So, my question about that is, there really seems to be no clamoring for a Chris Christie presidential race. In a way – this is a bit inside baseball.

But for my Catholic listeners, it's like when Pope Francis canonized John Paul II and John the 23rd at the same time. Now, everybody was interested in John Paul II. I don't know a single solitary person anywhere on Earth who was clamoring for the canonization of John the 23rd, but we got it. For some reason, we ended up getting it.

Well, same thing with Chris Christie. Nobody wants this, and somehow we're getting it. Now, I know that sometimes people run for office because they have their own ambitions. They want to elevate their profile. Maybe they want a cabinet position.

But if (as appears likely) Trump gets the nomination, ain't no way a Chris Christie is getting a cabinet post. So, what do you think is really going on here, Dan?

**McCARTHY:** Well, the conventional wisdom is that Chris Christie is running just as a spoiler against Donald Trump. And the way that's meant to work is that Chris Christie is the only person in the field other than Trump himself who really has this very entertaining, combative personality that can demolish someone on a debate stage.

And we saw that with some of Christie's exchanges with Marco Rubio back in 2016. So, the conventional wisdom is that Christie is going to run. He's going to run basically just a negative campaign attacking Trump the whole time.

And if Christie is able to get into the debates – which is going to be a real question mark. Because as you say, he has no support and it's hard to get into a debate if you're pulling at 0%. But if he gets into the debates, then the idea is that he will be able to somehow humiliate Trump by being such a devastatingly witty and forthright rhetorical opponent.

Now, all of that sounds a bit far fetched, right? Because, again, Christie would have to get enough support in the polls to make the cutoff for the debates. And then he would actually have to go toe-to-toe against Trump. Which, nobody has an easy time going toe-to-toe against Trump.

So, beyond the conventional wisdom, there is just the fact of sheer ego. Someone like Chris Christie, what is he doing these days that needs to occupy his time? So, this is a way for him to say that he's still relevant to national life.

And in the off chance that Donald Trump happens to not become the candidate or not become president, Christie may be looking to ingratiate himself with some of Trump's opponents. I think that's the most plausible explanation here.

I think the chances of Christie actually doing – well, the conventional wisdom says he will do – in damaging Trump is very unlikely. But what I do think is possible is that if Christie does get into a debate, he could wind up doing damage to some other candidate, DeSantis or who knows who that might be, simply because Christie has a lot of rough edges.

And like I say, back in 2016, it was Marco Rubio that he actually demolished and not Trump.

**WOODS:** I think that's about as plausible an explanation as I could expect. Makes sense to me. So, I don't think it's likely we're going to have a President Christie anytime soon. It's just that he's such an easy object of ridicule.

He's a very unlikely person to go up against Trump for that purpose. But I suppose we'll see how it all turns out. So, that was something that was covered in this brief little thing in the *Times* where they asked the opinions of various people.

But another topic now that's come up that you haven't yet written a column on – I mean, these things are happening all so quickly is that Trump is, at least de facto – or, I don't know if it's "de facto" or "de jure" or both, really, in this case – but in legal hot water once again.

And here we're hearing quite a few of his – or at least a number of Republican officials and maybe opponents of Trump saying things like: *Well, now he's really, really in trouble. He's really in trouble now. Now they've really got him.*

What do you think is the real significance of this? Now, Steve Deace, by the way, on Twitter, who is a host on *The Blaze* and he used to be a radio host in Iowa, says it's fine for Trump supporters to go around and say: *Oh, every time they persecute him legally, it just makes his numbers go up*.

Yeah, that's great for your tribe. It's not great for independents. And we've lost independents the last three times and we've lost elections the last three times. We need independents. And we can't just cavalierly say: *Everyone will see that this is a political persecution*. Because everyone does not see it that way.

So, what's your assessment?

**McCARTHY:** Well, it's putting Donald Trump on trial, but it's also putting the classification state on trial. So, this is almost like Julian Assange or Edward Snowden or any number of other leakers of embarrassing secrets for Washington getting a national trial in the public eye.

Donald Trump is accused of violating the Espionage Act from World War One, as well as violating the Presidential Records Act, obstructing justice by moving documents around. The documents themselves, they're classified "very, very secret".

But of course, nothing can be classified above the president. So, one of the ultimate arguments that Trump may wind up making all the way up to the Supreme Court could be that: *Well, if the president had the documents, then ipso facto he was declassifying them for himself.*

That's probably not going to fly with the Supreme Court. But it's the kind of argument about the very nature of the branches and what kind of powers they have. Because Congress is the branch that creates these classificatory schemes, but of course, Congress can't possibly say to the president: *Look, you're not allowed to look at certain documents in your own administration.*

Trump is not president now, of course, but when he was president, he obtained those documents and he could make an argument (which I think would be out on a limb, but nevertheless legally interesting, constitutionally interesting) to say that as president, he can automatically declassify what he wants to declassify.

He is on tape saying that these documents are classified. So, again, even if he wants to make that radical argument, he's going to be facing some words of his own which seem to contradict his claim.

And while there are plenty of officials from David Petraeus to former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger and others who have absconded with documents or have otherwise violated classification secrecy and who have gotten away with just a slap on the wrist, I think the Biden Justice Department is really coming down on Trump with everything they possibly can.

Many of the charges that he's facing, the penalties can range anywhere from a quarter million dollar fine up to a 20-year prison sentence. There's 37 counts against him. It's a very legally potent case.

But again, one of the things that I think is worth keeping in mind here is that it's putting the classification state itself on trial.

We've seen just recently with other revelations (that have come out in a number of cases, in fact, including about the Ukraine and Russia war) that the American people are still being kept in the dark.

There are fundamental questions, fundamental facts that the American people need to be briefed about in terms of what's going on in the world if they're going to make intelligent decisions as voters. If you claim that you're living in a democracy, you have to have a public that is at least informed of what's going on.

And we have a government that classifies everything. We could classify everything from a mixed drink recipe all the way through to nuclear launch codes. And I think this classificatory state has never really been put on trial.

People know the name Daniel Ellsberg. They know of leakers like Snowden. They know of Julian Assange, who's having legal troubles right now. He's probably going to be extradited from the UK to the US pretty soon.

So, they know about these things kind of in the background. But this has never been litigated or never been – I shouldn't even say litigated – never been put into a political electoral realm the way that even something like the Iraq war was.

So, one of the great things about Donald Trump in 2016 is he made the 2016 election in part about the Iraq war.

The American people got to say, okay, what is your verdict? Do you support a candidate who criticizes that war, or do you support a candidate who still says it was basically okay and that she voted for it, Hillary Clinton?

And of course, the American people gave the thumbs down to that war. So, in 2024, I think this is going to be one of the big questions.

Do Americans support the idea that we have to keep classifying all of these secrets and going after the leader of one of the major parties in our country in order to lock him up, or at least fine him severely for having these documents?

Or is it time to tear down the walls of this national security classification state?

**WOODS:** Michael Tracey had a funny, but I think penetrating, tweet the other day where he said: *Why is it that the only thing Trump is ever "held accountable for" is violating the fake made up self-serving strictures of the security state bureaucracy?*

And there's a good point there. I mean, at least in this particular case, in no real sense are these crimes. These were all state invented crimes. I'm not in any danger here because of any of this.

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, and it really depends on what is actually being hidden here. And there are things that you don't want to get out in public for good reason.

So, just recently, the convicted spy Robert Hanssen, for example, died in prison, probably of suicide. Hanssen gave the Soviets (and then the Russians) information about Russians who were spying for America. And many of these people, these sources were killed.

So, something like that is obviously in a totally different category. Now, Trump, interestingly enough, some of the transcripts that have been released about the Department of Justice's supposed smoking guns, where they say: *Aha, here's Trump admitting that things are classified.*

Well, if you look at what Trump is discussing in these transcripts, he's saying that basically these generals and other advisers would tell him: *Okay, here's a plan for war. Let's get into war.* And then the press would say: *Oh, Donald Trump is about to go to war.*

And Trump is saying: *No, look. Here are these documents that actually show that I was against going to war and that the generals were trying to tell me that I had to do something and I was not willing to do it.*

Now, that kind of thing is well worth the American public being aware of, both for knowing historically what happened, but also for knowing how our government actually works at the highest levels. Which is that the president is treated in some ways as a puppet.

He's treated as a kind of a passive consumer of whatever is served up to him on a menu that's composed by experts in the Deep State or in the Pentagon or what have you. This all needs to be got out in the open, I think.

And it's long overdue, right? We had some reforms in this country of the intelligence community after Watergate, but then a lot of those got scaled back over the succeeding 50 years.

It's really time that we have not just new Frank Church hearings, but that we actually have the public itself getting involved and making it an electoral issue at the ballot box as to what we're classifying in this country and what the public deserves to know.

**WOODS:** Let's shift gears now to the column you have on the GOP and 2024 and trying to learn what went wrong the last time around (the midterms) so that the same mistakes aren't repeated. I'm thinking about this in the context of a column Paul Gottfried wrote 3 or 4 weeks ago.

Now, Paul is not – he's a very good individual and a very friendly person. But when you talk to him about what the prospects for the future are, he doesn't have the sunniest disposition. I'll put it that way.

And so, he wrote a column in which he said: *We have to face the possibility that there really is a 40% chunk of America that is just going to vote with these people no matter what. That they are starting with 40% right off the bat.*

You would think if we were in a country with normal people, there's no way Biden can get reelected, it's impossible. But there's an assumption there that may not be justified. First of all, let's talk about that.

Because I wonder if, on the other hand, could we not also say: Is there not 40% that will automatically, right off the bat, vote against somebody like Biden? And so, does that maybe neutralize Paul's observation?

**McCARTHY:** That's exactly right. So, you have a closely divided country. And the question is institutionally, educationally, demographically, what is going to disrupt that 40/40 or 50/50 balance and start shifting it in another direction?

Until now, the left has really used two things in order to drive – well, in order to fortify the Democratic Party and drive the entire country in the direction of progressivism. One of those was simply immigration.

And the Democratic Party has had an advantage among immigrants, even going back to the days when the Democratic Party was officially the party of segregation. So, I mean, this is not the racial test of conscience that Democrats today try to make it out to be.

The Democratic Party has had an advantage with immigrant voters for a long time for a whole variety of reasons that are historical as well as contemporary. But it's simply a fact, and it's something that the Democrats have reliably used in order to fortify their numbers in all elections.

The other thing, and probably the more important thing that Democrats have used in order to fortify their power (and which has actually been much more important in terms of ideologically moving the country to the left) has been the stranglehold that progressives have on education.

And one of the things I like very much about one of the other Republican candidates this year, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, is that he has taken on the left-wing educational establishment, and he's tried to pull away the University of Florida system from the left and restore some sort of balance there.

So, this, I think, is what it comes down to in the long term. People are always – especially here in Washington – they're always worked up about what's going to happen in the next presidential election, or who's going to win the midterms or lose the midterms.

But the fact is, the long-range direction of the party is set by things like immigration and education. And if the right doesn't have a way of getting on top of those forces, then everything else is just playing for time.

**WOODS:** Let's get a bit more into your particular column here. We talked about what happened in 2022, and I think it's safe to say a lot of people were disappointed in the outcome.

That outcome actually pains me because I felt like that was the closest we're ever going to come to a referendum on what was done during Covid. And I thought that referendum has to be clear and unambiguous if we're to prevent such a disaster from occurring again.

And it was, to say the least, not clear and unambiguous. So, as we look back on it, what would you say if you were a political consultant going into 2024? What needs to be done differently so that there isn't another Biden term?

**McCARTHY:** My column drew a lot upon an analysis that appeared in *Real Clear Politics*. And I think that analysis – and I'm forgetting the fellow's name who wrote it, but I really recommend that people look it up.

It's about the 2022 midterms, and it's just a comprehensive examination of the different hypotheses people have offered for why the election turned out relatively badly for the Republicans. It wasn't a disaster for Republicans.

They still won control of the House, but obviously they lost one seat in the Senate and their expectations were of a much greater Republican victory. And the disappointment was absolutely disheartening and shocking to Republicans.

So, one of the explanations that was offered was, well, could it have been the *Dobbs* decision, the fact that *Roe v Wade* has fallen? Now that contributes something. But on the other hand, you'll notice that a lot of pro-life governors got reelected during 2022.

So, it doesn't seem as if voters were that energized and going in as single-issue pro-abortion voters. So, that doesn't really explain the whole thing.

You could say that, well, maybe it was bad candidate selection. Maybe it was the ghost of Donald Trump haunting the 2022 midterms. But if that was true, you would expect that force to have shown up in the polling leading up to Election Day, and it wouldn't have been a big surprise on Election Day itself.

So, the question is, why didn't that show up in the polling? And why, in fact, did the polls keep misreporting how much support the Republicans had?

And this analysis in *Real Clear Politics* makes the case that what the Democrats did is that in several key states, about seven key states, they were able to get out the vote of people who were not being picked up in the polling at all.

So, that you have a number of marginal voters. They're not people who regularly vote. And the Democrats were quite successful at mobilizing these voters who were basically under the radar of the polling companies and getting them to go out and vote.

And that was what saved the Democrat's bacon. Especially in the Senate, but it also really cut into the Republican gains in the House as well. I think there's a lot of truth to that.

And the rather unglamorous reality is that if you want to prevent that from happening again in 2024, Republicans are just going to have to get a lot better at grassroots, get out the vote, organizing, especially with people who are not the easiest voters to mobilize.

You have to go find those marginal voters. Now, this is an argument that I make in my column, that Donald Trump did exactly that in 2016. He went out and had massive rallies in places that hadn't voted for a Republican since Ronald Reagan.

And as a result, he got some votes that other Republicans did not get and he was able to win the Electoral College. And in fact, he won it with over 300 electoral votes, which is pretty impressive. That's more impressive than any of the Electoral College victories that George W Bush won in 2000 or in 2004.

So, Trump himself in 2016 modeled what Republicans need to do. They need to go out there and actually get voters who are winnable but who are not already part of the standard, reliable, Republican coalition.

And then beyond that, Republicans have to take seriously the idea that you have to fight fire with fire. If the Democrats are going out there and using mail-in voting, if they're using voting before Election Day and so forth, Republicans have to be just as mobilized on those fronts as well.

And you can't say that just because vote by mail is a bad idea and early voting is a bad idea – they are, in fact, bad ideas. And they are, in fact, vulnerable to various kinds of manipulation.

That said, if the enemy is using those tactics, you'd better be prepared to use the same kind of tactics if you want to win, because otherwise you're bringing a knife to a gunfight.

**WOODS:**  I just saw a poll of Democratic voters where the overwhelming majority thought there should be Democratic primary debates. I don't know how reliable that poll is, but if it is reliable, that's an interesting result.

Because I think everybody kind of understands the difficulties in the Republican Party and the rivalries and the personalities and all that. But we can't forget the Democrats, too, who are in a bit of disarray because surely some of them are secretly not that pleased with Biden.

And they all – as you pointed out in your column on Dianne Feinstein. And that her situation at age 90 is just calling to mind where Joe Biden will be after a possible second term. He'd be 86 at the end. So, there is definitely some division.

But what I'm curious about is I've taken a great interest in the candidacy of Robert F Kennedy Jr, and the response to him (the very predictable response to him) by the media. He keeps polling somewhere around 20%.

And we've heard from the DNC that there won't be any Democratic primary debates. I don't know if that changes if his numbers by some miracle grew fantastically to the point where it would be unreasonable not to have debates.

But what do you think about the prospect of that? Is there any possible chance that anything could happen that would force Biden into that situation? And secondly, what is your overall assessment of RFK Jr?

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, there were people who thought maybe Biden wasn't going to run for a second term. And I never bought into that. I always thought Joe Biden ran for president several times, didn't make it.

Now he finally has made it to the White House. He's not looking to get out of there. It's not as if he has a bright future for his post-presidency. The guy will be probably in the ground a year or two after he leaves the White House, whether that's after next year or whether that's after a second term.

The longevity prospects for an ex-politician are not all that great when they're as old as Joe Biden or Dianne Feinstein is. That's usually the last position they will ever hold in their lives.

So, Biden is ambitious, He is tenacious. He wants to be elected to a second term. That said, I have become increasingly won over by the people who say that, look, there is a sizable chunk of the Democratic Party – and it might be 40%. It might be more than that. Who knows?

That is, when you pull them, they will say they don't think Biden should be seeking a second term. And they're still saying that after Biden has made it perfectly clear that he is running.

And Biden is not, by his sheer prestige as president, succeeding in scaring off even someone like RFK Jr who's being totally assassinated in terms of his character by the media.

So, if even someone who's dismissed as a fringe, flake, barely better than Marianne Williamson – I mean, that's the kind of category that all of the establishment liberal media have put RFK in. And RFK is still pulling 15% to 20% in most polls.

He's been at 15% in some of the recent ones, so I can't say that he's been consistently at 20%. But there's definitely a substantial part of the Democratic Party – much more of the Democratic Party is interested in RFK than Republicans are interested in Chris Christie.

In fact, more Democrats are interested in RFK than you have Republicans interested in Mike Pence or Nikki Haley or any of these other candidates other than Trump and DeSantis. So, RFK, who, let's remember, is running up against an incumbent president.

So, this is not even like the Republican nomination where you have an ex-president, Donald Trump, running against a couple of challengers. This is an actual incumbent who almost always would have enough prestige to scare away any kind of opponent whatsoever.

This is an incumbent being challenged by a guy who's getting 15%, 20%, in the summer before the primaries even begin. So, the question is, is Joe Biden going to be stronger or weaker six months from now when the primaries begin, and we get to Iowa and New Hampshire.

South Carolina has been moved up in the Democratic schedule precisely because Joe Biden wanted to use South Carolina as a firewall against any opponent. South Carolina saved Joe Biden's bacon back in 2020, and he thinks it's going to be a reliable state for him in 2024 as well.

But I think if Biden looks as vulnerable in six months time, or more vulnerable than he is now, not only are you going to see more and more support for RFK, but you're also, I think, going to see other Democrats starting to say maybe they do have to get in and challenge Biden.

You also have polls that show both Biden and Trump have very high negative ratings. And even though they both seem to have a pretty firm grip on their parties, those negative ratings are a signal to other ambitious politicians that a Trump/Biden rematch in 2024 could be very unpopular with voters.

And there's an opening to try to disrupt that. There's an opening to try to nominate someone else in the Republican Party, and I think also in the Democratic Party.

**WOODS:** Do you think RFK is speaking for a genuine constituency within the Democratic Party that has over the past few decades watched the party be transformed in a direction they've been uncomfortable with, but they haven't known how to articulate that?

Or is that wishful thinking? Is the party basically the party of AOC now, and RFK is where he is simply on the strength of his name?

**McCARTHY:** I think it's a mix of both of those things and also Biden's weakness. So, the Kennedy name by itself is worth a few points. Biden's weakness is certainly worth several points.

But I think there is a certain element in the Democratic Party, maybe it's 10%, maybe it's 5%. But whatever it is, it's going to RFK. And it's an element that may have been supporting Bernie Sanders in the past.

It may have been supporting other candidates who were something of a challenge to the establishment in years past. So, I think there is a little bit of real philosophical or ideological resistance in the Democratic Party.

RFK is a mixture of anti-establishment and also pretty conventional on other things. So, it's hard to say whether you have people who like what's conventional about him and like the Kennedy name who are the bulk of his support, or whether you have people who like the fact that RFK is asking some of the same questions within the Democratic Party that Donald Trump had been asking in the Republican Party back in 2016.

But I think at least part of (half or more) of RFK support is the real thing.

**WOODS:** So, that means that there is at least a sliver in the Democratic Party that is unhappy with the direction of foreign policy as carried out by Biden. And I remember Pat Buchanan referring to his support within the Catholic hierarchy.

He referred to this as "the church silent". Well, this is kind of like the opponents of the Ukraine intervention in the Democratic Party. I don't really hear from very many of these people. But if RFK is doing that well, maybe they exist.

**McCARTHY:** Well, and the other interesting thing is that Cornel West, the professor, he's going to run an independent campaign for president. Now, he's not going to get a lot of votes, but Cornel West is also quite critical of the direction of the Democratic Party and the Ukraine war in particular.

So, I think it's interesting that if you look at what's happening in politics, you have Biden who is supporting the Ukraine war. You've got the Republican establishment, people like Mitch McConnell who are supporting the war.

But then almost everyone else, everyone who is entrepreneurial and may be gaining momentum and may be the wave of the future, whether that's Trump, who has been the wave of the future since 2016, or Ron DeSantis, who has tried to triangulate a little bit but is still not the sort of gung-ho neocon that you would expect of an establishment candidate.

Desantis is actually quite reserved and critical about the Ukraine and Russia conflict. And then you've got on the left RFK and Cornel West. Again, not necessarily big numbers, but they still have a kind of authenticity and energy behind them that is significant.

And again, all of these people are critical of the Ukraine/Russia conflict and of our involvement in it. That suggests to me that there really is a sea change going on here.

So, even though in Washington DC, the foreign policy blob and all the mainstream media, they might as well be employed by Zelinski because they have absolutely no critical perspective on the conflict. They are, I think, very unrepresentative of the country, that the country has grave doubts about this.

Just as the country – in the years before Donald Trump confronted the Republican establishment in 2016 about the Iraq war, there was still this kind of establishment consensus in Washington, DC and elsewhere that: *Yeah, things hadn't really worked out in the Iraq war, but it was still probably worth doing.*

And this is still the direction that the Republican Party (and the Democratic Party too) both need to adhere to in foreign policy. And then Trump came along and he smashed that. But we saw that when Ron Paul ran for president in 2008 and 2012, Ron Paul was also criticizing the Iraq war.

And even though he wasn't getting as many supporters as Donald Trump would later get, it was still a sign that something was starting to change. And I see that there's even more of that now on both the left and the right than there had been when Ron Paul was running for president in 2008 and 2012.

Now the Ukraine conflict with Russia – it's always funny. You go back and you read these accounts of World War One. And what do they all say? They all say: *Nobody knew it was a serious war.*

Everyone thought: *Well, this is going to be over in a few months. We can just enjoy our summer vacation. Some of the men will go off and fight, and that's gonna be kind of glorious. And then it'll be over and then things will go back to normal.*

And of course, after World War One, nothing was going back to normal. You had not just the war itself and millions dead, but you had a collapse in Germany, which would ultimately, 20 years later, lead to the rise of the Nazis. You had the actual rise of the Bolsheviks in what had been Russia and became the Soviet Union.

World War One was absolutely transformative and just demolished the sort of ethos of the 19th century and all the confidence that civilization had at that point. And then, of course, if you look at World War Two, there's actually some similarities there, too.

Because at the very earliest phase of World War Two, you had various American and British sources referring to it as a "phony war". And it seemed as if maybe World War Two wouldn't really get that serious. And of course, it did become serious.

Well, today we think: *Life goes on as normal despite what's happening with Russia and Ukraine. It doesn't really feel like this is the beginning of World War Three.*

But the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has a lot of unresolvable difficulties. So, one way or another, whatever happens, there are going to be ongoing border disputes. There's going to be an ongoing security risk situation.

Ukraine is not able to stand up for itself. It has to have some greater power backing it, which means Ukraine is going to continue to call upon NATO and call upon the United States.

You have a variety of European powers (including Poland) which really don't want to see the precedent that will affect them if Russia is successful in Ukraine.

This is a wound that will not heal anytime soon, even if there were an armistice tomorrow. And the likelihood of any kind of armistice is quite remote.

So, we're not in World War Three yet, but we are in a situation that is strategically a lot more grave than anything that the war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan represented in the past 20 years.

**WOODS:** You had a column about John Mearsheimer not long ago – what, a couple of weeks ago, maybe?

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, John Mearsheimer was in Washington, DC, and Mearsheimer gets smeared as being pro-Putin or pro-Russian, but he's not.

He's a foreign policy realist who has been – here's the irony of ironies. Mearsheimer, back in the early 1990s, told the Ukrainians not to give up their nuclear weapons.

He said: *Look, if you want your country to be secure, you need to keep those nukes that you have that were old Soviet Union nukes that now Russia wants to gain control of*.

That didn't happen. The United States actually put incredible pressure – as did Russia, of course. Both the US and Russia put pressure on Ukraine to give up its nuclear weapons. Ukraine gave them up. And then the question became: *Well, all right, so how are you going to guarantee the security for Ukraine?*

And Mearsheimer's advice to Ukrainians is: *Look, you've got this very tough, bad dude neighbor next to you called Russia. And so, you need to be very accommodating and careful. And if you piss off this bad dude, if you do something that he thinks is going to be a threat to him, he is going to wreck your country*.

And of course, that's exactly what has happened. So, Mearsheimer is getting all the hostile email and anger directed at him that you would expect from being a prophet who's been vindicated. Mearsheimer made this very interesting talk when he came to DC about a month ago, where he said that this is an existential crisis for all the parties involved.

And he meant that not only for Russia and Ukraine, but also for Europe and for the United States. And what he meant by that – so, obviously for Ukraine, it's existential in that there won't be a Ukraine if Russia gets 100% of what it wants.

You may have a rump state, but it'll be chaotic, it'll be a failed state. So, for them, in order to have any kind of normal life, Ukraine has to try to not only stop its country from being destroyed, but also, they have to get to a sufficient degree of security that they feel like they can lead a normal life.

And that's a very remote possibility right now. Russia has had a need for access to the Mediterranean going back centuries, and that's what Crimea means to Russia.

Think about what America would do if we thought we would lose all of our ports that have access to the Caribbean. We would never tolerate that. Russia needs to have its Black Sea fleet, which is based in Crimea.

If Ukraine is in charge of Crimea, then the Black Sea fleet is probably going to be cut off from Russia. And then Russia is not going to have access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean beyond that, other than by going a very circuitous northern route through Kaliningrad.

And Kaliningrad is an exclave, right? I mean, it's a Russian territory that is completely surrounded by other countries. So, even Kaliningrad, which is the other most valuable warm water western port that Russia has, that too, is not really very strategically secure.

So, Russia thinks that in order to be a great power, in order to have access to the Mediterranean, they have to have Crimea. If they have to have Crimea, that means they have to have a bit of a buffer zone, right?

So, if NATO were to move into Ukraine and take over all of Ukraine except for Crimea, then Crimea would have this powerful NATO force right next to it. That would be very insecure for the Russians.

So, for the Russians, it's also absolutely imperative that Ukraine not be able to join NATO. Or that if Ukraine does join NATO, that it's only a very shrunken Ukraine and not a Ukraine that has borders with Crimea and that has serious access to the Black Sea on its own account.

For Europe, it's an existential conflict in that the entire European security apparatus, all the eggs are in the NATO basket. The European countries, whether it's Germany (even places like Britain and France) they don't really want to do their own fighting.

They don't want to have to maintain their own militaries. They don't want to be responsible for the amount of spending they would need to pony up in order to secure the continent that they live on. They would rather just have the Americans do most things.

And NATO is a way of – the Europeans do shill in some funds for NATO, but it's really America that is obviously the leader and the primary paymaster of that alliance.

If NATO gets discredited by putting all of these resources into Ukraine and it still isn't enough and it still fails, then Europeans (and opposition parties in Europe in particular) they're going to start saying: *Well, wait a minute, does this really work for us? I mean, what is NATO worth if it can't actually even stop what's going on in Ukraine?*

Yes, NATO may stop an actual outright invasion, but it's clearly a much weaker alliance than people had thought. And so, you're going to have a change in the European order. And that change would mean Europeans are going to have to maybe start thinking more seriously about their own security.

But maybe the thing that would happen – and this is one of the things Mearsheimer fears. Is that you'd have European countries start to cut separate deals with Russia or China or others. They'd say: *Well, we're going to have a close economic alliance with you and we're going to peel away from NATO*.

So, the whole NATO apparatus is somewhat endangered by what's going on with Ukraine and Russia. And then for the United States, Mearscheimer was really talking about how it's existential for our leadership class.

That they have staked the credibility of what we would call the American empire on the ability to save Ukraine from Russia. And if they can't do that, then the question is: *Well, look, Ukraine is right next to NATO. You've got this massive land border where you can just ship all of these NATO arms directly into Ukraine.*

*If you can't save Ukraine from Russia (and Russia is a fairly weak power compared to China) how on earth would you possibly save Taiwan from China? Because you don't have a land border. How are you going to get materials into Taiwan? You're going to have to run a Chinese blockade. That's going to be pretty difficult.*

*And then China is a much larger and stronger country right next door to Taiwan. Now, if you get a conflict there, what it's really doing is putting the credibility of the US Navy and the credibility of the navies of our allies in question.*

And that makes a conflict more likely, in Mearsheimer's analysis. Also, if the US can't, again, salvage Ukraine with all of NATO behind it, it's going to cause allies in East Asia (and quasi-allies, places like Vietnam, for example) to really question which side they should be on in the event of a conflict between China and the United States.

So, this is a big problem for the American empire and for our own leadership class. Mearsheimer was speaking at a group called the Committee for the Republic.

Which, as the name suggests, doesn't like the American empire, would like us to come home, America, and be more concerned about our domestic freedoms, as opposed to having this "worldwide rules-based international liberal order" as they call it.

But if the rules-based international liberal order collapses or starts to fall apart, it will mean some changes for our lives here at home as well. It's going to mean changes in how we conduct trade. It's going to mean that there will be new kinds of mixtures of political and economic conflict that we just aren't used to.

We're used to having everything run the way we want it to run. If we want to tell the Swiss, for example, that they need to get rid of their banking secrecy, we can do that because we are this paramount power in the world.

If you have a more genuinely multi-polar world, we're not going to be able to impose those kinds of demands on allies or even constrain opponents. And it's going to be a much more complicated and messy situation for us.

So, it doesn't mean America goes away, but it does mean that the empire and the current leadership class of the empire probably does go away. These are very high stakes.

What I should point out here is even though critics of the empire would say: *Hey, it would be great if this just went away.* The decline of an empire, the collapse of an empire is often pretty darn uncomfortable.

And the leadership class that is in charge of this apparatus, it's not going to go quietly into the night. So, chances are we would become more interventionist and more activist in trying to save an empire that was jeopardized even than we are right now, where we're generally just trying to maintain an empire that we've built up.

**WOODS:** You mentioned at the beginning the way somebody like a John Mearsheimer is treated, and it's entirely predictable. But I want to add a little something to that.

Because last year at PorcFest (which is the big Free State Project libertarian event in New Hampshire) there was a debate on this subject that Gene Epstein moderated – our friend.

And it was about whether the United States should be pursuing the current policy with regard to Ukraine. And Cathy Young took the affirmative, and Scott Horton took the negative.

And when the name John Mearsheimer came up, she said: *Oh, he's somebody who believes that big countries have a right to dominate countries around them.*

And I thought: *What kind of a blockhead are you?* And so, Scott correctly said: *I don't think that's actually what he's saying. I think what he's saying is, this is the way of the world.*

*It doesn't matter if you like it. Or, it's not a question of having a right to it. It's that this is the way of the world, and you have to form your judgments and your policies in light of how the world works*.

And that's so obviously what he's saying. He's not saying that big countries have a right to dominate little countries around them. Not at all. But that's what they hear (or at least they pretend to hear) when people like him talk.

Which is why it's so hard to have conversations with people who are speaking to you in platitudes and propaganda. Because anything like that – it's like when Ron Paul tried to say: *Maybe there was some history before 9/11.* The response was: *You're blaming America for 9/11!*

You can't even talk to these people.

**McCARTHY:** Yeah, that's exactly right. And of course, it's similar to, but even worse than, when you just have progressives demagoguing against conservatives and libertarians and saying: *Well, if you're not supporting expansion of Obamacare, then you must really hate the poor and you want the sick to be thrown out on the street and to die*.

That's imbecilic. And we're used to that in domestic politics. But when it comes to foreign policy, you see that people who would never accept this kind of demagoguery in the domestic level – they would say: *No, look, you can oppose government programs without hating the poor and wanting to see the sick all perish and be left out to die*.

But when it comes to foreign policy, a lot of these garden variety, more establishment Republicans, what do they do? They resort to exactly the same kind of thing. And the same with a lot of these garden variety Beltway libertarians and New York libertarians. New York libertarians are a mixed bag.

I mean, you've got some who are establishment types, and some like Gene Epstein, who are good guys. But the establishment friendly libertarians and conservatives, when it comes to foreign policy, they will resort to the same sort of imbecilic moralizing and distortion of other people's arguments.

And of course, we had this same thing happen with Afghanistan, with Iraq. Over and over again we are told: *Here is the official propaganda line, and if you don't buy it, then you're unpatriotic. You are a supporter of Islamofascism or a supporter of Saddam Hussein. You're unAmerican.*

You're an "unpatriotic conservative", as David Frum said of all the right-wing critics of the Iraq war. This happens over and over again. And you would think – you know, I'm in my mid-40s and I've already lived through a couple of cycles of this.

And you would think: *Gee, don't we get to learn anything from history?* Don't we get to say at some point: *All right, maybe you guys got to do your hyper-moralistic, demonize the opponent, believe the propaganda thing back after 9/11 Okay, that happened. But now why do we have to do it again with Russia and Iraq?*

*Why do we have to once more pretend that we don't know that there are cruel realities in the world in terms of countries that happen to live next to Russia or in the 19th and 20th century, a rising Germany. Wow!*

But here we are doing the same stupid things that we've done in the past 20 years, and in fact, going back much longer. It actually makes me a little nostalgic for some of the old Cold War stuff that I read about from George Kennan and others.

Because at least these were serious people who tried to talk seriously about how different powers would react to one another.

So, Henry Kissinger just turned 100. And I'm not by any means a great fan of Kissinger, but you have all these whiny leftists trying to blame the entire American empire on Henry Kissinger.

But even Henry Kissinger at least realized that you can't just rely on moralizing thing and expect that – you don't have to acknowledge the fact that Communist China, for example, is not going anywhere.

And it would be better if we could neutralize its relationship with Russia, or pull them away from Russia (the Soviet Union, I should say) rather than letting the Soviet Union and communist China sort of align during the Cold War.

We could have these intelligent adult conversations in the Cold War, at least to some degree. And ever since the end of the Cold War, since Gulf War One, that has not been the case.

**WOODS:** Dan, give me your gut instinct, as we wrap up here, your gut instinct, what your gut is telling you about how Trump emerges from – I mean, there's so many variables here.

But how Trump emerges from the current legal problems and what are the chances he winds up not getting the nomination because of it? Where do you think it all ends up?

**McCARTHY:** The crystal ball or the magic eight ball is just giving a very cloudy response. The way things are right now, if today were actually June of 2024, it looks like Donald Trump will certainly be the Republican nominee.

He may be facing fines. His court case may be dragging on. And if he becomes president, he can obviously pardon himself and the whole thing disappears. So, that's one scenario, which I think is very plausible, and it's probably the more plausible scenario.

But the other scenario is that Donald Trump's legal problems could accelerate. And I think already he's actually lost a few points in polls as a result of them. And this could get much worse as we get to the actual primary season at the beginning of 2024.

And so, you could see maybe Donald Trump loses the nomination. Maybe he gets sent to jail. I mean, anything is possible here. I think this is an election with the most radical possibilities of any election that I've seen in my lifetime, certainly.

**WOODS:** Yeah. I don't see what else you can say other than what you just said. So, time will tell. Meanwhile, give us a link, just pick one at random, of all the many ways somebody could follow Dan McCarthy for people who are intrigued and would like to follow you more.

**McCARTHY:** Go to. ModernAgeJournal.com, which is the magazine that I edit, *Modern Age*. And beyond that, you can follow me @ToryAnarchist on Twitter. So, those are two good ways to follow me.

You can also see my work at the *New York Post*, as you mentioned. And the Creators Syndicate website will also have a list of columns I've written.

**WOODS:** Okay, very well. I'll put those things up. Everything you just said, I'll put that up at TomWoods.com/2349. All right, thanks so much, Dan. I appreciate it.

**McCARTHY:** Great. Thanks, Tom. Take care.