

The Theory That the Trump Era Is Over Is Over

Trump will keep it going until the next election and either be the Republican nominee or choose the Republican nominee.

by Conrad Black



The effect of President Trump's address to the Conservative Political Action Committee on Sunday has become clearer this week. The key sentence was, "A Republican president will be *returning* to the White House." Since the only other living Republican president, George W. Bush, is term-limited, Trump was speaking of himself.

The speech was not only the best and most interesting political speech delivered in the United States since President Reagan's successful reelection campaign in 1984, it also broke new ground in three important respects.

First, by expressing once again in reasonable and credible terms the basis of his complaint about voting and vote

counting irregularities in the presidential election in several critical swing states, and in avoiding exaggerated claims of the theft of millions of votes, Trump debunked the totalitarian attempt of the national media to suppress discussion of the integrity of the 2020 election. In doing this, Trump shattered the elaborate Democratic fraud that the rally of several hundred thousand of his supporters in Washington on January 6 had no legitimate grievance and was part of a premeditated attempt to destabilize or overthrow the government.

It was clear even from FBI Director Christopher Wray's unimpressive appearance at the Senate Judiciary Committee this week there is no evidence that anyone associated with the Trump campaign had preplanned any illegal activity. The intruders at the Capitol were led by semi-professional hooligans with no coherent political purposes. The outgoing president and his supporters had a legitimate grievance on that day and the entire comprehensive effort of the Democrats to represent him as a "disgraced" outlaw has collapsed. Donald Trump is not clouded in the odium of a lawbreaker or assailant of the Constitution and the prolonged effort to smear him as morally and psychologically unsuitable to high office has failed.

The second important consequence of his CPAC speech is that in showing the self-discipline to stick to the teleprompter and deliver a carefully constructed and fact-filled address, the former president incited the hope among his supporters that he now understands the need to be more careful and to smooth the rougher edges of his often abrasive public personality. It was clear from the uncontested election results that while Trump's policies were effectively ratified in the congressional and state elections and in the encroachments that the Republicans made upon traditional fiefdoms of the Democrats among the electorate—especially black, Latino, and working-class voters

generally—the majority of voters also disapproved of his personality.

Americans demand more dignity of the president and a president who is less exhausting and constantly in the face of the country—not only during all waking hours but, through his Twitter account, during much of every night. Trump’s speech on Sunday suggested he has grasped that message. His tactical success has been to use traditional Republican advocacy of lower taxes and fiscally incentivized economic growth to attract job-creating investment to disadvantaged areas where the Democrats have been accustomed to a free ride on Election Day.

The third takeaway from the day, counting the speech and the interviews the ex-president gave afterward, is that he sounds quite amenable to not being on social media all the time. His Twitter account was invaluable in launching his initial bid for the presidency and end-running the hostile national conventional media, but he is now happy to be more selective about when he makes himself heard and on which subjects.

Leader of the Opposition

His critics attempted to minimize the impact of his address. Former Ohio governor John Kasich, a defected Republican who spoke at the Democratic National Convention last year, said that Trump was like an aging prizefighter whose punches had lost their sting. Coming from someone whose victory address, when he won his home state primary in 2016, urged people to “take a widow to dinner in her red dress and embrace a stranger at the mall,” (advice that, if followed, would’ve led

to a spectacular increase in assault cases in Ohio), this was a critique that not only lacked all conviction but betrayed the unease of the Trump-haters.

Trump has discovered a political position that has not existed in the United States since the interregnum between the 1824 and 1828 elections, when General Andrew Jackson campaigned for the presidency on the claim that he only had been denied victory previously by a “corrupt bargain” between Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and House Speaker Henry Clay, both of whom trailed him in the popular and electoral vote but tipped the presidency to Adams in the House of Representatives. This position is the parliamentary status of a leader of the opposition.

Between presidential elections in the United States, the leader of the party not occupying the White House is usually either a former living president of that party, its losing candidate in the last presidential election, or its congressional leaders. Thus, in the first term of President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1956), former President Harry S. Truman, the 1952 Democratic nominee Governor Adlai E. Stevenson, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson, and House Speaker Sam Rayburn divided between themselves the right to speak for the Democratic Party. Similarly, in the Kennedy-Johnson term of 1961-1964, former President Eisenhower, former vice president and 1960 nominee Richard Nixon, and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, all at different times affected to speak for the Republicans.

He's Not Going Anywhere

On Sunday Donald Trump made it clear that he will speak for the Republicans. The dreamy idyll of the NeverTrumpers, that this meteoric phenomenon had come and gone and would not be back, has been shattered. And with that vanishment has also gone the pipe dream of trying to scoop up Trump supporters while pushing Trump himself out of the party.

The only other Republican who has even a third of Trump's support is Florida's governor Ron DeSantis, and most of his support is as a second choice to Trump himself. Trump proved at Orlando on Sunday that he can give ten or 12 hard-hitting but soberly uplifting speeches a year and maintain his position as the undisputed Republican leader and principal critic of the administration. By this method he can keep himself quite adequately in front of the public, maintain his status in his party, stay out of the limelight, and refuse to allow the Democrats to continue for four years to run against him and not on their own record in office.

The theory that the Trump era is over is itself over. He will keep it going until the next election and either be the Republican nominee or choose the Republican nominee. All of his career he thought that all publicity was good publicity and he translated that theory into enough votes to sweep the Republican primaries and win the 2016 election by a hair's breadth. He has now seen, as president, that he has had quite enough publicity and should now seek it only in favorable circumstances and in appropriate quantities. The Biden Administration, divided between reasonable Democrats and irrational socialists, and irresolutely led, should be under no illusions that it will have an easy ride in the next four years against as vulnerable an opponent as they have had for the last four years.

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