

Whither the Trump administration?



April 5

Jack and Ron,

On Bannon's removal from NSC, see article below. The shift, orchestrated by Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, will also restore the positions of senior military and intelligence officials who had been downgraded.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/us/politics/national-security-council-stephen-obannon.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

Rod

April 6

Rod and Ron,

My guess is that the move was precipitated by the confluence of several factors: The Nunes mess; pressure from McMaster and maybe Mattis, and their supporters; Trump repeatedly looking bad after following Bannon's advice; and maybe the glimmer of realization by Trump that he's in deep shit and needs to rein it in a bit and give more weight to the conservative wing of the

orthodox military/ foreign policy establishment, which might also somewhat alleviate the pressure on him from the deep state.

Jack



April 6
Jack and Ron,

I agree that this can be seen as a step toward "normalization," at least in this area, as well as the strengthening of the hand of the "professionals."

In answer to your question, Jack, it has the potential to slow the clock down, because it may bring some greater stability to the administration.

We don't know what Bannon's broader standing is at this point, though Ron's speculation certainly may be right.

Another speculation would be that, as the administration possibly moves closer to some kind of a military action in Syria, or vis-à-vis North Korea, McMaster may have upped his demand to clear the decks of people who didn't belong where they were as the price for seriously considering action. What impact this would have on the clock is anyone's guess.

Don't know if removal of Bannon was connected to the Syrian airstrike, but in any event, Trump gets an opportunity to look strong and have a win... Unless it blows up in his face.

Rod

April 6
Jack and Rod,

Yes, for now it does look good for Trump, if it doesn't backfire. Of course, we'll have to see what happens over the coming days and weeks. A lot depends on how Putin reacts.



I think this means, at least for now, that the Republican traditionalists (Mattis, McMaster, Kelly, and the arrive-iste Tillerson) have won Trump over on foreign policy. At the very least, Bannon's influence will decline further. His best step would be to resign now (soon) and denounce Trump for going over to the Establishment, the people he claimed to be fighting against.

Trump's statement, although mostly written by others, revealed a human side. He seemed genuinely moved by the photos of the victims of Assad's chemical attack. I guess he's not a total sociopath; his cynicism may have limits.

If all this leads to a confrontation or even heightened tensions with Russia, it may give the Russia/elections investigations, etc. less urgency. We'll see how the Republican Establishment reacts. McCain and Graham are calling for escalation.

Ron



April 6

Reportedly. Bannon wanted to resign but was talked out of it by Rebekah Mercer, his billionaire sponsor.

Jack

April 7

Jack and Ron,

It will be interesting to see if this is a meaningful pivot, or just one more herky-jerky actions by a man with the attention span of a child, and far fewer brains.

Rod

April 7

I believe that Trump will remain who he is. But he's not all-powerful. We are seeing the constraints, as reality closes in. He will always be narcissistic, erratic, vindictive, and shallow. But he has at least some survival instincts. Plus, people like McMaster, Mattis, Kushner, Cohn are dragging him back towards orthodoxy.

I don't know if he's sincere about what he expressed on the gassing of children. He is a gigantic con man. I think that he does it in part by getting into the role, like an actor. He may have even been sincere for the moment, but I don't think that sticks with him. Remember, U.S. aerial bombardment last week killed hundreds of Iraqis near Mosul, including children. No tears from Trump, no remorse. To the contrary.

Jack

April 7
Jack,

I agree with both of the points you make.

Rod

April 7
Rod and Jack,

Jack, you are probably right, although I continue to believe that Trump will tack toward the Republican Establishment in the hopes of trying to get something done. Also, on foreign policy at least, the Establishment line represents the logic of the imperialist system that he's loyal to.

Ron

April 9
Everybody,

For those who are interested in some of the Trump/Russia connections:

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/04/the-happy-go-lucky-jewish-group-that-connects-trump-and-putin-215007>

Ron

April 9
Ron,

Thanks for this article--fascinating, and something I knew nothing about.

I see two main possibilities: 1) This is the Russia connection and it's not really about the election; 2) This is the Russia connection, and it explains how election collusion with the Russians came about.

Rod



April 9
Rod,

I surmised that Jews, Russian Jewish oligarchs, and Jewish mobsters were involved, but I wasn't aware of the details or the extent. I think Trump's tax returns will reveal more details if they are ever released. In any case, how could it not be No. 2? We've got a friend in the US who has political ambitions; why not help him, etc., etc.? How could they resist?

Rod

April 9
Ron,

I was speaking from a Trump perspective, not a Russian perspective. That Russia intervened in the election is a given (it is acknowledged as 'known,' even if the information hasn't been released to the public). Whether Trump 'colluded' with this remains to be seen.

My point was that the smoke around collusion (all the 'connections') *might* be explained by the 'Jewish connection.'

Rod



April 9
Ron and Jack,

If Bannon walks/is pushed out, it seems to me that, between the resignation of Flynn, the step downs of Sessions and Nunes from specific roles, the bombing of Syria, and the hard line Tillerson and Hayley are now taking on Russia, and the rising role of Kushner (the 'Democrat'), there is a definite pivot toward the center/deep state.

I don't take issue with the view that this may be, "here today, gone tomorrow"--after all, policy toward Syria was there yesterday, here today, and De Vos, Perry, and others are still in place. But there it is.

Rod

April 9
Jack and Ron,

To add to this: I have come to agree that Trump is truly stupid. That said, accolades mean the world to him. He is getting it from neo-cons, Republican hawks, Clinton Democrat hawks, and even liberals, as well as seeming to stand up for the good ol' USA. He is facing sharp criticism from elements of his base, but these elements are tiny compared to lavish praise he is enjoying.



Given the lack of any real, worked out ideology, he may see his choice as: 1) the Bannon world of confrontation, chaos, bring-it-on, tear it down, fight them all (this has appeal to him because, in his ignorance, he gets to be the Messiah), or, 2) the attraction of greater popularity and seeming success that the pivot offers him. He hungers for this most deeply.

This is tempered by the fact that he may wake up on the other side of the bed tomorrow, or make some grand blunder that pushes him some other way, or whatever.

Rod

April 10
Rod,

I think Bannon is on the way out, even if he is not fired or decides to resign in the near future. Having been removed from the National Security Council and given his history of conflict with Kushner, I don't see Bannon's influence increasing. However, it is probably to Trump's advantage to have him stay on, since if Bannon goes, he will go out attacking Trump, and that may hurt Trump with his hardcore base (although it might help him with some of the more decent-minded conservatives who support him).

Ron

April 11
Rod and Ron,

My main thought is that the globalist faction in Trump's White House sure seems to be a lot more coherent and a lot more influential than it was being given credit for prior to the last couple of weeks. But look at their lineup: McMaster, Mattis, Tillerson, Mnuchin, Cohn, Kushner, Kelly, and probably Haley, for starters: national security adviser, secretary of defense, secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, chief economic adviser, head of homeland security -- plus Trump's son-in-law, ambassador. I don't think that they're all in place by accident, and I think that we are now seeing them leverage power in these established executive branch power posts. Bannon and his yahoos may be tolerated for a while longer as a sop to the billionaire Mercers, but I doubt that we'll hear much more talk of "President Bannon" -- although one never should underestimate the likelihood of Chris Hedges et al again screaming, "the sky is falling".



I've also been thinking about automation / robotization / job loss. The NYT ran a story today about a Toyota plant in Kentucky -- heavy new investment in technology, no job growth. The same is true in those Indiana plants that Trump "saved" from running away to Mexico -- they're staying, maintaining or increasing production, but reducing the work force. Foxconn, the huge Asian manufacturing giant that produces much of Apple's output in their Chinese factories is on a mission to displace human labor with robots. And now, robotization is turning towards non-manufacturing



sectors. Is there really a need for humans to flip burgers and dispense food bags and make change at fast food places? What does this say about the left's traditional orientation to the industrial proletariat as the key? And what replaces it?

Jack

Jack,

I agree with you about the globalists (I call them traditionalists) in Trump's cabinet. It seems pretty clear that Trump is orienting to them on foreign policy. As I mentioned to Rod, some of this is largely because the logic of the US's international position (a slowly-eroding imperialism) points to that kind of approach; other strategies don't make much sense right now. Whether this means Trump will follow a more traditional Republican line on domestic issues is unclear, although, for a variety of reasons, I think this is ultimately where Trump will wind up. I think that Bannon is on his way out, although if Trump is clever (or gets clever advice), he will avoid booting him too soon, instead, keeping him in limbo for as long as he can. (Apparently, there is a political adage that says that you'd rather have an enemy inside your tent pissing outward than an enemy outside pissing in.) I wonder what all this will mean vis a vis the Republicans' participation in the Russia investigation.

I have a long felt that, as far as a "revolutionary orientation" is concerned, we should look beyond the social categories and seek to unite with people, from whatever social, ethnic, cultural, educational, etc., background, who agree with us politically/morally. I don't believe there is any one social class that is ordained or even

more likely to be revolutionary than others, although one would hope that people less well favored in their circumstances would be more motivated toward revolutionary solutions than other layers. Of course, we would hope to avoid a situation in which wealthier, more educated people wind up having authority/power over those less well off. All of this flows from my rejection of Marxism and from my belief that the revolution we advocate is primarily based on ethical considerations and a desire for freedom and solidarity whose ontological grounding cannot be known or predicted. Hence, my "spiritual anarchism."

Ron

April 11
Jack,

I agree that the globalist faction, versus the Trump screw you faction, is now in ascendancy. But I'm not sure what your point is about the lineup not being an accident. I think Trump will freelance, and perhaps effectively (in terms of public support) for a while more before it catches up with him.

I get that robots are displacing jobs as much as anything. Does anything here change our view that technology is neutral, and it depends who owns and controls it and for what. Eliminating labor would be a good thing, if it weren't about eliminating jobs.

We probably agree on this, and your point seems to be about the industrial proletariat. As a student of the Russian Revolution, I am in awe of what the concentrated, industrial proletariat was capable at a certain point in time when the working class was tiny--but concentrated/industrial. Short of fast changes, this seems to be a thing of the past. I look to working people, defined in the most broad terms, that is, those who are not the owners, to effect change, should their consciousness lead them to do so.

Rod

April 16
Rod and Jack,

I agree that that appears to be what's happening. So far, it's just been about foreign policy, but I expect a general pivot toward more

typical Republican positions on domestic/economic issues, as well. I think NAFTA and the other trade pacts will be modified but not junked and that Trump will drop the demand for an import tax (tariff). They might even decide to abide by the Paris Agreement. It remains to be seen how drastic are the cuts to domestic programs.

I think Trump's motivation is to be successful, and he saw that the Bannon line wasn't achieving that so he's orienting toward Kushner, Mnuchin, Cohn, et. al.

Ron



April 16
Ron and Rod,

Yes, it certainly seems like that's what's happening. Here's my take on it: Trump's electoral victory was based on his (demagogic) populist rhetoric, appealing especially to the desperate rural and semi-rural poor (especially in Appalachia), displaced workers in the Rust Belt, and resentful low-level managers angry at "being held back" by (fill in the blanks). He had no deep belief in or attachment to the policies he advocated -- they were his sales pitch. Now, those policies won't fly in practice (e.g., his tariff policy would result in beggar they neighbor trade wars that would decimate world production and distribution chains; his isolationist policies clash with his tough talk on how he'd deal with countries that didn't go along with his program; his health care rhetoric was always a sham; ditto his baloney about bringing back jobs in coal; etc.) So once in office, he's adrift without a compass -- or, rather, with Steve Bannon as his compass -- and in short order crashes against the shoals on health care. Probably even he can see that the tax reform

proposals he's broadly outlined would be headed for the rocks in an adjacent bay. And his tariff and trade plans -- good night! And anyway, there's no way he's gonna get unity from Congressional Republicans on any of these. So where to go, what to do? Pretty obvious: shitcan Bannon, go to the military option. To heck with the



Isolationist campaign rhetoric -- they bought the car, he got the cash, and how he'll use it as best serves his needs. And his needs are to be viewed as a big success -- I agree with Ron -- and, especially, as a great dealmaker. So he's made a deal that almost no one in Congress will refuse -- bomb Syria and Afghanistan; shake a mailed fist at North Korea.

That still leaves the problem of how to satisfy the desperate who voted for him on domestic issues. A jingoist foreign policy may not be enough here. I expect we'll here a lot more about his amorphous plans for a \$1 trillion infrastructure project. And that may not be all smoke. It will likely be heavily weighted towards military and security-related contractors and construction (The Wall on the southern border together with access roads to transport construction materials to the sites and other such spin-offs; upgrading military bases; etc.) and other ways for his big developer friends -- and Wall Street bankers -- to gorge at the public trough. That might, in the short term, create some jobs in some targeted swing areas, and it might -- maybe -- be enough, together with the jingoism -- to cobble something together that salvages the core of discontented Trump voters.

Jack
