

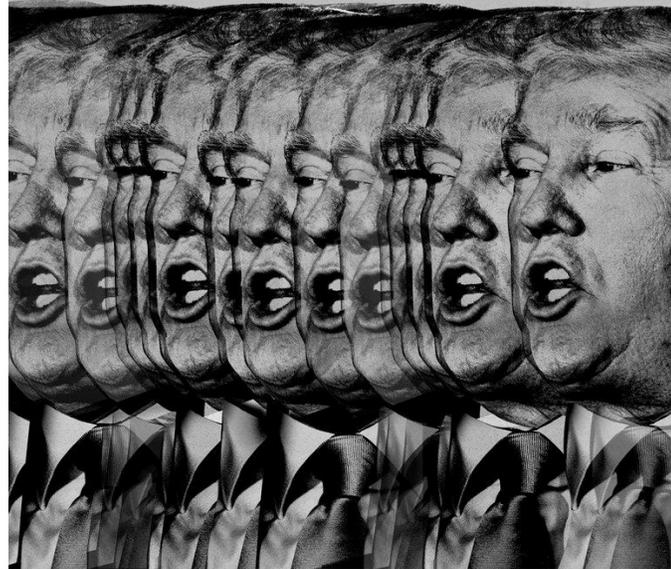
Commentary

Donald Trump's Mental State (Or, The Emperor Has No Mind.)

Ron T.

January 22, 2017

One of the things about the events of the past weekend I find striking is that Donald Trump seems incapable of perceiving reality. More specifically, he seems not to be able to recognize: (1) that many, many more people showed up in Washington to attend the two inaugurations of Barack Obama than showed up for his; (2) that many, many, many more people



showed up for the massive women's marches in Washington and other cities around the country (and around the world) than showed up for his swearing-in; (3) that he was elected by a small percentage (at best, 27%) of the voting age population; and (4) that (therefore) he does not have a popular mandate for either his presidency or his policies. In fact, he is probably the most unpopular president in the history of his country. This is something that should be glaringly obvious to any objective observer, but Trump not only refuses to accept this but also appears incapable of even perceiving it.

Trump's difficulty in accurately gauging reality has been clearly revealed in his and his team's claim that some sort of plot on the part of the mass media exists to denigrate him personally, that the media is conspiring to deny that his inauguration was the biggest in history, that he's immensely popular, that he has a mandate, etc. This seems not to be pure "spin" but a deeply felt (almost panicky) attempt to deny a reality that is deeply threatening to his self-image.

It suggests that what some commentators described as a paranoid facet of Trump's mentality is, in fact, much more serious. Up until now, it has been possible to claim that, while Trump is narcissistic, vain, insecure, impetuous, aggressive, sociopathic, and paranoid (as well as colossally arrogant and ignorant), he is on the sane side of the sane/insane boundary. Now, this is not so clear. Speaking personally, I'm coming to believe that Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States and the purported leader of the free world, is, or is very close to being, completely unhinged.

One would think that this would be of some concern to the elite that rules the country. After all, the president is the commander-in-chief of the largest and most powerful military apparatus in the world. He's the fellow who has his finger on the proverbial "nuclear button." He's the guy who can throw the world economy into a depression by a poorly thought-out decision and destroy in a very short time the international institutions -- political, military, social, and cultural structures, treaties, and organizations that were painstakingly assembled at the end of World War II and carefully defended by the global elite in the years since -- of global capitalism. And this is the man who is currently running their system!

Perhaps some of the more perspicacious individuals in the ruling class already see how dangerously unbalanced their new president is. It's also possible that it's beginning to seep into the consciousness of somewhat broader circles. After all, most of them thought Trump would "pivot" from "campaign mode" to a more poised, presidential stance after he won the election or at least after he was sworn in. But he hasn't done so. On the contrary, he continues his stream of silly tweets and vocal ejaculations, lavishing praise on himself and lashing out at any perceived challenge or even a hint of disrespect. Trump seems completely incapable of glimpsing how he is seen by the vast majority of the people of the country (and, one might surmise, around the world), how ridiculous and disgusting he is, how utterly laughable.

Stalin, the long-time dictator of the Soviet Union was often described as paranoid. (Whenever he suspected disloyalty, even or especially among his closest "comrades", he would have the individual, and usually the individual's extended family, dispatched.) But Stalin, with a long history of involvement in the revolutionary underground, two revolutions, a civil war, and years of factional struggle inside the increasingly Byzantine Bolshevik/Communist

Party, had his feet planted firmly to the ground compared the clown who now occupies the Oval Office.

In light of this, one can understand why the current Russian strongman, Vladimir Putin, would want Donald Trump to be the president of the United States. Putin had a long career in the Soviet Union's intelligence/counter-intelligence apparatus. Like all KGB agents, Putin was extremely well and thoroughly trained, in foreign languages, history, economics, international affairs, science, psychology, and the many, many tools of spy-craft. Putin is extraordinarily intelligent, knowledgeable, sly, crafty, and without a hint of the "softer" human emotions. He is thoroughly and completely amoral. What can a boob like Donald Trump possibly have that can possibly measure up to a man like that? (This is why they're drinking champagne in Moscow.)

In my previous piece on the developing political crisis in the country, I referred to but did not discuss Donald Trump's personality, his mental state. We are now seeing that condition much more clearly, and I expect it will show itself in an increasingly dazzling manner in the coming days, weeks, and months. The election and presidency of Donald J. Trump represents an acute stage of the leadership crisis of the US ruling class. While it might give ordinary people nightmares, it makes me happy, even optimistic. (I can't watch Trump on TV without breaking out into hysterical laughter.) Most important, it may offer revolutionaries some serious opportunities.

January 22

I totally agree with Ron. Not only is Trump certifiable but he's turning his staff into crazy people as well. Say one thing and then 2 minutes later refute it! Not just crazy but threatening the press! This morning Kellyanne had to contradict Spicer's comment about how big the inauguration was. See below!

Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Donald Trump, said the White House press secretary gave "alternative facts" when he inaccurately described the inauguration crowd as "the largest ever" during his first appearance before the press this weekend. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer gathered the press to deliver a

five-minute statement Saturday in which he issued multiple falsehoods, declaring erroneously the number of people who used the D.C. metro on Friday, that there was a change in security measures this year and that "this was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe."

"These attempts to lessen the enthusiasm of the inauguration are shameful and wrong," Spicer said Saturday. However, crowd size experts [told the New York Times](#) they estimated Trump's audience at fewer than 200,000 people, and widely distributed side-by-side photographs showed the stark contrast between the comparatively sparse crowd for Trump's inauguration and the record-setting crowd for Obama's first.

Asked on "Meet the Press" why Spicer used his first appearance before the press to dispute a minimal issue like the inauguration crowd size, and why he used falsehoods to do so, Conway pushed back.

"You're saying it's a falsehood and Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts to that," she told NBC's Chuck Todd. She then went on to echo Spicer's claim on Saturday that it wasn't possible to count the crowd, despite Trump's team's accompanying insistence that it was the "largest audience." "I don't think you can prove those numbers one way or another. There's no way to quantify crowd numbers," Conway said. Conway also suggested that Todd's insistence on asking why Spicer delivered a demonstrably false statement could affect the White House's treatment of the media.

Roni L.

January 22

All,

First, thanks to Ron for another thoughtful and provocative piece.

I agree that Trump is off his rocker. As were Hitler and Stalin, to name two. I am not sure, however, whether he is incapable of perceiving reality, or whether he willfully refuses to acknowledge reality. Or some combination of the two.

Take his insistence that his inauguration was the biggest ever, bigger than Obama's, etc. Does he really believe that? Or is he a hustler promoting his brand, in the same way that he said numerous times that Obamacare will be replaced by "something terrific", or that his electoral victory was "one of the biggest ever", or that his cabinet nominees have "the highest average IQ of any cabinet" (or that enrolling in Trump University guaranteed wealth, or that Trump steaks were the best, or that Sarah Palin is "classy", and on and on).

Also, whether he's incapable of perceiving reality or perceives it (if in a distorted way) but won't acknowledge it, I think that there's something very sinister and dangerous at work here. I'm reading a series of novels set in Germany, 1938 - 1948. The German media, which pre-1933 had been diverse, are now all just shells for Nazi propaganda. Trump's bashing of the media -- the insistence on the size of the inauguration and the refusal to acknowledge the existence (let alone the size) of yesterday's women's marches are just the latest instances -- are I think consciously aimed at muting the media to not just silence his critics but to make Trump's version of reality the only version. Berlusconi was able to do this to some extent in Italy, but I think that Trump wants to go beyond that to do what Hitler, Stalin, Mao et al did.

In his inaugural address, Trump said "America's carnage stops now." He was referring especially to inner city violence, which he claims (counterfactually) has been rising rapidly and is out of control. That will almost surely be used to turn loose the state's storm troopers (cops, homeland security, ICE, FBI, etc.), who already feel enabled by the fact of his election.

Like Ron, I have a hard time not laughing every time I see or hear Trump speak. I agree that large sections of the ruling class must already be shaken by his instability and, especially, their apparent inability to rein him in. But as I've said, I'm not sure how much he's an insane clown incapable of perceiving reality, and how much a sinister authoritarian who will not acknowledge it and plans to impose his own reality on the world. Some combination of the two, I think. And at this point, I do not see the will in the establishment to stand up to him. IF he goes through with his trade policies (which would mean beggar thy neighbor slide to depression) and /

or IF he tries to undermine NATO (which would bring him into conflict with much of the military and intelligence agencies), then I think that a bourgeois opposition will emerge pretty quickly. If not, then I think that movement(s) from below will likely grow against the attack on women's rights (as we already see), immigrants' rights, Muslim's rights, against black youth (and other people of color), against the LGBT communities, against whatever horrendous scheme they put in place for health care, against the naked robber baron regime that he's installed. Those will provide opportunities and the possibility of vibrant mass movements, although at the same time we can expect these movements to be met by repression from the state and violence from the right.

Anyway, that's how it looks to me this afternoon.

Jack G.

January 22

All,

I believe there is a great deal of evidence to support Ron's take on Trump. But, i too share Jack's perspective--which I will summarize as -- watch out, there may be more going on here than meets the eye.

Hitler was unhinged, ran a totally chaotic government, etc. There is a degree of 'who knew?' Mussolini, the 'strutting peacock,' had many personality similarities to Trump.,

Trump has consistently been underestimated, at every step. By others, and by us. We should be careful about this.

When I look for any logic in Trump's approach to date, one reality is idiocy, but the other is a bolder, more concerted and aggressive assault on the democratic norms of the country.

I think we make a mistake if we don't factor this variant into our analysis.

Rod M.

January 22

Everyone,

I agree with several of Jack's points about the inadvisability of underestimating Trump's wiliness or his appeal. We should all remember that nearly the whole public discussion did underestimate Trump throughout the long campaign (since summer 2015), and now he is president.

More generally, I'd make the following tentative points with regard to Ron's two documents:

(1) I agree that relations with Russia (and other major countries) will lead to major uncertainty internationally about the US's reliability and quality of its leadership, and, within the US, this can lead to real conflicts in the political class (government, press, etc.) over Trump's course of action, especially since this course may be very erratic, with different groups in his government pulling in different directions.

(2) I agree that there is a major potential crisis over Trump's conflicts of interest and that this issue is a potential weapon against him. However, I think the political class is unlikely to move in a real way against Trump on this issue until he has been weakened in other ways and is proving unable to govern effectively.

(3) I think Ron should have given more attention, among conflicts within the political class, to Trump's war on the press. I think he has real reasons but that this tack is likely to backfire. The press/media in general have immense resources and independent standing. Even a Trump-reconfigured Supreme Court would find it difficult to muzzle the press if that should be Trump's aim. The more Trump attacks the press the more the press is likely to dig for dirt on him and if they dig enough they will find plenty, worsening his problems from (1) and (2) above.

(4) These are all factors involving an internal crisis in the political class. Among the factors provoking a mass resistance, we should give more attention to the police and police attacks on Black, Brown, and other people, including street and homeless people, mentally unstable, etc. I agree with Jack's reading of "this carnage stops here" in the inauguration speech--coupled with Trump's scare picture of

the "inner cities" terrorized by gangs, this line foretells a major effort to vamp up police presence and actions and to shield police against protest. When (unfortunately it is "when") there are more police killings and protests over them, this will become a major source of popular fightback, along with defense of immigrants, abortion rights, health rights, and other issues Ron covered.

(5) I think Trump has major reserves of public support and that it's a mistake to put too much emphasis on his winning only 27 percent of the potential votes (given that about 60 percent vote, the winner usually has around 30 percent--Obama had 28 percent in 2008). I don't agree with Ron's point in the second document that a "vast majority" in the country realize Trump is "ridiculous." So far he has a major base of support; I think his attacks on the press and inflated accounts of his own support are designed to play to this base (whether or not he believes them as well). I think this base is likely to erode, but not in the next few months; more like in the next few years.

(6) So in sum I agree that there is a developing political crisis but think it is likely to move more slowly than Ron seems to think (although he doesn't specify a time frame). AND I think popular fightbacks against Trump's policies (including split-offs of some parts of his voting base) have a major part to play in developing the crisis and in making Trump's position untenable on both popular and elite levels.

Chris H.

January 23

Everyone,

Thanks to Ron for taking the time to write up his thoughts. My thinking is that while Trump may be unhinged, he also may be crazy like a fox. I agree with Rod's and Jack's cautions. While his public statements and appointments attack virtually every worker and oppressed person, I'm not holding my breath that he will go after every group at once. Instead I think it's a real possibility he will use the slice and dice methods traditionally used by conventional capitalist politicians to attack groups one-by-one. As

others have written, turning the cops loose to terrorize Black and brown communities in the name of fighting gangs and crime while rallying the racists, including those in the working class, is one possibility. Another is Trump's immigration proposals, which are designed not only to keep out and deport the undocumented, but to restrict all immigrants from Black and brown countries. Building the wall and deporting people will not only throw raw meat to his base, but also have the effect of causing splits in the working class along color and religious lines. Trump's nominee for Attorney General, Sessions, has campaigned for years against immigration on the grounds that it drives down the wages of 'real Americans' (really, white U.S. citizens).

However, in contrast to Trump's divisiveness, last Saturday's demonstration was different. While billed as a Women's March, the demonstration visibly included the struggle for all human rights and climate justice, among other things. Implicitly it carried the slogan, 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All' or, in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, 'Nobody's free until everybody's free'.

Peace,

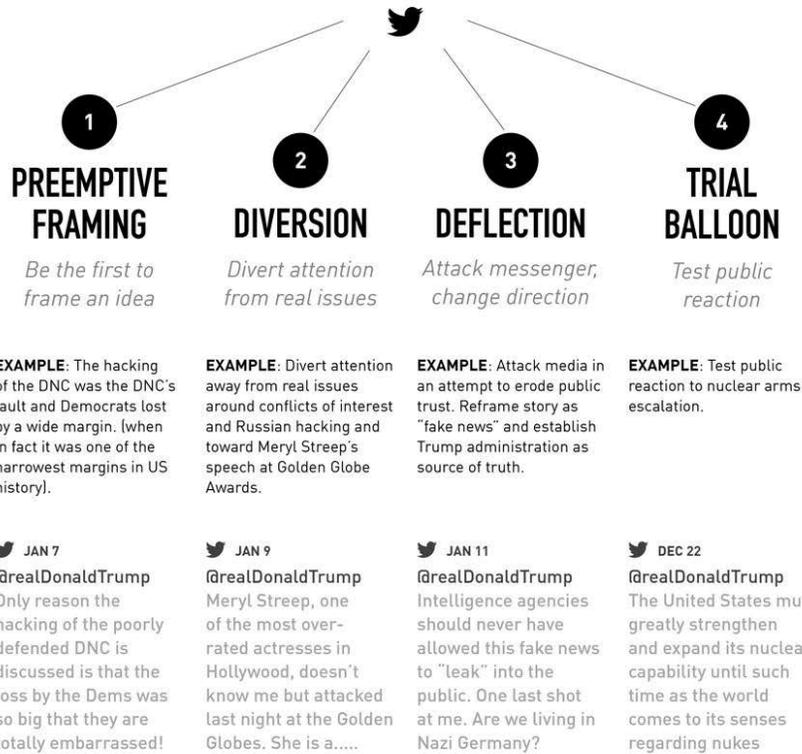
Bill B.

P.S. Despite the rhetoric, Trump may not 'renegotiate' NAFTA that much, but tweak it and call it a huge victory in the manner that he 'saved' the jobs at Carrier. Also, the TPP may not be as dead as it seems. I've read reports that it may be resurrected in revised form under another name.

January 28

Folks might be interested in this chart, which illustrates the observations about Trump's tweets and language more generally made by a linguist on [NPR](#). It suggests there is indeed some kind of method to his madness.

A Taxonomy of
TRUMP TWEETS



Created by @gibilisco
 Based on "A Taxonomy of Trump Tweets" by George Lakoff.
 First aired January 13, 2017 on WNYC's On the Media.
<http://www.wnyc.org/story/taxonomy-trump-tweets>

Mike S.
 January 29

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Trump's psychological diagnosis.

<http://bipartisanreport.com/2017/01/27/johns-hopkins-top-psychotherapist-releases-terrifying-diagnosis-of-president-trump/>

Wayne