

Trump 'Disdainers' Are Worse Than the Haters, But Equally Irrelevant

Trump is rising in the polls and has told the haters and the disdainers alike to stuff their complaints, bring on the impeachment burlesque, and he will see his enemies on Election Day.

by Conrad Black



While Donald Trump's haters intrepidly maintain there are grounds to impeach the president, the mere Trump disdainers at times can be more tiresome, because they approve of Trump's policies but do everything necessary to avoid being branded Trump apologists.

There is a slight redemptive quality in the helpless, irrational, and often demented fury of the haters. The current safe harbor of the disdainers is to nod smugly to each other on cable news panels while insisting the president and his defenders have failed in their effort to represent the Ukraine allegations as bunk and legally unassailable. Now the administration is left scrambling for excuses and technicalities.

This usually leads quite quickly to the idea that *everyone knows* the president's "perfect" conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was "wrong" but that there is some question whether it justified impeachment and genuine doubt about whether it would be just or appropriate to remove the president from office.

The disdainers love to imagine they can turn Trump on a spit while the flames crackle, although they know this whole exercise is essentially nonsense. It is enjoyable nonsense because they never imagined Trump could win. They regard him as a great political bumble bee who irritates them by buzzing endlessly and noisily about, stubbornly defying all laws of politics and nature by not falling down, politically dead at last.

My esteemed friend Peggy Noonan is a disdainer—too fair-minded and equable to be a hater, but too offended as a Reaganite traditionalist by Trump's ineffable infelicities to be at all comfortable with his presence in the White House.

Some weeks ago, I wrote that I was gently disappointed that, as someone who had gone through the Iran-Contra farce with President Reagan, Noonan did not have greater sympathy for Trump's predicament. In the *Wall Street Journal* on December 7, she addressed the Iran-Contra affair in a wholly admirable spirit of loyal Reaganian revisionism, as "a big mistake, a real mess . . . [whose] deeper lessons have to do with how to admit and repair mistakes, how to work with the other side,

and how to forge through and survive to the betterment of the country.”

President Reagan was a great man and a great president, probably the only great president apart from the almost unanimously acknowledged giants Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Iran-Contra controversy consisted of the U.S. government selling anti-tank missiles to Iran via Israel, with the gain realized by Israel being paid to the anti-Sandinista contras in Nicaragua, in contravention of the Boland Amendment which forbade assistance to overthrow the Communist government of Nicaragua. It contravened American anti-terrorism policy and a self-imposed ban on arms sales to Iran, and was agreed with unofficial parties in Iran who were supposedly reform elements who said they would secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

Noonan acknowledges that departing from government policy toward Iran, paying ransom money to charlatans in a way that would encourage more hostage-taking, in the belief that reform *might* be promoted in Khomeini's Iran, was bad policy. She doesn't mention the Boland Amendment, which was the basis for the complaints of the Congress, and glosses over the immense mockery that arose when it came to light that National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane went to Iran disguised with a red wig, delivering a Bible inscribed to Khomeini by Reagan, and doesn't mention Reagan's complete inability to explain what happened, (including more than 140 responses under questioning by the independent committee of inquiry that he did not recall).

Nor does she refer to then-Vice President George H.W. Bush's almost certainly false denial that he knew anything about any of it. Or the fact that McFarlane's successor at the National Security Council, Admiral John Poindexter, took the bullet for the president and said Reagan knew nothing of the legal

problems and that “the buck stops here.” (He went down on five criminal charges which were later overturned on Fifth Amendment violations.)

It was indeed a “big mistake (and) a real mess.” Reagan, as always in his career, was lucky-this broke half way through his second term; he was popular and elderly, and his aides took the heat and, in the case of CIA Director Bill Casey, died.

But Iran-Contra had no deeper lessons remotely approximating Peggy Noonan’s amiable divinations. The only other occasions in my conscient lifetime when a U.S. president appeared such a fuddy-duddy were when Jimmy Carter in 1980 ordered a hostage rescue operation in Iran that failed completely, and in 1960 when Dwight Eisenhower was caught red-handed in the falsehood that the U-2 espionage aircraft shot down over the USSR was a weather plane. (The Russians had captured the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, but didn’t reveal that until Ike assumed he was dead and produced his whopper.)

Iran-Contra was a shambles, one of the principals attempted suicide (fortunately unsuccessfully), and the government floundered badly. Reagan’s luck held as 40 years of containment and his missile-defense policies had pushed the Soviet Union under Gorbachev to abandon the Cold War and eventually to disintegrate altogether, in the nine months following the end of Reagan’s second term. Iran-Contra isn’t important in a historic evaluation of Reagan, but it was a modest scandal completely bungled, (even though I always thought the Boland Amendment could have been overcome and was *ultra vires* to Congress anyway).

But President Trump has no scandal at all in Ukraine. He asked to be told after suitable examination of the facts whether or not Joe Biden and his son were influence-peddling in Ukraine. There is nothing wrong with that; *nothing*. It is bunk, and the Trump disdainers will have to live with that.

No ill-gotten money has changed hands (other than to Hunter Biden), no principle of national security has been violated, not even a peccadillo. For these purposes, Trump's telephone conversation with Zelensky really was "perfect." Trump hasn't had an attack of insomnia and doesn't have to regroup politically. He is rising in the polls, has told the haters and the disdainers to stuff their complaints, bring on the impeachment burlesque, and he will see his enemies on Election Day.

That the far-Left and the most entrenched elements of the OBushinton post-Reagan political class would hate Trump is understandable; he said he would smash them, was elected to do so, and is doing it. He will not replicate Reagan's boffo performance of running against the government even after he had been president for six years.

That many people disdain him is also understandable; some of his antics, churlish responses, and malapropisms can be grating. But historians who write untainted by the cant, emotionalism, and bias that have so profoundly damaged the public trust in media and government in Trump's time, will recognize the force of his movement, the soundness of his policies, and the base vacuity and snobbery of much of the criticism of him. They will particularly recognize the attractions of a successful single-combat warrior in the greatest office and on the biggest stage in the world.

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