

Trump Turns the Corner

Impeachment looks less likely all the time.

by Conrad Black



The president's tour in the Middle East and Europe went extremely well, to the point where there is almost complete silence from the Democrats. The Treasury and the Office of Management and Budget are rolling out a budget and we might finally be turning a corner on settling this administration into office. The lengthy sequence of malicious allegations about Trump's unfitness for office is steadily fading: Sexism, racism, Islamophobia, bumptiousness and lack of nuance in international affairs – as in a dance of numerous veils, they keep falling away. The Democrats and their attack dogs in the media and the jilted, bitchy nerds on the highbrow Republican right are left only with the withering delusion of the Russian-collusion canard, and their imperishable, wistful

snobbery.

The effort to scandalize the country with fake news started with the scatological Golden Shower of Moscow, and is now down to Dianne Feinstein demanding transcripts of the president's Oval Office conversations with everybody, and the hollow pre-nightly-news bombshells of the *Times* and the *Post*. They scraped the bottom of the barrel last week with the Damascene revelation that the special counsel will wish to interview someone in the White House. This was portentously presented to the press lynch mob, although Robert Mueller will eventually probably want to interview many people in the White House, including the president. That is what investigators do, and the ratio of interviewees to indictees, even when there is some evidence of a felony, which is not the case here, is about 100 to one, and indictees are presumed to be innocent.

Assuming the president's trip continues to go well, that he returns promising full cooperation with Mueller, confident of the outcome as it involves him, and that he urges full speed ahead with health care and tax reform, the nasty ambiance in Washington should subside.

Schumer, Pelosi, and the striving mastiffs frisking at their sides, such as Schiff and Warner, can't keep screening *Groundhog Day* with these unscandalous daily scandals forever. Even they cannot possibly believe that they have anything to imperil the presidency with (despite the allegations of acts of treason and war by the more overheated Torquemadas of the *Times*). Schumer and Pelosi have been aiming at immobilizing the administration so that the economy would drift downward from the Obama doldrums, and 1 percent GDP growth would continue piling up the fiscal deficit and public demoralization. All initiatives by the Republican congressional majorities would be stalled by constant mudslinging and the press would hound invertebrate Republican senators and congressmen (they are in ample supply in both parties) with the dark cloud of suspicion hovering over the

president, chipping away at any consensus to do anything. We can foretell it all from what we have seen already: unctuous flights of hyperbole about the Statue of Liberty weeping along with Chuck Schumer over a temporary suspension of admission of visitors from terrorist-infested countries; the magnification into a likely cause for impeachment of alleged fragments of a self-addressed memo of the former FBI director as read anonymously over the telephone to a *Times* reporter. Never mind that the director, whose removal everyone agreed was justified, said that he had not been interfered with and that Trump was not suspected of wrongdoing.

Even Nancy Pelosi lectured the press to focus on the facts. The real game is: If everything can just be stalled to the summer recess and then through Thanksgiving, it might be possible to run in the mid-term elections against an indolent, ineffective, embarrassing, and ineffectual administration. Mueller can be relied on to conduct a discreet inquiry inside the FBI, so the only Democratic hope is to keep the fireworks going in the various congressional committees, all controlled by the Republicans. Though the Republican committee chairmen could be stronger in some cases, the Democrats' harassment and obstruction will not be allowed to succeed in the absence of any facts, as even Pelosi has recognized. Obnoxious and accusatory questions and pious claims of an absurdly extended public right to know won't cut it. Where there is no smoke, there is unlikely to be much fire, and in any case, it is up to Mueller to find it. Trump has done an effective job of stitching the congressional Republicans back together, unreliable and formerly hostile though many of them were. In this, he has been much better than Nixon. That Speaker Paul Ryan can't bring himself to express confidence in Trump is pretty shabby, given that Trump got Obamacare repeal through the House for Ryan, and that they both have the same goals and enemies. It was also very disappointing to hear serious commentators such as David Gergen say (on CNN), that "We're getting into impeachment country"; in the dreams of CNN and

its Democratic beneficiaries, perhaps, but not in the world Dave Gergen used to inhabit. Another disappointment was the very sensible Charles Krauthammer blaming the extent of the controversies on the president's denials; he knows that his rabidly partisan Washington-media colleagues are the culprits.

I was among those who warned at the time of Watergate that this would lead to terrible abuses. So it did in Iran-Contra, and under the Clinton administration. I will not repeat here at length the absence of convicting evidence that Mr. Nixon committed illegalities, though there was certainly a criminal conspiracy in parts of the White House staff and the Republican National Committee to obstruct justice. Iran-Contra was nonsense; the Boland Amendment wasn't necessarily constitutional, as the president's powers are at least equal to those of Congress in foreign, military, and national-security-policy matters. Special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh's indictment of Caspar Weinberger, who had opposed Iran-Contra, was an outrage illustrative of the megalomania that shortly grips those empowered under the old law for special prosecutors. (Archibald Cox, a Kennedy groupie whose biographer called him "the conscience of the nation," was such a terminal case of unrestrained righteousness that he wrote every government in the world, during the Gulf War to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, urging them not to cooperate with the administration of President George H. W. Bush – probably a violation of the Logan Act.)

There was no excuse for impeaching Andrew Johnson in 1868, and he survived only by a single vote. Nixon was such a conscientious patriot that he declined to put the country through such an ordeal, just as he had when the 1960 election was quite likely stolen from him and he declined President Eisenhower's urging of a full legal challenge. If he had gone to a Senate trial in 1974, and there had been any possibility of a fair hearing in the Senate (doubtful in the climate that had been whipped up), he would not have been convicted,

despite his catastrophic tactical and public-relations errors. Bill Clinton might have been vulnerable on aspects of Whitewater, but seems not to have committed perjury, and his peccadilloes were completely irrelevant, in constitutional terms (they were hardly unprecedented).

The president and the administration are raising their game.

When there are incriminating facts very close to the president, the opposition controls the Congress, and the media are rabidly hostile (Nixon), impeachment is sure and conviction possible. When there isn't a fact trail to the president's guilt, even a hostile Congress can't impeach, if the press isn't screaming for blood, and can't convict, if it is (Reagan). Where the facts are inconclusive and the media are indifferent, even a hostile Congress can get only impeachment but not conviction (Clinton). Now, there are no relevant facts, the Republicans control the Congress, and – though most of the media are aflame – there is substantial dissent and the social-media and talk-show worlds support the president. Incriminating facts and a hostile Congress and press can get all the way there; two of the three can get to impeachment but not removal; one won't do more than delay, defame, and distract. That is what the Democrats are trying to do with only a fake-news press that is widely distrusted outside Washington and the faddish districts of New York and Los Angeles. It has got more traction than it deserves, but it won't fly. The president and the administration are raising their game, with a rise in tone, the Mueller appointment, and some statesmanlike foreign exposure and initiatives, and are starting to look less vulnerable.

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