

Donald Trump's Defining Moments

Donald Trump's "reality TV" presidency revolves around his penchant for ignoring diplomatic tradition and brushing aside political decency in favor of stirring up his "base," a dangerous approach, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

In the last few weeks, President Trump has gone through a series of defining moments in which his disturbing rhetorical reactions to historical developments have opened a window on his sense of the world and the nation.

Let's pick up the story on Friday, August 11. On that day the New York Times (NYT) announced "Conservatives Relish the 'Fury' in Trumps Talk." A blurb for the article said, "Fans of Tough Rhetoric See a Promise Kept." The reference was to Donald Trump's suggestion that he would respond to any North Korean aggression with a counterattack of "fire and fury." Maybe he would even consider a preemptive strike.

The "fire and fury" talk seems to have been a spontaneous, uncensored display of what President Trump would do to North Korea if not precariously held in check by select others – perhaps certain Republican Party leaders and military advisers – who will now try to sublimate the President's belligerency into a new strategy for Afghanistan.

As is typical of spontaneous responses, the "fire and fury" outburst was contextualized not by historical facts or thought-out policy, but rather by the uninhibited personality of the responder.

At this point it should be noted that it has taken centuries to mature a set of diplomatic rules and practices which even now only just manages to keep the aggressive behavior of most nation-states in check. To see the President of the United States treat that history as if it meant little is chilling. Just as chilling is the response of the President's "base."

Trump's belligerent rhetoric exhilarated his "die hard" (pun intended) supporters, who obviously have the "bring 'em on" attitude made famous by George W. Bush. The *New York Times* kept referring to this group as "conservatives" who saw Trump's aggressiveness as a "promise fulfilled." Many of them proclaimed that they did not fear a nuclear war with North Korea because, living in places like Colorado, Arizona and Georgia, they saw themselves sufficiently isolated from danger of nuclear attack and, apparently, to hell with other Americans – particularly those cursed city dwellers. Among those exhilarated by the

President's words was "the conservative pundit Rush Limbaugh," who proclaimed that the U.S. finally had a real man in the White House after eight years of Barak Obama, whom he referred to as a "pajama boy who wears mom jeans who can barely throw a baseball."

The *Times* is wrong in its "conservative" attribution. What is revealed here is not conservatism, which by definition implies a certain reserved and disciplined posture. What the *Times* was really describing is the behavior of rightwing extremists, from the President on down. This fact was confirmed on the following day.

Moment Two

On Saturday, August 12, white supremacist groups ranging from the Ku Klux Klan to neo-Nazis showed up in Charlottesville, Virginia, to demonstrate against the removal of a Confederate monument, and ended up in violent clashes with counter-demonstrators. Both sides stand for easily recognizable,

if somewhat stereotypical, opposing cultural programs: the white supremacists demand a white-dominated America with archaic racist values, segregation and the elimination of any ethnic programs of upper mobility or immigration policies that might cause a threat to white privilege. The counter-demonstrators stand for an America of greater diversity, equal opportunity, desegregation and an array of other progressive values.

President Trump was slow to react to the Charlottesville violence. Perhaps he was initially rendered speechless at witnessing a truly "deplorable" subset of his "base" suddenly showing up at a broadcasted riot in a Virginia college town. How would the real Trump respond?

He ended up hedging. Under great pressure from both Republicans and Democrats, Trump begrudgingly condemned klansmen and neo-Nazis as "bad people" but simultaneously insisted that (1) also demonstrating on the side of the bad guys were a lot of "very fine people" and (2) both sides must be blamed for the violence. Though he and his advisers might not have realized it, in the eyes of the greater public, Trump's position put him, de facto, on the side of the Klan and the neo-Nazis.

The Ku Klux Klan and various like groups have always been extremist expressions of a broader, historically rooted, racist expression of American culture. This cultural "ideal" is juxtaposed against a more cosmopolitan, open and liberal America. Up until the time of the U.S. Civil War, racist culture predominated, with its most extreme expression being in the slaveholding South.

After the Civil War, that territorial stronghold was destroyed, and despite the

ultimate failure of “reconstruction” the culture of racism began a long and very slow decline. However, it has never disappeared entirely and what happened in Charlottesville tells us that this reactionary vision is capable of at least a temporary resurgence when given political encouragement. That is what President Trump’s this-is-the-real-me response has done.

In the last few weeks Donald Trump has shown himself willing to almost offhandedly ignore 200 years of the world’s diplomatic history and decades of his own nation’s progressive cultural development. This display of historical ignorance and spontaneous stupidity reminds one of Edmund Burke’s warning against men with “intemperate minds.”

It has also drawn ever more sharply the cultural divide now facing the United States. Do Americans really want a return to the racism signified not only by the Klan and its ilk, but also by the ongoing upsurge in police violence against African-Americans? Do Americans really want a reaffirmation of a monopolistic white culture that, through Trump’s immigration policy, would destroy the historical contribution of numerous ethnic groups in making a progressive multicultural society?

Most Americans, if pressed to take a side, would probably stand against the real Donald Trump revealed by these recent defining moments. However, in order for them to effectively take that stand, there needs to be a political alternative – an institutional choice that allows for the political defeat of the rightwing radicals.

When we look around for that alternative, all we find is a dysfunctional Democratic Party, which, under its present leadership, has proven incapable of checking the reactionary trend besetting the nation. So, the U.S. is in both political and cultural limbo. Its citizens are left asking if Donald Trump’s defining moments will also define their own future.

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‘Good Parents’ Who Kill Strangers

A troubling paradox in world leaders is their apparent love for their own

children while showing callous disregard for the lives of children and other innocents at the receiving end of their bombs and bullets, as Philip A Farruggio observes.

By Philip A Farruggio

Adolf Hitler never had any children, but most historians reveal how much he apparently loved the little ones ... IF they were of pure Aryan blood. He also loved, they say, his dog *Blondi*, appropriately being a German Shepherd.

Most, if not all, of the top Nazis in his regime were devoted family men. One wonders if Heinrich Himmler, after his trips to the concentration camps to view the half-starved, pajama-wearing inmates, and of course the gassing and incineration system he supervised, came home to his lovely daughter Gudrun, whom he affectionately called Puppi (Dolly).

Did his deputy Reinhardt Heydrich find time to play with his children – Heider, Silke and Marti – after he planned the operation of the “Final Solution” for Himmler? As to the man who kept the “Cattle Cars” rolling on schedule to and from the myriad of concentration camps, did Adolf Eichmann sit his young ones – Klaus, Horst and Dieter – on his knees and read them bedtime stories? The historians tell us that *all* of these men were devoted and caring fathers, and in Hitler’s case, was looked upon as “Uncle Adolf.”

We know from our American historians that Richard Nixon loved Trisha and Julie, his devoted daughters. Did he spend a quiet Christmas eve and Christmas day with them while his *Operation Linebacker II* (Dec. 18-29, 1972) sent the heaviest in decades B-52 bomber assault upon Hanoi? Did he exchange wonderful gifts with the girls while thousands of civilians were killed during the raids, the most since World War Two?

Fast forward to the 1980s and the “great” inspiration of fearless President Ronald Reagan. Behind his excuses and later with U.S. weapons and training, the ultra-right-wing Salvadoran death squads were murdering *anyone*, including priests (such as Archbishop Oscar Romero) and nuns who showed dissent. Yet, Ronnie had time to spend time with his children – Michael, Christine, Patti, Maureen and Ron Jr. He was, from many accounts, a good dad.

So supposedly was Poppy Bush, the first President Bush. He must have spent lots of time with his five children, even when he ordered the bombing of Iraq

during “Desert Storm” (August 1990-February 1991), which included obliterating a bomb shelter containing scores of women and children.

President George H.W. Bush also ordered U.S. airstrikes that annihilated defeated Iraqi soldiers as they retreated (the slaughter justified, in part, because he wanted to vanquish America’s anti-war sentiments, the so-called “Vietnam Syndrome”).

Another Kind of Syndrome

As for the U.S. military, would “Poppy” like it if his sons or daughter came down with “Gulf War Syndrome” (a very different kind of “syndrome,” i.e, debilitating and even fatal health ailments)? This condition, according to many scientific experts, was most likely caused by the U.S. forces detonating chemical weapons and the clouds of residue “blowing back” on U.S. troops.

William Jefferson Clinton became President in 1993, continuing the economic sanctions against Iraq. We know how much Bill and his wife Hillary loved their only child, Chelsea. Most likely, as with many parents of an only-child, she was spoiled in a loving way. Well, the harsh U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq left many Iraqis half-starved and sickly. So much so that thousands, perhaps tens, even *hundreds of thousands* died during Clinton’s eight years in office.

Clinton’s United Nations Ambassador and later Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright was asked in 1996 by reporter Leslie Stahl: “We have heard that half a million children have died. That’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And you know, is the price worth it?” Albright’s response: “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price, we think the price is worth it.”

In 2003, George W. Bush ordered – or rather was *told* by his handlers to sign off on – an immoral (and illegal) pre-emptive attack on another country. As the embedded and servile mainstream media cheered the “shock and awe” bombing of Iraq, Bush Jr. most likely was doting on his twin daughters, Jenna and Barbara. After all, it doesn’t matter how many of other people’s loved ones, including young children, our bombs and depleted uranium weapons destroy, it’s our family values that matter, isn’t it?

Finally, we come to our last two presidents. We know both of them love their children. President Obama obviously loved his girls *more* than he did the children of Libya. He allowed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to convince him

to sign off on another bombing campaign of another country that wasn't threatening the United States, this time Libya.

Obama must have been proud, as he shot some hoops at the White House, with how the U.S. contributed to the destruction of one of Africa's wealthiest and – in many ways – most progressive nations. Did he sit with his girls to watch the deadly chaos that he caused, with Secretary Clinton topping it off her celebration of Muammar Gaddafi's grisly murder by quipping: "We came, we saw, he died." Did Obama teach his daughters how much of the chaos in Syria was exacerbated by what his administration did in Libya and then by arming "rebels" who fought side by side with Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups?

Then, Obama gave way to Donald Trump, who may know as little about world affairs as Bush Jr. did. Yet, we do know how much this man has doted on his children, giving his Ivanka the leg-up to become a mega-millionaire. She is claimed to be his close adviser as well – and a devoted mother to her three children.

Ivanka reportedly urged his April 6 missile strike in Syria because she saw images of children apparently dying from chemical exposure, although President Trump's rush to judgment – blaming the incident on the Syria government – led him to unleash 59 Tomahawk missiles, including some that veered off course and reportedly killed a number of Syrian civilians, including children.

A few days later, Trump dropped the largest conventional ordnance known to mankind, the so-called "Mother of All Bombs," on a target in Afghanistan.

Just like the other aforementioned presidents, Trump will – in the end – do what the "Deep State" actors allow him or tell him to do. That is the real *family* that these men belong to.

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America's 'Global Policeman' Role

America's influential neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks want U.S. interventions pretty much everywhere, but other powers are chafing against this U.S. "global policeman," as ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller explains.

By Graham E. Fuller

Global disorder is on the rise. What can the U.S. do about it? There are two fundamentally different approaches one can take – it all depends on your philosophy of how the world works.

The first school thinks primarily in terms of law, order and authority: it accepts the need for a global policeman. The second school is more willing to let regional nations take the initiative to eventually work things out among themselves. Both schools possess advantages and disadvantages. Something called Balance of Power politics lies halfway between the two.

Global policemen nominate themselves from among the ranks of the most powerful – and ambitious – states of the world. Over the last half century the U.S. has assumed this role – but a significant shift is already under way. In Washington this school argues that growing American disinclination to assert order is a key reason for a more chaotic world. From the end of World War II to the fall of the USSR in 1991 Washington had shared, reluctantly, that role with the Soviet Union – rivals but both unwilling to let the world spin out of control into chaos and nuclear war. Then, after the fall of the USSR, the U.S. triumphantly assumed the role of "the world's sole superpower." In an earlier century the British Empire played the same role, although contested by Germany, France and others.

In Washington right now, neoconservatives and liberal interventionists (export democracy, by gunpoint if necessary) lead the charge against what they see as U.S. abandonment of its moral duty, leaving the world in the lurch. Their list of American failed duties is long: if only we had moved earlier to remove the Kim dynasty in North Korea, or Assad in Syria, or blocked the referendum that reincorporated Crimea into Russia, or brought about regime change in Iran, or backed Saudi Arabia against Qatar to keep the Gulf from splitting, or employed sufficient force to put an end to civil conflict in Afghanistan, or backed Ukraine to the hilt against Russia, pressed more vigorously in Venezuela, established firmer lines in the China Sea, warned Philippine leader Duterte off from his murderous anti-drug policies, and intervened to prevent looming Ethiopian-Somali-Eritrean war in the strategic Horn of Africa, etc. The list of U.S. duties, neglected in the eyes of this school of "benign" intervention, is

endless.

Troubling Questions

Yet this perspective raises troubling questions:

–Is the U.S. willing to perpetually expend its blood and treasure around the world in military and covert interventions to remove undemocratic leaders – or simply leaders we don't like? Simply to maintain U.S. pre-eminence? What is the overall gain in a cost-benefit analysis?

–How acceptable are the opportunity costs of such interventions – as opposed to better use of U.S. taxpayer money domestically?

–How much can the U.S. really prevent the rise of other powers with their increasing sense of their own interests and entitlements? Small powers are willing to sacrifice quite a lot when it involves interests on their doorstep – compared to limited American enthusiasm for intervention across an ocean for dubious gain.

–How do we respond to rising weapons technology abroad which increasingly circumscribes U.S. freedom of action? Nuclear weapons employ technology from the mid-Twentieth Century. And by now many powers are developing a meaningful cyber capability against rivals and opponents. To a cyber-warrior the world is a candy store of targets. Ditto for drones – simple technology spreading fast, capable of inflicting potentially great damage.

The counter-perspective to the global policeman accepts the reality of new powers arising all around us. There is little we can do to prevent them. We increasingly face major alternative power centers out there. China, a non-player for the last hundred years or more (unlike in much earlier centuries), is formidably back on the scene and asserting political, economic and cultural power. China even assumes a new degree of global leadership functions, some of which contain positive features.

Europe, after over a century of murderous and suicidal wars, is finally back on its feet representing perhaps the most progressive political grouping in the world. With a lot of soft and hard power Europe feels increasingly independent.

Russia has a global vision stemming from centuries of exercising power widely across Eurasia, and in the Cold War, as a “global super-power.” Its diplomatic and military power far overshadows its poor economy, but it is willing to pay the cost to be part of the global game. As with China, Russia is not entirely a negative factor on the world scene either, except to those U.S. hawks reluctant to compromise with any alternative power.

Additionally the world is witnessing more and more medium powers asserting their interests in their own regions than the U.S. or the Soviet Union would ever have “permitted” during the Cold War. Today that list includes states like India, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Iran, Canada, and South Korea with strong perceptions of their own interests.

Many Flashpoints

Any world policeman today faces a growing number of flashpoints beyond its capabilities. Many are ugly and may cost lives of millions of people. Humanitarian crises will continue to abound (like Palestine, Yemen, South Sudan, the Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, global refugees.)

Global warming and environmental degradation create powerful refugee mills that produce millions of hungry and angry have-nots. U.S. intervention is not designed to cope with these issues.

And then routine intervention by a world policeman also creates another major negative: the continued political infantilization of so many countries in the world. Routine U.S. intervention invariably leads to warring parties who prefer in the end to deal with Washington rather than with their own rivals for power. We see this repeatedly, most recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere where factions prefer to manipulate Washington to get what they want rather than face local realities. The Gulf States today are similarly playing Washington against Iran rather than communicating.

So a difficult and deeper issue arises: should most countries and peoples be “allowed” to stew in their own juices? To settle their own issues? Should they not take local responsibility? Doesn’t political maturity arise from being compelled to deal with rivals within a country, or a region? Remember, everybody in the world is eager to enlist the U.S. to fight on its side. Didn’t it take two hideous World Wars (preceded by many uglier centuries before then) before war-like Europeans finally figured out that enough was enough, and created alternative mechanisms for dealing with each other? Yet now it is an article of faith in European politics that war in Europe must be *unthinkable*.

Do problems have to “ripen” (to use that ugly political science term) before warring factions decide it is simply too damaging, dangerous, costly – even immoral – to press the conflict forward?

In a thoughtful and skillfully-argued recent essay, long-time journalist and conservative geopolitical observer and thinker Robert Kaplan shows himself to be in the first camp: the indispensable need for imposed law and order.

He argues that only continuing American commitment to its deepest international

ideals is what makes the U.S. what it is; that if we fail to uphold our ideals we are left with no organizing national principle – and thus no national purpose. (Never mind that these “ideals” are upheld on a highly selective, transient, cherry-picked basis.)

Dubious Neocon Logic?

But do we really believe that the U.S. will atrophy as a society in the absence of “maintaining global values?” It would be sad to think that U.S. greatness depends on constant intervention and war in the name of the global order.

How long can the U.S. go on “generously,” supplying international order? Perhaps we are indeed doomed to watch an increasingly Darwinian world out there, operating without Big Brother. But the handwriting is on the wall: few in the world still support American policing of the world – or perhaps policing by any single state.

If policing is required (and there may be an occasional role for it), it will ever more likely involve a consortium of major international players – at a bare minimum the European Union, China, and Russia. The United Nations Security Council, when it can agree, also plays an important role. Indeed, these three powers are determined to deny the U.S. any further monopoly of international power. And that was true before Trump.

In the end, how do we think about history? A process of gradual advancement? Or anarchy kept at bay only by great powers? Does history have any “meaning,” any trajectory? Or, as an earlier British statesman debunked the whole notion: “history is just one damn thing after another.”

If we believe that permanent conflict is simply a fundamental element of the human condition, then the argument for a policeman gains weight. But from now on international policing is going to be shared – like it or not. And however “inefficient” it may be.

After all, there aren’t many “benign” hegemonies around any more to do the job – if they ever existed.

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