

# 3 Ways to Get Rid of President Trump Before 2020

*Rosa Brooks*

Are we really stuck with this guy?

It's the question being asked around the globe, because Donald Trump's first week as president has made it all too clear: Yes, he *is* as crazy as everyone feared.

Remember those optimistic pre-inauguration fantasies? I cherished them, too. You know: "Once he's president, I'm sure he'll realize it doesn't really make sense to withdraw from all those treaties." "Once he's president, surely he'll understand that he needs to stop tweeting out those random insults." "Once he's president, he'll have to put aside that ridiculous campaign braggadocio about building a wall along the Mexican border." And so on.

Nope. In his first week in office, Trump has made it eminently clear that he meant every loopy, appalling word — and then some.

The result so far: The president of China is warning against trade wars and declaring that Beijing will take up the task of [defending globalization](#) and free trade against American protectionism. The president of Mexico has canceled a state visit to Washington, and prominent Mexican leaders [say](#) Trump's proposed border wall "could take us to a war — not a trade war." Senior leaders in Trump's own party are denouncing the new president's claims of widespread [voter fraud](#) and his reported plans to reopen CIA "[black sites](#)." Oh, and the entire senior management team at the U.S. Department of State has [resigned](#).

Meanwhile, Trump's approval ratings are [lower](#) than those of any new U.S. president in the history of polling: Just [36 percent](#) of Americans are pleased with his performance so far. Some [80 percent](#) of British citizens think Trump will make a "bad president," along with 77 percent of those polled in France and 78 percent in Germany.

And that's just week one.

Thus the question: Are we truly stuck with Donald Trump?

It depends. There are essentially four ways to get rid of a crummy president.

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First, of course, the world can just wait patiently for November 2020 to roll around, at which point, American voters will presumably have come to their senses and be prepared to throw the bum out.

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But after such a catastrophic first week, four years seems like a long time to wait. This

brings us to option two: [impeachment](#). Under the U.S. Constitution, a simple majority in the House of Representatives could vote to impeach Trump for “treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanors.” If convicted by the Senate on a two-thirds vote, Trump could be removed from office — and a new poll suggests that after week one, [more than a third](#) of Americans are already eager to see Trump impeached.

If impeachment seems like a fine solution to you, the good news is that Congress doesn't need evidence of actual treason or murder to move forward with an impeachment: Practically anything can be considered a “high crime or misdemeanor.” (Remember, former President Bill Clinton was impeached for lying about his affair with Monica Lewinsky). The bad news is that Republicans control both the House and the Senate, making impeachment politically unlikely, unless and until Democrats retake Congress. And that can't happen until the elections of 2018.

Anyway, impeachments take time: months, if not longer — even with an enthusiastic Congress. And when you have a lunatic controlling the nuclear codes, even a few months seems like a perilously long time to wait. How long will it take before Trump decides that “you're fired” is a phrase that should also apply to nuclear missiles? (Aimed, perhaps, [at Mexico?](#))

In these dark days, some around the globe are finding solace in the [25th Amendment](#) to the Constitution. This previously obscure amendment states that “the Vice President and a majority of ... the principal officers of the executive departments” can declare the president “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office,” in which case “the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President.”

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This is option three for getting rid of Trump: an appeal to Vice President Mike Pence's ambitions. Surely Pence wants to be president himself one day, right? Pence isn't exactly a political moderate — he's been unremittingly hostile to gay rights, he's a climate change skeptic, etc. — but, unappealing as his politics may be to many Americans, he does not appear to actually be insane. (This is the new threshold for plausibility in American politics: “not actually insane.”)

Presumably, Pence is sane enough to oppose rash acts involving, say, the evisceration of all U.S. military alliances or America using nuclear weapons first — and presumably, if things got bad enough, other Trump cabinet members might also be inclined to oust their boss and replace him with his vice president. Congress would have to acquiesce in a permanent 25th Amendment removal, but if Pence and half the cabinet declared Trump unfit, even a Republican-controlled Congress would likely fall in line.

The fourth possibility is one that until recently I would have said was unthinkable in the United States of America: a military coup, or at least a refusal by military leaders to obey certain orders.

The principle of civilian control of the military has been deeply internalized by the U.S. military, which prides itself on its nonpartisan professionalism. What's more, we know that a high-ranking lawbreaker with even a little subtlety can run rings around the uniformed military. During the first years of the George W. Bush administration, for instance, formal protests from the nation's senior-most military lawyers didn't stop the use of torture. When military leaders objected to tactics such as waterboarding, the Bush administration simply bypassed the military, getting the CIA and private contractors to do their dirty work.

But Trump isn't subtle or sophisticated: He sets policy through rants and late-night tweets, not through quiet hints to aides and lawyers. He's thin-skinned, erratic, and unconstrained — and his unexpected, self-indulgent pronouncements are reportedly sending [shivers](#) through even his closest aides.

What would top U.S. military leaders do if given an order that struck them as not merely ill-advised, but dangerously unhinged? An order that wasn't along the lines of "Prepare a plan to invade Iraq if Congress authorizes it based on questionable intelligence," but "Prepare to invade Mexico tomorrow!" or "Start rounding up Muslim Americans and sending them to Guantánamo!" or "I'm going to teach China a lesson — with nukes!"

It's impossible to say, of course. The prospect of American military leaders responding to a presidential order with open defiance is frightening — but so, too, is the prospect of military obedience to an insane order. After all, military officers swear to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, not the president. For the first time in my life, I can imagine plausible scenarios in which senior military officials might simply tell the president: "No, sir. We're not doing that," to thunderous applause from the *New York Times* editorial board.

Brace yourselves. One way or another, it's going to be a wild few years.

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