

Cohen's Warning

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.1 (posted on 12 March 2019)
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This post is the dark companion to last week's commentary, "*Trump's Waterloo Approaches*." In that commentary, I opined about the grave difficulties on the horizon for the current occupant of the White House. This week, I want to explore what I see as possibilities for the immediate aftermath of those difficulties.

Two eventualities seem reasonable to me over the period from now through the election in November, 2020, and into early 2021. Three others strike me as impossible, or at least extremely unlikely.

First, the impossibilities:

Impossibility #1

Trump is impeached by the Democratic House, convicted by the Republican Senate, and removed from office. Not a snowball's chance in hell.

Impossibility #2

Trump isn't impeached, but the growing mountain of evidence against him and his administration regarding all manner of crimes becomes so overwhelming that he resigns. No, Trump will never resign.

Impossibility #3

Trump is impeached by the Democratic House and acquitted in the subsequent Republican Senate trial. He serves out his first term and retires, choosing not to run for a second term.

Now, the possibilities:

Possibility #1

Whether Trump is impeached and acquitted or not impeached, he runs again for a second term as President in 2020, and loses the election.

Possibility #2

Whether Trump is impeached and acquitted or not impeached, he runs again for a second term as President in 2020, and wins re-election.

I need not write anything further about the three impossibilities. Sure, I may be wrong about them, but I'd be surprised and shocked should any of them come to pass. If Trump's resignation, removal from office, or retirement are to occur, something (and most likely many things) will have to change dramatically over the next year.

Of the two possibilities, only the first is worthy of discussion here. The second — Trump's running for another term and winning — will have to wait. (Even considering it fills me with dread...) That brings us back to the title of this commentary.

In his testimony on February 27th, 2019, during the nationally televised open hearing by the House Oversight Committee, Trump's former lawyer and "fixer," Michael Cohen, offered this ominous warning:

"Given my experience working for Mr. Trump, I fear that if he loses the election in 2020, there will never be a peaceful transition of power."

Can we trust a warning about Trump (and Trumpism) from a longtime thug who is a confessed liar and convicted felon? In this case, I think the answer is yes. Not only can we trust Cohen's statement, but we should take it seriously.

In the aftermath of the hearing, that comment by Mr. Cohen was largely overlooked. Some pundits, observers, and commentators responded, but, for the most part, the media response was indifferent at best. I watched the hearing live, and I took notice when Cohen made the statement.

In the 2016 Presidential campaign, Trump — who fully expected to lose — asserted that the election was "rigged against him." Even then, he was setting up his adoring, entranced followers by stoking their rage and giving them permission and encouragement to not accept the election results. Is there any reason to assume that Trump wouldn't do so again in 2020?

Over the long and inglorious history of American politics, every Presidential election — no matter how contested (such as Bush v. Gore in 2000) — has been followed by the peaceful transition of power from outgoing to incoming administrations.

Since Trump took office, numerous questions have been raised about the uncertain future of American political elections. From Russiagate to more generalized worries about the relative ease of using social media platforms to manipulate public opinion, from systematic voter suppression to the possibility of suspending altogether the 2020 election, fears have emerged. While I currently don't believe that suspension of the 2020 election is likely, I do feel that concerns about the electoral process are not mere paranoia. Democracy has

been badly wounded throughout much of my lifetime. One might say that it's been in coma, kept alive by life-support, but with little hope of reawakening consciousness. It wouldn't take much to pull the plug and kill it entirely.

I've written frequently my opinion — perhaps only a belief, but one supported by a mountain of evidence — that the greatest impact of western psychology in the 20th century occurred not in therapy or human wellness, but instead in the arena of mass mind control. One might call that psychology's grand triumph, but I think of it more as a sad achievement, and certainly not triumphal.

Listen to radio ads from the 1930s for almost any commercial product and compare them to today's television ads. Same story, different century. Even in the 1930s, the techniques used to appeal to emotion (invocation of fake authority, false testimonials, spurious claims, etc.) were already in place. Now it's the same, but achieved through images as well as words, with infinitely greater sophistication. Nowhere does truth enter into advertising in any meaningful way. And with Artificial Intelligence looming on the horizon, successful techniques of manipulating human attitudes and beliefs about nearly everything are about to take a quantum leap forward.

This is Donald Trump's playground. People ask if Donald Trump knows when he's lying. I think that's the wrong question. Truth and lies are irrelevant and meaningless to Trump. What matters is the manipulative effect of whatever he says in a given moment. His goal is two-fold: to bond more strongly to himself everyone who adores and worships Trump as a God, and simultaneously to attack, excoriate, and belittle anyone who opposes him. It is the ultimate use of the Us/Them dynamic that is so deeply embedded in our biological hard-wiring. I won't say that Trump is a master of this, but rather that he's completely devoted to it, without any reservations, ethical qualms, or considerations of conscience. Trump may succeed or fail in a given moment, but — even when he stumbles — he's utterly committed to this strategy and will try again very quickly. (Such narcissism is not limited to Donald Trump. It's a general symptom of the neoliberal, greed-is-good, all-for-me-and-screw-everyone-else culture that holds sway in so many corporate boardrooms.)

We're living in a time when both truth and nuance are on holiday. Although often absent in civilization, they left the building completely in the 1990s after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (when Saturn conjoined Uranus and Neptune in 1989) and have not yet returned. Their three-decade hiatus is now coming to a head as we leave the Uranus-Pluto period in the zeitgeist (starting in 2007 and continuing through early 2020) and the close of that polarizing and tribalizing period of 14 years is punctuated with three additional hammer blows — Saturn conjoining Pluto (2019 and 2020), Jupiter conjoining Pluto (2020), and Saturn square Uranus (2020 through 2022), all of which usher us into the decade of the 2020s.

Of these, the most important to us right now is the Saturn-Pluto cycle that begins “officially” (meaning mathematically) in January 2020, but is effective from December 2018 through January 2021. I wrote a full commentary in June of 2018 about that cycle, so I won’t reiterate it here, except to include a link for readers who want to revisit that post:

<http://www.billherbst.com/Comm99.pdf>

The cliff notes version of the Saturn-Pluto cycle, especially as it kicks off, is that it’s harsh, extreme, coercive, and based entirely in power and domination, often through the eruption of previously hidden or subterranean forces. It’s *black-and-white* (meaning that people form dogmatic opinions that defy logical argument or debate), *win-lose* (where some win while others lose), and *us-versus-them* (where inter-tribal conflicts are inevitable, and both loyalties and hatreds are sacrosanct). This cycle begins in Capricorn, indicating that the real-life correspondences of the entire cycle will tend to occur in the areas of authority, government, economics, institutions, and all other formal structures of society.

To those who ask, “Can’t we all just get along?” I say, that would be lovely, but it can’t and won’t happen right now. I don’t like war, but we’re in one, and if we don’t fight, we won’t win.

As I wrote last week, I think Donald Trump is in for a very hard time over the coming years. The odds of his “winning” are slim or none. If he goes down hard, however, I think it quite likely that he won’t go quietly, and that might include exhorting his hypnotized followers to revolt, ignore the rule of law, and even resort to violence.

Might that mean violence between Americans? Blood in the streets? Civil war? I don’t know. I won’t go so far as to predict it, but — given both astrology and what I see going on in America — I cannot rule it out.

I realize that we have bigger fish to fry than Donald Trump. Hell, it may already be too late to escape the disastrous effects of catastrophic climate change, and we’ve done nothing so far to defuse nuclear war and escalating militarism. Still, if we are to have any chance at all of addressing the major problems of our times, we must defeat Trump and Trumpism. We will have to bind up the wounds later, but first we have to win the war we’re in now.