

FORUM

EDITED BY RACHEL CUNLIFFE



America is changing, and the UK cannot afford to ignore it

CANNOT begin to estimate how much ink has been wasted on President Trump's state visit to the UK last week. This is not to dismiss the significance of commemorating the D-Day anniversary, and the immense shared sacrifice of British and American soldiers in liberating Europe.

But the rest of the state visit, focusing as it did on talks with a lame duck Prime Minister and speculation about various leadership hopefuls, was little but empty symbolism, where almost nothing of substance occurred.

However, British attention has been in entirely the wrong place. America – long the lodestar of the UK's geopolitical thinking – is undergoing serious changes.

With Britain distracted by the ongoing Tory leadership contest, not nearly enough has been said about the likely staying power of the Trump revolution, and what this means for the UK's strategic options in the world.

The long-awaited Mueller report into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential race was good news for the Trump administration.

In the end, despite deep-held fantasies on the part of the Democratic party and media that the election could be discounted as the result of criminal malfeasance, special counsel Robert Mueller found no trace of criminal conspiracy between the Russians and the Trump campaign after an almost two-year search.

So the first and most heinous charge against the President amounts to absolutely nothing.

While attorney general William

Barr's summary of the report made it clear that Mueller found evidence on both sides of the obstruction of justice fence (the second serious charge), common sense supports his decision to exclude prosecution on this point, given that there was no underlying crime to obstruct.

So while some Democrats are still calling for impeachment, the party must search elsewhere, beyond illegality, to explain Donald Trump's earth-shattering victory in 2016 and prepare for 2020.

On paper, Trump remains eminently beatable, never having enjoyed even one day of his presidency with anything like a 50 per cent approval rating. Worse, the 2018 midterms were highly discouraging for Trump supporters: his statewide approval ratings were sagging in critical Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin – the very places he needs to win again in 2020.

All that is true. And yet. America is also a place with exceptionally strong growth rates; the US economy grew by a very healthy 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2018. This contrasts with Europe trapped in a low-growth cycle, and with China's rise slowing as it grows old demographically before it gets rich. Relatively, America is a very good place to be just now in economic terms.

Even foreign policy does the Trump White House no harm. There have been no new wars during this administration; it is vital to remember that times of general peace and prosperity (think the Eisenhower and Clinton years) are usually rewarded by the electorate.

But beyond even this, for Democ-

John Hulsman



For Democrats the ultimate risk lies not with Trump, but in the mirror

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rats the ultimate political risk lies not with Trump, but in the mirror.

Blinded as they remain by their hatred for the President – not crediting either his successes or the reasons for his election in 2016 in the first place – they remain convinced that literally any candidate they choose (or indeed anyone with a pulse) can beat him in 2020.

Here, their continued Trump Derangement Syndrome will sow the seeds of their own destruction. For if they believe they can pick any candidate and win, there is little doubt that the Democratic caucus wants to move leftwards. Gone are the days of politically successful Democrats like Bill Clinton governing from the centre-left.

Instead, the Democrats over the past few months seem to be going full Trotsky, which can only assure Trump's re-election in a country

that remains resolutely on the centre-right.

The numbers-challenged Green New Deal pushed by rising socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, which Democratic presidential candidates have rushed to endorse given her undoubted star power, would cost between \$51-\$93 trillion. You do not have to be on the right of the Republicans to see this as absolute lunacy.

Mainstream Democrats are also talking about reparations for slavery, formerly only a morning chat for college professors protected from the realities of the world by tenure.

In adopting such far-left positions, the Democrats are ensuring the election of the man they most hate. While (relatively) centre-left former vice president Joe Biden currently has a healthy lead in the early days of the Democratic primaries, he will be forced to range far to the ideological left if he is to win the nomination, or he will stumble and fall.

So for all these reasons, here is a new prediction: Trump will reclaim the presidency in 2020. For the UK, this ought to be the real lesson of the last few days: that this difficult, unnerving, brash President is here to stay, and if we can find a way to work with him, he could be the ally we need to make the special relationship again one of the primary pillars of the geopolitical world.

Dr John C. Hulsman is senior columnist at City A.M., a life member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and president of John C. Hulsman Enterprises. He can be reached for corporate speaking and private briefings at www.chartwellspeakers.com.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

Arts and hearts

[Re: Will AI ever become indistinguishable from humans?]

Britain has an illustrious history of innovation, but as humans come to the limit of our capacity to manage the huge amounts of data being produced, we are increasingly reliant on intelligent technologies to support. Despite this, I don't believe that in our lifetimes AI will achieve a level of general intelligence similar to that of humans, until we can teach "arts and hearts" – love, creativity and empathy – to robots or algorithms that lack natural instinct and intuition. We are likely to achieve chatbots that are reasonably indistinguishable in the near future, and maybe even human-like physical manifestations in robot form. But achieving the concept of full "identicalness" can only occur if we manage to programme true autonomy and independent thought-processes into AI innovations. With the majority (72 per cent) of the UK public believing that neither businesses nor the government are clear enough on which technologies they use and how they use them, there are many ethical considerations still up for debate too.

Joe Baguley, vice president and chief technology officer (EMEA) VMware

[Re: Contactless and mobile payments surge among all ages of Britons]

UK Finance's report into payment trends can't be ignored. However, I would caution against assuming that this signals the death of cash. While clearly in decline, I would bet my last pound, dollar or euro that cash outlasts plastic as a method of payment. Cash still matters because it is our universal default, because it works regardless and puts us in clear control over our finances. We rely on mobile and contactless more and more but, unlike cash, they're not 100 per cent reliable as too many of us experience too often with technology outages. Cash may have lost top spot, but it is still number one choice of many, and will remain an alternative payment choice for a long time to come.

Mark Aldred, banking specialist, Auriga



BEST OF TWITTER

No 10 by no means dismissing reports that May could end her time as PM by committing to new domestic spending, to the ire of Philip Hammond: "The PM has a number of weeks in office and she will be hoping to build on her domestic priorities." **@peterwalker99**

The taxpayer is still picking up the bill for the pensions promises Tony Blair made as he left office. All power to H M Treasury as it resists further "legacy" vanity projects. **@nickmacpherson2**

Last month #HargreavesLansdown research director Mark Dampier was telling investors #NeilWoodford was about to turn the corner. At the same time he was selling £6.1m of HL shares, just before they plummeted in value **@RobinJPowell**

People call millennials snowflakes, but have they ever met a printer? "Ooh my ink's a bit low" "Ooh my paper's slightly out of alignment" "Ooh I don't like the look of that driver" **@holly**

By working together, we can clean up London's air quality and stop pollution

WITH state visits and political leadership battles dominating the news, it's unsurprising that the environment – particularly air quality – isn't at the top of the agenda.

But Londoners are determined to see a major clean-up of the capital's air, and we can't afford to take our foot off the pedal.

Much of central London and the Square Mile experiences higher levels of air pollution than the rest of the UK. But we're taking a number of bold and radical steps in our fight against toxic air. And the good news is that our monitoring shows that air quality in the City is improving.

We are working hard to combat harmful vehicle emissions. For instance, we've banned the purchase of diesel vehicles from our own fleet where there is a clean market alternative – and plan to turn parts of the Square Mile into zero-emissions zones by 2022. And we are

looking to have the UK's first fully-electric fleet of refuse collection vehicles by the end of the year.

Our idling engine action days model, where staff and volunteers talk with drivers who leave their car engines on when parked, has been adopted by 18 London boroughs.

And we have brought in new emissions-based charges for on-street parking, targeting high polluting transport with higher charges, while rewarding drivers of low emission vehicles with lower tariffs.

These measures are part of a wider strategy to protect the public's fundamental right to live in a clean and safe environment.

For instance, our work with Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary resulted in major improvements in clean air at the school. We installed an air quality monitoring station, planted green walls, fitted air filtration units in classrooms, and brought in lessons on air quality.

These improvements were boosted

Catherine McGuinness



by transforming the local area with the removal of the Aldgate gyratory system, planting 71 trees, and creating a new public square. Pedestrian access and cycling routes have been improved, and traffic reduced.

Also, our clean air cargo bike delivery scheme helps City firms tackle pollution by shifting deliveries away from diesel and petrol vans.

And over 27,000 Londoners are using our CityAir app, which gives users low pollution travel routes across the capital.

Our draft air quality strategy, which will be finalised this summer, will strengthen this work, in-

creasing our collaboration with organisations across London, and boosting our partnerships with schools by helping them to develop individual air quality action plans.

But we know that more can be done. Local authorities need regulatory powers to control emissions from boilers, power plants, and generators. That's why we're looking to introduce an emissions reduction bill to stimulate new thinking in the policy debate on air quality.

There is a real desire across the capital for a major improvement in clean air, and we are determined to safeguard the health of those who live, work, and visit the City.

So, we're pleased to announce that next month we are hosting the third Green Finance Summit, during London Climate Action Week.

We are taking action to make sure that everybody is protected.

Catherine McGuinness is policy chair at the City of London Corporation.