

The Cohen Fiasco

Democrats are doing their feeble best to build an impeachment case against the president, but it won't succeed.

by Conrad Black



The whole state of national political discourse has risen a notch, but not from elevated content, rather from a de-escalation of the tawdriness and vituperation of discredited allegations. As the abysmal, shaming failure of the Russian-collusion fraud reveals itself in the run-up to the production of the Mueller report, the president's accusers, without even a subliminal hint of embarrassment, regret, or belated moderation, lower their sights.

Let us recall that two years ago, all manner of groups were staging sizeable marches all over the world announcing, in Bruce Springsteen's words (from Perth, Australia), the beginning of the Resistance. The *New York Times'* Tom Friedman asserted that the Russian influence on the 2016 election was an infringement of U.S. sovereignty on the same scale as the

attacks on Pearl Harbor and the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Hillary Clinton was putting the finishing touches on her book about the 2016 election, which explained that she had lost because of Donald Trump's treasonable collusion with the Russians in the Kremlin's tactical interventions in the campaign, and because she was "shivved three times by Jim Comey." (Never mind that two of these applications of the shiv were exonerations and another was almost certainly a whitewash of illegal conduct.)

Two years ago, the congressional Republican party was sitting on its hands, waiting to see if the president who had run against them as much as against the Democrats would be impeached. Whole conversations between the president and foreign leaders were being leaked, and personnel were coming and going from important positions in the White House in a blur of constant change magnified by the rabidly hostile media. When President Trump spoke to the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) two years ago, he was received politely but tentatively, hopefulness tempered by astonishment and disbelief. At that time, Nathan Silver was predicting that Trump's chances of impeachment were 50-50, and even the sober David Gergen said on CNN "We are moving into impeachment country." An immense media effort was made to enhance his vulnerability by dragging his approval ratings down into the 30s. His following has been unshakeable.

When the president returned to CPAC on Saturday, it was clear from beginning to end of his extraordinary appearance, speaking largely extempore for over two hours, that he was the head of a united Republican party and a conservative movement lined up to the last male and female combatant behind him. His leadership of the Republicans is now as unambiguous as that of Ronald Reagan and Dwight Eisenhower, an astounding feat in these uproarious circumstances, and given that he is much more of an outsider than Reagan was. (In the case of Eisenhower, the party grandees came caps-in-hand to the general and asked

him to run, and Richard Nixon delivered the California delegates to provide the margin of victory in seating the Eisenhower delegates over those pledged to Senate leader Robert A. Taft in a number of contested states, in exchange for the vice presidency.)

Richard Nixon in 1972, on his way to what still stands as the greatest plurality victory in American presidential history (18 million votes in an electorate only about 60 percent the size of the present one), faced a primary challenge, and won only about 68 percent in the New Hampshire primary, though he swept everything after that. At this point, despite obscure audible ruminations in rural church basements by Maryland governor Larry Hogan and John Kasich, former governor of Ohio, not even a mouse is stirring in the Republican party, and the president's tour de force at CPAC reinforced his position as the head of the entire country to the right of Joe Biden and Michael Bloomberg. If he is not running next year against either of those men, or possibly Amy Klobuchar or Sherrod Brown, that will be his likely percentage of votes cast next year, around 60 percent. If he is running against one of the few plausible centrists in the Democratic scrum, his margin could narrow to about 10 percent, which is still nearly 15 million votes.

As the Democrats take to the lifeboats from their foundering ship of impeachment, the unsinkables who have eschewed life vests are still declaiming on the tilting deck. Jerry Nadler is claiming the president's 1,100 public references to the Mueller inquiry as a witch-hunt constituted obstruction of justice, and the unstoppable talking head Adam Schiff is still repeating the existence of evidence of Trump-Russian collusion (that he can't identify and no one else has seen). Their fallback position, when they finally take the order to abandon ship on Russian collusion, is to make Trump's entire career their province and try to paw through everything he ever did commercially, back to childhood lemonade stands. Of course,

this will be a complete failure. The president can ignore these subpoenas and restrict compliance to specific issues, and endless trips up the court ladder could easily retard the progress of this nonsense until the public has entirely lost interest. These are not the same Nadler and Schiff of two years ago, who had thin lines of foam and saliva at the corners of their mouths as they solemnly announced that they had cornered the president.

The Trump-hating media did their best with Michael Cohen, a man who again lied to Congress last week, claimed to have flipped against Trump after Charlottesville nearly two years ago, and affirmed that there was no Trump–Russian collusion, although, while the president had never told him to pay off the stripper who was trying to blackmail Trump (Stormy Daniels), he had used a coded method of urging him to do so, which Cohen couldn't describe. We have descended from hearsay from a self-confessed liar to hear-intuition from the same majestic source, and the Democrats are so desperate they are having him back in the days immediately preceding his incarceration. We have descended from the drama of the conceivable removal of the world's premier officeholder to the squalid fabricated evidence of a pathetic plea bargainer, ground to powder by the partisan Mueller meat-grinder.

The Democrats and their media organ monkeys have done their best to sound unctuous and morally outraged and pretend that a credible witness has produced real evidence of a "high crime," and that an unadmitted response to attempted blackmail constitutes a campaign-finance violation, which is itself a constitutional high crime. But no one believes any of it, and no one cares. This clunker will take the dead-cat bounce, like all the others, including the weekly bubble of rage about the president's son-in-law receiving a security clearance. The country is tired of it. Those who detest Trump detest him. Those who like him are no less convinced or numerous than they were. But the modest no-man's land between them is breaking in

the president's favor as he edges slowly up in the polls. There are no more plausible revelations; there is no doubt of the country's economic performance, and the administration is clearly moving coherently and steadily in foreign policy.

In the absence of any new sensational or substantive anti-Trump argument, of anything to justify the howls of racism and misogyny of two years ago, the Resistance is doomed with their nonsense about Cohen and obstruction, and the Never Trumpers are mercifully silent. And those who merely disapprove of Trump, with sadness and nostalgia for more stylish and chivalrous times, such as Peggy Noonan, are back to the character issue. This is legitimate as a reservation about the president and a reason not to vote for him, but it won't fly as grounds for impeachment, and is not claimed to be by those who articulate it.

The country knew in 2016 that it was gambling on a garish, financially checkered New York development wheeler-dealer television reality-show star and downmarket impresario. They gambled that someone as far out of the familiar mold of the OBushintons as Trump was could be justified to try to reverse the post-Reagan slide in America's morale, economic competitiveness, and standing in the world. By a hair's breadth, the gamble succeeded, and so far, Trump supporters are reassured. Every conceivable epithet and charge has been hurled at Trump, and there is almost nothing to any of it. We're only 20 months from the next election and the Democrats, with no show-stopper to disqualify Trump, are scrambling to the left like lemmings to mount a radical alternative to the incumbent. If one of the few Democratic moderates can't get control of the runaway bus, it will go over the cliff. If they can, it will still break down on its axles as the long-delayed inquiry into the skullduggery of the politicized Obama Justice Department and intelligence agencies oozes into the public's nostrils. The Democrats have had their long turn at mudslinging. Now professionally and discreetly, it is time to

unearth the real scandal from the last election.

First published in