

Trump Steamroller Racks Up More Victories

The feverish activity concerning a third-party race by Republican defectors from Trump is sawdust. Any such effort would replicate the nonsensical challenges of Henry Wallace against Harry Truman in 1948 and John Anderson against Ronald Reagan in 1980. These ideological tantrums gained 2.4 percent of the vote in the first case and 6.6 percent in the second and had no effect on the result. The notion of Rick Perry, the former Texas governor who couldn't remember his third radical proposal for change of the government ("Oops") and had his father-in-law perform a vasectomy on him, running against the Republican and Democratic nominees is an insane conjuration. The anti-Trump "strategists" (the most overused descriptive word in the news these days) are divided between those demanding that John Kasich withdraw, to give Ted Cruz a clear one-on-one shot at Trump, and those urging him to remain and effectively try to divide the electorate, so that only one of them would make a real effort in the state where he ran more strongly against Trump than the other.

One of the virtues of American democracy is that sleazy tricks like that don't work. In France, where there are two votes, two weeks apart, the second pitting the two strongest candidates when no one gained a majority on the first ballot, tactical withdrawals are not rare. Any attempt to carve up the Republican vote in a deal between Cruz and Kasich where each would run a straw campaign only where the other was stronger in the remaining primary states would be so mortifyingly denounced, by Trump, as the imbecilic scam that it would be, it would accelerate his nomination.

As for Kasich's retiring from the race, there is no reason why he should do so, unless his candidacy has no legs at all in the next few weeks. That could happen, though he has more

natural support than Cruz, and if he does withdraw, he is unlikely to recommend to his supporters how to vote. Trump should get as many of them as Cruz does, as Trump and Kasich are closer in policy terms, and even in being less hard-edged and more jocular personalities than Cruz. The idea that Cruz, with all his abrasions and nasty techniques (prematurely announcing the departure of Ben Carson from the race, blaming Trump for the leftist demonstrations against him, accusing Trump of ambivalence toward Israel, etc.), could suddenly morph into a unity candidate for all Trump's foes on the frightened left and under-indulged right is bunk.

There is always a chance of a Trump disaster, and his opponents have repeatedly imagined that his gaffes and miscues have delivered the fatal weapon to their hands. But he has pulled back from the no-Muslim-entrant idea; begun, at least, to clarify the deportation guidelines, though he will have to finish that task; and rebutted the false charge of a dalliance with the KKK and other racists. And his reference to riots if he were to be cheated out of the nomination is now generally accepted as his clarification that, in such circumstances, there would be turmoil and recriminations, not that he would try to seize the nomination in a coup de force, as his opponents claimed.

His statement that, if he were in a mediating role between the Israelis and Palestinians, he would have to be fair, while unambiguously defending Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, was not the anti-Israel statement Cruz and others claimed. It is a bit rich for Hillary Clinton to imply such a thing, as someone who prior to running for the U.S. Senate from New York generally preferred Palestinians to Israelis, and as secretary of state tried to deny the existence of Ariel Sharon's agreement with George W. Bush over settlements and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The fact is that Donald Trump is not an extremist, and the intelligent Right makes a legitimate point when it alleges that he is not overly

conservative in most policy areas. He has walked the tightrope this far in bringing in the reactionaries on immigration and trade (those with a genuine grievance as well as the mere blowhards); and he has not given his many critics much to shoot at even as they over-eagerly leapt at his carefully chosen marginal reflections and even doubles entendres. He is unlikely to blow up in Gingrichian manner now. (Gingrich, a very intelligent but legendarily accident-prone man, appears to be a Trump supporter.)

His latest temptations of the political muse, about reducing the U.S. contribution to NATO and extracting confessions from terrorists by torture, have been candidates for *The New Yorker's* old category of "things that could be better said," and doubtless he will talk his way through them. Of course, America's allies, except the Polish, the British, the Israelis, and the South Koreans, are freeloaders. The paltry military capacity of Germany, Canada, Italy, and even France is a scandal, but there is no need to fold up the most successful alliance in history like a three-dollar suitcase to make that point. Germany has to be helped out of its fiscally convenient trauma over its crimes during the Third Reich (which was exterminated 71 years ago, followed by the suicide or execution of its leaders), and return to behaving as the responsible leading power of Europe, a role it has not played since the hyperactive child-emperor William II fired Bismarck 126 years ago. Donald really means waterboarding terrorist suspects and shouldn't use such a repellent generality as "torture," lest gentle voters think he means torturing them to death in the traditional way of most foreigners (including the French in Algeria). The hysteria of *The Economist* that Trump could cause a sharp decline in U.S. GDP, or the jeremiads of *Wall Street Journal* op-eds that he would produce a global recession, are piffle – he won't do anything that would cause such problems, and his statements are just electoral posturing to produce a better "deal," an attainable objective.

Trump has clearly wrong-footed the media, and the country supports his batting the so-called working press about. Not even the startling pulchritude and relative fluency of Megyn Kelly saves her from the fatuity of the Fox News statement on her behalf that Donald's rebuke of her was "beneath the dignity" of a presidential candidate. I yield to few in my respect for Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch as media operators, but if they are now to be the arbiters of the dignity of the American presidency and those who seriously aspire to it, I can only concur in the sentiments of Czar Nicholas, at the outbreak of World War I, that "it is time to pray." The almost demented Trumpophobic fulminations of W. Mitt Romney, who made such trivia question-candidates as Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis look like Wendell Willkie as a challenger for the presidency four years ago, were seen as a badge of honor for Trump by most Republicans. Much more important, and rational, was the quasi-endorsement of Bob Dole, a giant of the Congress though an indifferent presidential candidate. The fact that Romney was able to assist his fellow Mormons in delivering Utah to Cruz on Tuesday is the tiniest obstacle to the Trump juggernaut.

The notion that it is an unsurpassable hurdle for Trump to win the 55 or so percent of delegates yet to be chosen to lock up the nomination is, like most of the other confections of his panic-stricken opponents, drivel (which is even more obnoxiously vacuous than piffle). Most of the proportionate states in delegate selection aren't really proportionate. Delegates are chosen along the lines of congressional districts within the states, on a winner-take-all basis within each district. If Trump or anyone else gets 51 percent of the vote in each district, he takes all the delegates from the state, not 51 percent of them. This will not happen, of course, but given the wind in his sails now, and the fact that he won four-candidate races in Florida and Illinois by nearly 20 and nearly ten percentage points, there is no reason to doubt that he will wrap this up with California, where he has

a large lead (as he does in New York).

The last refuge of the Trumpophobes is the argument that Hillary will hammer Donald. I don't think so. She has never faced a serious opponent and has advanced to her preeminence by shadowing her husband, yet being distinguished from him by her victimhood. It has been a skillfully calculated advance from Birnam Wood to Dunsinane, interrupted by Obama's hijacking of the Clintons' party for the overdue shattering of the color-bar. But now, all her falsehoods, her absence of a real public record, her working both sides of the street as a feminist and a wronged woman, the profligacies of the Clintons, and the American public's boredom with the Bush-Clinton era, will come home to roost. Donald's limitations are obvious and have been more than adequately decried, but no one should doubt that he will throw everything that isn't nailed down at Hillary and carpet-bomb the country with well-placed negative advertising through October. This isn't Don Tyson's free pass to a jackpot or a \$150K speech; Hillary is tough and smart, and, as Obama famously said, "likeable enough." But I doubt she will prevail against Donald, with all the baggage of the snipers in Bosnia ("jetlag" caused this apparition, she said), Benghazi, the apology to the world's Muslims, the improprieties of the Clinton Foundation, e-mailgate (assuming she isn't indicted), and the voluminous catalogue of her other jejuneries. Trump's vulnerabilities have been labored by overreaction for six months and there is unlikely to be too much left in them. Senator Clinton's apparent defeat of the almost admirably unfeasible Bernie Sanders is little better than a Pyrrhic victory.

The best bellwether of where the political currents are flowing is the undoubtedly expert political tactician Karl Rove's piece in the *Wall Street Journal* last week. Karl had previously announced that Trump had fallen off his peak in New Hampshire, and he purported for a week or two to be sheltering in the sandcastle that durable Republicans in the Congress and

the party could brace themselves against the tempest of a Hillary Clinton sweep over Trump. He opined on March 17 that Trump should change his tone (avoidance of such exhortations as "Knock the crap out of them" would be welcome); unify, listen to party regulars (it's happening); devise a strategy for dealing with the evident controversies from his business career; and get a team together and out in front. Donald isn't by nature a team guy and his group of foreign-policy advisers isn't barn-burning, but some of them may become stars. (I like Frank Gaffney on the Cruz foreign-policy team; he's nostalgic for the Cold War and is a bit fierce at times, but is a perceptive and sometimes brave man, and I was glad Cruz defended him against CNN.) Karl Rove urged Donald Trump to chase the swing voters, focus on Obama and Clinton, start giving speeches (and not disjointed ruminations), and stop talking about polls. I don't monitor Donald like Karl does, but it seems to me that he has done all of this in the few days since that advice appeared. More important than the advice itself is the shift in position of Karl Rove, one of the shrewdest political strategists since FDR's Louis McHenry Howe (and FDR himself, who did as well after Howe died as before).

Trump took more than 55 percent of the delegates on March 22 (Arizona and Utah), and pulled in astonishing numbers of voters. It is hard to see this train stopping anywhere before its destination at the people's house (as Ronald Reagan called it).