

# Trump and the State of the Union

The fever of partisan hatred might be breaking.

by Conrad Black



A week in England has enabled me to see more clearly the absurdity of the depths and length that the political scandal-mongering in the United States has achieved. Most of the British media are anti-American anyway, and, like most of America's so-called allies, Britain likes weak American presidents who are fluent and courteous, other than when they are themselves in mortal peril, at which point strong American presidents suddenly are appreciated. Generally, the Western European attitude toward the U.S. evolved from fervent and almost worshipful hope for rescue by Roosevelt, to appreciative, even grateful recognition for Truman and Marshall's military and economic support of non-Communist Europe, while fretting whether America would "stay the course" (Mr. Churchill's concern), to complacent patronization in the

post-Suez Eisenhower-Dulles era. Europe, like most of the world, swooned over John F. Kennedy and genuinely mourned his tragic death, but it has been slim pickings since. Johnson was regarded as a boor and an amateur, and, on the left, a war criminal. Richard Nixon was regarded with suspicion and then the customary orchestrated opprobrium, though with grudging respect for his strategic talents. Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush were regarded as dolts, though Reagan, whose anti-missile defense plan was regarded with shrieks of derision and fear, was seen, long after he left office, as possibly useful. Clinton was likeable but déclassé, and Obama was greatly welcomed but ultimately a disappointment. The Europeans like the U.S. to be a great St. Bernard dog that takes the risks and does the work, while they hold the leash and give the orders.

With Donald Trump, the British and most Western Europeans have the coruscation of their dreams that the United States is a vulgar, completely materialistic, cultureless Darwinian contest of the most tasteless and unsavory elements, elevating people in their public life who excel at the country's least attractive national characteristics. In the British national media there is almost never a remotely insightful or fair commentary on anything to do with President Trump. At one point last week, Ambassador John Bolton had what amounted to a debate with some academic British supporter of the Paris climate accord, and of feeble responses to all international crises, from Ukraine to Syria to North Korea. Both participants were speaking from remote locations and were on large screens, and the moderator's questions were posed in such a provoking and tendentious manner to John Bolton that he began his last several responses with the stated assumption that the management of Britain's national television network presumably approved of framing questions on such serious subjects in a deliberately dishonest way, and then answered effectively. The BBC correspondent in Washington uniformly referred to "Donald Trump" or just "Trump" and never to

“President Trump” or to “the president,” as normal professional usage requires. *The Economist*, a distinguished magazine for many decades, follows the same route, referring to Mr. Trump as a “bad” or “poor” president, as if this were an indisputable and universally agreed fact.

The British, and to a large degree the major continental powers, slavishly repeat the Trumpophobic feed from the American national media and justify “Trump’s” view that most of the media propagate lies as a matter of policy, and that America’s allies are largely freeloaders – passengers of the Pentagon with no loyalty to the country that liberated them from Nazism and protected them from Soviet Communism. Senator McCain’s editorial criticism of the president in the *New York Times* two weeks ago, that his attacks on the press weakened democracy by demeaning a free press, is bunk. The president was closer, though, as is his wont, was slightly carried away, when he called the primal-scream newscasters and writers “enemies of the people.” They are even worse abroad.

Apart from being a revelation (reminder, in fact) of how distorted a view Europe has of this president, my six days away enabled me on return to appreciate how swiftly the Resistance is collapsing. In my first perusal of the news channels on Sunday night, my dear friend David Frum, an intelligent and courageous man who is not rational on this one subject, explained on Fox, in reference to his new anti-Trump book, that it was really Obama’s economic recovery (it isn’t), that the December economic figures showed the boom was slowing (it isn’t), and that while the pre-Trump Republican party was useless and stupid and ignored immigration, infrastructure, tax reform, and other key issues, the “tragedy” was that Trump had seized those issues and sullied the policy questions with his “corruption.” The principal evidence given of his corruption was that he asked FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe how he had voted, which was “unconscionable.” We have only dubious “anonymous sources” for that allegation, and since

McCabe's wife was an unsuccessful Democratic candidate in Virginia, the president may be assumed to have known the answer. McCabe's cameo appearance in the Strzok-Page texting confirms the obvious, yet Trump tolerated McCabe's retention of his position in the FBI, right up to his firing on Monday by the new director, Christopher Wray, immediately after Wray read the Senate Intelligence Committee's majority summary of findings in its extensive investigation. Also on Sunday night, Hillary Clinton read part of Michael Wolff's defamatory political novel at the Grammy awards, despite the revelation of her role in commissioning the Steele dossier, her invocation of it in her fantasy-memoir as the grounds for accusing her opponent of having won the election by recourse to acts of treason, and her failure to remove her faith outreach adviser though her campaign manager and many others concluded that he had sexually harassed more than one female Clinton-campaign staffer.

The president has constantly recommended the release to the public of everything gleaned by the congressional and Justice Department investigations into the Russian-collusion story, apart from anything that might be harmful to American intelligence operations. This is not the conduct of someone who is covering anything up or is in fear of emerging relevant facts. The repeated failings of the Justice Department and the FBI, which started to emerge in the disgraceful fiasco of the Steele dossier, have backed severely into the conduct of the Clintons, and at least some members of the Obama administration. The Democrats, in what appears to be their last trench of defense before throwing away their weapons as impediments to their headlong flight to the rear, are trying to claim there is some possible relevance to the Mueller inquisition while distancing themselves from their former Clinton icons. Some are claiming the Russians were meddling in both campaigns, while some of the more energetic Trump supporters are alleging greater and more sinister conspiracies than is plausible.

The best that can be hoped for is the revelation of the defects of American criminal justice, the disincentivization of the mortally irresponsible practice of criminalizing political differences, and a compromise between civilized continuity of a system in need of repair and a partial evaporation of the swamp. The president, in his way, tried for that in his State of the Union address. The practice of introducing valorous ordinary people was vastly overdone, and the July 4 old-fashioned flag-waving a trifle laborious. But the policy points were strong, especially emphasis on vocational schools, immigration reform, infrastructure, a second chance for convicts, a hard but sensible line against Iran and North Korea, and reductions in aid to antagonistic countries. It was a good balance of tradition and reform. Over time, half the people are in each party and both are needed to govern. Washington became Babylon, Donald Trump stormed Babylon, and the process of what is (ironically) known politically as “fusion” between the two is underway. The Democrats, having set out to impeach Donald Trump and having almost destroyed the Clintons instead, must be almost ready for a modicum of cooperation, as the government-shutdown farce indicated. The media will cool out, and the world will see America more clearly. Chaos is receding rather than rising. Neither side will send the other to prison and neither should aspire to do that.

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