

Reflections on the Counter-Revolution in America

By Victor Davis Hanson

When Donald Trump entered office, he faced a number of choices that had confronted the last three Republican presidents, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush. They all had the choice to either shrink government and reduce deficits or *slow* government growth while cutting taxes.



They had the choice of using American power to restore deterrence by invading belligerents (e.g., Grenada, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan) or targeting enemies without deploying ground troops to change governments.

Republicans could either impose tariffs to ensure trade balances and fair trade or argue that free, even if unfair, trade was in the U.S.'s interest by lowering consumer prices, keeping domestic producers competitive, and assuming foreign subsidies were unsustainable.

They had the choice to either reverse the left-wing domination of culture or moderate its fated influence.

They could have shut down the open border and eliminated

illegal immigration or publicly condemned it while tacitly maintaining an influx of hundreds of thousands per year for the corporate world, rather than millions.

In general, no Republican president of the past 50 years sought to radically reduce the size of government and balance the budget. None closed the border and began deportations. None avoided optional ground wars while solely hitting aggressors from the air. None led a cultural counter-revolution to reverse the left's long march through our institutions.

Why?

Because to have done so would have constituted a veritable cultural counter-revolution that would incur an unacceptable level of hatred and resistance from the entrenched left—defined by the nexus of the media, bureaucracies, campuses, foundations, Wall Street and Silicon Valley, and the Democratic Party. The latter were deemed just too formidable—and dangerous—to confront in a single term, if ever.

Or so it was felt by prior Republican administrations. So, most stayed clear and sought to deregulate, cut taxes, keep illegal immigration to about 30,000 or so a month, and use rhetoric to oppose the left's cultural revolution.

Not so with Trump. The target of four years of lawfare in his wilderness years, he has now become a true counterrevolutionary determined not to slow down the progressive trajectory of the last 60 years but to end it and return the U.S. to the center—at least as now defined by a balanced budget, reciprocal fair trade, full use of all modes of energy, a closed border, legal only immigration, no optional ground wars abroad and a fierce effort to end the woke/DEI/ESG/Green New Deal leftwing orthodoxy.

Will it work?

The left's revolution had become so deeply institutionalized that the once-bizarre had become the politically correct norm: three, not two, sexes; illegal aliens de facto not different from American citizens; a country without borders; massive debt and trade imbalances propped up for years by near-zero, de facto interest rates; and nation-building abroad as the country's interior at home was hallowed out.

Trump is currently waging a 360-degree, 24/7 effort to undo at least the last 20 years of the most recent manifestation of the leftist cultural revolution inaugurated by Barack Obama.

Given that war and the economy often determine the legacy of a president's tenure, Trump's success or failure will hinge on several factors:

1) Flooding the Zone – Can he achieve enough massive cuts to the federal workforce and federal spending to realistically project a balanced budget in 2-3 years? Can he use tariffs to adjudicate rough trade parity without panicking Wall Street and reduce our huge trade deficit—while stimulating the economy through increased energy production, some tariff income, massive inflows of foreign capital and private-sector jobs, deregulation, and tax cuts? And in addition, can he end the war in Ukraine while denuclearizing Iran without blowing up the Middle East? The answers remain uncertain because no one has really attempted all of these measures simultaneously.

2) Speed – Speed is of the essence. He must see most of his major counterrevolutionary steps enacted this year while avoiding a recession before the midterms. Otherwise, he may see a new Democratic majority House in 2026 that will do nothing but issue subpoenas, conduct investigations, and impeach him. The Democrats seem to have little desire to offer a comprehensive counter-agenda that would reflect their own ideas on how to achieve balanced budgets, a secure border, a deterrent foreign policy, fair trade, and energy dynamism. For now, bizarrely, these new Jacobins are de facto Trump's allies

by becoming so unhinged, often so repugnant in their smutty rhetoric and street violence, and so angry without constructive alternatives that the counter-revolutionary Trump seems centrist in comparison.

All know that Trump's agenda of cutting the size of government, balancing the budget, deregulating, achieving trade parity, expanding gas, oil, nuclear, and hydroelectric energy, and leveraging massive foreign investment in the U.S. will soon result in a booming economy. But the question is, how long will the bitter medicine of cutting spending, federal jobs, and the size of government, forcing trade symmetry, and shocking voters with layoffs and deregulation last? Or to put it another way, will the new oncologist be allowed to apply sufficient harsh radiation and chemotherapy to a near-terminal patient to see him recover?

3) The Supreme Court. The Supreme Court must restore our constitutional tripartite government. The court must stop allowing the brazen lower-court judiciary's hijacking of U.S. foreign policy and national security—and do it within the next month or so. Otherwise, a group of minor federal judges, some 300-400 unelected but cherry-picked liberal appointees, will essentially be running the country. Power has gone to their narcissistic heads, and they grow ever more emboldened as special activist lawyers—funded by foundations and political action committees—send them an endless stream of marching orders and writs. Currently, a once-unknown but now megalomaniac Judge Boasberg believes he is a more powerful adjudicator of U.S. foreign policy and national security than the combined power of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Advisor, and the President. And he may be right.

4) No Margin of Error – Trump has no margin of error, given thin congressional margins and the left-wing cultural juggernaut.

So far, his nascent counter-revolution has been largely disciplined and well-managed. But he can afford no more avoidable psychodramas like the still inexplicable Signal leak to the likes of a hyper-partisan Jeffrey Goldberg.

Cabinet officials should grow more silent but carry even bigger sticks. The entire messaging of Team Trump must be sober, even tragic, without braggadocio. The latest Fox interview by Brett Baier of a reflective, soft-spoken Elon Musk and his DOGE team did more to win the public over to their thankless but critical task than all the grandstanding on social media or chainsaw theatrics.

They need to remind Americans that the Trump team did not open the border but are now forced to close it if the country is to exist.

The public needs to recall that it is recklessly easy to allow entry to 12 million illegal aliens but almost impossible to find them all in a country of 345 million.

It is not hard to borrow and spend, but it is unenviable and unpopular to cut and save.

It is much less trouble in Washington to dine with and leak to media celebrities, become a power couple on the A list, and play tit-for-tat and don't-rock-the-boat than to become a despised disrupter on behalf of far-away people in rural Kansas, along the southern border, or in the inner-city without lobbyists, national audiences, or a fat checkbook.

It is easy to smile, pal around, and hand out money and commitments abroad at summits while foreign leaders welch on their military commitments and run up unsustainable trade surpluses with the US. But it quite another thing to demand from our allies and neutrals trade parity, reciprocity, and keeping defense commitments as prime ministers and their state media damn you as either crazy or sinister.

In sum, we are witnessing the greatest effort to reinvent or, rather, restore the U.S. since the first 100 days of FDR's radical New Deal revolution. It can succeed even against the street theater nihilism, mainstreamed vulgarity, neo-terrorism, lawfare, and the congressional circus arrayed against it.

But success hinges on speed and audacity (*"L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace!"*), the rapid reassertion of its constitutional duties by the Supreme Court, constant discipline to prevent needless errors and leaks, calm and tragic explication and messaging rather than boastful high-fiving, and a constant reminder that their desperate opposition wishes to destroy this last effort to stop what had become sheer madness.

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