

Great Again

by Conrad Black



Everyone who follows American affairs should understand that the country is now in what amounts to [a second, but non-violent civil war](#). There are still serious commentators who sagely counsel a return to bipartisanship, “reaching across the aisle,” as if anything of the kind were remotely possible. The Democrats and some of the Republicans smell blood and wish to see the Trump presidency destroyed and believe that to be possible. Some have been spooked by the malicious media carpet-bombing of the president; some actually think that there has been some impeachable offense committed, despite the absence of any evidence of one. But most have never seen such an immediate and no holds-barred battle between the Washington power structure and a new administration, because there has never been one, and want to see which way it moves before getting aboard one battle wagon or the other.

Because Donald Trump took control of the Republican Party by running against all factions of both parties, and the Washington media and lobbyists, Hollywood, Wall Street and the campaign financing system (and financed his own campaign for the nomination), and pitched his appeal to those dissatisfied

with the system, he won an astonishing series of victories even unto the White House, and banished the Bush-Clinton-Obama triumvirate that had ruled post-Reagan America. But all the other elements of the political class he assaulted remain in place and are swarming Washington like assassins in the most unstable days of the Roman Republic and Empire. Every day, nonviolently, is [the Ides of March](#).

Certainly, the opportunities for Trump's opponents have been enhanced by some of the president's inconsistencies and indiscretions, but almost all of these would have been overlooked or thought amiable in a normal presidential honeymoon, in which everyone settles in comfortably, a halcyon fairness is accorded by the media, and public curiosity about the new residents of the White House is benignly informed. None of it happened here, and even if the nature of the changeover: a righteous, raucous storming of Babylon by someone representing nearly half the people of a very dissatisfied and anxious country, assures the continuation of the war through Inauguration Day, the antics of Trump's enemies have exceeded all modern American standards of systematic dishonesty. Jeff Sessions was the only Republican senator who supported him in the campaign. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) would not appear in public with Trump, and then party chairman Reince Priebus ran for the tall grass several times. Neither of them expected him to win.

A Stumble and a Recovery

Trump has made a respectable effort to conciliate Republicans and place himself fairly gently at the head of that party. But it has been a delicate and incomplete act of union, and the congressional timetable has overtaken it.

The president failed to get right on top of the complicated health care issue, and was late to grasp how far Obama had succeeded in addicting many states and their congressional representatives to expanded aid for the low-income groups, Medicaid. Former president Obama incited a widespread desire

for universal state-run health care, but which exposed the inherent corruption of many of the cross-arrangements of the large drug companies and private medical providers and hospital companies with influential members of the Congress. Paul Ryan's biggest donor is Anthem, for example.

The president saved Ryan in getting the bill out of the House to the Senate, where senators who had shrieked for seven years they would repeal Obamacare and voted many times to do so, waffled and crumbled in a cowardly, shameful manner. They let the president down badly. It remains to be seen if anything of healthcare reform can be salvaged anytime soon, and Trump is not helping by oscillating between "letting Obamacare fail" and trying to pass something through a Senate with 48 disciplined Democrats, about 46 fairly purposeful Republicans, and five or six Republican hypocrites hiding under their desks and sheltering behind the anti-Trump media. The president's efforts to shame and muscle his ostensible partisans into some consistency has some virtue, whatever happens.

The Republicans perhaps will make a better and successful effort at tax reform, already being denounced by the Democrats in Congress and the media, sight unseen, as the usual giveaway to the rich (who generally support the Democrats anyway with their odious fund-raising exactions in their splendid homes). Tax reform is also complicated and makes for better politics than health care; a bill is presumably being designed that would be difficult for the tin soldiers of Democratic Senate obstructionism to become too demonstrative about. This time, the president should be on top of the subject and lead from the front.

Crisis Leadership

The arrival of Anthony Scaramucci as White House communications director is a sharp upward ratchet in the Trump game, and demonstrates a couple of his more impressive traits. The president does seek high-quality collaborators, as he did when his business was in crisis, and in forming his cabinet.

He is highly determined and almost impossible to discourage. It has been a fierce battle these six months and both sides are escalating, which makes talk of bipartisanship especially absurd.

I was one of those who thought that in engaging Robert Mueller as special counsel to take over an investigation in progress and run it within the designated parameters of subjects "relevant" to Russian intervention in the 2016 election, the administration would benefit from a man of integrity who would run a fair inquiry limited to its defined scope. The stupidity of Mueller in packing his staff with notorious Democrats, the scandalous leaks out of his operation, his charge into subjects far removed from his ostensible field, and his insolent tweet last week contradicting the president, do permit the inference that he is trying to run an assassination squad reminiscent of the worst days of Archibald Cox, Lawrence Walsh, and Kenneth Starr.

The problem is compounded by Attorney General Jeff Sessions probably having to recuse over his meetings with the Russians, innocuous though they were, and Deputy Attorney General Ron Rosenstein showing no disposition to give Mueller reasonable and impartial guidance. The solution here is not to fire anyone. There is still no evidence of anything. (It would be instantly leaked and deafeningly hyped if there was.) Scaramucci presumably will run a comprehensive debriefing operation and the president's legal team would consider legal challenges to an open-ended search and destroy mission through the entire lives of the president and his family if that is what Mueller is trying to conduct.

There will never be any evidence of Trump-Kremlin collusion, and the whole concept is just self-serving Clintonian myth-making, that has flourished in the hothouse of Democrats unable to accept the election result, echoed by a partisan press that is a prop of the failed *ancien regime* Trump assaulted. This episode should disabuse the entire political

class of the temptation to criminalize policy differences, a cancerous constitutional deformation ignited by Watergate, and nurtured by Iran-Contra and the nonsense of President Clinton's peccadilloes.

If Trump Fails. . .

Apart from the fact that this is war, what seems to escape notice is that if Trump fails, and however he fails, it will not bring a return to something good. It would be the return of those who gave America the initial under-reaction to terrorism, the housing bubble and world financial crisis, the elevation of Iran to preeminent influence in Iraq and much of the Middle East, then the North Korean crisis, the migrant humanitarian disaster, a flat-lined American economy hobbled with a back-breaking and under-funded welfare system, and the enthronement of political correctness to the point of official inability to utter the words "Islamist extremism."

Not only should Trump win, he *must* win, to prevent the profound decline of America, and the rise to world leadership, as if on the other end of a teeter-totter, of China. That is what is at stake, not the president's hairstyle, syntax, or tweeting habits.

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