

The Alt-Right's Alternative Reality

President Trump's "Alt-Right" is a grab bag of mostly incoherent or contradictory ideas derived from white resentments. Now, it will be played off against the Republican establishment with unpredictable results, as JP Sottile explains.

By JP Sottile

One thing to keep in mind during the Age of Trump is that reality shows are far more scripted than they appear. That simple fact should be used like a decoder card to decipher the combative stories and click-baited headlines emanating from Steve Bannon's portentous reboot of Breitbart.

This is particularly true of the #WAR meme gleefully spread by Breitbart's shock-troops at the very moment Bannon triumphantly returned to the fold. Like an exiled sheriff returning to a one-horse town, Bannon boasted that his hands were back "on his weapons" after a short trip from the West Wing to Breitbart's nearby headquarters. And how proud Breitbart's staff must be to find themselves holstered on Bannon's hip, ready to be deployed as his at-will instruments of destruction.

True to form, Bannon reportedly led an editorial meeting to plan an attack on a presidency he pronounced "over" during a tour de force exit interview with the Weekly Standard. That interview punctuated a week of mixed messages from a swollen Svengali who'd been transformed by the media into jacked-up version of Karl Rove. TIME even dubbed Bannon "the Great Manipulator" in a Trump-baiting cover story. It was quite a meteoric rise for a man who'd previously hitched his star to Sarah Palin.

Although Rove sanctimoniously denounced his kindred spirit, the alluring idea of Bannon as Trump's version of Bush's Brain 2.0 was toothsome fodder for a press corps forever on the prowl for juicy details of palace intrigue from inside Trump's White House. Some, like deposed hit-man Anthony "The Mooch" Scaramucci, believed Bannon slaked their thirst with his self-serving leaks. Perhaps that's why Trump wisely avoided poisoning Bannon's media-friendly well.

It would explain why Bannon's parting shots at the administration were met with praise by his "former" boss. Trump thanked him on Twitter, touted his renewed role at Breitbart, and welcomed Bannon's coming attack on the GOP establishment. Most notably, Trump ignored Bannon's brutal autopsy of his failed administration, thus transgressing his iron law about "always hitting back" with twice the force he receives. That important detail kept the Beltway's blatherati

guessing about the damage Bannon could do to Trump's otherwise impregnable base. But it may indicate there's something far more triangular than diametrical at work between the supposed frenemies.

Bermuda Triangulation

It's really easy to get lost down one of Trump's rabbit holes. There are lots of 'em ... and they become even harder to avoid when Trump's torrential tweetstorms open 'em up into rhetorical sinkholes. And that's exactly what he's done since Bannon's departure. He's deluged Capitol Hill with tweeted attacks on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky; Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, R-Wisconsin; foreign affairs scion Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee; and never-Trumper Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Arizona. It could be part of a cunning plan. Then again, Trump's star-turn as a celebrity has been built on a pro-wrestling-style of political choreography that gins up villains so he can showcase his unique ability to slam them.

This need to continually spoil for a fight was on full-display when he drew a line in the sand during a long, strange pep rally in Phoenix, Arizona. In what's shaping-up as an epic Mexican stand-off over the debt ceiling, Trump threatened to shut down the government if Congress fails to properly fund a wall that was originally supposed to be purchased with pesos.

So, with Trump poised to officially break one of his key promises (Mexico will pay) in order to keep one of his other key promises (build a wall his party's leadership doesn't want to fund), what is the logic of risking a shutdown that, if history is any guide, will almost certainly damage the GOP?

Perhaps damaging the GOP establishment is the whole point. Bannon certainly has them in his sights. He told The Economist that Sen. McConnell tops his growing list of targets. And, according to a report by Bloomberg, Trump developed this stand-off strategy in cahoots with Bannon the week before he resigned. White House sources said Bannon "urged the president to go through with a government shutdown if necessary to force Congress into providing money for the wall."

Apparently, this is seen as "crucial to Trump's credibility and even political survival." And, in what's becoming a Trumpster talking point, Roger Stone called for Trump to take "a scalp" from "arrogant" members of Congress to end their defiance. Said Stone to The Hill, "All he needs to do is punish one incumbent and I think you'd see a sea-change." And Bannon told *Devil's Bargain* author Joshua Green that he left the White House to "go to war for Trump against his opponents – on Capitol Hill, in the media and in corporate America."

At the same time, Trump is doing everything he can to signal that he's keeping

the faith ... particularly after Breitbart derided his "flip-flop" on Afghanistan. Since that decision, he's said the media isn't just the enemy, but they actually don't want America to be great again. He's pardoned criminally contemptuous Sheriff Joe Arpaio and inspired exactly the response Bannon relishes from his opponents. Trump punished transgendered Americans in the military. He's resumed controversial transfers of military hardware to local police. And it looks like he's poised to crack-down on DACA "Dreamers."

So, since Bannon left the White House in control of the "moderates" ... Trump has made a point of hitting many of the hot buttons that activated the ire of Bannon's critics on both sides of the aisle. Mostly, this onslaught looks like it is designed to confront the GOP, their role in passing Trump's agenda be damned. It's a triangular agenda to distance him from Congressional failures. And it means that Bannon is still calling Trump's tune.

Who's The Boss?

The simple fact is that Trump was never really Bannon's boss in the first place. Just refer back to The Mooch's colorful comments to find the only person Bannon is truly willing to bend over backwards (or forward, as the case may be) to serve. If Bannon is beholden to anyone it is the deep-pocketed Mercers – a pair of super-rich ideologues who've tipped their tin-foiled caps at the Frank Gaffney wing of a growing Islamophobia plunderbund. Just think of them as the Koch Brothers of the Alt-Right.

In fact, Robert Mercer pumped \$10 million into Bannon's version of Breitbart. He and his daughter Rebekah doled out \$26 million during the 2016 campaign to a variety of causes like the "Defeat Crooked Hillary PAC" and a fun little PAC run by Iran-obsessed Neocon John Bolton. The elder Mercer also reportedly dropped another \$10 million on Cambridge Analytica, the ever-more scrutinized data targeting company that spread micro-targeted pro-Trump/anti-Hillary "news" during the 2016 Election.

Not coincidentally, both Bannon and deposed National Security Advisor Gen. Michael Flynn drew salaries from the Cambridge operation. The Mercers were instrumental in bringing Flynn's paranoid, "Iran is Lurking Behind Every Corner" worldview into the White House. And they even quietly funded Milo Yiannopoulos after he momentarily became too controversial for the controversy-addicted editors of Breitbart.

But it was Trump's Bannon-managed rise that put the Mercers on the map. And their money helped Bannon coalesce a growing cohort of Alt-Right civilizational strugglers in a political force. This is the same fringy scrum that kept Hungarian hustler Seb Gorka from disappearing forever into the dark abyss of a

tediously long White Nationalist subreddit. And it's the same Alt-Right universe where you'll find a "deep state of alert" over National Security Advisor Gen. H.R. McMaster's purge of Michael Flynn's anti-Islam groupies. Many of them actually believe recently dispatched NSC aide Rich Higgins was axed by McMaster because Higgins was getting dangerously close to uncovering a plot between the Deep State's "cultural Marxists" and their far-flung network Islamist allies.

According to a much-discussed memo titled "POTUS & Political Warfare," Higgins infamously warned that a cadre of Deep State actors called "Globalists" is actively trying to destroy Trump. Even worse, these nefarious "Maoist" tacticians are said to be risking the nation's future because powerful "Islamists will co-opt the movement in its entirety" and calamity will fall over the land like a pitch-black burqa.

As Higgins wrote, "Globalists and Islamists recognize that for their visions to succeed, America, both as an ideal and as a national and political identity, must be destroyed."

And the linchpin of that Globalist-Islamist plan to destroy America? Look no further than the ongoing Deep State coup against the one man who dares to stand between the United States and the Globalist abyss – Donald J. Trump. Russia-gate and the Globalist-controlled media are two prongs of this attack. But devotees of this grand narrative see Globalist insiders like Jared Kushner, Gary Cohn, McMaster and Obama's puppets in the Intelligence community as the primary anti-American phalanx battling Trump as he struggles to make America great again.

Along the way, Trumpist websites like Breitbart, American Greatness, Infowars, Conservative HQ and American Thinker routinely wield the "Globalist" moniker like a cudgel against Trump's enemies. They find these Globalist enemies hiding under all of Washington's mossy rocks and lurking around every international corner. George Soros is often targeted because they believe he uses Craigslist ads to pay protesters and he secretly funds the Antifa, Black Lives Matter and just about every group that opposes Trump and America's heritage. Soros the indefatigable boogeyman is even blamed for orchestrating the Charlottesville mess in an effort to discredit the Alt-Right.

And at one strange point, McMaster was simultaneously called a puppet of the Rothschilds via Soros and an anti-Israel agent. But since Bannon bailed, it's Jared Kushner and Gary Cohn who've become their primary targets.

Castigating Kushner

The tension between Bannon and Kushner is well documented. In fact, Breitbart's Editor-in-Chief even reassured someone he thought was Bannon that he was willing

to do the “dirty work” of smearing Jared and Ivanka. No stranger to a sneaky smear, Bannon reportedly relished calling Kushner a “cuck” behind his back. The term “cuck” is the Alt-Right’s favorite epithet for those deemed effeminate and weak and traitorous. But the epithet *du jour* has to be “Globalist.”

As if on cue, Breitbart heralded the return of Gorka under the headline: “EXCLUSIVE—‘Like the Last Scene of Star Wars’: Sebastian Gorka Compares Battle Against Globalist Cabal to Rebel Alliance Fighting Evil.” It’s actually kind of ironic since “Seb Gorka” sounds exactly like the name Jar-Jar Binks would take if he turned to the Dark Side to become a Sith Lord. Breitbart has also ripped Kushner as “starstruck” with “Goldman Sachs Globalists” and they’ve repeatedly attacked Gary Cohn as a “Globalist” who’s hijacked Trump’s White House. They’ve taken to framing Cohn in-between two globes, which they did once again when Cohn recently criticized his boss’s response to Charlottesville and called-out Neo-Nazis.

Frankly, their use of “globes” is troubling. It is strangely reminiscent of anti-Semitic paranoia about Jewish plots to control the world. But Breitbart is also decidedly anti-Muslim, often garishly pro-Israel and its Jewish staffers swear by their mission, as the Jewish Telegraphic Agency detailed in a survey of Breitbart’s mixed messages. This deep state of confusion between anti-Semitic and pro-Israel messaging was even exploited by embattled Israel Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and his son Yair ... who eagerly weaponized the Charlottesville melee for domestic political purposes *in spite of* the anti-Semitic chants of the White Nationalist marchers. It’s that willingness to let the ends justify the means that makes the Alt-Right’s “anti-Globalist” meme so complicated and, potentially, an ideological trap.

Grand Designers

What is the The Alt-Right, anyway?

Wikipedia pegs the Alt-Right as “a loosely defined group of people with far-right ideologies who reject mainstream conservatism in favor of white nationalism.” The Associated Press’ primer goes with “a political grouping or tendency mixing racism, white nationalism, anti-Semitism and populism.” And there is a fascinating debate raging on the Right over the Alt-Right’s conservative bona fides and the supposed “Libertarian to Alt-Right pipeline” feeding White Nationalism.

However, one thing stood out from the “Unite The Right” melee that catapulted the Alt-Right and its White Nationalist subset into the center of American politics. Vice News captured the seminal moment when a cohort of White, similarly-dressed and evocatively-coiffed young men marched with burning tiki

torches while repeatedly chanting “The Jews Will Not Replace Us.”

This, of course, belied Trump’s recalcitrant claim about the presence of “good people” who were only interested in protesting the removal of a Confederate statue. However, Gary Cohn certainly took note of the chant. Trump’s embattled economic adviser has since remarked that he “will not allow neo-Nazis ranting ‘Jews will not replace us’ to cause this Jew to leave his job.” But what does “The Jews will not replace us” really mean? “Replace” them how?

The ideological forge of White Nationalism is found in the not-too-distant past ... particularly in a mélange of Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klansmen, Christian Identity/Aryan Resisters and Skinhead Punks that coalesced at the beginning of the 1990s. This nexus point was captured on film in a 1991 documentary titled “Blood In The Face.” The title comes from the Christian Identity belief that Adam was said to have blushed in the Bible and this proves that he was actually an Aryan. Their elaborate idea asserts that Adam could not possibly be Jewish because Jews are supposedly incapable of blushing ... unlike God’s “true” Chosen People.

At the same time, this idea of “true” Chosenness also means by definition that Jews are imposters who conspired to “replace” Aryans in the Judeo-Christian narrative. They usurped the title through deception. And now these “imposters” are directing a global conspiracy to destroy White America and European culture in the final affront God’s people.

This conspiratorial narrative often includes the belief that Jews and the Jewish-controlled media orchestrated the civil rights movement and illegal immigration, thus foisting both Blacks and Latinos onto the backs of working-class White Americans. This false flag-like concoction helped the “Zionist Occupation Government” take control of the United States as part of their grand design to dissolve America into a Jewish-dominated One World Government. That dissolution would ultimately mark the extinction of White, Euro-American culture as they know it ... or think that they know it. In other words, Jews would “replace” Whites as the preeminent race in America and the world.

Although these ideas have been around for a long time, they’ve recently reemerged from the shadowy tentacles of the internet and, more notably, out of the still warm graves of the racially charged, Southern Strategy-style campaigns the GOP has run in the wake of Jim Crow’s demise. It was this pattern of racial dog whistling that Trump turned into a bullhorn during the last campaign. And the evidence of its effectiveness is mounting.

A post-Charlottesville poll by Public Policy Polling gives us a good handle on what percentage of Trump’s base sympathizes with this Alt-Right/White

Nationalist narrative. According to the poll, 45 percent of Trump voters say Whites face “the most discrimination in America.” They’re followed by Native Americans (17 percent), African Americans (16 percent), and Latinos (5 percent). Additionally, when “asked what religious group they think faces the most discrimination in America, 54% of Trump voters says it’s Christians followed by 22% for Muslims and 12% for Jews.”

This is a far more substantial number than the 9 percent of Americans who said it is “acceptable to hold neo-Nazi or white supremacist views” or the 10 percent who said they supported the “so-called alt-right movement,” [according to an ABC News/Washington Post poll](#). Still that works out to roughly 22 million Americans who find some form of White Nationalism acceptable.

And that’s why it’s worth asking if there isn’t something more pernicious behind Breitbart’s cartoon globes demarcating “[Globalist Gary](#)” and the drumbeat of negative headlines about nefarious Globalists and their Deep State minions. Is “Globalist” actually just another code-word? Were the young men who marched in Charlottesville actually angry about being “replaced” as the pre-eminent “species” by a conspiracy of “Globalists” who are, in fact, really “the Jews”?

It’s a powerful narrative that merges victimhood and grievance with an Alt-Right media-reinforced confirmation bias that sees anything and everything as further evidence of a deep, ongoing deception. Trump himself mastered this tactic when he rematerialized as a born-again Right-Winger by pushing Birtherism. That racially coded connivance fed right into his run for the White House which, according to a [fascinating read](#) by Gabriel Sherman of New York Magazine, was born out of a series of memos scrawled out by a small group of Roger Stone-led advisers who jotted-down hot-button keywords they culled from listening to Right-Wing talk radio.

Those keywords became the Trump’s *de facto* campaign platform. Why else would Trump talk about “Common Core” or reverse himself on one position after another? He was merely echoing back the catchphrases popular on Right-Wing radio and, perhaps, on Alt-Right favs like [InfoWars](#). No doubt, one of those keywords was “Globalist.” It’s still the Alt-Right’s favorite way to identify the “cosmopolitan” cabal White House aide Stephen Miller [famously called out](#) in a presser on immigration. These are the self-same “Globalists” many of Trump’s supporters expected him to replace with good old-fashioned American greatness.

Trump The Martyr

Yet, in what could be an epic bit of intellectual jiu-jitsu, Trump’s transgression on Afghanistan and his failure to “Make America Great Again” are poised to become reinforcing examples of [Globalist control](#) over a once-sovereign

nation.

It's a narrative of betrayal and economic irredentism the Alt-Right and White Nationalists inherited from the racist convergence of the early 1990s. Trump harnessed it during a campaign that blamed America's decline on external forces like China and NATO ... and on unwanted "criminal" interlopers like Mexicans and Muslims. Trump has even appointed a bloated, talk radio gabber who decries "race traitors" to the FDA. Really, is it any surprise that Richard Spencer and David Duke embrace Trump?

Nor is it surprising that Bannon's been able to jump off his "platform for the Alt-Right" with the help of the Mercers' money and Trump's self-satisfied trolling. Now he has to re-channel the sense of transgression that got him and Trump into the White House toward a new effort to both explain away their failure and to justify continuing their fight.

That's because Bannon knows "traditional" Republicans don't want his trade war with China or Trump's border wall or huge spending on infrastructure. Republicans thought they could use Trump as a pliable rubber-stamp for the usual GOP suspects of deregulation, increased defense spending and entitlement-gutting tax cuts for the top brackets. But after the Trumpcare debacle, there's little appetite for horse-trading with a President who hoards the credit and avoids the blame. And Trump and Bannon must both realize there's little chance of squeezing their populist-nationalist agenda through Washington's clogged-up sausage machine. No doubt Bannon's known it for a while.

More to the point, Bannon – like the Senators he and Trump are now targeting – must realize the legal danger Trump faces now that Special Counsel Robert Mueller has eschewed the convoluted mess of the DNC data breach in favor of Trump's troubled financial dealings with Russian money laundering ... particularly at the ground zero site of Trump Soho, in the offices of Bayrock Group and with Trump's Moscow-linked connection to long-time henchman Felix Sater.

Trump's hardened base will stick with Trump come Hell or high crimes and misdemeanors. Trump knows it. Bannon knows it. The key now is to build a narrative framework that makes Trump a martyr to the cause, thus allowing him and the agenda he embodies to survive the coming storm. Mainstreaming the Globalist conspiracy is a crucial part of that framework. Everyone has heard of the process of globalization. Fewer know about the elite cabal of Globalists who seek America's destruction by affecting a Deep State coup that forestalls America's return to greatness.

Frankly, the Deep State and corporate-fueled deindustrialization have long been the sole bailiwick of the Progressive Left. But Trump exposed a fissure on the

Right that opened up these issues inside the GOP. Bannon needs to preserve and expand that rift ... if only to reverse Breitbart's flagging fortunes. It's even possible Bannon used his much-discussed interview with The American Prospect's Robert Kuttner to send a faint signal to disaffected Democrats and to Sandernistas – 10 percent of whom crossed-over to vote for Trump. But he sent his strongest message to the Alt-Right and the recalcitrant GOP Establishment. He said loudly and clearly that he and Trump are not beholden to the party as they head into the 2018 election. Trump's Presidency may be over. But Trumpism, a.k.a. Bannonism, is alive and well. And they plan on using it against the GOP.

Trump reiterated that point by demanding his aides present him with tariffs so he can deliver the one thing that tops Bannon's wish list – a trade war with China. That's another attack on Republican orthodoxy and, therefore, another opportunity for Bannon and Trump to triangulate against the Globalists and their minions in the GOP establishment. It also goads the as-yet unrequited neoliberal backlash festering in the Democratic Party. And it means that Bannon's much-ballyhooed exit was not the end of something. It was, as Seb Gorka vengefully proclaimed, just the beginning.

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