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## What's Up With Trump?

Is anybody surprised that Donald Trump refuses to concede the election he lost?

Everyone knows that his septuagenarian body houses the mind of a child. The only question is whether it is a toddler's mind or a spoiled male adolescent's. Either way, petulance and acting out comes with the territory.

And, though cunning, as the weak in courage often are, Trump is among the least subtle creatures on the face of the earth.

He doesn't just put his "high crimes and misdemeanors" in plain view; why wouldn't he with base and servile Republican Senators sure to give him a pass? He also seems to revel in calling his criminally actionable offenses to public attention.

There are quite a few of them. Not all are grounds for impeachment, according to the understandings assumed last year, when Democrats actually did impeach him – successfully, but to no avail. Many of them are grounds for fines and prison time, however.

Beyond that, there is a long tradition in the United States and around the world of holding persons who willfully menace public health liable for punishment. There is and never has been anyone in more punishable on that account.

The sad fact is, though, that Trump has so far gotten away with all of it. He hasn't yet shot anyone on Fifth Avenue and, as he boasted could with impunity — but only, one suspects, because he has had no occasion to do so, and because, by now, he is so despised in New York City that he dare not show his face there.

In short, to this point, the law hasn't touched him at all and, until now, he has been acting as if it never will.

Moreover, since anything he says or does is fine with his base, and also, it now seems, with some later-day version of Richard Nixon's "silent majority," he feels that he has no need to watch his words.

Thus, when he said, more or less explicitly, that he would only accept the results of the November 3 election if he won, he ought to have been taken at his word.

Indeed, win or lose, he would still complain of having been treated unfairly, just as he did in 2016. Trump is not good for much, but when it comes to accumulating grievances and harping on them every chance he gets, nobody does it better.

Could there be anything more to his prattle than that? Could there be some strategy behind his saying that he would not accept the election results? Or does he just lie for lying's sake?

I would venture the latter. That the man is a consummate liar is beyond dispute. His mendacity is downright pathological.

Even so, why would he lie about not ceding power voluntarily? Why would he advertise this in advance?

To test the waters? More than a few pundits seem to think so. However, they never quite explain what he might be testing them for. Could it just be to see if he could get away with it? This is unlikely inasmuch as he believes he could get away with anything; so why even bother?

The belief that he could get away with anything is one of the very few evidence-based beliefs he holds. But Trump is nothing if not radically insecure, and therefore timid to a fault. Why, then, would he needlessly tempt fate? Why would he deliberately violate one of the very few norms that virtually everyone in our deeply divided country respects?

From George Washington's time on, that norm – that political power in the United States should be transferred peacefully in accord with the results of (more or less) free and fair elections — has been scrupulously observed. What could Trump gain by flouting that tradition, especially for no good reason, and then flaunting having done so?

The short answer is: nothing. This is why he and his enablers have been making such fools of themselves by arguing that the election just concluded was not free and fair. Their contentions are so obviously false that even the troglodyte judges that Republicans have been foisting upon the body politic cannot bring themselves to go along with them.

By now, just about everybody, even many of the most ardent Trump supporters, understands at some level that Trump does nothing unless there is something in it for him. What could be in it for him in this case? What could he gain by violating a norm that is universally esteemed?

The corporate media line seems to be that Trump is trying to please his donors and also that he wants the lost souls in his base to keep on loving him, either because he plans to run again in 2024 or because he thrives on adoration or both.

But one has to wonder what they think they are talking about.

It would be different if Trump could somehow remain president. Even the very worst presidents, even Trump, the worst American president ever by far, can seem charismatic – to

all of the people, some of the time, and to some of the people all of the time – simply in virtue of the office they hold.

But now that he is a loser, defeated by Joe Biden no less, Trump's days as a charismatic figure are over. In the saddest of sad redoubts, where the miscreants that crawled out from under the rocks Trump overturned reside, remnants may linger on for a while. But, for the Trump cult, the future is bleak.

This is why it may actually be a good thing that Trump talks of running again in 2024. This would keep the Republican Party bollixed up for a while, impeding the forward trajectory of some of that wretched party's leading figures.

But Nikki Haley and Little Marco need not worry; there is no reason to think that Trump actually would do as he says. It is not just that where there is death, there is hope. It is that, before long, Trump is all but certain to be seen, at best, as the sick joke he is, in much the way that, for example, his mentor Roy Cohn nowadays is.

When Trump leaves the White House, whether or not he concedes defeat, his problems will hardly be limited to those brought on by his manifest psychological disabilities. He will face enormous legal and financial difficulties as well.

Among other things, his brand, always his most lucrative asset, will be shot.

A few shameless but, by Trump's lights, "very fine" people aside, nobody nowadays or ever would want, for example, to book rooms at a Mussolini or Franco or Pinochet International Hotel or rent office space in a Hitler Tower. The Trump brand will likely always be a notch above that, but not by nearly enough to keep the money flowing in.

Ivanka and Jared will feel the pain – not a moment too soon! So will Trump's two idiot adult sons, Qusay and Uday – I mean Eric and Don Jr.

I used to hope that Tiffany would take her mother's name, Maples, following the lead of Patti Davis, formerly Patti Reagan. But she is turning out to be too much the bimbo for that. And, by now, I have even less hope that Melania will break free from the Faustian bargain that put her in a gilded cage before turning her into a world historical criminal's accomplice.

If not for her own sake, she should at least do it for her son. She is essentially a single mother anyway, and there is a chance that in a sounder environment, the bad seed Barron inherited could be rendered benign. I am not holding my breath, however.

At some level, Trump must realize that even with tens of millions of people willing to follow him anywhere, even unto death, that his "legacy" is unsalvageable; that he will be remembered mainly for managing the covid-19 pandemic in ways that led to more American deaths than occurred in any foreign war except perhaps World War II (the jury is still out on that), and for giving corruption and venality a bad name.

He must also realize that, even with pusillanimous Bidenites, looking to "move on" the way Obama did with Bush-Cheney era war criminals, calling the shots, he could well be looking at financial ruin and at spending his declining years in some federal or state facility.

Small wonder that he is becoming increasingly desperate.

When he first assumed the presidency, many of us worried that, in a fit of pique, he would literally go nuclear. He still could, of course, but we seem to have dodged that bullet.

However, according to reliable reports in the press, “his generals” have had to talk him out of following the Bill Clinton – wag the dog strategy, by attacking Iran. That was hardly a great success in the nineties, and it would be a lot more dangerous now – because Iran is potentially a far more formidable enemy than the former Yugoslavia, and because the United States had a lot more pull around the world back then than it now does.

The main thing, though, is that this Commander-in-Chief’s attention is fixated more on imaginary grievances than on self-serving strategies. Thus, he cares more, even now, about Hillary Clinton’s emails and Hunter Biden’s Ukraine shenanigans than about asserting his authority over a military and foreign policy establishment that is unwilling to indulge his fantasies.

It’s not over till it’s over, but we’ve almost certainly dodged that bullet too.

Ironically, we can therefore be grateful for Trump’s psychological disabilities; they played a role in keeping war at bay.

We can be grateful too that while Trump could care less about leading his own followers along with other Americans to sickness and death, he has been far less bellicose – and lethal — abroad than any Democrat since Jimmy Carter.

If, as seems likely, the liberal imperialists of the Obama-Clinton era return, we will again be sponsoring murder and mayhem abroad with far fewer restraints than during the past four years. This is perhaps the one and only respect in which Biden’s victory over Trump will turn out to be a change for the worse.

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I would not worry a whole lot either about Trump pulling off a *coup d’état* – not because he wouldn’t like to, but because there are too many obstacles in the way.

First, a semantic point: many political scientists, especially those who focus on Latin America, would say that, strictly speaking, a government cannot launch a coup against itself. For them, the concern is that Trump will try to pull off what they would call an “*autogolpe*,” an attempt by a leader who came to power in a lawful way, to remain in office after the expiration of his term or otherwise to violate constitutionally or legislatively prescribed laws. This would be tantamount to a “self-coup,” just as the term, translated from Spanish into English, suggests. Therefore, quibbles aside, we just might as well use the more familiar term.

As a South American dictator wannabe, the idea that a coup would be just the thing for him has surely crossed Trump’s mind. There are many reasons, though, why he hasn’t a chance of pulling one off.

High on the list is the fact that he has been working hard from Day One to make enemies of those who would be able actually to do the job. That would be the CIA especially, but also large sectors of the national security state apparatus and the military. A shrewder plotter would not have bad mouthed what he calls “the deep state” quite so often or so viciously.

That deep state may not quite hold a monopoly position over coups and coup attempts around the world, but it comes close.

Thus, Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, himself a victim of several American sponsored coup attempts, famously quipped that the reason why there have so far been no coups in the United States is the absence of an American embassy.

His point is well-taken. For Trump to succeed in doing what it is feared he might attempt, he would have to have the backing of the American government, the “deep state” part of it especially. Thanks to no one but himself, that is one thing he has no chance of getting.

He does have a base that regales him with cult-like fervor, but that is no substitute. The Trump base is good for keeping feckless GOP governors and legislators in line, but it is useless for overthrowing governments, the American government most of all.

This is not all Trump’s doing. American right-wingers — I hesitate to call them “conservatives,” though that is what they call themselves — have been making a fetish of the U.S. Constitution for decades.

Thus, if, for example, evangelicals want to permit churches to violate anti-discrimination laws, they appeal, disingenuously, to First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion. If in the wake of countless gun related deaths and periodic massacres, gun fanatics feel that some of the least restrictive and most dangerous gun laws on earth might be reined in, they roll out preposterous, but juridically well established, construals of the Second Amendment’s language on the right to bear arms.

A Trumpian self-coup would therefore be seen even on the right as a crime against the Constitution. A true dictator would have no qualms about that. But in the real world of American “conservatism,” the Constitution, or at least their understanding of it, is sacrosanct.

And while there is much in the Constitution that is susceptible to various interpretations, some of its language is not. That presidential terms expire as they do is a case in point.

No doubt, many of Trump’s “fine people” could care less. But the vast majority of the seventy-two million Trump voters would care a great deal, rendering attempts to violate clear Constitutional provisions non-starters.

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If Trump had even a tiny sliver of the “big and very stable brain” he boasts of, instead of emoting or preparing to burn down the house, he ought now to pardon everyone in his fold — even himself, if that is possible — then resign, and then, because presidential pardons don’t extend to state prosecutions and because New York State won’t back down even if Biden does, skedaddle off to some country that has no extradition treaty with the United States.

I would imagine that there are plenty of countries without extradition treaties that would be happy to welcome “the smartest man in the whole flat world” (apologies to Maria Bakalova), if he would bring with him enough money to make it worth their while.

Israel would be a good choice; they like him there, and his daughter’s in-laws, the Kushners, could pave the way. Or maybe not. Biden is and always has been the ethnocratic settler state’s best friend, and it needs America a hell of a lot more than America needs it. If Trump’s goose is cooked, the Israeli political class is likely to come to the conclusion that there is no percentage in bothering with him.

They do have standards, after all. If they wouldn’t let Meyer Lansky in, why would they welcome someone who isn’t half the gangster Lansky was, a goy moreover, who thinks anti-Semites are fine people?

There are other countries, though, where Trump could live like a potentate, play golf to his heart’s content, and continue doing whatever it is he does in the Trump Organization — if, by then, there is any Trump Organization left to do it in.

Thus, Trump would be well advised to get out of Dodge as soon as he can, before “the deep state” decides not to let him leave the country at all, for fear that he would sell state secrets. This is a legitimate concern; he is more than corrupt enough.

There was a time when it seemed likely that, thanks to Trump, the GOP would be finished except perhaps in a few benighted regions; that Republicans would flee their party like rats fleeing sinking ships. That expectation gave Republicans too much credit.

Thus, so far, they have remained under the Donald’s thumb. If even his post-election acting out hasn’t embarrassed them enough to get them to bolt, perhaps nothing ever will.

It is fair to say, though, that even should he fly the coup, his malign influence will continue, more or less undiminished, for a long time to come.

After all, while Biden got many more votes than Trump, just as Hillary Clinton did in 2016, and while, this time, thanks to the hard work of the Democratic left, they came from the only places that really count, the so-called “battleground states,” Biden didn’t exactly defeat Trump; Trump defeated himself.

And, Trump’s defeat aside, contrary to what was widely believed beforehand, the election, down ticket, went better for Republicans than for Democrats. More than seventy-two million Americans voted for Trump, and the Trump Party, formerly known as the GOP, is still flourishing, still retrograde and vile, and still capable of all sorts of mischief.

Democrats craving “normalcy” should bear this in mind when they prattle on about the importance of “reaching across the aisle.”

In the same vein, they should also reconsider their views about intra-party unity. A united Democratic Party made sense when the alpha and omega of electoral politics in the USA was getting rid of Trump.

It continues to make sense now that so much depends on gaining control of the Senate by winning those two Georgia runoff elections.

But it is going to stop making sense soon.

Then the reality will hit: that to defeat Trumpism, defeating Trump is only a first step; and that once that objective is achieved, making common cause with those who would restore pre-Trump era normalcy, though still sometimes expedient, is no longer always worth doing. After all, it was pre-Trump era normalcy that made Trumpism all but inevitable.

The word to the wise, emanating out of corporate media before November 3, was that it was not enough to be anti-Trump, that Democrats should be *for* something. Fair enough, but *for* what?

If for nothing more than the same old same old, updated to fit the changing times, then count on a “shellacking” (Obama’s word) just as debilitating as the one that Obama’s Democrats got in 2010, when midterm elections come around again.

To be sure, it wasn’t just Obama’s “moderation” that brought that on; it was also the realization, by nativists, racists, and sundry GOP strategists that he had feet of clay and almost nothing in the way of “hope” or “change” to offer. Were he more “audacious” (his word again) and less Wall Street and corporate friendly, it might have been different.

There is no audacity in Bidenland; there isn’t even the pretense. What there is in its stead is pious, apolitical cant about electing candidates that “look like” Americans who are not white and male, and support for centrist and, whenever possible, bipartisan politics.

The praise liberals now heap on Obama is a case in point. Our first and so far only president “of color” didn’t do much for African Americans beyond breaking the color line himself, and then seeing to it that laws already on the books would be enforced.

Nevertheless, the view in some circles is that, just by being there, he conferred blessings upon African Americans, much like the body of Oedipus did for the city of Colonus. Those benefits hardly included protection from police violence, however, or even economic advancement except for the fortunate few.

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This time around, Trump lost; the good guys defeated the bad guys. In the United States, they often do.

But in the United States – unlike, say, in Germany or Japan after World War II – the bad guys never really lose, not nearly enough to change anything fundamentally for the better. Losing in Vietnam made the United States better, but only for a while. Before long, it was “morning in America,” and it has been going downhill ever since.

With Biden and the actually existing Democratic Party calling the shots – if the Georgia runoff elections turn out well – we are on track for something like that happening again in the aftermath of Trump’s defeat.



But even with Trump reduced to the laughing-stock he so plainly is, with seventy-two million Trump voters at the gates, Trumpism will remain a factor in our lives for a long time to come. This is the last thing we need in the months and years ahead, especially as we enter a time when we most likely won't have Trump himself around, inadvertently helping us out, saving moderates from themselves.

This is why Biden and the politics he represents will soon replace Trump as Public Enemy Number One. Ironically, what Trump is up to now may turn out to be a great help at least in the early phases of that great struggle ahead.

Trump is going out, for now and most likely forever, not with a bang or a whimper, but with one vile, protracted sulk that is making his assault on the nation's public health worse even than it was just a few weeks ago, when it became clear that he was not about to win a second term.

This puts all sorts of opportunities for seizing the time at the top of the agenda.

The Bidenites and Pelosiites and Schumerians will do all in their power to assure that nothing damaging to their interests and the interests of the Democratic Party's major donors is adversely affected; in other words, they will mobilize just as ferociously as they did when their goal was to defeat the Sanders and Warren insurgencies.

They were able to do that successfully, partly because the Sanders and Warren campaigns, and Sanders and Warren themselves, seeing a need for unity and being ill-disposed, as liberals typically are, to stick up for their own side, gave in too easily.

This time, though, with more insurgents around, and with a Trump victory out of the picture, there is reason to hope that genuinely progressive Democrats will not so readily acquiesce.

Making this happen is hardly what Trump is up to; he is too incoherent and too moronic to be up to much of anything.

Ironically, though, what he is actually doing, as he flounders about, making himself even more ridiculous than need be, could have precisely this effect.

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