

## Thirteen: Bad Personnel PLUS Bad Process is Bad Policy Is Bad Politics

*The returns from [President] Nixon's failure to staff his government with loyalists who would follow his lead and carry out his policies were now in... The chance to seize control of and redirect the government of the United States passed us by. It would not come again.*

*Patrick J. Buchanan, Nixon's White House Wars*<sup>83</sup>

At the end of this chapter, we are going to strap ourselves into a time machine and jump forward to the last few months of the 2020 presidential election. There, we will see how Five Strategic Failures committed in part by key White House personnel and in part by the Trump Campaign would inexorably lead to the loss of the 2020 race and the Fall of the White House of Trump.

The reason why we have thus far spent so much time on the 2016 campaign, the presidential transition, and the early 2017 days of the Trump administration has been to illustrate how, in many ways, the foundation for that 2020 defeat was already being laid by a toxic combination of the Bad Personnel, Bad Process, Bad Policy, and ultimately, Bad Politics that define those early years.

Accordingly, as a capstone to this early journey, I want to do what we often do in my native academia. This is “formalize” the underlying principle that most succinctly explains the broad thesis of this book. That thesis is an offshoot and refinement of the famous Ronald Reagan-era dictum that “Personnel is Policy.”<sup>84</sup>

By this dictum, the people that you put in positions of power in any White House will tend to advance their own policy agendas. It follows that if a president fails to appoint personnel who share his or her own agenda, things can go very wrong and very quickly.

If you don't think that is true, just re-read the Pat Buchanan quote leading off this chapter to see how long-lasting such a “Personnel is Policy” problem can be. Richard Milhous Nixon forever lost a golden opportunity to redefine the federal bureaucracy in his practical conservative image because of Bad Personnel choices.

By parallel construction in this book, Donald J. Trump lost a platinum opportunity to institutionalize a Populist Economic Nationalism across the economic and national security policy spectrums of the U.S. government. These reasons for this crushing loss are best captured in this refinement and extension of the Reagan-era dictum:

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*Bad Personnel PLUS Bad Process is Bad Policy is Bad Politics*

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“Bad Personnel” are those who do not share, and are unwilling to advance, the vision and policy agenda of the president they serve. When you have such Bad Personnel – particularly if they are

able to access Bad Process such as the Staff Secretary process we have discussed, you will have “Bad Policy.” This I further define as any policy that substantially deviates from the president’s vision and agenda.

Of course, when these Bad Personnel use Bad Process to advance Bad Policies, the inevitable result must be “Bad Politics” in the following sense:

When policies are put in place that fail to implement a president’s campaign vision, or that deviate substantially from policies necessary to implement and advance that vision, or, in the most extreme case, outright contradict that vision, these Bad Policies will inevitably disappoint those who voted for that president.

If the deviation is substantial, that disappointment may even rise to a deep feeling of betrayal; and the likelihood in either case –from mild disappointment to deep betrayal – will be the failure of that president to retain enough of his or her original supporters come Election Day for a second term.

To put this in *realpolitik* terms, Candidate Trump promised in 2016 to be tough on Communist China, secure the Southern border, bring our globalized supply chains back on shore, and bring our troops home from Endless Wars. Yet, some of President Trump’s very top officials within both the White House and across the Cabinet agencies and departments charged with fulfilling those promises would pursue just the opposite policies.

Again, at least from a *quasi*-academic point of view, let us think about these critical Bad Personnel within the context of at least six distinct, at times overlapping, mischievous Madisonian factions that often ruled the White House roost.

## The Wall Street Transactionalists

At the top of the Disloyalist pyramid, at least in terms of the sheer ability to lean directly on the president and twist the arc of history, there were the Wall Street Transactionalists.

The essence of Wall Street Transactionalism is that all that matters is The Deal. There are no moral, ethical, or national security issues that must ever be allowed to get in the way of The Deal, not even when, to these high net worth, low brow rug merchants, it comes to a godless, authoritarian, concentration camp-strewn, military expansionist, intellectual property-stealing Communist China.

Through the dollar-green colored lenses of these Wall Street Transactionalists, every policy action is always about somewhere and somehow finding an accommodation that enriches both parties. And the best deals during the Trump administration were those where the United States would tactically gain more than the other country – never mind any broader economic, human rights, or strategic national security concerns.

The most prominent Wall Street Transactionalists in the White House of Trump included Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin; son-in-law Jared Kushner; Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross; and the two who would serve as the Director of the National Economic Council in first Gary Cohn and then Larry Kudlow.

Here, it is well worth noting for the history books that arguably the worst act of disloyalty ever perpetrated in the Trump White House by a Wall Street Transactionalist was the theft of documents from the president's Resolute Desk by National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn. It didn't just happen once. It was a pattern.

If Cohn objected to the president signing an Executive Order or Presidential Memorandum that was in conflict with Cohn's free trade view of the world, Cohn would literally try to make the document disappear, even if the president wanted it to be implemented. Cohn, himself, would even brag about doing this to reporters, as if it were some heroic act.

A poster child was Cohn's theft of a document I myself had drafted at the president's request which would have pulled us out of a toxic trade treaty with South Korea within a specified timeframe. What this felony dumb Cohn never understood was that these kind of presidential actions were designed not necessarily to exit such agreements but rather to put pressure on other countries like South Korea so that we could quickly negotiate better deals for American workers and companies.

If I had had my way when I found about Cohn's thievery, I would have had him charged with both a felony and treason. I just hope that anybody who ever thinks about employing Cohn factors in his lack of moral fiber in their hiring decision.

As for Kushner, he considered himself to be the ultimate "DJT Whisperer," first on the 2016 campaign, and then within the White House itself. In private, Jared would often boast about how he had brought the President back from whatever the brink of the day was – shut the border down, get out of NAFTA, slap tariffs on China, get tough on the Koreans, whatever.

This "neuter the Boss" role Jared had chosen to take on in the White House quickly became a source of friction between us. This is because Kushner believed that yours truly, more than just about anyone else inside the perimeter, would, and could, "rile up" the President, as Jared put it, to take actions that in fact were totally consistent with Donald Trump's campaign promises. But as this particular Wall Street Transactionalist liked to say – and it always made me cringe: "That was the campaign. This is reality."

## The Traditional Globalist Republicans

As a second important Trump Disloyalist faction, there were the hordes of Traditional Globalist Republicans spread out across the Trump bureaucratic diaspora. These often balding and gray-bearded punks in pinstripes were as enthusiastic about the Trump policies of deregulation and tax cuts as they were horrified by the idea of using tariffs to bring about fair trade or sealing off our Southern border from a flood of cheap, illegal immigrant, labor.

While there was no shortage of Traditional Globalist Republicans resistant to the more disruptive and transformational aspects of the Trump agenda in the White House itself – Joe Hagin, Chris Liddell, Rob Porter, Marc Short, and Derek Lyons come immediately to mind -- some of the most significant damage would be done by "quasi-Bad Personnel" in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Key among these "quasi-personnel" Senators were then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Iowa's Chuck Grassley, Nebraska's Ben Sasse, Pennsylvania's Pat Toomey, South

Dakota's John Thune, Utah's Mike Lee, and the now retired Orrin Hatch (it would be from Hatch's office that Rob Porter would come, having served as Hatch's Chief of Staff).

Quick aside on the Utah front: Senator Mitt Romney also fits like a glove into this Traditional Globalist Republican category. However, Romney has been such a pompous, self-righteous ass from the moment he got elected to the Senate – after President Trump graciously endorsed him – that Mitt deserves his own category. We'll call this category: Bitter Loser and Forever Jealous of a president who did what Mitt never could.

None of these Traditional Globalist Republican Senators – many from farm states – gave a lick about the plight of American manufacturing workers. These “quasi-Bad Personnel” were continually firing warning shots at, and lobbing grenades into, the White House; and one or more of them was always seeking to pass new legislation to constrain the power of the president, particularly on tariffs and trade.

Of course, none of these politicians worked directly for the president – ergo the term “quasi-personnel.” However, many had former staff members working in high positions directly inside the White House perimeter. And here's the quasi-personnel punchline: These termites in the Trump house tended to be far more loyal to their old Capitol Hill bosses than the new POTUS in the Oval Office – making them a particularly virulent strain of Disloyalist.

Take, for example, Emma Doyle. You probably never heard of her, and you probably never will hear of her again after reading this book. Yet, because of the White House positions she would hold, she was a consummate bureaucratic saboteur when it came to derailing the Trump agenda.

Doyle started as Mick Mulvaney's Chief of Staff at the Office of Management and Budget and then became his Deputy Chief when Mulvaney became Acting White House Chief of Staff. As to where Mick found a saboteur like Doyle, he plucked her straight from the Senator Pat Toomey Globalist tree.

Here, all you need to know is that Toomey rose to prominence as the Chairman of the Globalist on steroids Club of Growth and represents the most extreme version of a Traditional Republican free trader as Chairman of the Globalist on steroids Club of Growth.

Toomey, hands down, was perhaps the oddest choice that Pennsylvania, with its working-class and manufacturing base electorate, has ever made for a Senator. In fact, the only reason Toomey got elected was because Donald J. Trump endorsed him at the last minute in 2016.

Talk about biting the hand that feeds you: Toomey would prove to be a perennial thorn in the side of the Trump administration. And the president would lament on more than one occasion in the Oval Office that his single worst endorsement was that of Toomey. Yet Emma Doyle would wind up doing far more direct damage.

Down the pecking order, there were big problems from seemingly smaller appointments as well. For example, Gary Cohn's principal deputy on trade was Everett Eissenstat. He held the coveted “Sherpa” role whose job it is to orchestrate key international meetings like the G-20 and the G-7.

Like Rob Porter, Eissenstat was a pure Orrin Hatch guy; and Orrin is as pure a Traditional Globalist Open Border Endless War Free Trader Republican as the Good Lord ever conceived. Eissenstat's specialty was watering down the joint communiqués that country leaders would issue with President Trump at the G-20 and the G-7 in a way that would weaken the Trump trade and America First agendas. Lighthizer had to watch that guy like a hawk.

When Eissenstat left to become a high-priced lobbyist for General Motors, he was succeeded by two more lobbyists in training, first Clete Willems and then Kelly Ann Shaw. Willems, for example, fought me tooth and nail on a pure Trumpian Open Skies initiative designed to put an end to the United Arab Emirates predatory trade assaults on American airlines like Delta and United.

Of course, Clete wound up working for the mega-lobbying firm Akin Gump,<sup>85</sup> which has the United Arab Emirates as a client.<sup>86</sup> Cursed be the lobbying ties that blind.

As for Kelly Ann Shaw, she joined Hogan Lovells.<sup>87</sup> That's one of the largest lobbying firms in the United States<sup>88</sup> with a client list that reads like a Who's Who of multinational corporation offshoring companies opposed to Trump trade policies.

Shaw's bio on the Hogan Lovells website claims "she was directly involved in almost every major economic decision made Trump White House."<sup>89</sup> In truth, she was constantly throwing sand in the gears of every Trump trade and economic policy that did not conform to her Globalist ideology – or future lobbying prospects.

My broader point is that the Trump White House was riddled top to bottom with these kind of Globalist termites eating away at the very foundations of the Trump presidency – and those little termites like Doyle and Shaw can sometimes do as much damage as sharks like Cohn and Kudlow.

#### The Freedom Caucus Nut Jobs

As a third category of Disloyalists – and a particularly toxic strain of Traditional Republicanism – there were the Freedom Caucus Nut Jobs. These Nut Jobs represent the "just say no" to any form of government or government expenditure wing of the Republican Party.

This anti-Trump agenda faction gets its name from the House Congressional Caucus that would be established in January 2015 by two particular Nut Jobs who would serve as the President's Chief of Staff – Mick Mulvaney and Mark Meadows. And throw in for bad measure here, Meadows' Deputy Chief of Staff John Fleming.

Yet a third Freedom Caucus founder and Libertarian acolyte, Fleming would almost single-handedly kill any last chance American lives could be saved from the China-Fauci virus by lifesaving therapeutic otherwise known as hydroxychloroquine.

Said former House Speaker John Boehner of the Freedom Caucus: "They can't tell you what they're for. ... They're anarchists. They want total chaos. Tear it all down and start over. That's where their mindset is."<sup>90</sup> Here I must use the three most favorite words I learned in Washington: "I don't disagree."

A big source of friction I had with these Freedom Caucus Nut Jobs was their opposition to President Trump's two simple rules: Buy American, Hire American. Neither Meadows or Mulvaney – or, for that matter Kudlow – ever met a Buy American, Hire American Executive Order they liked or didn't want to (and often did) shoot down. Dealing with their continual sniping and sabotage was as exhausting as it should have been unnecessary.

On October 17, 2019, the hapless Mulvaney would almost get the President impeached with a flippant “get over it” remark in arguably the worst press briefing ever given by a Chief of Staff. In his remarks, Mulvaney falsely implicated the Boss in a “quid pro quo” impeachable offense with the Ukrainians; and in this case, a punk's smartass character almost determined the President's fate.

As for Meadows, as we shall soon see, he would spectacularly crash and burn any hopes for a Phase 4 stimulus and relief package. But, that would be just a small sliver of damage that Meadows would do to the Trump agenda and the President's re-election bid.

## The Broken Chain of Command Commandos

As still a fourth category of Disloyalists, there was the “Broken Chain of Command Commandos.” These were the Generals – Gulf War hero and tank commander H.R. McMaster, Jim Mad Dog Mattis, and John Just Always Mad Kelly. These top brass, along with other high-ranking military officers serving in the Administration like Four-Star General Mark Milley, would repeatedly ignore direct orders from their Commander-in-Chief. Yes, that would be the guy at the very top of *their* chain of command.

Their treasonous conduct – a court-martial offense in the military – always reminded me of the quip Bob Lighthizer, the United States Trade Representative, would often make about some gaggle of Globalists seeking to subvert the President's agenda. To Lighthizer, there were only two types of people in the Trump Administration: Those people who thought they had to save the world from President Trump, and those who thought President Trump would save the world.

You could put every single Break the Chain of Command Commando, including McMaster, Mattis, and Kelly, into the former “save the world from Trump” box, and wrap that box up with a neat and treasonous little John Bolton bowtie.

## The Deep Administrative State Bureaucrats

The fifth Disloyalist faction included a broad array of Deep Administrative State Bureaucrats who were constantly throwing sand into the gears of the Trump Populist Economic Nationalist machine.

Here, I have already told you about how the firing of Michael Flynn aborted the normal housecleaning of detailees at the National Security Council. As a result, for all four years of the Trump administration, the NSC was riddled with Obama appointees to the NSC who often worked at cross purposes to the Trump agenda.

The White House NSC wasn't, however, the only Deep Administrative State problem. Besides sappers like Gina Haspel at the CIA, Dan Coats as the Director of National Intelligence, and just about everybody at the top of the FBI – Comey, Wray, Rosenstein, Page, Strzok, and so on – the President and his agenda also had to contend with the slings and arrows of the administration's sprawling healthcare bureaucracy.

The most dangerous of these healthcare bureaucrats was the media savvy, passive-aggressive Tony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). But there were others of this ilk with names like Francis Collins at the National Institutes of Health, Robert Redfield at the Centers for Disease Control, and Steve Hahn at the Food and Drug Administration.

Each of these Never-Trumpers would contribute in their own way to the fall of the White House of Trump – Fauci with the stilettos he would stick in the President's chest and back every time he got on TV, Collins with subtle subversion, Redfield with incompetence, and Hahn with weakness.

The inevitable Bad Politics and fall in President Trump's approval rating that would follow would be no accident but rather a clear expression of the partisanship and personal animus of Fauci and his disciples.

## The Political Climbers

As a final Disloyalist faction, there was the Political Climbers. These were typically registered Republicans and often young kids – 20- and 30-somethings with no well-formed ideology or strong commitment to the transformative and disruptive Trump agenda. These Political Climbers were simply upwardly mobile opportunists who saw the White House on their resumes as a cool steppingstone to fame or fortune (likely as a lobbyist), or to some higher political position.

It always amazed me that on weekends at my office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building I was virtually alone. The long, almost 100-yard hallways of the EEOB were devoid of human life – except for the occasional tour that came through – and much of the marbled building resembled a mausoleum come Saturday and Sunday.

This amazed me because I always saw my work at the White House not as a job but rather as a mission to serve both the President and the country. It was a mission that necessarily required long hours at short pay and weekend duty.

The fact that the EEOB was mostly deserted on weekends – even during the critical crucial weeks before Election Day – was a function of the fact that the offices in this building were largely populated by either the National Security Council's 9-to-5 Deep Administrative State Bureaucrats or the Political Climbers for whom work at the White House was merely a Monday through Friday grind and stepping stone job.

The poster child for the Political Climbers was, hands down, Madeleine Westerhout. She would literally wept the night Hillary Clinton was vanquished by Donald J. Trump. Yes, Madeleine literally wept for Crooked Hillary.<sup>91</sup> Against all odds and logic, she wound up in the Outer Oval as the gatekeeper to the Oval Office sanctum.



As for what might go wrong with such an odd Hillary-lover choice, with Westerhout, it would turn out to be quite a bit. For starters, she was allegedly one of the biggest leakers in the West Wing. To that point, it was always a puzzle to me how we could hold our Trade Team meetings in the Oval Office with the President and there would only be a few of us in the room – typically Mnuchin, Kudlow, Ross, Lighthizer, and myself.

Yet, within hours of virtually every meet, hostile publications like *Axios* or *Politico* would publish stories with verbatim quotes and often very damaging details – damaging at least to the president’s ability to prosecute his trade policy without massive blowback as a result of the leaked material.

Here, it must be said that while Mnuchin, Cohn, and Kudlow were no strangers to strategic leaking, even they would not leak at least some of the poison arrows and quotes that came out of the Oval Office. That left as the only other possible explanation the fact that the door to the Oval Office was typically open during the trade team meetings and Westerhout was a mere 30 feet away. And our conversations were often as loud as they were contentious. And yes, as another piece of circumstantial evidence, after Westerhout left and was replaced by Molly Michael, the amount of leaking fell dramatically.

## Original Sin Redux

Of course, at this point you might be thinking: “How in the world did all these people with personal and policy agendas so opposed to that of POTUS 45 wind up serving in his administration?” Indeed, all that has transpired thus far in this chapter begs the very big question as to why a president who is supposed to be one of the greatest assessors of talent– wasn’t that the whole talent-picking premise of “The Apprentice” – would make such Bad Personnel choices across so many White House and Cabinet-Level positions.

I think the answer to this question boils down to five main reasons.

First, at the beginning of the administration, many within the Trump inner circle believed that the only way the administration could effectively govern was to be accepted by the power elites and establishment figures of Washington, at least on the Republican side. That meant making an accommodation, first and foremost, with a Republican National Committee that had often worked against the President during the campaign, particularly prior to his locking up the Republican presidential nomination.

This “after you licked them, join them” mentality also meant making an accommodation with Traditional Globalist Republicans on Capitol Hill like the aforementioned McConnell, Grassley, Lee, Thune, and Toomey.

With McConnell in particular, he was always playing a double gam. The Boss would say to Mitch: “You give me passage of my Repeal Obamacare bill and I’ll give you a bunch of judges to appoint.” Double Game Mitch would say “sure.”

Yet all we ever got from McConnell was the appointment of judges. Judges by the boatload. Judges by the ton. More judges appointed up to that point than any in presidential history. Conservative

judges coming out of your eyes, ears, nose, and throat. Just not a lot of Trump agenda policies passed.

And here's what was even worse about McConnell. Yes, the "Turtle," as Mitch was derisively called, would move his conservative judges faster than Usain Bolt. But when it came time to moving President Trump's key personnel appointments, these would move at, dare I say, a turtle's pace. And because President Trump couldn't quickly fill his top Deputy and Under Secretary political slots across many of the Departments and Agencies, his policies would fall prey to the Deep Administrative State career bureaucrats – just as Turtle Mitch no doubt intended.

As we have discussed, it was this Traditional Republican accommodation by President Trump that the 2016 campaign strategist Steve Bannon would refer to as the "Original Sin" of the administration. This Original Sin, which I have likewise already waxed at least semi-eloquent on, would lead, for example, to the disastrous decision by President Trump to give RNC Chairman Reince Priebus the keys to the White House by making him Chief of Staff.

Note: That would be the same Reince Priebus who implored, indeed demanded, that Candidate Trump quit the race after the infamous 2016 October Surprise Billy Bush tapes broke<sup>92</sup>. At that time, Bannon and Trump told Priebus to pound sand; and Reince, cute little puppy dog though he is, never should have been let back into the fold.

Once, however, Priebus got his snoop dog nose through the door of the White House, he would bring a whole parade of Never Trump Traditional Republicans with him. The seed of Priebus would beget Cruella Katie Walsh, the hyperbolic Sean Spicer, the Bushie Joe Hagin, the Never-Trumper Don McGahn, the Littlefingering Rob Porter, and so on down the West Wing Original Sin chorus line – just a host of bad seeds that would sprout all manner of poisonous trees across the West Wing and beyond.

## Straight Out Of Central Casting

As a second reason for the president's Bad Personnel choices, there is the president's well-known weakness for glamour, good looks, and characters that he refers to as coming "straight out of central casting." Exhibit A was Rex Tillerson, the President's first Secretary of State.

How can you resist a guy like King Rex, Lord of the Exxon Manor, with his beautiful mane of hair, deep tan, and deep soothing baritone? Of course, this Oil Barren turned out to be, as they say in his native Texas: "all hat and no cattle." And Rex would leave the State Department with the President's Twitter door hitting him right in his silk underwear on his way out.

And by the way, it is absolutely true – not West Wing legend – that John Bolton did NOT get the National Security Advisor job the first time around because the President hates mustaches. Trump Rule #247:

Mustaches are not in the Good Guys wardrobe when it comes to central casting – there are only for villains. And yes, Bolton would turn out to be a real lying about the rooms where it happened villain.

## Rich Guys Rule

By this rule, President Trump would often judge an individual by the size of his bank account. The thinking was: “If this guy is rich, he must be smart and therefore a good appointment.”

Never mind that being a profit-hungry Wall Street sociopath doesn’t always – indeed rarely – translate into a propensity for honorable public service. But it was this kind of “billionaires have bigger brains” thinking that would saddle the president with Wall Street Transactionalists like Steve Neville Chamberlain Mnuchin, the kleptomaniac Gary Cohn, and the octogenarian Wilbur “Lost a Step” Ross.

By the way, I heard from more than one Yale that Mnuchin was one of the dumbest guys in his class at Yale and only made it into the Goldman Sachs sanctum on the coattails of his daddy, a high-ranking Goldman executive. That story certainly resonated with me: Mnuchin is the dumbest smart guy I have ever met this side of Larry Summers.

As for Cohn, he at least had street smarts. He would make a bundle by agreeing to serve in the Trump administration because, by a loophole in the tax code, Cohn was able to defer hundreds of millions of dollars in capital gains taxes that he otherwise would have had to pay when he divested his Goldman Sachs stock so he could enter the White House<sup>93</sup>.

Of course, by the time Cohn left, he had been part of the effort to significantly reduce the capital gains tax rate. Ergo, by being in the Trump administration, Cohn was able to increase his net worth in two ways – once through the deferral of the tax on his capital gains and twice by paying a lower rate when he finally had to pay the tax.

## Dazzled by the Brass

As a fourth reason for the President’s Bad Personnel choices, there was also and always the President’s fascination with military brass – the more stars on the shoulder the better. Perhaps it was because the President had never served in the military. Perhaps it was his love of war movies – according to Steve Bannon, the President’s favorite movie of all time is the documentary series “Victory at Sea” about World War II.

His fascination with military men would, however, saddle the President with a renegade Secretary of Defense in General Jim “Mad Dog” Mattis; a Globalist, Endless War National Security Advisor in General H. R McMaster; and the dark, brooding, and bullying Chief of Staff John Kelly.

In a story relayed to me by Matt Pottinger that reveals a lot, Kelly continually treated McMaster with condescension because he had “only” three stars. Never mind that McMaster was a four-star war hero in anybody’s book and had 20 IQ points on Kelly – to Kelly, it was only the stars and bars that mattered.

As for my relationship with the bullying Kelly, I would physically have to steel myself every time I got a call from his office as it would inevitably mean some type of abuse or threat. Some men lead by inspiration. Some try to lead by intimidation. Kelly was clearly the latter; and I can’t imagine serving under his command in a combat situation.

Here's the broader military brass lesson that the President never learned in his own worship of stars and bars. It was a stark lesson that became painfully obvious to me after interacting repeatedly with Mattis and Kelly:

Four-star generals like Mattis and Kelly typically reach the pinnacle of their profession because they are generally the sharpest tools in their military shed. Yet put Mattis or Kelly in a room in the West Wing with uber-elite civilians drawn from academia, the corporate world, and Wall Street, and these guys were often the dumbest guys in the room. Just checker players thrust into a chess world.

Yet, that wasn't what bothered me the most about Trump's Generals. Rather, it was their utter failure to obey their Commander in Chief -- and therefore the chain of command.

Just think about that: These Generals knew, above all else, that without an ironclad respect for, and adherence to, the chain of command, the military would fall apart in a heartbeat. Yet once Trump's Generals got to the pinnacle of civilian power, they figured no one was above them, apparently not even their President.

And please take note of this: What Mattis and Kelly and McMaster all did in ignoring the chain of presidential command would be a court martial offense in the military punishable with a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement for two years. From my perch in the White House, I'd say that punishment would have more than fit their crime. I would have put them in the same cell as Gary Cohn.

## Both Nepotism and Excrement Roll Downhill

As a fifth and final reason for the President's Bad Personnel decisions, there was this nepotistic abomination: The President would often delegate tasks to his son-in-law Jared Kushner. Yet Kushner was nothing more than a young and rich, run-of-the-mill liberal New York Democrat *cum* slumlord with a worldview totally orthogonal to the father-in-law and President he would putatively serve.

Kushner, himself, considered himself to be the ultimate "DJT Whisperer," first on the 2016 campaign, and then within the White House itself. In private, Jared would often boast about how he had brought the President back from whatever the brink of the day was – shut the border down, get out of NAFTA, slap tariffs on China, get tough on the Koreans, whatever.

This role Jared had chosen to take on in the White House quickly became a source of considerable friction between us. This is because Kushner believed that yours truly, more than anyone else inside the perimeter, could, "rile up" the President, as Jared put it, to take actions that in fact were totally consistent with Donald Trump's campaign promises. But as Jared liked to say – and it always made me cringe: "That was the campaign. This is reality."

In the cold light of a January West Wing day, there was simply no other scenario than a nepotistic one where this decidedly unqualified Clown Prince would wind up sitting as a modern-day Rasputin at the right hand of a Washington God.

## When Margaret Mead Met Richard Nixon

To end this chapter, I would like to clear up at least one misconception that may already be forming in your mind. That misconception may be that I had little regard for *anybody* at the White House that I worked with and, more broadly, even less regard for those I interacted within the broader Washington Swamp.

You would not necessarily be wrong to think that thought at this juncture in this book. After all, all I have mostly done so far is dump on a lot of people, many of whom have had, by traditional DC metrics, distinguished careers – people, for example, like Mattis and Fauci that the anti-Trump media have lionized. But the truth is far more textured.

The truth of the matter is that, in the White House and DC Swamp, I worked with some of the most amazing and intelligent people I have ever encountered in my life – and you will meet many of them at the end of this book when I offer up my “MAGA Dream Team” for a 2024 Trump Administration.

For now, the simple point I have been trying to make is embodied in that most famous quote of the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead:

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

The point of this chapter – and a key theme of this book – is that Mead’s wisdom can very much cut the wrong way.

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*Under the weight of the Bad Personnel facilitated by Bad Process in the Trump administration, many of the Mead-like Bad Policy changes that came to the Trump World were certainly not for the better, at least when it came to Bad Politics and the re-election prospects of the Boss.*

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If, on the other hand, we had simply followed a more top-down policy process in the image of President Trump himself, and if we had avoided the trap of Bad Personnel, it is likely we would have avoided most or all of the Five Strategic Failures that we will now begin to work our way through.