NEED TO KNOW
BY DAVID ROTHKOPF

We Have Descended into Utter Madness

A new sense of urgency is needed. Our national crisis has grown much more acute.

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We have descended into utter madness.

We knew we were at risk of it. We struggled against it as it was happening. We called out the warning signs and its first manifestations. And yet, somehow, its onset has accelerated and deepened and we are suddenly in a place of lunacy more acute than this country has ever experienced.

What is more, for all of our awareness and resistance, it is clear right now that our response is too subdued, too complacent, too accepting of the inarguably unacceptable.

At least, as it turns out, frogs do have the common sense to jump out of a pot of water as its temperature grows unacceptably high. We don't. The water is boiling all around us.

Take the news of just the past few days as sketched out in headlines and shards of social media.

We are about to go to war against another country for no reason. Our president is delusionally barking out orders to the planet, seemingly convinced he rules the entire globe.

He commands closed the skies of a foreign land. He demands the people of another nation vote for his political ally or he will punish them. He sets free a convicted drug lord while arguing that he is waging a hemispheric battle against narco-terrorists. His minions are committing war crimes in his name, lying about their justifications, bringing disgrace on our country and our armed services.

In the wake of a tragic killing, he and his aides are making racist proclamations and promising sweeping draconian measures including banning entry to the US of all people from the “third world” and expelling from this country naturalized citizens who do not ascribe to our leaders’ ideas or political opinions. He has turned the legal apparatus of this country against his perceived opponents, even those who are only doing their duty and urging others to do theirs, even those who recognize that illegal orders are being given that are resulting in crimes for which all those involved except the president himself can be prosecuted.
His emissaries are selling out our allies and seeking to pressure them into capitulation to foreign enemies in ways that will undermine our national security and that of many of our most important friends and partners.

Starkly unqualified crackpots have been put in charge of our healthcare system and are actively seeking to undo two centuries of progress in the administration of public health. Children are already dying because they are stigmatizing vaccines, attacking science itself for ideological reasons and with utter disregard for the risks that are being created. They are responding to a climate crisis by systematically stopping programs that might contain it and accelerating those that will certainly make it worse.

Corruption is rampant, in the open, almost celebrated. The White House has been partially torn down and is being replaced by a monstrous monument to the president’s ego…one unlike any ever conceived by any past leader in our history…one that increasingly grows so out of scale with both our executive mansion and the limits of good taste that the architect and contractors are seeking to distance themselves from the project.

Heroes are called traitors. Journalists and others who seek to exercise their first amendment rights are crudely bullied or worse. Racists are being given rein make their twisted vision of what America should be into a reality enforced by the law. Armed thugs are on the march in our cities rounding up the innocent. Vital programs upon which millions depend are being shutdown. Universities are being directed away from learning, intellectual independence, the traits that made them the envy of the world and forced to bend the knee to an ideology that promotes ignorance and prejudice. With a few quick keystrokes, the mentally unstable man who is leading this country believes he can reverse every executive order of his predecessor and threaten him with prosecution.

This is just a summary of the past few days. This is just a progress report on our descent into a state that, unchecked, will surely destroy our country and that, even if reversed, will take decades to undo and repair.

It is not an exaggeration to observe that on virtually every issue of importance—national security, foreign policy, economics, budgets, taxation, tariffs, healthcare, social services, energy, environment, education or the rule of law that the policies and positions adopted by this administration are not just greatly deviant from our past or the views of the opposition or the views of the majority of Americans or our historical positions…they are completely wrong, the opposite of what is needed.

In almost every case, where the president and the administration can make a choice, they make the most damaging choice, the most dangerous choice.

Think about it. Do your own math. Run through your own checklist. Perhaps you will find a few isolated areas in which they are not doing the worst possible thing. On one or two or a handful perhaps, they may be making a positive contribution to our well-being. But that is a handful out of countless instances in which the worse case is the case with which now find ourselves contending.

And it is less than a year into this administration. And the president is clearly, visibly, ever more rapidly declining, losing his faculties, losing any sense of perspective or limitations he might once have had, shouting into the void his commands, serving his needs, and seeking to institutionalize his pathologies in our national institutions and life.

As shocking as this is, however, our president's dementia and character flaws and the defects of those in his inner circle are not our biggest problem.

We are the problem.

I don't mean you, per se, no doubt you share my views on the above. No doubt you have been railing against what we see and are profoundly disturbed by where we are.

I mean the American people. I mean the third of the electorate who apparently still support what is happening. I mean the GOP legislators who enable him and their constituents who continue to back and empower them. I mean the traditional media that continues to both-sides a profound national crisis. I mean new media that feels snark and "I told you so" and calling for outcomes that will never occur are adequate. I mean those we know who just seek to change the subject or have grown inured to all this or think it is business as usual and that it will be reversed by time without any effort from them or who assume that shaking their head and lamenting our state is somehow enough.

We have reached a point at which recent events should be demanding that every group mentioned above, that all who have enabled or tolerated or not done enough to prevent where we are now must reconsider.

This moment must be a turning point. It is time to recognize that we have entered a dark, perilous new phase of the drama of the Trump years and it is up to us all that we ensure we are in the last act of that play.

To do so, we must start by recognizing that what we are seeing happening, what has dominated the headlines every day this week, and the spiraling descent into national psychosis that we are experiencing is qualitatively different and much more grave even than that we have experienced before. And we must acknowledge that there are still three years to go in this presidency and we must imagine what they will look like if current trends go unchecked.

The water is boiling.

It is time to get out. It is time to call it a crisis. It is time to sound the alarms. It is time to reject those who would excuse it. It is time to become intolerant of the intolerable, the

equivocations, the excuses, the too timid responses. It is time to spend every erg of energy at our disposal to hasten the exits of the enablers and the principal actors at the center of all this.

Electing Trump was a mistake. Trump's first term was for the most part a series of calamities. He should have been impeached and removed both times it was before the Congress. That he led an insurrection compounded and exceeded past bad choices and actions of he and his team.

But where we are now is qualitatively worse and growing more precarious daily.

Thanks to the Supreme Court and the supine Congress and the right wing media bubble and the apathy of most Americans and the bumbling of the opposition, Trump and those around him have been sent a message that they are above the law and that they have more power than anyone who has ruled here since George III. They believe they are unstoppable. He really does believe he can issue decrees on Truth Social and the laws and the world must submit to his will as soon as he has completed saying, "Thank you for your attention to this matter."

It is for that reason we must see those words as a call to action. We do need to direct our attention to these matters.

My sense is, as I have often written before, that while all of us have a role to play here, it is going to require a new generation of leaders and voters to step up. They will determine the tenor of the debates to come. They will determine—by whether they turn out or not—the outcomes of the elections in 2026 and 2028. They will determine what alternative course of action can be followed that can stop this era of self-destruction and find new goals and remedies and a new path forward.

The problem is that for most of Millenials and Zoomers, Trump has been a fact of political life for virtually all their time as adults. He is the norm. And so they must either come to recognize that is an illusion or they must reject that norm and demand a new one.

In any case, noting the special role emerging generations must come to play while important to note, does not leave the rest of us off the hook. We all must come to terms with the idea that what we have done thus far is not enough. It is not working. Our

situation is only growing more dire. Past demonstrations have not been big enough. Past calls to action have not been urgent enough. Each of us has to ask, what more can we do—even if we feel we have done a great deal—and then we must do it.

Because, as I noted at the outset, as I hope all of you have recognized over these past few days, we have descended into utter madness.

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