

Trump Derangement Syndrome and Presidential Egocentricity

He drives his critics insane.

by Conrad Black



Like many others, I have for some time been trying to understand Trump Derangement Syndrome, the phenomenon of otherwise reasonable people reacting irrationally to some peculiar quality of the president, a quality especially in evidence when he is in the presence of his supporters.

Some of it is easy enough to comprehend. Unlike any president since at least Jackson, he was elected by attacking the entire political class from right to left and practically all leaders of both parties and the parties themselves. He managed to stir

up enough discontent to win the nomination of one of the parties and then got just enough votes in the right places to win the election. Since he had opposed everyone in both parties, they all opposed him, and the Republicans, almost as much as the Democrats, wanted to get rid of him. If there had been any truth at all to the gigantic fatuity about Trump-campaign collusion with Russia, there would have been bipartisan enthusiasm and relief in throwing him out of the White House like a large dead mouse.

He was not only the first president who had never sought or held a public office, elected or unelected, or a military position. He also had no knowledge of the official procedures and attitudes in the upper approaches to the presidency. And as he had changed parties seven times in 13 years looking for his chance to try the novel theory of turning celebrity, and often rather crass celebrity, into electability, and had countered media skepticism with social-media direct contact with the people, supplemented by support on the talk-radio circuit, which generally enlists the attention of a lower-middle- and working-class demographic, he had no cadre of political loyalists to assist him. He thus had no bedrock of support in either party or any part of government, and was not treated to the traditional "honeymoon" period with Congress. He was like a threatening alien to the powers that have always been, and they reacted with almost uniform hostility. They generally hoped that he had colluded illegally with the Russians, so they could be quickly rid of him. The proportions of that gigantic fiasco have been appreciated by the president and his supporters, but the effect of it on his enemies has been the bitter embarrassment of the defeated and unconvinced.

Richard Nixon was probably cheated out of the 1960 election; at the least, we don't know who really won, as with the 2000 Gore-Bush election. But he liked and respected John F. Kennedy, and he had come up through and respected the rough-and-tumble political system. He declined a formal contest of

the election, even though President Eisenhower urged him to do it and promised Nixon that Ike's wealthy friend would pay for it. Richard Nixon declined to put the country through such a wrenching ordeal (as he did over impeachment 14 years later, though there remains no probative evidence that he committed crimes, despite the self-serving claptrap of imperishable Nixonocides who inflict themselves on us on television with depressing frequency). Nixon respected the system. There has been almost no such acceptance of the Trump victory by Democrats. Republicans have generally noticed the side their political bread is buttered on, and many prominent Never Trumpers, such as former Speaker Paul Ryan and Senators Jeff Flake and Bob Corker, have retired. But for most partisan Democrats, he remains a horrible, unimaginable usurper.

The Democrats are almost leaderless. The Clinton faction is discounted by the election result, the appalling fraud of the Steele Dossier, and many unsavory financial questions; President Obama remains somewhat popular but is a rather withdrawn figure. In these circumstances, the frolicsome Democratic Left has made the running, and as usually happens, the more strenuous factions of the party out of the White House have the most energy, which in these times means that the Democrats have made a seismic shift to the left. This has been magnified by the fact that the farther to the economic and foreign-policy left one is, the more repulsive Donald Trump appears. The far-left faction of the Democrats, led by congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib, have with this big, very white, rigorously politically incorrect billionaire, what they believe, tactically and by uncontrollable impulse, is the target of their political dreams. He is the personification of every policy they hate and every human trait they despise; to them, he is a monster of ignorance, greed, bombast, bellicosity, and racist bigotry. They are like World War II movie submarine captains seeing a thousand feet ahead of their

periscopes a giant enemy oil tanker, inching through still waters.

Their hate is real, but their impression of the target is a chimerical mirage. In pursuit of him it is acceptable to say publicly “impeach the motherf***er,” to claim adequately outfitted border detention centers where illegal migrants are fed Big Macs are “concentration camps” where children are forced to drink from toilets, and to demand a green terror, unpatrolled borders, free health care for everyone, doubled income-tax rates in the high and corporate brackets, trillions of dollars for reparations to non-whites, and legalized infanticide. All four of them qualify as anti-Semites. As has been widely mentioned, the president is doing what he can to help make these four the best publicly known face of the Democrats. They are, to adapt other lavatory images, drinking their own bathwater, and the president will hang their insane ideas around the Democrats’ necks like a toilet seat.

His tweeted remarks about the four going back to where they came were only marginally more forceful than FDR’s statement in the 1936 campaign that those who did not like the way the country was governed were free to leave it. Trump is steadily gaining strength in the polls of African and Hispanic Americans and has no grievance with Muslims per se, just with the two whom he mentioned. Trump is not a racist. The congresswomen’s attacks on the United States; Omar’s trivialization and quasi-justification of the 9/11 terrorist attacks; the imputation of racial and sexual bigotry to almost anyone who is not in lock-step with their absurd and nasty opinions, including their own leader, Nancy Pelosi – all are well within their rights of freedom of expression, but are politically suicidal. They are the dangerous young Jacobins of the Committee of Public Safety, except it is all hot air; they have no authority and were the only dissenting votes on a bipartisan bill to fund improved border facilities (because

they had pledged not to vote a cent to Immigration and Customs Enforcement). This is just obnoxious child's play, and it will end, but not before it has done a lot of damage to the Democratic party.

Cory Booker, struggling to get to 1 percent in the polls, began his campaign by telling Iowans that fighting climate change was like the D-Day landings to liberate western Europe, and has moved on to the assertion that Trump is worse than George Wallace. Wallace, some of us remember, said "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!" The comparison is unutterably stupid and dishonest, but indicative of where the four congresswomen are pushing their party. All of these elements produce a partial derangement about Trump in the minds of many.

It must be added that there is a last ingredient: His refusal to make it difficult for his detractors. No serious person can still claim that Trump is a fool, given what he has achieved, before he was president and in that office. But he invites questions about his egocentricity. On Monday, while sitting in the Oval Office with the Pakistani prime minister, Imre Khan, he was asked if he supported the beleaguered governor of Puerto Rico. He replied: "No. I know Puerto Rico. I did a great job for Puerto Rico – great place. I know it better than anyone," or something very close to that. It wasn't what the journalist asked; it wasn't strictly accurate. And it was the response of a caricature of the 1950s Ugly American, a boorish braggart. The people who elect a president have the right to expect him to be gentlemanly on normal occasions, and with almost no exceptions in living memory they have had that, at least in public. This president is often gratuitously uncouth in public, and almost unrecognizable to those who know him as a congenial, courteous, and charming man and a fine raconteur. These traits are less frequently in evidence than in earlier days.

Like all of us, the president gets better at his job the longer he holds it. But this would be an easy problem to correct, and that would leave the intense disparagement of Trump exclusively to the extremists and the decayed servitors he has served the country admirably by driving from office.

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