

# Trump's Winning Demeanor

by Conrad Black



The problem with all the advice to the president urging him to change his demeanor is that it is given for the wrong reason and at the wrong time.

As I have often recounted, since Donald Trump attacks the entire political system and almost everyone in or near it in both parties (including former presidents), it was never going to be possible for him to lower the ferocity of his barrages until it was clear how successful his effort to dislodge or reorient the entire political establishment had been.

Obviously, if he had not won the nomination, or lost the election, he would be, in political terms, a trivia question like Michael Dukakis (Democratic presidential nominee in 1988). He has expelled the NeverTrumpers from the Republican congressional delegations with Senators Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), and others headed for the exits. But if he loses control of

the Congress next week, gridlock will reimpose itself, and we will have trench warfare until the next presidential election. In those circumstances, Trump might likely be disposed to be more placatory, and behave more like a contestant in a great national debate, with little realistic hope of changing the system he has attacked much more than he already has.

#### A Truly Transformative Presidency

This was the lot of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who put in their tax increase and health care, respectively, in their first two years, and then were severely defeated at their first mid-terms and never moved more than a Christmas card through Congress thereafter. Republican congressional leaders Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole frustrated Clinton, and John Boehner, Paul Ryan, and Mitch McConnell drove Obama to attempt government by questionable executive regulation, leading to the extreme politicization of Supreme Court nominations.

Trump has revoked almost all Obama's executive orders, gutted the coercive part of Obamacare, and got his two conservative nominations onto the Supreme Court. Obama's lasting effect—apart from having admirably smashed the color bar on eligibility for the presidency—has been minimal, as has been Clinton's. So much for the loudly proclaimed ambitions of both of them to be “transformative” presidents. At transformation, they were a bust. Trump is already ahead of them. America and the world are waiting to see if this president can hold the momentum past the midterms.

The polls consistently have underestimated him, and I don't believe the polling organizations are unbiased. Nor have they adjusted their echelon of opinion-sampling to allow for the phenomenon of tens of millions of fervent Trump voters largely from demographic groups not in the habit of voting in such large numbers, at least not since the Reagan years. There is also the widely noted phenomenon of the resistance of Trump voters to reveal their preferences, so called “shy Trump voters”—they mistrust anyone who telephones them at home,

especially on a robo-call, asking their voting opinion.

Given the polling experiences of the 2016 election, I believe that the 30 toss-up House of Representatives elections and the five toss-up Senate seats are really at least 20 Republican congressmen and four Republican senators, and that Trump gets to hurl himself at the throat of the political class he set out to dispossess for another two years. The Republican gain in the Senate will balance the reduction of the Republican majority in the House, and there will be no remaining credibility for the monstrous fraudulent confection of the Trump-Russian collusion canard that distracted the country for more than a year.

#### Beyond the Harsh Discourse

But whatever happens in the election, the claim that the harsh political discourse, and especially that the president by his forceful words and acts, has incited and encouraged public violence, is bunk. A number of very reputable and fine commentators have bewailed the nasty and belligerent tenor of public discourse and many estimable people have said and written that it is up to the president as the chief of state and government and in Franklin D. Roosevelt's phrase, "the head of the American people," to lead the way to greater civility, and that this would have a halcyon effect on the country, including those elements of American society with any disposition to violence.

It is true that President Trump is a much higher and more important officeholder than anyone else in the country, but he has never said anything remotely as conducive to sociopathic behavior as Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), and others have regularly spewed out. But they haven't influenced the public much either, and the media and the elected officials should understand that they have almost no influence on the great American people's behavior.

Americans and their commentators are going to have to realize

that in a country of 325 million people with practically unlimited access to sophisticated firearms and a generally proud national ethos of self-reliance and resistance to an overbearing state, the vagaries of public mental health in so spontaneous and fluid a society as America will assure a good deal of violence. If the country wants an end to violence, it will have to gather in the guns held by the public, and triple the police presence throughout the urban part of the country. These are completely unacceptable measures, legislatively and constitutionally.

No extent of even sincere hand-wringing about the lack of gentility in public discourse had anything to do with the near assassination of Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), the ineffective and easily intercepted pipe bombs to prominent Democrats, or the massacre of worshipers in a Pittsburgh synagogue. The expertise of the police response in each case was very high and professional.

Such a huge and comparatively free society has no shortage of well-armed violent criminals and lunatics. They have nothing to do with Donald Trump, Maxine Waters, or Cory Booker. As the economic life of the whole country continues to improve, violence will decline, and, as the president has said, the National Rifle Association can be rolled back a little. Republicans need not fear the NRA—as Trump has also said, they have nowhere else to go politically, and as they stand on the Second Amendment to the Constitution, they can't be pushed very far.

The fact is, scores of millions of Americans kit themselves out every week in battle fatigues, go to the firing ranges and paintball parks, and get ready if need be to kill the IRS on their front lawn. Their individualist determination should not be despised and will sustain the country long after the Quislings of Hollywood and the poseurs of Silicon Valley and Wall Street have been put back in their places.

America will not be a civil society any time soon, and almost no Democrat calling for it will take a step to make it happen. But the chances for better government are promising.

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