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Will Trump Make It Through Year Two?



On January 20th, Donald Trump began his second year as president and on the 30th he delivered his first State of the Union address. It was a depressing, painful first year on nearly every front, whether domestically or internationally, politically or socially or personally. One can only worry about what will play out during year two.

Americans, however, can be grateful for one accomplishment of the “make-America-great-again” president – he did not declare war against a minor, peripheral nation-state somewhere on the globe, like North Korea, Yemen or Honduras. Nearly two decades ago, in an act of great distraction, Bush & company played a similar gambit in Afghanistan and

Iraq – and now, 16 years later, everyone knows where those policies led. Trump and his aggressive military leadership may well mark year two with a comparable fool’s action.

The release by Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee of a report by Devin Nunes (R-CA) alleging that the FBI and DOJ engaged in surveillance abuses with regard to the Russia investigation quickly put Trump’s speech in the dustbin of history.

While Hillary Clinton lost the election on her own, it’s been pretty well determined that the Russian government (through its intelligence services and proxies) sought to influence the outcome of 2016 election. Amidst all the daily prattle, it remains yet to be determined what role Trump played – if any – in “Russia-gate.”

Much of the nightly clatter on CNN and MSNBC, on NBC, CBS and PBS, let alone in the print and online information media like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and NPR, consists of a never-ending stream of eyes-on news reports and speculations by carefully chosen puffers. The daily drama about this story has been engaging, an enjoyable distraction. It’s been a gambler’s holiday; *Newsweek* reports the odds are 4-7 that Trump will be impeached before Inauguration Day 2021. But the unanswered question remains: So what?

Most remarkable amidst the daily prattle about Russia’s likely role in the election, the media never discusses the well-documented role the U.S. foreign-policy apparatus – State Department, CIA, military, *National Endowment for Democracy*, Peace Corp., etc. – plays in similar election-disruption campaigns undertaken throughout the world over the last half-century.

The efforts by Rep. Nunes and House Republicans to discredit, if not terminate, special counsel Robert Muller’s investigation is but one of the challenges Trump faces as he starts year two. Two others involve his possible impeachment resulting from investigations being conducted by Mueller and House and Senate committees as well as his competency to hold office.

In the last century-and-a-half-century, the U.S. has witnessed the impeachment of three presidents. The question facing Trump is whether he will be the fourth? The key questions at the heart of the various Russia-gate investigations involve the role (if any) played by the distractor-&-chief and/or any of the key *apparatchik* of his election team, most notably his son, Donald, Jr., and son-in-law, Jared Kushner. In addition, the Justice Department and the Congress must determine if the results of the investigations involve an impeachable offense or a criminal matter.

The outcome of current investigations, like those about the Nixon impeachment and the Kennedy assassination, is unpredictable. Both sides of the aisle, Republicans and Democrats, will initially claim victory, political and personal exoneration, but as evidence mounts unforeseen consequences could occur. Congressional probing forced Nixon to resign to avoid being impeached; the original Kennedy investigation, the Warren Commission, promoted the single-killer thesis, and a later Congressional investigation recognized a likely conspiracy at work. Skeptics and questioning independent investigators will persist in calling for Trump's impeachment, but one can only wonder if it will really happen.

Following the end of the Civil War and Lincoln's assassination, vice president Andrew Johnson assumed office and, in 1868, he was subject to a failed impeachment effort. In May 1974, the House Judiciary Committee opened its investigation of Pres. Nixon; it was concerned as to whether he knew — and approved! — the payments to the Watergate break-in defendants. Anticipating impeachment by the House and Senate, Nixon abdicated. A quarter-century later, in February 1999, Pres. Bill Clinton faced the wrath of the culture warriors and was accused of lying about a sexual liaison. Convicted by the Republican-controlled House, he was acquitted by the Senate on a legal technicality; impeachment required 67 votes and the Republicans simply didn't have the votes. If impeached, Trump would be the first president to be removed from office.

So why not mobilize to impeach Trump? Tom Steyer, a hedge-fund billionaire, has found his own Jesus and funded a campaign to impeach Trump as well as to promote grassroots organizing for "progressive" Democrats. To date, his impeachment campaign has garnered some 4 million signatures. In the wake of the Wolff revelations, one can expect many more Americans to sign the online petition.

What will happen if the Democrats regain control of either or both Houses of Congress following the 2018 mid-term elections? In all likelihood, some will push for Trump's impeachment, not for his removal from office but as a 2020 campaign ploy. The Democrats leadership, led by Sen. Chuck — let's-make-a-deal — Schumer and Rep. Nancy — keep-it-civil — Pelosi, oppose the impeachment initiative. They fear it will only make for still-greater hardening of the political arteries, with both Houses of Congress truly frozen. They also worry that a House impeachment trial will provoke a strong, perhaps violent, reaction from hardline Trump supporters. More so, they fear a Mike Pence presidency and a further tightening of the reactionary screws.

Trump and his administration are on a dangerous course taking on a host of what he likely sees as “enemies,” those who question – and thus challenge – his legitimacy, as president, and his masculinity, as a macho man. In addition to railing against Muller and attacks on the FBI, Trump continues to assail Hillary Clinton, throwing red meat to his most committed supporters; he plays a game of shadow-puppet warfare with *North Korean’s leader, Kim Jong Un, mocking him as “Little Rocket Man”*; and he even denounces Haiti, Honduras and African counties as “shit-holes.” All raise questions with regard to his competency.

A month ago, the talking-heads media was ablaze about Michael Wolff’s latest exposé of the Trump presidency, *[Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House](#)*. Steve Bannon, the alt-right’s leading proponent and a former key Trump advisor, is the go-to insider guy for gossip about Trump’s personal incompetence and political corruption. (One unexpected fallout is that the reactionary – and billionaire – Mercer family has broken with Bannon putting Breitbart Media in play.)

Wolff’s revelations, assuming they are accurate, follow a mounting chorus from psychiatrists and other mental-health professional as to Trump’s mental fitness for office — and whether the Twenty-Fifth Amendment should be invoked to remove him. Two recent books have generated much attention — *[The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President](#)*, Bandy X. Lee, ed., and Allen Frances’s *[Twilight of American Sanity: A Psychiatrist Analyzes the Age of Trump](#)*.

Lee (Yale School of Medicine) and Judith Lewis Herman (Harvard Medical School) warn: “Collectively with our coauthors, we warn that anyone as mentally unstable as Mr. Trump simply should not be entrusted with the life-and-death powers of the presidency.” Frances takes a more cautionary tone, “Calling Trump crazy allows us to avoid confronting the craziness in our society.” He adds, “We can’t expect to change Trump, but we must work to undo the societal delusions that created him.”

These assessments are part of a mounting chorus promoted on TV talk-shows and newspaper op-eds questioning Trump mental fitness. While everyone can be her/his own coffee-klatch shrink, the last half-century medical psychiatrists, licensed psychologists and other mental-health “experts” had to adhere to what is known as the “Goldwater rule” – i.e., not giving a professional opinion about a public figure without personally conducting an examination. (In 1964, Barry Goldwater ran against Lyndon Johnson and a psychiatrist declared him “severely paranoid” and “unfit” for the presidency.)

None of those who questioned Trump's mental competency has conducted a formal, in-person psychiatric examination. In a follow-up defense of the collection, Lee – with Leonard L. Glass (Harvard and McLean Hospital) – argue against the rule and insist that the analyses presented are not a diagnosis, but an informed warning offered for the public good.

Dr. Ronny Jackson, a physician at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center who oversaw Trump's annual medical exam, observed, "I've got to know him pretty well. And I had absolutely no concerns about his cognitive ability or his, you know, his neurological function." He added, "I've found no reason whatsoever to think the President has any issues whatsoever with his thought processes."

Trump is a great showman, a hyper-sexual predatory rooster. Almost every day, through Tweets and glib press statements, he plays a game of three-card-monte with the American public. Combining the skills of P.T. Barnum's circus shows and Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, Trump prances before his audience, seducing them with an endless stream of venom, a clever game of distraction. And the popular media – of all stripes — promote distraction, its where the ad dollars are. His fictions echo in the latest news report, pundit talk shows and sex-harassment scandals.

Unfortunately, Trump's year two will likely play out worse than year one. He promised his electoral base that he would deliver personal and cultural renewal, promising something more to those who felt that they had nothing left of their self-hood than their white skin privilege. Worse than the Republicans' control of Capitol Hill, conservative zealots are in charge on the vast administrative bureaucracy, whether Defense Department or ICE, Dept. of Education, Health & Human Services or Energy, as well as numerous court justices (including an additional Supreme Court seat). Worst case, will Trump — like Bush before him — provoke a national-security crisis? We've got a long way to go in 2018.