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Dealbreakers: The Democrats, Trump and His Wall

After all the votes were counted and the dust finally settled, it became clear that Democrats scored huge victories in the midterm elections last November. This wasn't clear right away because some of the contests in "red" states were close, but the "blue wave" actually did materialize.

Even for those of us who thought at the time that the only good thing about the Democratic Party is that the Republican Party is seriously worse, this was good news.

It was bad news for Donald Trump. He wasn't technically on the ballot and neither were the family members and others he turns to for advice or the ignoramuses he dug up to do the actual governing when malign neglect just isn't enough, but they all lost big time.

What is bad for them is good for the nation and the world. Trump could start a nuclear holocaust in a fit of pique, and his environmental policies are nearly as dangerous. His presidency poses a clear and present danger to life on earth "as we know it."

The situation was dire before he came on the scene, but he made the problems he inherited worse – not just quantitatively, but qualitatively too. Hegel was right about quality emerging out of quantity.

Trump's shenanigans put the very idea of the rule of law in jeopardy, along with basic human decency and the norms upon which democratic societies are built.

Because he and his underlings are class warriors on the wrong side of the class struggle, Trump is bad news in countless lesser ways as well. The more hobbled he and his minions become, the better off almost everybody else is.

This was why the midterms mattered. Voters did not have “a world to win,” but they did have a lot still to lose. We all do.

Had the “founding fathers” been less opposed to such core democratic notions as equal political influence, had they not bequeathed “we, the people” an Electoral College, and had we more feasible ways of doing electoral mistakes over, we would not now have a Trump to worry about. But that is not the hand we have been dealt.

Short of a real revolution, not just the kind Sandersnistas talk about, there is no getting beyond that. All we can do is ready ourselves for the time when Trump’s term finally ends.

Therefore, now is a time to do all in our power to limit the harm Trump and his people are able to do. Unfortunately, we cannot now cure the body politic of the disease of Trumpism, but we can keep the harm it does in bounds by treating it as a chronic, debilitating, and potentially fatal disease.

Thus the main task now is, or ought to be, to forge a genuine political opposition dedicated to taking on both duopoly parties, the one that does most of the harm, and the one that makes its malefactions possible and perhaps even inevitable.

Even at its worst, the Democratic Party is less odious than the Republican Party at its best. However, it is plain that there are no major differences between the two on fundamental political economic issues or on war and peace, global justice, domestic and international solidarity, military policy, nuclear and also conventional weapons disarmament, or on how to minimize that harm that the American empire does around the world. Except in minor respects, the two parties are even alike on environmental and fiscal policies and priorities.

On the political spectrum that has existed notionally in the heads of everyone who has thought seriously about politics since the French Revolution, Republicans and Democrats are parties of the center right. On good days, Democrats may do a little better than that, but both parties are essentially the same – like Coke and Pepsi.

Conventional wisdom has it that “bipartisanship” has lately gone missing. The fact is, though, that while party polarization has intensified, the main difference between the two duopoly parties is just that one of them is less mean spirited and less conspicuously identified with the interests of venal and avaricious capitalist than the other.

If the Democratic Party, the nicer one of the two, sometimes seems more oppositional than it actually is, it is because in our duopoly system, leftists and left-leaning liberals who want to escape sequestration in the margins of political life have nowhere else to go.

Over the years, the party leadership has learned how to deal with this, while remaining in their donors' good graces. The Sanders phenomenon of 2016 is a case in point. It almost got out of hand. However, in the end, the center (or center-right) held, thanks partly to Sanders' freely given acquiescence. Thus it served as a kind of stress test, passed with flying colors, of the institutional party's well practiced ways of keeping progressive impulses down, while keeping progressive voters on board.

Might the Trump phenomenon undo, or begin the undoing, of that seemingly insurmountable obstacle in the way of a better world? How wonderfully ironic that would be!

Where Democrats are involved, one should always be wary. But in light of what some newly elected House members have been up to so far, it is not too unreasonable to hope that change for the better will eventually come to pass.

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What Sarah Palin aptly called Obama's "hopey, changey thing" ten years ago, makes it difficult for anyone with an intact memory who was politically conscious in 2008 to harbor even a fleeting thought that maybe the times really are changing for the better.

There are limits, however, to how much disappointment there can be this time around, because everybody understands that with Trump in the White House and Republicans in control of the Senate, legislating change for the better will be practically impossible before 2021. Obama's candidacy in 2008 gave rise to countless illusions. Largely thanks to that experience, people nowadays are more skeptical and less inclined to expect what is plainly not in the cards.

Even so, I, for one, have no problem being cautiously optimistic that at long last the seeds of change, the kind that is urgently needed, are falling into place.

It isn't just Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez whose election gives reason for hope, though no one else has done nearly as well at scaring the bejesus out of Fox News commentators and likeminded miscreants, and at forcing mainstream media to take progressive ideas seriously.

Jill Stein and others in the Green Party have been promoting a "Green New Deal" seemingly from time immemorial, but it took Ocasio-Cortez and others like her for the idea to gain traction. She and others who have lately appropriated the name and the thought behind it might have given the Greens some credit, but what the hell, especially now that they have gone some way on their own in spelling out what a Green New Deal would involve.

AOC has even managed to get away with promoting “radicalism.” Bringing that term back into public discourse in a positive way is nearly as significant an achievement as Bernie Sanders’ reintroduction of the word “socialism” into the political mainstream.

Sanders’ “socialism,” and presumably also Ocasio-Cortez’s, doesn’t have much to do with the socialism of the socialist tradition. AOC’s radicalism isn’t all that radical either. The “scandalously” high marginal tax rates she talked about on “Sixty Minutes” were actually less severe than the rates in force in the Eisenhower era; and the conservation side of the Green New Deal was mainstream in both Democratic and Republican circles just a few decades ago. Weaning the country off fossil fuels is new – mainly because, decades ago, no one knew how important that is. But this doesn’t make it radical. In a healthier political landscape, everybody would be pushing that line because it is simple commonsense.

However, AOC’s proposals are radical indeed compared to what is taken for the limits of the possible in the political mainstream in the United States today. Politics is said to be the art of the possible; so far, Ocasio-Cortez has not only been exploring the limits of the possible, but also exceeding them, opening up new possibilities. Brava to her for that, and to her new allies in Congress as well!

There were a lot of smart, articulate and tough newbies elected in November, and there are more seasoned lefties in Congress who, until now, have been, for the most part, going along to get along, but who are not yet entirely coopted, and who, with enough prodding and support from other dissidents in Congress, and, above all, from an organized (and organizing!) citizenry intent on forging a better world, just might find the courage to shatter the chains that, for example, pulled Sanders back into the Clintonite fold after he had, unintentionally but nevertheless assuredly, broken free their hold.

It is even possible, thanks to the midterm elections, that in the future there may actually be some opposition in Congress to giving Israel carte blanche to do whatever it wants to Palestinians who stand in the way of Israeli ethnic cleansing, and more reluctance than in the past to giving the Israeli military blank checks for the wars and depredations it periodically unleashes.

With benighted Christian evangelicals and elderly Jewish Republicans fast becoming Israel’s most ardent supporters in the United States, and with many American Jews finding themselves out of touch with and increasingly embarrassed by the rightward drift of Israeli politics and Israeli society, a sea change in American-Israeli relations is not out of the

question – especially if the Netanyahu government, or the government that succeeds it, is clumsy in its efforts to draw the United States into a war with Iran.

If I am right about the nature and trajectory of American attitudes, all it would take to reveal the Israel lobby to be the Paper Tiger I think it already is would be for a few highly placed American politicians conspicuously to call Israel out when circumstances warrant. Newly elected Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian-American, could be the one to do that. She is best known around the country now for having said of Trump: “Impeach the motherfucker,” while the cameras were running. She could easily become better known to history for having introduced a more honorable and just perspective to Democratic Party understandings of Middle Eastern politics than that wretched party has ever known. For the time being, though, it is her “potty mouth” that they want to talk about on cable news outlets and in what passes for a quality press. That Republicans, in thrall to Donald Trump, would find the word “motherfucker” out of bounds is risible, and that Trump would voice similar sentiments is absurd. That Democrats would then bleat on sanctimoniously about the importance of taking some more decorous “high road” is not nearly as ridiculous. It is pathetic, however.

Of course, what really got the goat of the Democratic Party’s wise men (and women) was not the word “motherfucker,” but Tlaib’s call to get the motherfucker impeached.

This is what the Democratic Party base fervently desires, and what the Party establishment and its media flunkies want to prevent. They want to stifle impeachment talk and delay impeachment action long enough for Trump removal to become an issue in the 2020 election, not before.

It seems that they don’t want to shake the cages of Trump supporters, because they fear a backlash. True to form, Democrats make a virtue of their own pusillanimity.

If only those “founding fathers” hadn’t made it so difficult to get rid of presidents before their terms expire. If only Americans could change presidents and their administrations as easily as the citizens of other liberal democracies can correct their own mistakes.

Nancy Pelosi is determined that Democrats not even try – unless, of course, G-Man Mueller comes up with a case against Trump that is so damning that even rank cowards would feel obliged to act upon it.

Pelosi is a one per-center’s one per-center, a corporate Democrat, with a net worth along with her husband of some one hundred twenty million dollars. Robert Mueller is essentially a cop. Maybe it will all work out even so. Pelosi is said to be a tough cookie and a whiz at the ways of the legislative branch, and the conventional wisdom has it that,

notwithstanding his dedication to the forces of order and service to the ruling class, Mueller is a straight arrow. Even so, with so much at stake, it is astonishing that an ostensibly progressive opposition would put so much faith in the likes of those two.

Liberals these days will venerate pretty much anybody whom they can contrast with Trump, even John McCain and George H.W. Bush. Obviously, they could do worse than Pelosi and Mueller. But they could also do better.

No one knows yet what Mueller is up to or how his investigation will bear on the likelihood of Trump's impeachment, but Pelosi was impeachment averse in 2006 and she is showing every sign of being impeachment averse again today.

Had she let Democrats go forward with impeachment when she first became Speaker, the death and destruction in Afghanistan and Iraq that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney were perpetrating might have diminished somewhat.

But she thought then that it was more important to elect Hillary Clinton president in 2008, and that impeachment would put her election in jeopardy. When the time came, she was able to pivot gracefully from Clinton to Barack Obama. Nothing else changed, however, and so the war dragged on. It still does, and she is still up to her old tricks.

Is she right about impeaching Trump? Might impeachment now do more harm than good? As Bill Clinton, might say, it all depends on what impeachment is. Clinton was our last president to undergo the process, and is therefore entitled to some deference in these matters. He also deserves credit for the artful, lawyerly his depositions concerning Monica Lewinsky misled through literal truthfulness. His prevarications have become legendary and should therefore be honored.

In the system laid upon us by those founding fathers of ours, an impeachment is like an indictment. To impeach an official, a president in this case, is to charge him (or her) with "high crimes and misdemeanors" or other impeachable offenses. Impeachment by itself does not remove a president from office; for that, an impeached president must be tried in the Senate, where 2/3 of the Senators must vote to convict.

Therefore, with the Senate as it now is, the impeachment process will not remove Trump from office. Of course, Republicans could suddenly start growing brains or some of them might develop a moral sense; or events could transpire — perhaps thanks to the Mueller probe, directly or indirectly — that alter the probabilities. Otherwise, Trump is safe as can be.

It is relevant too that nobody really knows what "high crimes and misdemeanors" means. Inasmuch as the Constitution's authors wanted to make it difficult, if not impossible, to

overturn the results of elections, the indeterminacy surrounding the expression was probably intentional. It could also be fatal to efforts to get Trump out of the White House. While there is little doubt that, on any plausible interpretation, he has committed impeachable offenses, probably quite a few, determined Senators could always conclude otherwise.

In addition to his high crimes and misdemeanors there is also Trump's obvious violation of the Constitution's emoluments clause and the possibility of concluding that his purported "collusion" with Russian oligarchs was tantamount to treason, another impeachable offense.

However, in the end, to impeach or not to impeach is not the question. Inasmuch as ought implies can, and as long as a two-thirds majority for conviction in the Senate is necessary to convict, removal by impeachment is a practical impossibility.

Trump could well leave the White House before his term expires – for health, especially mental health, reasons, or to save his businesses and his wealth, or because he negotiates a way to keep himself and his family out of prison in exchange for his resignation. But removing him from office by "impeaching the motherfucker" in the way that Tlaib and so many others would like is not a real option.

It still does make sense, however, for the House of Representatives to get the process going and perhaps even to draw up articles of impeachment. They could and should hold hearings and investigate every lead, twist, and turn to the hilt.

If the first order of business these days cannot be to remove Trump from office, then the next best thing is to put obstacles in his way. Aggressive, well-conducted investigations would serve that purpose, even if they lead to nowhere else.

Of course, it would be better in a democracy to vote him and his cohort out of office. But with that option now foreclosed for some twenty-three months, this is the best we can do.

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What has any of this to do with obsession of the hour: Trump's wall. The short answer is nothing. But Trump befogs minds, causing ideas to take bizarre turns. The answer therefore is also: everything.

The conventional wisdom is that the fate of the Trump presidency depends on that wall – because if it goes, so does his base, and therefore so would his get-out-of-impeachment-free card, as Republican Senators up for reelection would feel pressured to let the loser go. The longer Trump's (partial) government shutdown continues, the more pressure there will be. It helps that, as it happens, states with Republican Senators up for reelection in

2020 are generally more dependent on federal government assistance and largesse than most, and that a lot of federal workers live in many of them.

It is apparently of little or no concern to hardcore Trump supporters that the very idea of a concrete wall across the entire southwest border is the epitome of stupidity or that scaling back in various ways – either by using steel slats or some other material instead of concrete or by leaving some areas without any physical barrier doesn't change that basic assessment.

As an accomplished conman, Trump probably does have a feel for what his most ardent supporters want. If he is right – that what they want is a wall — then Hillary Clinton was too kind when she described the Trump base as a “basket of deplorables.”

But whether he needs it to work his con or merely to stroke his vanity, the bottom line remains; he wants a wall as much or more than anyone in his base. Moreover, like a toddler throwing a fit, he will not calm down and he will not take No for an answer.

Even if – indeed, especially if – his obduracy causes workers to go without paychecks, businesses to suffer, and smaller and greater inconveniences to befall nearly everybody, Trump will hold fast. That is who he is, we are told: a tough guy negotiator.

That is a bit of an exaggeration; calling him a narcissist who cares only about himself would be more on point.

The only way to deal with that is to be as obstinate as he is.

But why not just let the motherfucker have his way? He wants 5.7 billion dollars for his wall, a figure that seems arbitrary and would, by most accounts, fall short many times over. Even so, Trump is talking serious money.

But no matter – unlike most countries nowadays, the United States controls its currency and could therefore, if need be, pay for the wall by printing the money needed to pay for it. Trump's Great Wall would hardly be the only truly stupid expense the treasury would have to deal with; the Defense Department budget is replete with follies of greater or lesser magnitude.

Neither did Trump and his band of erstwhile deficit hawks bat an eye when they cut taxes on corporations and the hyper rich – for no economically sound reason.

But cost is not the reason not to give Trump his wall.

The reason is that standing up to him decisively, with obduracy equal to or greater than his own, is as good a way as any to hobble his designs. This is why the Donald must be denied his wall.

It may not bring his presidency down, but it will diminish it, and that will be all to the good.

Therefore, no wall for the baby boy in the septuagenarian body!

Of course, it might turn out that the way to open the government back up will require giving Baby Boy Donald a face saving way to back down. Since Trump thinks he is a great negotiator, he could probably be induced to play along, and that could turn out well. Let him make one of his vaunted deals, but let it be one that actually does some good.

Trading his stupid wall for a path to citizenship for the “dreamers” would be a start, along with halting the deportations of Haitians and others who have been living in the United States for decades.

And then there is what Richard Nixon, a far more worthy crook than the Donald, might have called “the big enchilada,” the Supreme Court and the other pending appointments to the federal judiciary.

Why not insist, for example, on reinstating the old rules on filibusters? The iniquitous Mitch McConnell is currently in Trump’s pocket; he could therefore be brought along. Then Ruth Bader Ginsburg could retire in peace, if Senate Democrats could be counted on to do the right thing; and the truly heinous would have a harder time getting lifetime appointments on federal courts.

Also the Donald could get an inkling of what the art of the deal really involves.

Will Democrats be up for that? Probably not, for the most part; they will want to be, or seem to be, “reasonable” instead.

But maybe Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib and the other newbies will. Who knows, they might just have started something that will thrive uncoopted and strong.