

Trump: A Brief History Thereof

The political debate has become so unfathomably absurd it may be worthwhile to retrace how we got here.

by Conrad Black



Six months before the Iowa caucuses, the political debate has become so unfathomably absurd that it may be worthwhile to retrace how we got here. It is a little over four years since Donald Trump opened what has proved to be a new epoch in American politics by coming down the escalator in Trump Tower and announcing his campaign for president. He elicited a pandemic of almost hysterical ridicule. The Bill Maher–Stephen Colbert–Chelsea Handler echelon of late-night public comment, and their even more banal and imbecilic daytime-television analogues, ghoulishly lavished hundreds of millions of dollars of free airtime on the Trumps. I cannot face the aforementioned people on a screen for more than a few minutes without requiring an airsickness bag to be confident of

avoiding an unpleasant incident, but just surfing along has helped maintain perspective as the correlation of political forces has inexorably shifted.

The Republican nonchalance about the Trump branding exercise quickly gave way to concern about his apparent strength among Republican voters. (Having changed parties seven times in 13 years, he wasn't a dyed-in-the-wool party loyalist.) The large crowds Trump pulled wherever he went and his rise in the polls rattled the Republican establishment but, if this were possible, elevated the mirth of the lowbrow talking and mocking heads: If the reactionary Republicans, who in their view hadn't produced a respectable candidate since Eisenhower, if not Lincoln, tore itself to pieces, so much the more jubilant Hillary's cakewalk triumph as the Clinton pay-to-play casino moved back into the White House. Mitch McConnell advised Republican congressional candidates that if Trump were nominated, the rest of the party would "drop him like a hot rock."

Trump's almost uninterrupted winning streak through the Republican primaries quickly cornered and terrified the Republican leadership, which only encouraged and delighted the Democrats, serene in their confidence of trampling a riven Republican party lumbered with the albatross of the unfeasible billionaire buffoon and public swindler. A landslide was expected. As the campaign unfolded, the immense Clinton lead did not materialize. With a month to go before the election, the *Access Hollywood* tape was released in which Trump had said, eleven years earlier, that celebrities could get away with almost any sexual liberties with women, including groping their crotches. This was assumed to be the knockout blow, the secret weapon held in reserve to blast the race apart.

Many Republicans fled for the tall grass; party chairman Reince Priebus virtually called for Trump's withdrawal, and even vice presidential candidate Mike Pence went ominously silent. Two days later came the second presidential debate.

During the day, Trump conducted a televised session of reminiscences by women who said they had been seriously violated by Bill Clinton. The media didn't choose to recognize it, but Trump, under greater pressure than any candidate had been in the history of these debates, won the exchange with Clinton. He only lost about a point in the polls over the *Access Hollywood* tape.

As all the world knows, though Clinton was almost a 90 percent favorite on Election Day, Trump won, and the system has still not entirely assimilated that fact. The Democrats and their massively supportive national-media hallelujah chorus went to window-rattling volume accusing Trump of having conspired with the Russian government to intervene in the U.S. election and rig the result by an immense campaign of social-media advertising and voter canvassing. Trump was inaugurated amidst huge demonstrations all over the world against his supposed xenophobia and misogyny. A dossier commissioned and paid for by the Democratic campaign through intermediaries had been concocted out of defamatory fabrications about Trump. Although it was too late and outlandish for the election, it was determinedly circulated before the inauguration and illegally used, on the authority of the Justice Department and the FBI director (James Comey), to engage in surveillance of the Trump campaign and transition team. The National and Central intelligence directors appear clearly to have collaborated in leaking aspects of this dossier and then referring to the leaks as justifications for a counterintelligence investigation.

All of this eventually collapsed and is now being investigated to discover who should be indicted for this unprecedented subversion of the election process. The national media almost uniformly stuck with the Democrats and have retreated inch by inch throughout the Trump term. A special counsel was established who proved to be an incapable Justice veteran of declining faculties, under cover of whom an investigation,

vastly surpassing anything any previous president was subjected to, played out for more than two years.

It is clear from published text messages that the investigating team, comprised entirely of partisan Democrats, knew from the outset that there had been no cooperation between Trump and the Russians, and the special-counsel investigation was continued in the hope of provoking Trump into something like Richard Nixon's firing of the special prosecutor in 1973 that could be taken as an act of obstruction of justice, which could form the basis of an impeachment case. Trump's attorney general, the previously competent Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama, bumbled forgetfully while responding to a question at his confirmation hearings and recused himself, leaving no check at all on the zealots who ran the special-counsel operation.

The Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives in the midterm elections but gained secure control of the Senate, as the premier Never Trump Republicans in both houses departed by death or retirement and Trump had taken over thorough control of his party. Mitch "Hot Rock" McConnell was about to be portrayed by the increasingly desperate Democrats as a "Kremlin asset," as Trump had been by the Clinton entourage and the former CIA and NI directors. The special-counsel report acknowledged there was nothing to the Russian conspiracy charges, but invented the legal concept of inability to "exonerate" the president on the obstruction questions and gave ten examples that the House of Representatives might wish to consider as evidence of obstruction. This was outrageous – prosecutors indict, or recommend impeachment in this case, or say nothing. The special-counsel staff threw a very improper grenade with the pin pulled into the Congress. The new attorney general, a serious former holder of the position, with the concurrence of his deputy, who had recommended the firing of Comey as FBI director and ostensibly supervised the special-counsel investigation, and with the concurrence of the

independent Justice Department counsel, declared that nothing in the report contained any elements required for a charge of obstruction of justice by the president.

The controversy, which should never have occurred, should have been over, but the Democrats have managed to cantilever themselves two more steps out on the limb that protrudes over the political abyss. They recognize that they have no chance of even getting an impeachment vote through the House, as there is no justification whatever for imagining there is evidence the president committed "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors" as the Constitution requires. So the radical Trump-haters and the custodians of whatever sense of survival the Democratic congressional leadership retain are working out the shabby retreat to the last-trench defense of this colossal fraud by conducting what they are calling "an impeachment inquiry." This will purport to be ever closer to inculpatory evidence but will not unearth anything relevant [new].

What must be the ultimate step out on the limb is the media campaign to obscure to the public the fact that impeachment requires likely conclusive evidence of serious crimes, and to create the misconception that it is like a non-confidence vote in the parliaments of Britain, Canada, or Israel. It isn't really a criminal matter at all; it's just acute distaste, and severely unseemly behavior and utterances. This is why there is this febrile overreaction to Trump's clever ploy of painting four new extremist congresswomen as the true face of the Democrats, and over his powerful reply to histrionic abuse of the acting Homeland Security director by the decayed 13-term relic of corrupt Democratic bossism, Baltimore [ward-heeling] congressman Elijah Cummings. The media echo chamber is shrieking "racist" from the Washington rooftops, but Trump has never been tainted with the least hint of racism. The facts are that the four congresswomen are socialists, dislike Israel, trivialize the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and compare

adequate if crowded facilities for those who have crossed the southern border illegally with Nazi death camps. Trump is commendably liberating the American political vocabulary from the extreme constraints of political correctness.

All radical political movements in sophisticated countries become more and more extreme until the sensible people force a deescalation: Thermidor in the French Revolution (1794), the New Economic Policy in Russia (1921), and, in the more genteel and bloodless convulsions of Washington, the censure of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in 1954. I predict that the Democrats will not be able to sustain any public interest in this farce during the congressional summer recess, that the Senate Judiciary Committee will start lifting the rocks on Democratic skullduggery in the early fall, and that the first indictments from the special counsel investigating the spurious investigators of Trump will come in late autumn. The usual pattern will be followed: Former FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe, already before the grand jury, will implicate Comey, who will implicate former attorney general Lynch, who will lay it on Obama. I doubt that Obama will be prosecuted, but his Mr. Clean image will not survive. And what now appears to be the only hope that Senators Sanders, Harris, and Warren have of stopping Joe Biden rests, with rich irony, on whether the new special counsel, John Durham, finds any complicity of the former vice president in this debacle. When the indictments come, it will develop unstoppable momentum and acquire a name like Comeygate. The trend has been constant from the beginning to the present: a protracted failure of the Democrats to stop the Trump phenomenon despite the employment of extraordinary dirty tricks to do it.

The guilty will slowly sink in the quagmire of their revealed misdeeds, Trump will almost certainly be reelected and finally enjoy his deferred honeymoon, and the country will finally move on, as it always does.

First published in