**Is Trump deluded or determined?**

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Whether one admires or abhors Donald Trump, about one observation all can agree.  Trump is the most transparent president in the nation’s history.  Wielding Twitter as a machine gun, the president unleashes torrents of 140 letter commentary about everything and everyone.  The last outburst was over vetoing the Defence Authorization Bill and after various threats signing the Covid Relief Act.

But despite his displeasure over both in his tweets, is the president deluded as some argue and a modern day mad King Lear?  Or, is he determined in his efforts to maintain power and mad only in the sense he is furious with the results of the election and a party that no longer bows and scrapes to his every whim perhaps looking to 2024 to redeem his failure to win a second term?  Unfortunately, the transparency of his tweets do not provide an answer.

Applying rationality to these questions is undermined by a president whose decision-making process and attention span are measured in micro-seconds.  One of the most frightening and perhaps unintentional revelations of former national security adviser John Bolton’s book ‘In the Room’ Where It Happened was the lack of an apparent presidential decision-making process.  Even the term ad hoc may be too clinical as Bolton describes  few  high-level meetings with the president in which decisions were carefully weighed.

With that caveat, what may be driving the president?   Clearly, he refuses to accept defeat and the loss of a second term, only the third time since the end of World War II that a sitting elected president was not re-elected (Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush being the other two as Gerald Ford succeeded Richard Nixon after his resignation).

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More likely, Trump is manoeuvring for a 2024 re-run and putting a final measure of discipline and control on the Republican Party in his remaining three weeks in office.  By vetoing the Defence Bill, Trump forced Republicans to vote against him in the override thereby providing future leverage to attack any dissenting members.  By threatening to veto the Relief Act and calling for a $2000 vice $600 payment, Trump was aided by House Democrats who passed such a bill and put great pressure on Senate Republicans to support him. No matter the outcome, the president will cynically claim achieving a political victory and blaming others if the bill fails.

How this will affect the Senate run-off in Georgia on January 5th, 2021 is unclear.  If Senate Republicans have enough members to override the veto, then perhaps candidates David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler  can vote to sustain the president having already having committed to support the $2000 add on.  For the moment, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has not allowed this spending bill to reach the floor as stand alone legislation because a substantial number of his caucus are in opposition to increasing the debt.  All this could redound against Republicans in the Georgia senate race as Loeffler and Perdue are caught in this presidential crossfire.

Trump is also playing to his base.  The Defense Bill is loaded with items that can be attacked, rightly or wrongly, as pork and waste representing the worst in the Washington Swamp Trump is still trying to drain.  By so forcefully advocating more relief money for Americans, Trump rallies his populist audience.  And make no mistake.  All this  keeps the president as the center of attention  crowding out the president-elect.

Thus, rather than seen as acts of delusion, a case can be made that President Trump has made a determined effort to keep the public eye, build on his popularity, seize the high ground for 2024 and tighten his grip on the party.  Critics will reject this conclusion as too logical for an often irrational president.  However, what has propelled Trump to presidency, and made him so dangerous, is the ability to exploit the moment whether through a premeditated assessment of conditions or a primal instinct that worked.

As Bolton underscored, this lack of or ad hoc decision-making process made Trump’s foreign policies ultimately self-defeating certainly with North Korea. And even though the former national security adviser still claims that leaving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and the Paris Climate Change Accord along with demanding NATO members pay more for defense and imposing sanctions on China were the right choices, all have damaged American national security and relations with friends, allies and adversaries.

How does this end? At this stage, no one knows.  The best bet is that even a year or two from now, not even Trump will know.

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