

Trump Is the Good Guy

It is time to look more seriously at the Donald Trump presidential candidacy. He continues to lead the polls among Republicans; his closest rivals seem now to be Senators Mario Rubio and Ted Cruz, easing ahead of Dr. Ben Carson. There does not seem to have been much effort to see the Trump candidacy in any sort of historic context. For the first time in its history, the United States has had four, and arguably five, consecutive terms of unsuccessful federal government, from administrations and Congresses of both parties. The last Clinton term under-reacted to the original terrorist incidents at the Khobar Towers (1996), the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassies (1998) and the USS Cole (in 2000); and stoked up the housing bubble through the Community Reinvestment Act and executive orders to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to invest massively in sub-prime mortgages. George W. Bush responded well to terrorism, and his economic countermeasures were adequate after the 9/11 attacks, but he did nothing to let the air gently out of the housing bubble, his response was contemptibly inept when the economic crisis erupted, and his intervention in Iraq was for unsubstantiated reasons and resulted in a major strategic victory for America's Iranian enemies, a vast waste of lives and treasure, and an immense humanitarian crisis.

President Obama has doubled the national debt accumulated in 233 years of American independence in eight years, not really produced an economic recovery, facilitated nuclear weapons for Iran after a great deal of purposeful braggadocio, and humiliated the United States by drawing and erasing a "red line" in Syria and being chased out of its air space by the Russians. Two-thirds of Americans, in all polls, feel the country is headed in the wrong direction, Obama does not get a positive job-performance rating even in the most leftish polls, and a majority consider Obamacare to have been a

retrograde step. It is unlikely that the United States has been less respected in the world than it is now, at least since the time of Hoover, who was blamed for the worldwide Depression, if not since the prelude to and early days of the Civil War.

The crime rate, after decades of decline, is rising again, in part because of police discontent at public and media focus on what is widely regarded as a coast-to-coast shooting gallery conducted largely in the African-American districts of the country's cities. The habits of decades of the political system simply ignoring problems as they festered and grew – abortion, immigration, wealth disparity – has disgusted the country, and coincided with a pecuniary inundation of politics on a scale the world has rarely glimpsed in a democratic country. Most congressmen and senators are unambiguous representatives of the leading economic interests in their states or districts, and presidential campaigns, as we are seeing, last for years and cost over a billion dollars for each party. It is a corrupt and vulgar system and virtually all Americans know it, and everyone above the age of 40 has seen an alarming decline in the quality of candidates for high, and especially national, office since the Reagan years.

The presidencies between Polk and Lincoln (Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan sharing three terms) were inadequate, and so were those between Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt (Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, though Coolidge retains his apologists), but none of these presidents was re-elected after a full term, and neither talent drought was as profound or extended as the 20 years of misgovernment the United States is reeling from now. In the circumstances, it is little wonder that the country is looking elsewhere than the ranks of its elected officials to find a possible president. There is precedent for this, but usually with generals (Washington, Jackson, Grant, Eisenhower, and unsuccessful candidates including Cass, McClellan, and Hancock), plus not entirely

career soldiers such as Hayes, Garfield, and both Harrisons, and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt: These named individuals were major-party nominees for national office in a total of 20 elections, but wars and their generals have not been as popular lately; Colin Powell was the last who could have done it). And there have been non-military candidates for the presidency as an entry-level elective office, including Horace Greeley, Alton B. Parker, Wendell Willkie, and Herbert Hoover.

Viewed from that perspective, the rise of Donald Trump is not so surprising, and he is not running as a spoiler, as Ross Perot did against George H. W. Bush in 1992, nor as an aggrieved Theodore Roosevelt did in 1912 against William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson. He has the populist aptitudes of the old Progressive party because of his often outlandish Archie Bunker-esque political incorrectness, but he is more credible than Archie because his views emanate not from a blue-collar reactionary, but from an accomplished billionaire as well as a successful television personality. As he is financing himself, it is refreshing that he is not constantly seeking life support from controversial individual sources, or from a vast and aggressive fundraising organization, or from a coalition of sleazy and opinionated philistines in the entertainment industry.

But his rather iconoclastic techniques and his promises to effect radical change if elected – and even to be at the head of an angry movement of scores of millions of Americans who feel their country has been stolen and mismanaged and that there is no point merely to ejecting the incumbents – has a profound appeal: They have tried turning the rascals out many times in the last 30 years and they just get worse rascals. The liberal media establishment is frenzied in its animosity to Donald Trump, and their hysteria is becoming more vociferous and desperate as he utters clangorous violations of the normal parameters of political discourse. The echo chamber explodes, the commentariat foams at the mouth, but he seems to

pay no penalty in the polls. I think there are two explanations for this: Donald doesn't really say such outrageous things as his opponents spinningly impute to him; and vast sections of the population are more bitterly disappointed and angry at the deterioration of their country and the misinformation of the mainstream media than the subjects of that resentment can imagine.

They started by mocking Trump; and his preoccupation with unserious matters, such as where the president was born, made that simple. But Trump's durability now scares them. Last week, the *New York Times* accused Trump of being on "the brink of fascism." The worthy Max Boot, respected strategic writer, compared him to Joseph R. McCarthy. There is a good deal of this sort of overreaction, and of course the public will be too intelligent to buy into much of it. McCarthy announced that Roosevelt, Truman, General Marshall, and even Eisenhower were effectively Communist dupes. Fascists are identified with lawlessness, mob rule, racism, the physical intimidation of opponents, and the overthrow of democracy. The *Times* and Max Boot should know better than to descend to this sort of thing.

Just to set the record straight, let me review the key positions Donald Trump has taken.

On immigration, he wants to deport 351,000 illegal immigrants in American prisons; stop all illegal immigration, chiefly by constructing an Israeli-like wall on the Mexican border; and conduct an imprecisely defined screening action to deport a large number of illegal immigrants and regularize entry of the others, citing Eisenhower (who certainly did not deport people in the numbers spoken of in this campaign). He acknowledges that the U.S. is partly responsible for the refugee crisis in the Middle East but still opposes admission of any of its victims. His latest wheeze, of suspending admission of Muslims unless they are returning people who have already been granted residency or accredited foreign officials, was clumsily phrased and hysterically misrepresented. He will presumably

clean it up enough to reduce the controversy.

In other areas, he does not advocate much increase in defense spending, but a reallocation toward anti-terrorist operations. On health care, he seeks the repeal of Obamacare, the shattering of the insurance cartel, and the provision of universal health care, with health-savings accounts and with, presumably, where necessary, the according of discretionary tax credits. He is for gradual, extensive legalization of drugs with some of the proceeds of savings available to drug education and treatment. He is a militant opponent of cruelty to animals, supports anti-pollution standards but deplores the excessive zeal of the EPA, thinks climate change is a hoax, and cap-and-trade both insane and hypocritical. He would disband the Department of Education and distribute its funds to the states, and leave legalization of specific drugs, like the rules over same-sex marriage, to the states.

He does not believe gun control is the answer to violence, and thinks better policing, tighter immigration control, and greater facilities to identify and treat mentally deranged potentially violent people are preferable. He would abolish super PACs, lift limits on individual contributions to candidates, and ban soft money. He is a medium protectionist to support domestic-manufacturing and other employment; his tax plan is a moderate reduction in income taxes and a steeper reduction in the corporate rates; he seeks, effectively, to turn the national debt into a sinking fund, cutting expenses beneath revenues and steadily shrinking the deficit.

Trump gets a little closer to a reactionary view in international affairs. Germany, he believes, can sort out Ukraine with the Russians, who are welcome to Syria, and let Russia destroy ISIS. It's a bit flippant and doesn't entirely square with his call for the U.S. to behave in a way that commands the world's respect again. (Though what he does propose would be an immense improvement on the Obama-Clinton-Kerry *Gong Show* of the last seven years.)

He favors retention of the death penalty and heavy prison sentences, and seems not to notice the rot in the U.S. legal system, or at least has not much commented on it yet; and he has largely avoided abortion as a subject, though he opposes it personally, and would ban it in the late term, other than in extraordinary circumstances.

In general, his policy positions, though vague in places, and subject to being moved around in response to his apparently spontaneous aperçus and reminiscences, are not especially radical or provocative. The Trump effect appears to rest on his talent for shocking conventional opinion, and on his extreme contempt for the conventional wisdom, the degraded political modus operandi, and the snipers' gallery of the biased and lazy senior media. He still leads the polls of those for whom people absolutely will not vote, and I suspect that in the end the elected Republican politicians will stand on each other's shoulders and deny him the nomination, while making profound concessions to his policy preferences.

Donald Trump – who, I should disclose, is an old friend, a fine and generous and loyal man, and a delightful companion – is striking very close to the heart of the American problem: the corrupt, dysfunctional political system and the dishonest media. My view, as persevering readers know, is that it all started to go horribly wrong with Watergate, when one of the most successful administrations in the country's history was torn apart for no remotely adequate reason and the mendacious assassins in the liberal media have been awarding themselves prizes and commendations for 40 years since. Ten times as many people believe Rush Limbaugh as Bob Woodward (and they are correct in that assessment), and Donald speaks in fact (obviously not ex officio) for many more people than Obama. I suspect the Bush-Clinton era, which had its moments, is ending, and that whatever happens next year, Donald Trump will have played an important role in it. But the desperation prayer of the liberals – that he will split the Republicans –

will not happen: He was never going to run as an independent, and the Republicans recognize how great a bloc of voters he can bring to them. To adapt George Wallace's old phrase, he has shaken the American political system "by the eyeteeth," and it will be better for it.

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