

Trump and the 'Enemy of the People'

The media are indeed playing a harmful role.

by Conrad Black



What is utterly astonishing about the fierce contest between the national media and President Trump is that the media do not realize how despised they are by most Americans, and how richly, as a group (which contains many individual exceptions), they deserve to be despised. For 18 months Donald Trump campaigned with great energy all over the country, swept most of the primaries, many by astounding margins against a large field of candidates, and made a point of denouncing the national media as biased, self-serving, and malicious myth-makers. He referred to them hundreds of times as “liars,” and directed the very large crowds that he drew to the media section, and his supporters shook their fists in unfeigned rage at the press gallery. Did the complacent, bemused national press think they were paid plants or that it was all a spoof?

Virtually all of the press opposed Trump, and after ridiculing his bid for the nomination as mad and an enjoyable occasion for an egotistical billionaire buffoon to make a complete ass of himself at great expense to himself and the profound mirth of the journalists, they lapsed into a slightly uneasy assurance, when he was nominated: It was a bit surprising that he demolished the Bush-McCain-Romney centrists, but the Clintons were unstoppable, his defeat was practically certain and a matter of national deliverance from evil and garish foolishness in the showdown with the invincible Hillary.

Even those within the media who professed to favor the Republicans were almost exclusively defeatists. Daniel Henninger in the *Wall Street Journal*, two weeks before the election, wrote as if it were six months later, lamenting President Clinton's policies that will flatline the economy and entrench political correctness and tinkering judges, and disparaging Trump for having run such an inept campaign that he fumbled away the last chance to stop the socialized rot of the national state. Despite the failure of the Billy Bush tape to serve the purpose for which it had long been held in reserve, to be the coup de grâce; despite even the inability of FBI director James Comey to quell a revolt within the Bureau against the whitewash that had been performed for Mrs. Clinton in the e-mails affair – the national media were almost unanimous in predicting a Clinton victory. It would probably not be on the Goldwater-McGovern-Mondale scale that had been hoped and expected; Trump had proved to be a tenacious candidate of inexhaustible energy and inexplicably wide popularity. But the all-forgiven Hillary would save America and the world from the great mountebank.

As the Democrats had no argument for reelection on their merits, their only campaign was a personal denigration of Trump. It was the nastiest campaign of modern American history, but also the most entertaining. Trump responded to the Billy Bush tape by trotting out at the second debate three

women who signed affidavits that Bill Clinton had sexually assaulted them. In general, the media hyped the anti-Trump onslaught and under-reported his counterattacks, but he made up for it with his antic activity in the social media and the heavy support he enjoyed on the talk-show circuit. At the least, the campaign was a divertissement. Trump ran against all factions of both parties, almost all the national media, political academia, Wall Street, and the claue of opinionated limousine-liberal idiots in Hollywood. While Trump threw as much mud as Clinton, and had as enticing a target, he also promised the enactment of a drastic revision to the tax, health-care, election-financing, and environmental-regulation regimes, and the resurrection of the foreign policy of a Great Power, a prudent but reliable ally of kindred states.

It is not surprising that the Republican leadership that Trump had steamrollered are not enthused by him. And it is this small group of Republican senators – McCain, Graham, Rubio, and others – who are the hinge for the enactment of Trump's radical populist and conservative program. He needs their votes in the Senate, and the country wants the program. They appear to be snapping churlishly at the president after his more infelicitous outbursts, but remaining with the administration when the bells ring for a Senate vote. The tactic of the Democrats and their fellow travelers in the national media are to invent and amplify false stories, "fake news" such as the golden-shower fraud (the allegation that Trump organized a group of prostitutes to urinate in a bed in a Moscow hotel because the Obamas had once slept in it) and the fabrication that Trump had removed the bust of Martin Luther King from the Oval Office. Each incident of the slightest potential to embarrass the administration is instantly splashed across the media to inflict as much damage as possible on the president, and immobilize him before he can enact his reforms and assume a stature in the political workings of the country that restores to the presidency the authority it has enjoyed when the occupant was generally

judged to be effective and competent. These are conditions that, apart from a brief consolidation of support around George W. Bush after the 9/11 attacks and a short interlude with the incoming Obama, have not existed since the first Clinton term.

At one level, it is understandable that the media are fighting to defeat the man who has outed them as myth-makers complicit in the shameful misgovernment of the country for the longest such period in the country's history. And the media's discomfort is compounded by the decline of their principal outlets. All the newspapers and most of the television networks are struggling and losing audience for competitive and technological reasons and owing to the fragmentation of the news market. It is understandable but inexcusable. Their primary duty and only *raison d'être* as reporters of news is to be responsible and professional. They hyped the golden shower and the nonsense of improper Trump relations with Russia. There has never been any evidence of that; it is impossible that Russia could have influenced the election result, but Obama, whose Russian policy was a total failure, and whose investigators couldn't find any evidence of impropriety in the two months following the election, imposed sanctions against Russia anyway to keep the myth going. Tom Friedman, the ne plus ultra of *New York Times* Democratic partisans and Obama groupies, solemnly gabbled out the assertion that the Trump-Russia connection and Russia's completely unsubstantiated intervention in the U.S. election were an assault on the country on the scale of the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Friedman has tested the patience of serious readers for years by being the pub bore about Israeli settlements and the need for every newborn child in the world to have a laptop, but this sally incited the inference that he has gone stark, raving mad. David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* on February 17 that Trump would not complete his term, because he would bring unimaginable disgrace on himself. His critics alternate between being the

boy who cried wolf at fake scandals and issuing fatuous expressions of confidence in his imminent self-destruction.

The travel executive order was sloppily formulated, but the overreaction to it, the violence at Berkeley, mobbing of airports, demonstrations all over the Western world, Senator Schumer sniveling and saying that the Statue of Liberty was weeping too, was insane. Democratic judge-shopping quickly found West Coast judges happy to exceed their jurisdictions and purport to usurp the president's powers. But the hoped-for result, that Trump would blow up and ignore them, enabling ululations of impeachment to arise, were frustrated. Trump shifted to intensive screening at point of arrival rather than departure, and was the soul of compliance. This has had the supplementary benefit of rebutting the spurious charge that he is an autocrat, the allegation that succeeded to the previous claims of racism and sexism, which the president's conduct has, in Watergatese, rendered "inoperative." It is really Trump who is goading his opponents and driving them to overreact and make absurd accusations that vanish within a few days. The media, in their smug purblindness, think the administration is coming apart, as the latest jeremiad from Mr. Henninger put it (*Wall Street Journal*, February 16), "Donald Trump's presidency is getting bitten to death by an invisible, lethal ant hill of anonymous leakers." Henninger, too, fears the immobilization, though not the impeachment potential, of Watergate. There is not the slightest comparison to be made, but the nostalgic invocation of one by Dan Rather, a bedraggled, discredited survivor of the Nixon-assassination squad, has been seized upon to circulate this new Never Trump fantasy.

Henninger, Brooks, and most of the rest of the media miss the point. If Trump can hold the Republicans who are resentful of him personally, and produce his health-care and tax reforms promptly and as promised, they will pass and the country will have turned the corner away from 20 years of generally inept

government. Trump has done nothing but win, while the laughter of his detractors slowly turned to cold terror, thinly disguised as moral outrage and patriotic sensibility, accented by the misplaced snobbery of the highbrow Right. The country will be grateful for a fairer, simpler tax system, and a better health-care plan than the Obamacare fiasco. If that is what emerges, the atmosphere will settle down in Washington, and the Republican stragglers will stop playing footsie with the opposition and the Democrats will start to rebuild, as parties do after defeats. No one but a centenarian of faltering mind could regard Schumer and Pelosi as the future.

That leaves the press, and the president's elevation of his counterattacks on the "failing" *New York Times*, CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN as "enemies of the people." Provided that what is meant is that those outlets have been so slanted and malicious that they have misled the declining section of the country that takes them seriously and that this is inimical to the country's democratic desire for an informed electorate, it is a justified statement. The recent political coverage of those outlets has been a disgrace and the failure to realize that reveals the moral bankruptcy of most of the U.S. national media. "Enemies of the people" is no more meant to replicate the actions of the French Revolutionary Committee of Public Safety and Lenin's Politburo, which used the expression, than "America First" was meant to incite the effectively pro-Nazi isolationism championed by Colonel Charles Lindbergh under that banner in 1939–41. The national media have failed the country badly, on balance, and are now fighting the retreating action side by side with the rejected Democrats, which is not their role.

Will Rahn was correct when he wrote just after the election that the media response would be not that Trump's followers were not all "deplorable" lager louts and couch potatoes after all, but that there were more of such people than they had thought. Partly because of his own antics and partly because

of the bruising campaigns he has been through, this president has lower trust levels than most of his recent predecessors, especially as most of them had been honeymooning at this point. But his credibility still runs well ahead of that of the national media, according to a range of the polls. If Trump and Ryan and Price can deliver their tax and health-care reforms, Donald Trump will have stormed Babylon and razed its hierarchical structure to the ground, as his supporters elected him to do. The Democrats' fears, though not their tactics, are justified; the media's unprofessional and dishonest calumnies are not. The media should revisit their boycott of the president and contemplate their own shortcomings. It is they, and not he, who threatens a free press. Trump, and the country, will win.

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