

## Genius of Trump enrages liberal media

By Janet Albrechtesen, *The Australian*, 19 August 2017

John Howard wrapped up a conversation about Donald Trump with *The Australian's* Paul Kelly last week rather neatly. He rolled his eyes to high heaven when chairman of the left-leaning US Studies Centre Mark Baillie encouraged the audience to look out for a new paper by the centre's chief executive, Simon Chapman. It's called Impeachment 101 and Trump.

Many won't budge when it comes to Trump. They're not much interested in advice from Australia's second longest serving prime minister that it is too early to make definitive judgments about Trump's presidency after just six months in office. Trump has said some sensible things, like telling the Europeans to lift their weight on their own defence rather than free-riding on America. To be sure, there are risks around trade with Trump, but Howard recalled having more arguments as prime minister with US president Bill Clinton over lamb exports than anything else. Howard chastised the new French President: Emmanuel Macron needs to earn a few stripes before presuming to mark an American president.

On Trump's capacity to manage a crisis, Howard made the obvious point: so far the only field evidence is Trump's decision to bomb Syria for unleashing chemical weapons on its own people — “and just about everyone applauded that”, Howard said. Trump has also, in a speech in May in Saudi Arabia, implored the governments of the Middle East to drive out terrorists from their holy lands. And then, in his recent Warsaw speech, he defended the core tenets of Western civilisation. Howard said it would be wise to ask whether his brusque deal-making, locker-room style, is the whole man, and those who are writing him off already are foolish.

On that score, the media is replete with fools with an unwavering media orthodoxy: the man must be impeached, he's unhinged, his character is all wrong, he's crude, he's rude, he's putting family in charge of the country, he's alone on the world stage, he's cutting off Europe, he's out of his depth with North Korea and China, he's clearly in cahoots with Russia and Vlad Putin, he's a weird night-time tweeter who simply should not be president. Barack Obama never behaved this way. Hillary Clinton would never have behaved like this as madam president.

The media's conventional wisdom misses one glaringly obvious point: Trump is a completely unconventional President, just as he was a very different candidate vying for the Republican nomination and just as he was a very different contender facing off against Hillary Clinton. Understand this elemental truth, then put it aside as less important than matters of substance. The constant blather about Trump's style and character, whether it's in the media or at dinner parties, is propelling too many people into intergalactic irrelevance. And in space no one can hear you scream.

The genius of Trump is how he manipulates fools in the media to his own ends. During last year's presidential campaign, mainstream media's “get Trump” coverage backfired badly. The more the media dumped on Trump, the more coverage it gave him and the more it helped Trump win the presidency — not just with free airtime, estimated to be worth \$US2 billion, but by feeding Trump's message of a biased media. It's the same now. Trump goes after the “fake news” media because he can and because it works. Trump speaks directly to his 34 million Twitter followers without being filtered by the media. This drives the media nuts, as it can't game the system the same way.

As *The New York Post's* Michael Goodwin said during a speech a few months ago, while left-liberal politics were baked into the journalism cake decades ago during the social revolution of

the 1960s and 70s, what happened last year was something altogether worse. “As with grief, there were several stages” in journalists’ coverage of Trump, he said. They started out treating him like a joke, then, when Trump won the GOP nomination, the media got angry, especially because his battle with the media aided and abetted his rise. Since he won the presidency, the media has tried to get even, calling for Trump’s impeachment absent hard evidence. Having helped create the celebrity who became a president, the media seems to imagine it can bring him down too.

Trump’s message resonates because the media’s anti-Trump bias is still evident. Just look at the feverish reporting of the latest ABC/*Washington Post* poll this week. Trump’s six-month approval rating is at an all-time low, sitting at just 36 per cent, the lowest of any president in 70 years. Our own excitable ABC journalists added that the poll had a fine history of accuracy; it was out by only 2 per cent at the November presidential poll. No biggie unless you remember that being out by 2 per cent meant the poll failed to predict the 45th American President.

When former FBI boss James Comey gave evidence before the US Senate last month, there was fanatical condemnation of Trump by the unholy trinity of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and CNN. Cooler analysis might have noted that Comey refused to say Trump’s actions were an obstruction of justice. There’s no excited reporting of the poll that found 79 per cent of Republican voters backed Trump’s decision to sack Comey. Or of last week’s poll that found 60 per cent of Trump voters weren’t fussed by Donald Trump Jr meeting a Russian lawyer who promised dirt on Clinton during last year’s campaign.

Attacking the media works for Trump for another reason: the cycle suits him. He tweets about “Low IQ Crazy Mika” and “Psycho Joe” from MSNBC *Morning Joe*. He posts hashtags like #FraudNewsCNN and #FNN — fraud news network. He posts spoofs on Twitter of him in a WWE professional wrestling match with a candidate wearing a CNN logo. The media responds: he’s juvenile, he’s encouraging violence. He’s un-presidential, petty and devaluing his office. A comedian quips: “Imagine a kindergarten principal tweeting: ‘The little f.cker punched me first’.” Sweet old actress Mia Farrow demands that the President “stop this nonsense”. Author JK Rowling quotes George Washington about silence being the best answer to calumny.

Then Trump strikes back. The media responds with more attacks and unwittingly, the outraged media and countless celebrities become his useful idiots, their frenzied loathing helping him to feed the message about media bias and disconnected celebrities. Then, the media ratchets up its Trump loathing even further when it realises he’s playing it like a hillbilly fiddler.

Indeed, if this continues for 3½ more years, the US President will look more like a masterful conductor of Wagner’s epic *Ring* cycle.

Constant entreaties for the US President to act more presidential fail to understand him. Trump is unlike anything America, or the world, has seen before. He makes no apologies and he’s not interested in changing. He celebrates his difference, tweeting: “My use of social media is not Presidential — it’s MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again.” Normal programming cannot resume until the media starts reporting news and offering considered analysis rather than trying to get even with a modern-day President it helped create.