

Here's a true Trump nightmare for the liberals

Niall Ferguson | Harvard University | 15 January 2017

Imagine if George Washington's farewell address had been followed a day later – rather than 172 years later – by Richard Nixon's first press conference as president-elect. That is what *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN* and *National Public Radio* – along with a legion of liberal bloggers, tweeters and Hollywood luvvies – would like us to believe happened last week.

On Tuesday night, President Barack Obama delivered a valedictory speech that had progressive celebrities in ecstasies. "I admire you so much," tweeted the right-on actress Ashley Judd. "And I will do my part to become increasingly aware of my #implicitbias and #whiteprivelege." (I'd recommend also becoming increasingly aware of how to spell.)

Obama certainly did his best to give them the highfalutin' rhetoric that has been the hallmark of his presidency. He could not resist quoting Washington's farewell address, implicitly putting himself in the founding president's league.

To me he sounded at once pompous and oddly phoney. As he reeled off the list of his triumphs – the economy growing, the wealthy paying more taxes, more people than ever with health insurance, Osama bin Laden dead, the planet saved from climate change – I wondered just how he reconciled his self-satisfaction with the dissatisfaction and desire for change that two-thirds of voters expressed to pollsters throughout last year.

Then, the next morning, Donald Trump held his first press conference as president-elect. The contrast could scarcely have been more complete. From Obama's frostily artful, clinically crafted brand of uplift we cut straight to the Donald's unrehearsed, unfiltered construction-site banter.

Within seconds, Trump was throwing punches, suggesting it would be a "tremendous blot" on the record of the intelligence agencies if they were responsible for leaking the now notorious kompromat dossier, which alleges that Russian intelligence has evidence of perverted sexual behaviour by Trump.

The most that can be said at this point is that at least parts of that report were inaccurate, so its allegation of a Russian plot to blackmail Trump must be viewed with scepticism.

Trump has always believed that attack is the best form of defence. He refused to take a question from CNN – "You are fake news" – because of its report that US intelligence officials had given Obama and Trump a two-page synopsis of the kompromat allegations.

Insisting that "conflict of interest rules do not apply to the president" Trump made clear that he had no intention of selling the assets of the Trump Organisation and putting the cash in a blind trust. Instead, his lawyer explained, he would delegate the running of the organisation to a trust run by his two adult sons. If they did not do a good job, quipped Trump in true Apprentice fashion, they would "get fired".

The people who had been crying their eyes out the night before were now frothing at the mouth. It was "a scary glimpse into the future of what we might be able to expect from a Donald Trump presidency," seethed *The Daily Show's* host, Trevor Noah. In liberal la-la land, bad things are always "scary".

What the liberal media would most like is for Trump's presidency to go directly from his inaugural address on Friday to Watergate, ideally within 24 hours – except that this time the scandal won't be called Watergate but, assuming the Russians have a video of Trump ordering tarts to urinate on his Moscow hotel bed, Wettergate.

Here are just some of the reasons why this fantasy will not be realised. First, Trump's party has control of both houses of Congress, something Nixon did not have despite his landslide victory in the 1972 presidential election.

A Democrat may well propose an impeachment resolution in the House of Representatives some time this year. But there are numerous hurdles the resolution would have to clear before it even came to a vote.

The House judiciary committee chairman would have to agree to put the resolution on the docket – essentially endorsing impeachment himself. The majority of the committee would have to vote to approve it.

Paul Ryan, the Speaker, would then have to bring the resolution before the House while adhering to the Republicans' informal practice that he can bring only those bills to the floor for a vote that are acceptable to the majority of the party's caucus.

Even if a majority of House Republicans supported impeachment, holdouts from the most pro-Trump districts might then try to topple Ryan. Finally, the Senate has the sole power to try all impeachments and 67 of the 100 senators must vote for impeachment to remove a president. At least 15 Republicans would have to defect for Trump to fall.

Second, the news media are far less respected today than they were in 1972. That was the year Gallup first asked the question: "In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media... when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly – a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?" Back then, 68% said a fair amount or a great deal. Last September, in the most recent survey, it was 32%. In 1972 only 5% of voters answered "none at all". Now it is 27%.

Reality check for newspaper editors and chat-show hosts – the more people tweet and "like" on Facebook the term "fake news", the more they can dismiss any news stories that do not fit their political preferences.

Finally, there is the distinct possibility that many voters do not care half as much about what Trump has got up to in bedrooms as they do about whether or not he can deliver on his election pledges. Instead of wishfully thinking about what could go wrong for him, liberal hacks need to consider the (for them) nightmare scenario that things may go right.

For example, voters do not expect economic miracles, but they may get higher growth if Trump and Congress can quickly deliver on tax reform and deregulation and avoid an all-out trade war with China.

They may also get peace in the Middle East if Trump can turn his bromance with Vladimir Putin into a concrete plan to end the war in Syria. And they are almost certain to see much more effective action against Isis and its non-violent sympathisers than they have seen under Obama.

Trump may find he can quite easily sustain his supporters' morale by continuing to goad the very people – liberal bloggers, tweeters and Hollywood luvvies – who hate him most. For what those inhabitants of coastal bubbles of privilege (and that includes you, Meryl Streep) do not seem to appreciate is how many ordinary Americans despise them.

No doubt the liberal media will wage unrelenting war on Trump, as they did on Nixon nearly half a century ago. And no doubt there will be at least some grist for their mills as there was then – perhaps, even some compromising tapes. But this is not the 1970s. And Trump is no more likely to suffer the fate of Nixon than Obama is to achieve the immortality of George Washington.



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Professor Niall Ferguson is a special guest keynote at [PortfolioConstruction Forum Markets Summit](#) (14 February 2017).
