

Double, Double Toil and Trouble: Harris Creeping Up on MAGA Like Something Out of Macbeth

By Conrad Black

Each time it seems that the anti-Trump coalition has run negative positions to retreat to, they feverishly dig a new trench, fasten their helmets, and leap into it. In the anti-Trump category, it seems that just as the most vicious wars are often civil wars, the most passionate Trump-haters are authentic Republican Never-Trumpers. Their party has almost vanished.

The most impassioned and talented of this group are Peggy Noonan of the Wall Street Journal, former speechwriter extraordinaire for Ronald Reagan, and Karl Rove, the political conjurer and tactical guru who turned George W. Bush into a two-term president from the awkward and malapropistic governor of Texas.



Vice President Harris in North Carolina, August 16, 2024. AP/Julia Nixhinson

In addition to their expertise, they are in all respects admirable and likable people. But Ms. Noonan has

declared the recent presidential debate a decisive victory for Kamala Harris, and therefore a “decisive defeat” for Donald Trump, and Karl Rove, also writing in the Wall Street Journal, declared it to be a “catastrophe” for Trump. This is bunk and anyone who saw the debates, including partisan Democrats, must know that it is bunk.

The book-ends of the debate were when, in the opening question, the vice president was asked if Americans were better off now than they were four years ago and she answered with syntactically correct but meaningless blather about how she was brought up in a middle-class household; and the closing when President Trump asked her if she had all these hopeful but unspecific ideas, why she had not achieved the accomplishment of any of them in her term as Veep.

Answer came there none. Trump did not say anything that embarrassed him, and Ms. Harris did not say anything that embarrassed him either. Polls on the outcome of the debate vary widely but they have had no appreciable effect on the race. Ms. Noonan and Mr. Rove have, throughout the Trump era, shown a demiurgic talent for anti-Trump improvisation.

These have ranged from the regular Noonan assertion of two years ago that Republicans should stop being intimidated by Trump because his popularity was in steep decline right up to his sweep of all of the primaries, and the Rove theory that the indictments of Trump had caused him a significant dip in the polls, just before he opened up a four-point lead on the incumbent including leads in all of the swing states.

Vice President Harris did undoubtedly make it much more difficult to portray her as she has often appeared, as a thoroughly failed candidate for the presidential nomination and as vice president: a vacuous airhead. She was fluent and coherent but obviously on autocue and rescued from the discipline of normal debate by the winners of this year's Chris Wallace Prize for rabid partisanship in debate moderating.

She made, though, no attempt to defend the Biden administration, refute the indisputable facts of its failures in inflation, immigration, crime, green excesses and overregulation, hypocrisy over the Middle East, ineffectuality at ending the Ukraine war satisfactorily, and the imperishable debacle in Afghanistan.

She did get somewhat under President Trump's skin: he should have ignored her fatuous allegation that while he drew big crowds they tended to depart early, and if he had to make the claim that the poor countries of the world had reduced their crime rates and transferred the residents of their prisons and insane asylums to the United States, he should have only said it once.

The fact that she managed to irritate the former president does not constitute a triumphant advance for her candidacy, any more than the fact that Trump was slightly distracted by the obnoxiousness of his opponent disqualifies him from returning to the office that it is generally conceded that in policy terms he successfully occupied for four years.

Few of the statewide polling organizations are reliable, most of the national polling organizations that are identified with left-wing universities and the press are also unreliable, and except for a couple of independent polls that model their questions and canvassing more impartially, the nation-wide polls habitually underestimate Trump by two to three percent.

California and New York have 82 electoral votes and Texas, Florida, and Tennessee have 81 electoral votes, but because California is a gigantic rotten borough, the Democrats amass a majority in California and New York that exceeds the reliable Republican plurality and the other three states by four million votes. This requires the Democrats, if they are to elect a president, to lead the popular vote in the country by at least four percent. There is at this point no believable sign of any such surge in the Democrats' support.

At the last moment to have any chance of salvaging anything useful out of the election, the Democrats ditched the unfeasible President Biden, who has already almost become a trivia question. The vice president has performed energetically and has created a chipper ambience in her party that has at the least, probably avoided the devastation of down-ballot Democratic candidates that had been rightly feared.

The vice president, though, has not done anything to rewrite the baneful history of the administration for which he has been the co-captain, and it is no longer possible to smear the MAGA agenda since Ms. Harris is creeping towards it like Birnham Wood approaching Dunsinane. Peggy Noonan and Karl Rove and others can leap about as if they were participating in a teenage New Year's party if it helps them, but there is still no good reason not to vote for Trump.

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