

Iran, the economy: An insurgency that becomes a government is eventually responsible for conditions.

Trump Is Starting to Look Precarious

It has seemed to me this summer that people avoid the subject of Donald Trump as much as possible. What is there to say? People stand where they stand, no one expects to win anybody over. The subject is both boring and harrowing, so why disturb the moment?

A classically conservative insight is that no mere political figure should be given the power to fully colonize your brain and heart, so going to other topics is a good impulse. But I think something has been happening while we haven't been talking about him. His position in the political cosmos is changing. In some new way good fortune is not on Mr. Trump's side. There is a new precarity there. *7. The state of being unsure, unsafe, or lacking stability - a life or 806 built on shaky ground*

All this is connected, obviously, to the dangerous mess of Iran, widespread economic anxiety and a rise in the energy and electoral success of the left, which hates him and, in its political bloodlust, apes him.

All this is expressed in his approval ratings. The RealClearPolitics average has him at 39% job approval, 59% disapproval. The Economist this week had a piece titled "How unpopular is Donald Trump?" Its own poll found him dramatically underwater, 34% to 61%. The magazine said voters are "uneasy about the president's ability to deal wisely with an international crisis."

Mr. Trump has survived bad numbers before. I think people enjoy registering disapproval of his leadership, whether they voted for him or not.

But there's no denying the current erosion of his position. His political problem with Iran is not only that the conflict is dangerous and unresolved, or that his attempts at diplomatic resolution seem half-baked, but that almost six months in, he seems utterly out of his depth, like someone who wouldn't have gone in there had he understood history or the nature of Iran's leadership. Another problem: From the beginning, much of Mr. Trump's political persona was based on his rejection of foreign adventures. Now he's launched a war of choice that has produced a strategic maze.

Regular people watching all this peripherally, as regular people do, would be thinking: Is this a new forever war? Are we running out of bullets? Endless talks and nothing settled? Gasoline prices up if things drag on?

It's more than "This is what he said he wouldn't do." Mr. Trump's supporters have always enjoyed his air of certainty—nothing is that complicated; his common sense will rout the deep-state swamp creatures. Now he looks as if he doesn't know what his next move is. He's uncertain. He doesn't look . . . competent.

As for the economy, the polls say what you see with your eyes, that the cost of living is the public's leading concern. There was an edifying poll this week from Reuters/Ipsos saying that among registered voters, 37% said Democrats had the better approach to the economy, and 36% Republicans. It echoed a startling Fox News poll last month, in which Democrats led Republicans on the economy by 54% to 45%. Fox reported it was the Democrats' largest advantage on that question since 2006.

This when Mr. Trump's famous brand is the billionaire businessmen who knows money better than all the rest, and knows how to create the conditions of prosperity.

All of this would have some impact on the outcome of the upcoming midterms. Everyone knows it's hard for an incumbent president to hold on to Congress, but a year ago the Senate looked pretty solid for the GOP. And suddenly there are a lot of competitive House races.

Not so long ago, all the energy was with MAGA, the insurgents who went up against the establishment in the big rebellion, the big rebuke. But it's the progressive left trying to claim that role now, and with a similar ideological chestiness. We'll see how many they speak for, but it matters in politics where the energy and fervor are, where the hunger is.

An insurgency that becomes a government is eventually responsible for conditions. MAGA as a force has been around more than a decade. You can't blame everything that doesn't work on the bad governance of the past when the past is fast receding and your candidates have been controlling Washington for a while.

It is said that in politics friends come and go but enemies accumulate. In a presidency good news comes and goes but bad news accumulates. ICE excesses, Epstein, Ukraine, Iran, inflation, tariffs—none of these things have ever destroyed Donald Trump, but when you've been in office a while people start seeing not individual and discrete issues but a rolling blur of problems, one after another, and they start to think: *This feels bad, out of control, or I don't like his performance.* That is the Incumbent Problem.

Here is the Things Pass Problem: Everyone knows a post-Trump world is coming, about two years after the November election. This lessens his mystique. His future is finite. Knowing that, people reposition themselves, feel less fear.

Mr. Trump has always had a hearty appetite for combat, and there is no reason to believe that will change. Combat is his default political mode. But more is needed now because competence, not combat, seems to be the growing issue.

He has taken, at rallies, to calling the Democrats "communists." Does labeling them this way help his party's position? Or would it help to explain exactly what the progressives' platforms and past statements contain? He continues to have no patience for cool, careful argumentation. I think the single most revealing statement Mr. Trump has made in his second administration is the one reported in "Regime Change," the deeply reported history of the first half of the second administration by Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan. Mr. Trump was talking to Tucker Carlson by phone in the weeks before the Iran war commenced. Mr. Carlson was trying to warn the president against military action. Mr. Trump said, "I know you're worried about it, but it's going to be OK." Mr. Carlson asked how he knew. Mr. Trump replied, "Because it always is."

Things just break his way. It is hard to understand such a breezy gloss on history, or on life. Presidents don't say that kind of thing, because presidents are precisely the people who learn each day that many things don't work out for the best.

Mr. Trump seems to have a real fear of boredom. Even at his age he is restless; when there's peace and quiet he seems to become anxious, as if he can't tolerate normality. He shows little faith in quiet progress, as in: Set good policy in place and hope it succeeds inch by inch. Instead he creates drama or a crisis, arouses a counterforce, attacks this new enemy, experiences fear—*will my luck hold?*—defeats the new enemy, feels relief, relaxes. Then, restless again and on the prowl, he creates new drama . .

That is a real weakness in life, needing drama. It will find you on its own. When you need it you're always generating new stakes, and in a presidency they're often high, and when you fail that is some big failure.



DECLARATIONS

By Peggy Noonan



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