**E Unum Pluribus?**

[Harlan Ullman](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/harlan-ullman/)

April 10, 2023

The national motto of E PLURIBUS UNUM is “From Many, One,” denoting how the separate thirteen colonies were bound into one nation. Yet, the fierce divisions today from abortion to zoonotic transmission of Covid-19, if unchecked, could reverse E PLURIBUS UNUM into E UNUM PLURIBUS for “From One, Many.”

Huge divisions always existed from 1775 when a majority of colonists in America preferred to remain under the Crown to the Civil War, in which more of us died than in every war the nation would fight. Washington’s foreign policy pragmatism and Wilson’s idealism have persistently clashed. The US was divided before entering two world wars.

But is 2023 dramatically different from the past? Has the country become so divided not by the geography of the Mason-Dixon Line but by other powerful forces to make it politically ungovernable and disunited on a national level? Or is pessimism unjustified?

One reason for worry emanates from the dramatic decline of the legitimacy and perceived trustworthiness of too many of America’s most important institutions including government; law and law enforcement; media; health care; the clergy; culture; and education. Even the US military is no longer well-regarded by the public.

Washington’s foreign policy pragmatism and Wilson’s idealism have persistently clashed

One important data point: In 1964, just prior to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and America’s entry into Vietnam based on an attack that never happened, the Gallup Poll reported that about 85 per cent of the public believed and trusted its government in Washington. Today, that figure is reversed. Less than one in six Americans trust Washington to do the “right thing.”

No counterforce or movement is apparent to lessen the extent and depth of these divides. Hence, is or how much is E PLURIBUS UNUM at risk?

The current and possible future indictments of Donald Trump could accelerate the danger of “From One, Many” in part by raising grave uncertainties about the resilience of the political system to absorb these shocks. Too many politicians and pundits have pontificated on the New York District Attorney Alvin Bragg’s decision to indict Mr Trump with no knowledge of the charges. Whether outbreaks of violence and rioting follow, the possible implications are politically profound and the unknowns unknowable.

Suppose indictments over the January 6 riots on Capitol Hill; federal and state investigations over alleged election rigging in Georgia; and possession and possible obstruction of justice in keeping highly classified documents in unsecured and unauthorized storage at Mar a Lago are filed? Suppose Trump was acquitted? Would that end the controversies and some of the divisions or exacerbate them?

Suppose Trump is convicted on one or more counts. Would a former president be sentenced to jail; house arrest or not at all? If the former, would the Secret Service protect him behind bars? And house arrest at Mar a Lago would not seem much of a punishment.

Suppose Trump secured the Republican presidential nomination and wins. Can he issue a self-pardon? Suppose he runs and loses? Would the next president follow President Gerald Ford’s example in pardoning Richard Nixon? Or would Trump be required to serve whatever sentences that may be adjudicated?

An appeal process could take years. These currently unanswerable questions intensify the uncertainties. And these legal proceedings will damage America’s international influence and standing. How? No one can be sure. But each adds to this sense of pessimism.

China’s Paramount Leader Xi Jingping and Russian President Vladimir Putin will do their utmost to exploit what is happening in America as will leaders in North Korea, Iran, Venezuela and elsewhere. Relations with China only seem to worsen. Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen’s meeting with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy at the Reagan Library in California will inflame Beijing even more.

China’s media is pounding out stories about mass school shootings in America; drug epidemics; and other signs of a failing country. Russian trolls are following suit. It would be naive to think otherwise given the 2024 elections.

If Kyiv does launch a major offensive, the war in Ukraine could enter a new and potentially dangerous escalatory phase if Russian forces are driven from part or all of Crimea. Should Putin deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus, the spectre of their use cannot be disregarded. All this contributes to growing pessimism.

Of course, the US has always recovered from the most difficult of times. One can argue that Donald Trump’s indictment is little different from four impeachments of three past presidents; the trial for treason of Vice President Aaron Burr; and Nixon’s forced resignation over Watergate. So don’t rush to judgment. Perhaps.

But perhaps not.

*He writer is a senior advisor at Washington, DC’s Atlantic Council and a published author.*