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The Donald Trump Phenomenon and the American Presidency

This paper deals with the subject of what is being called the “Trump phenomenon”. Much has already been written on the rise of Donald Trump, who gained a spot at the top of the United States political structure without previously ever having been elected to public office or holding a position in government. His rise was unprecedented in American history and will leave an indelible mark, not only on the country, but also on the entire world. Why that happened will be the subject of interest for historians and political scientists for decades to come. The final judgment is not likely to be positive. He will be seen as a great disruptor rather than as a great builder.

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Introduction

A number of books have already appeared on what has begun to be called the Trump phenomenon. More will get written and published. The growing literature asks and attempts

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to answer a number of questions. For instance, United States (US) President Donald Trump's rise led to renewed interest in George Orwell's book *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Sales of the book spiked after Kellyanne Conway, the White House Adviser, attempted to defend Press Secretary Sean Spicer by calling his lies "alternative facts." Many were reminded of Orwell's use of the term "double-think" which is the act of holding two contradictory facts in your head at the same time. In *It Can't Happen Here* by Sinclair Lewis, published in 1935, and Philip Roth's much later work, *A Plot Against America*, published in 2005, the two novelists used fiction to describe the situation that resembled the present with Trump as president, with several non-fiction works also published. There is no doubt that Trump's rise and election to the US presidency will have consequences for the country he is leading and for the world at large. How and why that may occur is the main question asked in this paper.

Who put Trump in the White House?

What made it possible for Trump to achieve what seemed to be out of his reach – the American presidency? There are many answers, some of them more convincing than others. There is a belief that the electorate wanted change. Although a large majority of the American voters were pleased with what President Barack Obama had achieved during his eight years in office and there was great admiration of the way the Obama family had conducted itself while in residence at the White House, there was still interest in bringing about change. By electing Hillary Clinton it was widely perceived that the end result would have been the extension of the Obama period to 12 years.

Clinton had a number of explanations for her defeat. After a silence that lasted for months, she spoke on 6 April 2017 at Tina Brown's 'Women in the World Summit'. Present at the event were a number of journalists. Among them was *The New York Times*' Nicholas Kristof. "Certainly, misogyny played a role" in her loss, she said. "That just has to be admitted." She noted the abundant social science research showing that when men are ambitious and successful, they may be perceived as likeable. In contrast, for women in the traditionally male fields, it is a trade-off, "The more successful or ambitious a woman is,

the less likeable she becomes – that’s also true of how women perceive women; it’s an unconscious bias”, reported Kristof.²

Some analysts believe that Clinton proved to be a weaker candidate than expected. Her use of a private server to send and receive official emails led to an inquiry by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to determine whether she had committed a crime. Although cleared by the FBI, Trump was able to exploit the incident to his full advantage. He began to call her “crooked Hillary”, a description that stuck in the minds of many voters. A few days before the election, James Comey, Director of the FBI, announced that his agency was, once again, looking at another trove of emails that had surfaced. This revelation, many believe, had a damaging effect on Clinton’s candidacy.

In some of the post-election analyses, the blame for Clinton’s loss is assigned to those who managed her campaign. Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes, who followed Clinton as a political figure, have now published *Shattered*. This is a book on how the news that Clinton may have lost came in and was slowly absorbed by her staff. The first indication of trouble came from Steve Schale, the best vote counter the Democrats had in the state of Florida. “You’re going to come up short”, Schale said in a telephone call, stunning aides in a Brooklyn hotel while they were preparing to celebrate. They were until then “cradled in the security of their own faulty analytics.”³

And there was the possibility that Russia had managed to interfere in the elections by infiltrating the email accounts of the Democratic National Committee and that of John David Podesta, who ran the Clinton campaign. According to Evan Osnos, David Remnick and Joshua Yaffa writing for *The New Yorker*, there was nothing new in the Russian attempt to influence an American election. Using what they call “active measures” – the Russian term is *aktivniye meropriyatiya* – Moscow had gotten involved on earlier occasions as well. An attempt was made to influence the election that brought Ronald Reagan to power. “Unlike classic espionage, which involves the collection of foreign secrets, active measures aim at influencing events – at undermining a rival power with forgeries, front groups and countless

² Nicholas Kristof, “Clinton, free to speak her mind,” *The New York Times: Sunday Review*, 9 April 2017, pp 1 and 9.

³ Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes, *Shattered; Inside Hillary Clinton’s Doomed Campaign*, New York, Crown, 2017.

other techniques honed during the Cold War.”⁴ Before leaving office, Obama ordered an inquiry into possible Russian involvement – the results of which will become available when the Trump presidency is well on its way.

However, there is consensus among those who have studied the Trump phenomenon that it is largely the consequence of the anger that swelled up among millions of white voters from the lower middle class. This group felt that it had been ignored by the existing political and economic systems. This development received serious study by several social scientists pursuing different disciplines. For instance, the Nobel Prize winning economist Angus Deaton, working with his wife Anne Case, identified one group – the lower middle-class whites without a college degree – as having suffered the most from the rapid changes in the shapes of the global and domestic US economies. This was the only ethno-economic group that had seen a decline in its life expectancy. This was the consequence of the factors that included alcoholism, drug addiction and suicides.⁵ This group was solidly behind Trump.

That those who had been left behind would react with anger was foretold by Ganesh Sitaraman in a book, *The Crisis of Middle Class Constitution*, written before voters went to the polls in November 2016. He saw enough in the Trump and Bernie Sanders primary campaigns to assess with confidence the significance of the election. “After thirty years of a collapsing middle class, after thirty years of an economy designed to stack the deck in favor of a political and constitutional system increasingly rigged to work for the economic elites – after all this the people revolted.”⁶ To a reviewer of Sitaraman’s work, “this people’s revolt sounds a clarion call to all Americans: Do something about economic inequality, or face nothing less than the decline and fall of the American republic.”⁷ According to Sitaraman, there have been crises before involving the middle-class but they were handled by incorporating changes in the constitution. The situation was ripe for amending the basic law again.

⁴ Evan Osnos, David Remnick, Joshua Yaffa, “Annals of Diplomacy: Active Measures”, *The New Yorker*, 6 March 2017, p 40.

⁵ Angus Deaton and Anne Case, “Rising morbidity and mortality among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, of the United States of America* 112(49), December 2015.

⁶ Ganesh Sitaraman, *The Crisis of the Middle Class Constitution: Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic*, New York, Knopf, 2017.

⁷ James Pope, “How inequality endangers America,” *The Washington Post: Book World*, 9 April 2017, p B8.

For a thrice-married person, who had admitted to adultery and of having groped women, it was surprising that he won the support of evangelicals, a fairly large segment of the US population. Several analysts have searched for an answer to this question, including Wayne Flynt, Professor Emeritus of History at Auburn University in the highly conservative state of Alabama and the author of a book, *Poor but Proud*, about his people.⁸ Gary Silverman, a *Financial Times* writer, talked with Flynt about the dilemma posed by the enthusiastic support for a man like Trump in the Bible belt. “Flynt’s answer is that his people are changing,” wrote Silverman. “The words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, are less central to their thinking and behaviour. The church is less compelling. Marriage is less important. Reading from a severely abridged Bible, their political concerns have narrowed down to abortion and issues involving homosexuality. Their faith has been put in a president who embodies an unholy trinity of materialism, hedonism and narcissism. Trump’s victory, in this sense, is less an expression of the old time religion than evidence of a move away from it.”⁹

Silverman has a direct quote from Flynt in which he puts religiosity in the US in the context of what is occurring in other parts of the western world. “Arguably, what has constituted white evangelical Christian morality for 200 years no longer matters, which is to say we’re now a lot like Germany, a lot like France, a lot like England, a lot like Netherlands, and what we have is a sort of late-stage Christian afterglow.”¹⁰

Trump’s Leadership Style

An assessment of Trump’s impact on global affairs must begin with an attempt to understand the man – his strengths as well as his failings – who now occupies the White House. No previous occupant of the presidential residence had come to it with as little experience as Trump in managing complex bureaucratic systems. That said, Trump, as the president-elect and soon after being inaugurated America’s 45th president, has in numerous tweets and statements, promised to remould the country. He projected himself as a winner who could turn the US around from being a country that, in his words, “doesn’t win

⁸ Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, University of Alabama Press, 1989.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gary Silverman, “God complex,” *Financial Times: Life & Arts Weekend*, 15/16 April, 2017, pp 1-2.

anymore”. Once in office, he endured a litany of missteps that dented his “I alone can fix it” vow to put the country back on the track he said it had left under the misguided policies of his several predecessors. He alone could make “America great again”.

Peter D Feaver, who served on the National Security Council (NSC) of President George W Bush, nicely summed up the circumstances surrounding the assumption of power by Trump. “He made it all the way to inauguration without doing the deep-dive policy reviews and internal debates that every other successful administration does during the campaign and the transition,” he wrote. In Trump’s case, the recalibration was starker “because of the extreme nature of the positions he had staked out on issues like China, Russia and the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] alliance, as well as the thin ranks of policy advisers and his slowness in assembling a full national security team in the White House. It also stands in stark contrast to his uncompromising approach on other matters like legal challenges to his executive order on immigration.”¹¹ This lack of preparation showed in the language and content of the inaugural address.

In the address on 20 January 2017, Trump promised to put “America first” in all that the country does within its borders as well as outside. The phrase “America First” is attributed to Charles Lindbergh, the aviator, who displayed tremendous physical courage and aeronautical genius in crossing the Atlantic alone in 1927. This adventure gave him the political platform to advance his extremist views. He was pro-Nazi, isolationist, anti-immigration and anti-Semitic. In 2005, the award winning American author Philip Roth published a novel, *The Plot Against America*, in which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt loses his bid to a surprise Republican Party candidate – the aviator Lindbergh. In the novel, a foreign power, Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany, meddles in the election. The novel traces the travails of a Jewish family in the city of Newark that has to deal with Lindbergh’s America and the population’s increasingly anti-Jewish sentiment.¹² With Trump in power, fiction seemed to be repeating not as itself but as the real world.

The New Yorker’s Judith Thurman asked the 84-year old Roth whether his novel, originally published in 2004, represented the 2017 America as it was being shaped by Trump. There

¹¹ Mark Landler, “Trump’s foreign sheds sharp edge,” *The New York Times International Edition*, 13 February 2017, p 4.

¹² Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*, New York, Vintage, 2005.

was a widespread belief that Trump's victory was aided by the Russian government's machinations. And a considerable amount of enthusiasm on the part of the new president's followers was based on his anti-Muslim bias – the Muslims were the Jews of the 21st century. Had he been remarkably prescient, Thurman asked Roth. She received a long email in response to her query, "It isn't Trump as a character, a human type – the real-estate type, the callow and callous capitalist killer – that outstrips the imagination. It is Trump as President of the United States." Roth's email, as quoted in *The New Yorker*, became more graphic and picturesque as it went on. "I found much that was alarming about being a citizen during the tenures of Richard Nixon and George W Bush. But whatever I may have seen as their limitations of character or intellect, neither was as humanly impoverished as Trump is: ignorant of government, of history, of science, of philosophy, of art, incapable of expressing or recognizing subtlety or nuance, destitute of all decency, and wielding a vocabulary of seventy-seven words, that is better called Jerkish rather than English."¹³ Roth left little doubt as to how he felt about the new American president.

As he began his tenure, several of Trump's characteristics became even more apparent than before. One was his impetuosity and the second was the inclination to take liberty with the truth. A third was the total lack of interest in the details of the policies he wished to see adopted. These traits were extensively commented upon in the liberal press and in TV news programmes. In a story titled *An itchy twitter finger in the Oval Office*, *The New York Times'* Peter Baker wrote the following, "Impetuous and instinctive, convinced of broad but hidden plots to undermine him, eager to fight and prone to what an aide called 'alternative facts', President Trump has shown in just a few days in office that he is like few of any occupants of the White House before him."¹⁴

Trump certainly stirred whirlwind in his first 10 days. "But it is not unprecedented", wrote David Dunlap in *The New York Times*. "Take a look at the front pages from the first ten days of Franklin D Roosevelt's presidency in 1933...In the first 10 days, the fledgling Roosevelt administration generated five banner headlines in The Times."¹⁵ However, the parallel between Roosevelt and Trump ended with the space occupied by the two newly-

¹³ Judith Thurman, "What-if department: Roth on Trump," *The New Yorker*, 30 January 2017, pp 18-19.

¹⁴ Peter Baker, "An itchy Twitter finger in the Oval Office," *The New York Times*, 26 January 2017, pp A1 and A20.

¹⁵ David W Dunlap, "Busy start for a President, and that was in 1933," *The New York Times*, 4 February 2017, p A11.

elected presidents on the front pages of the newspapers. In the case of the former, the attention given by the media was because of the shake-up of the economic system that Roosevelt believed had plunged the US, and with it the rest of the world, into a deep depression. By the time Roosevelt took office, the US was the world's largest economy, larger than the combined economic power of Europe's three largest countries – Britain, France and Germany. It was clear to the new American president that he was not only his country's leader but, in many ways, of the entire world. He needed to act and act fast. He did. It was Roosevelt who coined the phrase “the first hundred days” in one of the many fireside chats he gave on radio. In it he maintained how much he had accomplished in the first hundred days in office. Unlike Roosevelt, Trump's America on the eve of his inauguration was not faced with a major crisis – not even a minor one. The economy was doing well, adding a quarter million jobs a month. The rate of unemployment had touched historical lows. Wages had begun to increase and the long-suffering middle-class had begun to gain confidence in its future. The world was reasonably well-settled even when extremist Islam had been making trouble in several areas.

In Trump's case, the media got preoccupied by the oddities in behaviour which included the liberty he took with the truth. He was also willing – sometimes even anxious – to treat as the ultimate truth what was said and written by the media representing the extreme right. For instance, he bought the assertion made by some that the Trump Tower, his residence and place of work before he moved to the White House, was wire-tapped on Obama's orders. There was also the penchant for announcing executive orders without giving their content much thought.

The press's unfavourable view of the new president was based on some of the controversies ignited by him soon after assuming the high office. He fought with the media about their assessment of the size of the crowd that gathered on The Mall – the stretch of land between the Capitol, the home of Congress, the country's legislature and the Lincoln Memorial – to view his inauguration on 20 January 2017. By all accounts, it was a much smaller crowd than the one that greeted the beginning of Obama's presidency eight years earlier. He said that those who saw him being sworn in and heard him speak after taking the oath of office, was the “largest crowd ever” at an inaugural.

He also had difficulty in accepting that, while he had won the majority in the electoral college, Clinton received almost three million more votes. He put out the view that some three to five million illegal immigrants voted for Clinton; without their support for his rival, he would have won the majority. When that claim was challenged as absurd, he ordered a full-fledged formal inquiry into the voting process in January 2017. At times, his public pronouncements plunged to extreme pettiness. In his first visit to the office of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at Langley and standing in front of the wall that had stars commemorating those who had given their lives in the service of their organisation, the president returned to the theme of the size of the inauguration crowd. *The Guardian*, the British newspaper, reported on the event as follows, “His 15-minute speech included boasts about the supposed – and inaccurate – size of crowds for his inauguration; expression of airily defined love and support for the intelligence agencies with which he has been at odds over their belief in Russian attempts to influence the election on his behalf; boasts about the number of times he has appeared on the cover of Time magazine; the supposed fact that it stopped raining when he spoke at the Capitol on Friday (it didn’t); and an insinuation that he might start another war in Iraq.”¹⁶

When the speech drew criticism, retired CIA Director John Brennan said that, “(He) was deeply saddened and angered at Trump’s despicable display of self aggrandizement in front of the memorial wall”, the president responded through a tweet on 22 January 2017. “Had a great meeting at CIA Headquarters yesterday, packed house, paid great respect to Wall. Long standing ovations, amazing people. WIN!” Numerous Twitter feeds also led to the announcement of some reaction to the events he watched on the television. For instance, listening to an analysis of the rising wave of crime in Chicago, Trump threatened to send a federal force to the city without reflecting on its implications.

The press, having avoided the use of the active verb “lies” in writing about politicians’ pronouncements, dispensed with this inhibition in Trump’s case. Once again, *The New York Times* took the lead. Some news organisations used such words as “falsely” or “wrongly”, adverbs that tend to weaken the impact in framing what the president has said on several occasions. *The New York Times*, though, ultimately chose more muscular terminology,

¹⁶ Martin Pengelly, “Trump tweets: a controversial speech at CIA memorial was a win,” *The Guardian*, 22 January 2017, p 1.

opting to use the word “lie” in a headline – after initially using the word “falsely”, it switched to “lie” online and then settled on “meeting with top lawmakers, Trump repeats an election lie” for the 24 January 2017 print edition. Dean Baquet, the newspaper’s executive editor, explained that the word “lie” refers to the intent of the speaker and that was resolved for him given that the president had made the same assertion two months earlier. He said that he fully understood the gravity of using the word “lie”, whether in reference to an average citizen or to the president of the US. “On the other hand, we should be letting people know in no uncertain terms that it’s untrue,” referring to Trump’s assertion of a voter fraud epidemic. “He repeated it without a single grain of evidence, and it’s a very powerful statement about the electoral system.”¹⁷

Truth matters in international affairs. However, as the columnist Roger Cohen wrote, “The enormity of the defiling of the White House in just three weeks is staggering. For decades, the world’s security was undergirded by America’s word. The words that were issued from the Oval Office were solemn. It was on America’s word, as expressed by the President, that the European continent and allies like Japan built their post-war security.” However, with Trump in the White House and his close associates advancing “alternate facts” as a way of communication, it became hard for countries to understand where Trump’s America stood on important matters. One example of the uncertainty about the US posture in an important international policy matter was Trump’s position on “One China.”

Trump’s People

With no government experience, Trump’s style of management impacted the way the country was run. It also affected the US’ relations with the rest of the world. Trump’s initial interaction with world leaders created a great deal of anxiety around the globe. It was not clear which way the US was headed as the new president had been less than consistent in articulating his view of the world. Under normal circumstances, the State Department would have taken the lead in developing policy options for the new and inexperienced president. That did not happen. An uneasy atmosphere at the Department of State, under its new Secretary Rex Tillerson, was one of the many examples of the way the country was being

¹⁷ Dan Barry, “In swirl of ‘untruths’ and ‘falsehoods,’ calling a lie a lie,” *The New York Times*, 26 January 2017, p A21.

managed. According to one account, “eight weeks into his tenure as President Trump’s top diplomat, the former ExxonMobil chief executive, is isolated, walled off from the State Department’s corps of bureaucrats in Washington and around the world. His distant management style has created growing bewilderment among foreign officials who are struggling to understand where the United States stands on key issues. It has sown mistrust among career employees at State.”¹⁸ With the State Department in a low-key mode, those working in the White House gained inordinate influence on the making of foreign policy.

Some of the void created by the lower profile adopted by Tillerson’s State Department was filled by Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN). One commentator described her as the “darling of the hawks”, taking positions on a variety of issues that were different from those not only of Tillerson, but also of Trump. “All the chaos inside the Trump administration over the past 80 days has allowed Haley to get away with the kind of freelancing that would ordinarily cause someone in her position to be rebuked”, wrote James Homann in an article in *The Washington Post*. “In fact, she has been left alone. As she said on ABC the weekend before last, ‘The President has not once called me and said, ‘Don’t beat up on Russia.’ He has not once called me and told me what to say.’”¹⁹

It came to be noticed that several individuals from the extreme right had gained an influential voice. The new president, not given to deep thought and reflection, was being guided by some of those who were close to him. According to analysts, the architect of this “shock and awe” approach was supposedly Senator Jeff Sessions, whose nomination as the Attorney General was being debated by the Senate when some controversial orders, such as the one barring the entry into the US of people from some Muslim-majority countries, were written and issued. According to one assessment, “From immigration and health care, to national security and trade, Sessions is the intellectual godfather of the President’s policies. His reach extends throughout the White House, with his aides and allies accelerating the President’s most dramatic moves, including the ban on refugees and citizens from seven Muslim nations that has triggered fear around the globe.”²⁰ When Lieutenant-General H R

¹⁸ Anne Gearan and Carol Morello, “An uneasy atmosphere at State under Tillerson, *The Washington Post*, 31 March 2017, pp A1 and A8.

¹⁹ James Homann, “How Nikki Haley has emerged as the darling of the hawks,” *The Washington Post*, 11 April 2017, p A15.

²⁰ Ashley Parker, Philip Rucker and Robert Costa, “Furor over ban reveals White House, GOP rifts,” *The Washington Post*, 31 January 2017, pp A1 and A7.

McMaster restructured the NSC and removed Stephen K Bannon from the powerful principals committee, he appointed Haley as the full member. She was already the first UN Ambassador to have a full Cabinet rank since Ronald Reagan was President.

Bannon was believed to be the other person who was seen influential in crafting the spate of orders issued in the first few days of the Trump presidency. His was a strong voice in the “alt-right” community in the US identified with extremist views. Before joining the Trump campaign and helping the candidate to win the presidency against heavy odds, Bannon had directed Breitbart, a website that advanced anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-Semitic views. His group wanted to make “America white again”, presumably, if not by expelling people of colour from the country, then at least preventing the arrival of new ones. His rise to power in the White House led the media to label him as the real president. *The New York Times* wrote an editorial titled *President Bannon?*, to underscore that view.²¹ Bannon received a great deal of media attention not only in the US, but also abroad.

For instance, a special report on the situation in the US in the British newsmagazine, *The Economist*, provided a fair amount of space to Trump’s strategic adviser.²² What was of particular concern to many political commentators was the decision by Trump to seat Bannon in the NSC, in particular in that body’s principals committee. In order not to enlarge the committee, the Chairman Joint Chiefs and the Director of National Security were dropped as regular members. They were to attend only when their presence was required.

“To Bannon, the entire world order – from the two political parties to the Wall street reliance on leveraging to multiculturalism – was undergoing an extraordinary realignment, one made manifest in the 2016 election. According to Bannon’s vision, economic nationalism would reorient priorities to the working class’s benefit. Trade deals, jobs programs, tax incentives, immigration restrictions, environmental deregulation and even foreign policy ultimately serve to restore the primacy of those Trump called ‘the forgotten Americans’”, wrote Robert Draper for *The New York Times Magazine*.²³ Trump had adopted a good part of the Bannon agenda. As Draper noted, he regarded Bannon, at 63, as a peer in the way the 45-year old

²¹ The Editorial Board, “President Bannon?”, *The New York Times*, 30 January 2017.

²² There were a number of articles on Bannon in *The Economist* in the last six months. See *The Economist*, 4 February 2017, 6 April 2017 and 13 May 2017.

²³ Robert Draper, “Trump vs. Congress: Now What?” *The New York Times Magazine*, 26 March 2017, p 34.

Reince Priebus, Trump's Chief of Staff, was not. However, Sessions and Bannon were not the only major influences on Trump. In fact, the prominence Bannon had achieved in the administration irked the president. He bore part of the blame for the White House's problems in governing. He was closely involved in developing the Muslim entry ban that was twice blocked in federal court, and the failed healthcare push hurt him. Trump was confident that Bannon would be able to bring along the House Freedom Caucus – the group of extreme-conservative members of the House of Representatives – but they helped tank the bill to scale back the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obama-care. "Trump loyalists dispute the idea that Bannon is the id of the Trump movement, pointing out that Trump has been advocating some of the populist positions – especially on immigration and trade – for decades and for more than a year on the campaign trail before Bannon's hiring last summer."²⁴

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, was also important. He was given the status of an adviser and occupied an office in the White House. His wife, Ivanka Trump – the daughter of the president - and he effectively pushed Bannon to the margins of White House operations. Ivanka, in particular, was incensed by articles she believed were planted by Bannon's allies suggesting he, not the president, honed the populist economic message that helped sweep the Midwest. Her father and she were particularly annoyed by a February 2017 cover of *Time* magazine labeling Bannon "The Great Manipulator."²⁵

According to Thomas Mann, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, the Trump-Kushner dynamics is like "a mob family operation. It's as if Trump is the don and he only trusts his close family friends. There's no indication that experience in the real estate business prepares one for the tasks at hand. It's the hubris of a businessman imagining he can run government just because he's a businessman."²⁶ Kushner's portfolio expanded quickly once he moved to the White House as Senior Advisor. It encompasses slices of foreign policy (China, Mexico and the Middle East) and domestic issues (opioid addiction, veteran affairs, overhauling the federal bureaucracy), in addition to serving as the mediator

²⁴ Philip Rucker, Ashley Parker, and Robert Costa, "Bannon in crosshairs after Trump scolding", *The Washington Post*, 13 April 2017, pp A1 and A4.

²⁵ See thehill.com/homenews/media/317599-time-cover-labels-bannon-the-great-manipulator. Accessed on 6 June 2017.

²⁶ Quoted in Ashley Parker and John Wagner, "For a loyal son-in-law, an unprecedented role, *The Washington Post*, 4 April 2017, p. A12.

for the various feuding camps in the West Wing (the ideologues and the Wall Street people). He has been called the “phantom chief diplomat.” Kushner was joined in the White House by his wife. “Both have seats at the table at any meeting they choose to attend, join lunches with foreign leaders and enjoy ‘walk-in privileges’ to the Oval Office, wrote *The New York Times*, in a story that analysed the role of the young couple. “And with the marginalization of Stephen K Bannon, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump have emerged as President Trump’s most trusted advisers, at least for now.”²⁷ There is a problem with the family exercising so much control in the White House. Chris Whipple, author of *The Gatekeepers*, a history of White House Chiefs of Staff, said relatives in the West Wing can confuse the chain of command. “It can be disastrous if they exert their influence at the expense of the Chief of Staff.”²⁸ That may be happening in the Trump White House, with Priebus proving not to be very effective in his role.

Could Trump be Impeached?

The speculation started, almost on the day Trump completed his first 100 days in office. He was failing as president and as the leader of the world. The idea also took the form of a 290-page book by Allan J Lichtman, the American University historian who in September 2016 predicted Trump’s electoral victory. Not only that, he had called every presidential election since 1984. In *The Case for Impeachment*, the historian uses less rigorous forms of analyses than he did while predicting the results of presidential contests. He based his prediction of the outcome of the 2016 elections on a systematic evaluation of 13 political indicators. According to Carlos Lozada, who reviewed this book, its main thesis is more wishful thinking than based on deep analysis. “This book joins the campaign for Trump’s removal that started as early as the Inauguration Day. Mr Lichtman’s case for impeachment is plausible, certainly, but it is far stronger as an argument for why Americans never should have elected Mr Trump in the first place.”²⁹

²⁷ Peter Baker, Glenn Thrush, and Maggie Haberman, “Young couple rises as pillars of family-driven West Wing,” *The New York Times*, 16 April 2017, pp. A1 and A14.

²⁸ Peter Baker, Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, “Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump: Pillars of Family-Driven West Wing”, *The New York Times*, 15 April 2017. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/15/us/politics/jared-kushner-ivanka-trump-white-house.html>. Accessed on 6 June 2017.

²⁹ Carlos Lozada, “The case of impeaching Trump. (Too soon?)”, *The Washington Post: Outlook*, 16 April 2017, pp B1 and B5.

The American Constitution provides for impeachment as an extreme recourse for presidential failure. Andrew Jackson and Bill Clinton are the only presidents ever impeached by the House of Representatives but both survived in the Senate. Nixon may have been removed by the impeachment process had he not resigned. Lichtman builds his case by using Nixon as an example. “Early in his presidency, Donald Trump exhibits the same tendencies that led Nixon to violate the most basic standards of morality and threaten the foundations of democracy,” he writes. “They also shared a compulsion to deflect blame, and they were riddled with insecurities. They exploited the resentments of white working class Americans and split the world into enemies and loyalists...Neither man allowed the law, the truth, the free press, or the potential for collateral damage to others to impede their personal agendas...They obsessed over secrecy and thirsted for control without dissent.”³⁰

Arguing that impeachment “need not be limited to violations that occur during the presidential term in office,” Lichtman devotes a lot of space to some of what Trump did before entering the White House. However, his strongest case is based on the president’s and his associates’ relations with Russia. “The response of Trump and his team to allegations of communications with Russian officials fits the classic pattern of cover up”, he writes. “First conceal and deny, then when outed by press claim that the communications were routine, innocuous, or incidental – kind of a ‘third rate burglary.’”³¹

Lichtman discusses at some length the fiasco of the executive order banning entry into the US people from several Muslim-majority countries. “Through the drafting, implementation, and defense of his travel ban, Trump trampled on core American traditions and principles,” he writes. “He has effectively claimed absolute presidential authority and breached the separation of powers that the framers established as check against tyranny.”³² However, it would be a stretch to argue that this, along with several other uncalled-for moves, is an impeachable offence.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Allan J Lichtman, *The Case for Impeachment*, New York, Dey Street, 2017.

Conclusion

During the first phase of his campaign for the presidency, Trump attracted a great deal of attention because of the entertainment value of the campaign he had launched. In the skills he had developed as the leading character of the reality show, *The Apprentice*, made him a draw on cable television. While his rivals spent loads of money buying television time, Trump received a lot of it for free. This attention also over time built him a real base of support. The level of enthusiasm for him and the ideas he espoused won Trump enough support to win the Republican Party's nomination and the presidency. Now that he is lodged in the White House, the question is whether he has the temperament and the skills needed to lead the world in which the US may no longer be the dominant power but is still preeminent.

William J Burns, who was the Deputy Secretary of State – the second highest-ranking diplomat from 2011 to 2014 during the Obama presidency and is now the President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, got it right when he wrote recently, “The power of our example has mattered more than the power of our preaching, and enlightened self-interest has driven our strategy. What we often saw during Mr Trump’s campaign and still bubbling in the background of this administration has been more ‘self’ than ‘enlightenment’ – a malevolent brew of mercantilism, unilateralism, and unreconstructed nationalism, flavored by indiscipline and over-personalization. At a moment when the international order is under severe strain and great-power rivalry has returned, the values and purpose at the core of the American idea matter more than ever.”³³ In sum, for the arguments put forward in this essay, President Trump does not appear to possess the leadership qualities which could keep the US in the lead globally by representing the American idea.

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³³ William J Burns, “The risky hollowing out of U.S. leadership,” *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2017, p. A19.