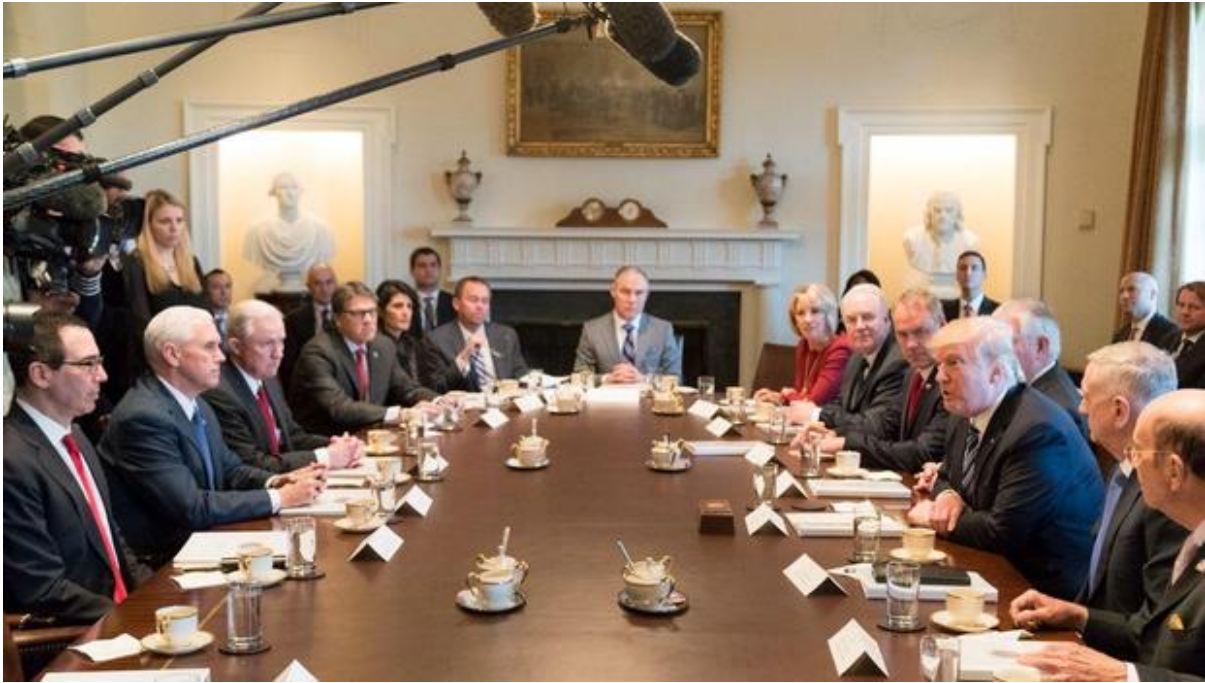


The White House Shakeup Affords Critics of Trump Chance for a Second Look

by Conrad Black



The shakeup in the White House affords even some in the serried ranks of anti-Trump commentators the opportunity to take a somewhat more benign perspective. What the veteran and always fair and perceptive Brit Hume of Fox News calls “the floating crap game in the White House” has been instantly upgraded by the installation as chief of staff of General John Kelly and the rustication of the completely unfeasible Anthony Scaramucci as communications director.

One of Donald Trump’s strong points as a businessman, as a presidential candidate, and as president is that he knows when matters have deteriorated to the point where he needs new people to replace or supplement the efforts of those who have been unsuccessful. He was correct that communications were in shambles and that his team could not win the war with the

national media.

Sean Spicer was not agile enough to deal with such a barrage of questions that daily resembled the verbalization of a full broadside from an *Iowa*-class battleship. His departure from his position showed Mr. Spicer to be a gracious, decent, and admirable man, and I suspect even the jackals who drove him off wish him well. It was time for someone of greater articulation, presence, and authority.

The president reached for his friend and admirer, and, up to a point, his kindred spirit and nature in hardscrabble, outer-borough, New York City moneymaking and self-promotion, Mr. Scaramucci. He impressed on Day One with a formidable performance before the press, handling tough questions with flamboyant self-confidence and showing personal proximity to but respect for the president, and dealing plausibly with a lengthy sequence of hardball questions.

As in other fields of endeavor, the press, however cynical and hostile, respect an adversary (which any representative of the Trump administration is in this forum) who can meet them face-on, answer clearly, and give it back a little without being defensive, ill-tempered, or excessively aggressive. This is why even the many journalists who did not agree with most of what Henry Kissinger was doing in government were always respectful of his brilliant articulation, mastery of the dossiers, and irresistible sense of humor.

Mr. Scaramucci did not get near those highs, but for one brief shining moment, he seemed to be the right man: confident, fluent, plausible, and somewhat likable, in that vintage, tough-talking, but educated Italian New York way, a faster-talking Michael Corleone with no blood on his hands.

That was Day One; on Day Seven, Mr. Scaramucci caused his sky to fall down. Accepting the word of a reporter from the *New Yorker* (possibly the most Trump-hating of any American press

outlet) that they were off the record, he engaged in a tirade against his White House colleagues that was the most outrageous, grossly vulgar without being even slightly witty, back-stabbing, and mountainously indiscreet screed in the entire history of the presidential entourage, going back to the presidency of General Washington.

The following day, Reince Priebus, who had rendered great service as Republican-party chairman but was identified with Trump skeptics and seems never to have understood whom and what Mr. Trump represented or why he won, and who probably never possessed and was never given the authority the position of White House chief of staff requires, departed, and Marine general John Kelly's arrival at the end of the weekend was announced.

Mr. Scaramucci's flameout had been so dazzlingly meteoric that vocal commentators along the whole range of the president's supporters, skeptics, critics, and haters generally remained quiet, waiting to see whether the shoe, in the shape of Mr. Scaramucci's head, would drop.

Everyone with any liking for America and respect for its highest office was relieved when it did fall lightly into the basket under the guillotine, with an anodyne one-sentence statement, and no histrionics. The whole Scaramucci episode was too excruciating for anyone to wish to discuss it much. We all make mistakes and the best thing to do with the most obvious mistakes is to correct them at once with the least possible comment. In some aspects of his office, Mr. Trump has not been a swift learner, but he cut his losses quickly this time.

The most frequently mentioned replacement for Mr. Scaramucci is television, radio, and Internet commentator Laura Ingraham, who would be an inspired choice and would put more distance between the Trump presidency and the Gothic excesses and lapses of the recent past. This progress back from the public-

relations abyss is the clear trend.

The Russian-collusion idiocy was dealt an almost mortal blow by Jared Kushner's boffo in camera performance at the House Intelligence Committee last week, after which even the super-Pavlovian attack dog of congressional Democrats, Adam Schiff, the personification of his malignant airhead Hollywood constituents, acknowledged that the president's son-in-law had been forthcoming and persuasive.

And, as General Kelly arrived and Mr. Scaramucci departed the White House, the Senate Intelligence Committee finally announced, while demanding an independent prosecutor, its own investigation into the vast labyrinth of Democratic skullduggery: the Clinton Foundation and Uranium One, the Lynch-Bill Clinton meeting, Director Comey's usurpation of the Justice Department's prerogatives in exonerating Hillary Clinton's e-mail misuse, the murky Wasserman Schultz protection of recently indicted Imran Awan and other possible misdeeds in her zealous support of the Clinton campaign, and Susan Rice and others and the questionable "unmasking" and surveillance activities directed by the Obama administration against the Trump campaign. It seems that the Russian nonsense had to run out of steam to embolden the Republicans to open the door to the dank cave of Clintonian political science. Finally, it will be Mr. Trump's turn.

Having incited leftist sympathy for Attorney General Sessions by his outrageous public criticism, Mr. Trump has reaffirmed his faith in him, and armed him with an increased mandate to look into the Democrats and not be peppered with complaints that he is just a Trump spear-carrier.

The president must have known that he had achieved his goal when the most self-important member of Congress, Senator Graham, who for years bestrode the world with John McCain telling foreign powers, on their own authority, how to behave, warned the president that if he pushed Sessions out to make an

interim appointment to fire special counsel Robert Mueller, he would face impeachment.

I was among those who never bought into the pious claptrap that Mr. Mueller was any paragon of integrity, and his packing his staff with notorious Clinton partisans and leaking like a sieve suggests we were right. (He, Mr. Comey, and their sidekick, former U.S. attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, should all have been disbarred years ago for some of their antics, but this is not the place to open up that subject.) There was never anything to the Russian-collusion fraud, the Democrats have shot their bolt, the public doesn't buy any of it, and the national press will have to add some strings to their bow.

Despite the ramshackle nature of the White House, this administration has accomplished a good deal: pulling out of the Paris climate agreement and the Trans-Pacific trade deal, confirming a Supreme Court justice, drastically reducing illegal foreign entry into the country, ambitious deregulating, giving a green light to increased energy production and reduced imports, providing aid to non-unionized schools, and creating fiscal expectations that have added trillions of dollars to stock-market values and torqued up economic growth to more than double the late-Obama rate.

The pusillanimity toward North Korea of three consecutive administrations has come home to roost, and the accumulated failures of tax and health-care policies of over 15 years, and many other problems including collapsed infrastructure and rising crime rates, scream for resolution. Only Mr. Trump's clumsiness at times, the balkiness of Republicans whom Mr. Trump derided in his campaign for the nomination, and the refusal of the Democrats to accept the legitimacy of the election or the need to deal with the president have prevented his getting to grips with these issues.

The Republican congressional performance has been contemptible, though not as shameful as the sleaziness of the

Democrats and their Washington-New York-Hollywood press and show-business cabal.

In a democracy, ultimately the people are always right, and with a smooth-running White House, the people will soon demand that the administration be given a fair chance; that will be all it needs to succeed.

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