

Trump and His Enemies

He needs to change his tone – and show that he's the serious man in Washington.

by Conrad Black



A change of pace and tone by the president is the best way to end the war of attrition that has overtaken and partly anesthetized the entire process of government in Washington. The bombastic Trump personality and his frequently changing treatments of prominent current subjects incite the belief among many who do not follow these things too closely that Mr. Trump is creating an unseemly, overly contentious climate in Washington, in which there is no agreement on anything, odd things keep happening, and a shrill tone never subsides. He has a mandate to tear the government apart, uproot it, reform it, do it better, and execute drastic policy changes in taxes, health care, immigration, trade, campaign funding, environmental policy, energy production, education, financial regulation, industrial relations, transport and infrastructure, law enforcement, treatment of veterans, and foreign policy (especially with regard to North Korea, Iran,

and a Western Alliance that has largely become a freeloading operation by America's so-called allies).

The government is led now by a movement that arose in the Republican primaries but cut across all party lines, and finally smashed the traditional Bushites, decisively defeated the new Cruz Right, and squashed the Obama-Clinton soft-Left Democrats against the Warren-Sanders far-Left. The movement took over the government for an ideologically centrist but radically reformist alliance of angry and politically incorrect people, most of whom were at heart affronted moderates. This phenomenon posed such a threat to the almost uniformly complacent power and opinion-leading establishment of Washington, New York, and Los Angeles that the reaction has vastly exceeded the usual partisan resistance to a change of party, as Trump had indicted both parties.

It would be easy to judge from media coverage that the entire administration is sinking in contumely, obloquy, and chaos, and the general impression seems one of dysfunctionality achieving nothing. From the start, the Democrats offered "scorched earth," abetted by their nasty parrots in the media, whom Trump attacked as mercilessly as he did the Bush-Clinton-Obama mediocracy. It took over three months from Trump to get his unusually talented cabinet installed, and at the start, given the vigor of the internecine Republican-nomination struggle, his party was in a state of disarray. The president has done a good job of patching the Republicans back together, as his eventual House victory on health care demonstrated.

Since simple obstruction would not in itself attract adequate public support to resist the Republican congressional majorities, and the arguments of sexism and racism that had been the principal Trumpophobic smears on the campaign trail could not survive Trump's record in office for a week, the Democrats were obliged to pin the tail of quasi-fascist authoritarianism on the president. The executive order on immigration, sloppily worded but obviously within the

president's constitutional authority, was singled out for judge-shopping on the leftist Far West bench, and district judges were found eager for five minutes of fame as they purported to prevent the president from doing his job. Chuck Schumer, the leader of the Senate Democrats, had approved restriction of entry of people of some predominantly Muslim countries when President Obama did it; now he wept publicly and claimed that the Statue of Liberty was weeping also. There were protest marches, mobbings of airports, public blubbering and puling by witless actresses, and so forth, all in the hope that Trump would ignore the silly local courts, as Andrew Jackson once famously ignored the Supreme Court. This would have enabled the great conversation about impeachment to have been made a byword in every home by the Democrats' media echo chamber, though Trump would have been within his rights in such a scenario.

Trump outsmarted them, and sent the matter toward the Supreme Court, where he had a very respected and unexceptionable judge fill the vacancy he had inherited; as a result, he instituted more thorough screening at point of arrival rather than at embarkation. The false moral tidal wave crested and will fall like a breaker at Waikiki when the Supremes rule. The next mighty confection of moral righteousness was the canard that the Trump campaign had colluded with Russia, a story for which the Obama administration spent its last six months feverishly using all intelligence and investigative agencies to find proof. Evidence came there none. It is bunk and no slightly informed and sane person in the world could possibly believe a word of it. Former campaign manager Paul Manafort had a role in Ukraine long before he was with Trump; General Mike Flynn had some contacts, but more with Turkey than with Russia, and nothing that any earth-bound imagination could connect to the election result.

Just as the whole shabby business was beginning to sag, Trump, deliberately or otherwise (his tactical cunning and inconstant

attachment to a message and revelry in controversy often make it difficult to analyze his motives), towed a gigantic lump of shark-bait in front of the quivering jaws of the Democratic politicians and media by firing an FBI director no one but his loyal deputy director tried to defend. The sharks leapt out of the water like swordfish. There were cries of "fascist," the peppier hotheads chinned themselves on "Nazi," and Maxine Waters began chanting "impeachment" as if it meant throwing peaches at the police. (MSNBC, even more vapidly partisan than CNN, got Waters to say that it would have been a good thing for Hillary Clinton to fire Comey, but not for Trump to do so. Aren't 14 terms enough for this mad congresswoman?) I elicited from Nancy Soderberg, former deputy national-security adviser for President Clinton, in a brief exchange on the BBC last week, that a special prosecutor was necessary to plumb this phony crisis to its depths and take the time necessary – i.e., to immobilize the government indefinitely, so that its agenda would evaporate and it could be accused of failing to clean up the horrible dilapidation it had inherited from both parties.

It has been the most effective Democratic strategy available and it has been executed with fanatical devotion to the simple message. And to some extent, the president's personality, at once insensitive and hyper-sensitive, has facilitated the work of his enemies. Of course, it won't succeed – for three reasons. First, it is nonsense – there was no collusion, and if there had been, the leaks by now would have required the construction of an ark the size of the U.S.S. *Carl Vinson* just to save the whistleblowers from drowning in the Washington swamp.

Second, the substantive steps proposed are absurd. The special prosecutor is an institution that should be abolished: It is an unanswerable, open-ended, terribly lengthy obstructive fishing operation that stalls government and is legally justifiable only when a crime has clearly been committed and there is reasonable doubt that it will be investigated

thoroughly and independently. Every presidential-level special prosecutor has been a disaster. Deputy attorney general Henry Petersen would have been much better than Archibald Cox or Leon Jaworski, Lawrence Walsh (Iran-Contra) and Ken Starr (President Clinton) should never have been appointed, and the criminalization of policy differences, which is what is being attempted here yet again, will ultimately destroy the U.S. government if the political class does not come to its senses. There was no excuse for impeaching Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton, who were fortunately acquitted after terrible and needless crises, and with Richard Nixon, one of the most successful presidencies in American history was destroyed for no remotely adequate reason.

Finally, President Trump is legitimate. He has a mandate, there is not a shred of evidence that he violated his constitutional oath, and no crime has come to light.

James Comey explained that Mrs. Clinton was a felon and then said he would not prosecute her. He was a policeman, not a judge or prosecutor. Having tried to ensure her election but having left her open to impeachment proceedings, when the next e-mail enormity arrived, he revealed it – presumably under some pressure from within the Bureau – and then implausibly explained that over 30,000 e-mails that had gone astray had, with astonishing swiftness, been judged immaterial. Given his alacrity in that matter, there is little excuse for him to have dragged his feet over the Trump-Russia issue. He concluded that President Trump is not suspected of wrongdoing in the Russian matters, as Senator Dianne Feinstein (D., Calif.), no friend of the administration, confirmed. But Comey declined to reveal publicly the president's innocence of improprieties with the Russians.

Donald Trump is the president and he has a mandate for change.

Comey apparently thought he was a maker and breaker of presidents. J. Edgar Hoover, in 48 years in that position, never publicly revealed anything about investigations until they were handed over to the Justice Department, and rarely even then. The *New York Times's* story that Comey had been denied funding for the Russian investigation was denied by his loyal deputy, and when Trump implied that he might have recorded some conversations with Comey, the former director withdrew his agreement to testify before Congress. A Sherlock Holmes is not required to interpret these events.

No one defends Comey, and few seem now to lament the defeat of Mrs. Clinton. Most of her popularity was as Bill's wronged wife and president-presumptive. What we are watching is a desperation play to keep up the water level in the Washington swamp. The best thing the president could do would be to shake up his staff a little, nominate as strong a candidate as FBI director as he did for the Supreme Court, continue to emphasize that he wants a thorough investigation, and have an excellent trip to the Middle East and Europe. He is the president and his enemies are liars.

First published in [Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom, Flight of the Eagle: The Grand Strategies That Brought America from Colonial Dependence to World Leadership.](#)