

Inside the Trump Administration

Revolution:

Trump, Washington and 'We The People'

K T McFarland

New York: Post Hill Press, 2020

In Trump Time:

A Journal of America's Plague Year

Peter Navarro

St Petersburg, Florida: All Seasons Press, 2021

The Chief's Chief

Mark Meadows

St Petersburg, Florida: All Seasons Press, 2021

I'll Take Your Questions Now:

What I Saw at the Trump White House

Stephanie Grisham

New York: Harper, 2021

There Is Nothing For You Here:

Finding Opportunity in the 21st Century

Fiona Hill

Boston: Mariner Books, 2021

John Newsinger

The tsunami of Trump publications continues unabated. The five books reviewed here, all written by administration insiders, provide further testimony to the character of Trump's administration and to the politics of those who served the 45th President. Having read them, I advise you to be afraid.

'Trump as the Renaissance Prince'

According to Kathleen Troia McFarland, she 'was a Trump supporter from the beginning'. She was a New Yorker herself, although with a working-class background, and had 'followed him over the years and liked a lot of what he said, especially when it came to foreign policy'. And she was

particularly impressed by 'his ability to cut through the details and zero in on the core of an issue, almost intuitively' – which is one way of putting it. (p. 4) She had previously worked for the Nixon, Ford and Reagan administrations and on one occasion had unsuccessfully tried to secure the Republican nomination for a seat in the Senate. She then went to work at Fox News, hosting an online talk show, 'Defcon 3'. On this she was relentlessly hostile to Barack Obama, accusing him of playing too much golf instead of doing his job – unlike President Trump presumably; demanded the death penalty for Chelsea Manning; supported waterboarding (which was not torture, she thought; and even if it was, so what?); and in 2013 recommended Vladimir Putin for the Nobel Peace Prize. It seems that it was her performance at Fox News that earned her a place in the Trump administration. And what an administration it was. As far as she was concerned, or at least purports to believe, Trump's election was a 'Revolution', a populist revolt against the corrupt elites who effectively controlled both the Democratic and the Republican parties. As she puts it:

'On one side were the elites of both parties who had governed America for decades and supported big government and a globalist, interventionist foreign policy. On the other side were the populists, the ordinary citizens who rarely got excited about politics, but were now mobilized in rebellion against a governing class they believed was arrogant, unresponsive and unsuccessful. It was a revolt by the governed against the governing.' (p. 5)

It ushered in what she describes as 'a full-scale, political civil war'. Moreover, this rebellion was led by Donald Trump, who, for all his faults – 'he can be petty, uncouth, and unpredictable . . . a mean, stubborn SOB' – was the only man with 'the self-confidence, guts, and perseverance to keep going until he's won'. Trump's 'Revolution', as far as she was concerned, is merely the latest in a history of Revolutions that have made America great: she lists the Revolutionary War, the Jacksonian Revolution, the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and the Reagan Revolution as earlier transformative events and periods. Trump is that important, that momentous. 'We needed changes even more pronounced than those of the Reagan Revolution of nearly forty years before. We needed another political revolution'. (pp. 298-299) By 2016, she tells us, she was 'already a committed populist and nationalist' and accordingly rallied to Trump, a man whose 'independent wealth allowed him to embrace populism'. (pp. 29, 37)

Does she actually believe any of this? Whether or not she does, what she puts forward completely distorts the nature of the Trump administration and the mainspring of the Trump movement. A far better way of conceptualising the Trump phenomenon is to see it as the result of a conflict within the US capitalist class, a conflict between those who realise their profits globally and those who realise most of their profits domestically. The right-wing populism was all about enlisting overwhelmingly middle-class Americans, many of them white evangelical Christians, behind the 'nationalist' section of the capitalist class in their attempt to overthrow the globalists. This was a fight waged both within the Republican Party itself, as well as against the Democrats; indeed the battle was also fought out within the administration itself. From this point of view, the MAGA movement, far from being an authentic grassroots movement, has to be seen as an 'astroturf movement'.¹ Populist slogans and rhetoric, indeed the full culture wars playbook, have been used to rally popular support for one section of the capitalist class against another. And while it has been incredibly successful in some ways, the downside is that the man who emerged as the leader of this 'nationalist' revolt was completely unfit to hold public office of any kind: a corrupt, self-serving, lying, profoundly ignorant, narcissistic incompetent, convinced of his own genius. This incompetence was just as well, given that he and his supporters were absolutely prepared to move the United States in a decidedly authoritarian direction to hold onto power.

McFarland was appointed Deputy National Security Advisor, working under General Michael Flynn, who was 'part of Trump's inner circle'. (p. 141) One of the people she brought into the administration, with Flynn's approval, was the 'Putin expert "Dr" Fiona Hill', who she describes as 'one of the savviest analysts of Putin in the country'. (pp. 173, 176) As we shall see, Fiona Hill has a very different take on the Trump administration from McFarland.

On the question of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, McFarland differed from Trump, accepting that it had happened. What she advocated though, was that the US had to reach some sort of accord with Putin in order to avoid pushing him into the arms of the real enemy, China. She felt she had a very real advantage when it came to briefing Trump because of her time at Fox News. This meant she knew how to construct the briefing as a short news item which Trump could just about cope with. As she puts it: 'Anyone can speak for thirty minutes to

¹ On astroturf see <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/astroturfing>>.

make a point; it's far more difficult to make the same points in three minutes'. (pp. 178-179) And she had no problem briefing him in the splendour of the Mar-a-Lago ballroom either. Indeed, she gets quite carried away: 'Mar-a-Lago is like a 15th century Florentine de' Medici palace, with Trump as the Renaissance prince'. (p. 175) Really!

Regardless, her tenure was only to be short-lived; she was brought down soon after Flynn himself. She makes clear that she thought Flynn 'was soon in well over his head', that he gave his enemies 'lots of ammunition' and that his 'business ties and financial irregularities which had come as a surprise to many, myself included' were a serious problem. As far as she was concerned Vice President Pence, 'one of the most decent, unassuming, understanding, and forgiving people I have ever met', had no alternative to firing him once he was proven to have lied. (pp. 188, 197-198) She was herself removed in the aftermath of Flynn's dismissal. At one point she blames this on his replacement as National Security Advisor, General H R McMaster, and at another is not sure if it was him or Steve Bannon or 'even President Trump'. (p. 203) She had been in post for three months. As a consolation, she was offered the Singapore ambassadorship, but complications regarding the Mueller investigation led to her withdrawal from the confirmation process.

Nevertheless, McFarland remained a Trump supporter, apparently continuing to believe that he was in the process of putting 'the American Dream back within reach of all our people, especially the working and middle classes who had been ignored and left behind for the past two decades'. He was taking on

'an entrenched self-perpetuating Washington Establishment locked into a battle with the American people over who is sovereign. Is it the American electorate who voted for populism and nationalism with Donald Trump as their flagbearer? Or does the ultimate power rest in the hands of the entrenched Administrative State and the governing class' (pp. 298-299)

Interestingly, she prefers to call the enemy the Administrative State rather than the Deep State. Her commitment to Trump saw her later involved in producing the '79 Days to Inauguration' report published in October 2020.² This came from the hard right Claremont Institute, where they had war-gamed both a Biden election victory being overturned and

² On which see <<https://tinyurl.com/28rpsy3m>> or <<https://www.thebulwark.com/notes-on-an-authoritarian-conspiracy-inside-the-claremont-institutes-79-days-to-inauguration-report/>>.

the use of an 'Operation Spearfish' to repress the subsequent protests. The report envisaged the likes of the Proud Boys helping the police round up the protestors, a process that involved shootings and fatalities. There is a violent Antifa-Black Lives Matter demonstration on the very day Trump's victory is due to be certified by Congress, but the process goes ahead anyway . . . Democracy triumphs!

'That Great Tower of a Man'

Peter Navarro's memoir, *In Trump Time*, is really a somewhat embarrassing declaration of love for the great man, with coprophilia as his preferred way of showing his deepest feelings. Navarro was one of only three people who survived in post throughout the whole of Trump's term. The other two were Stephen Miller, (Trump's anti-immigration adviser and speechwriter) and Dan Scavino (who had managed one of Trump's golf courses before he became his Director of Social Media). Scavino is generally credited with writing many of Trump's tweets for him. Apparently those Scavino wrote can be easily identified because they are the ones without spelling and grammar mistakes. As for Navarro, a former Professor of Economics and Public Policy, he was Director of the White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy. He was a determined opponent of free trade, a strong advocate of protection and regarded the USA as being effectively at war with China. Navarro's publications prior to joining the administration included such books as *The Coming China War: Where They Will Be Fought and How They Can Be Won* (2006), *Death by China: Confronting the Dragon* (2011) and *Crouching Tiger: What China's Militarism Means for the World* (2015). As far as he was concerned, he was 'one true populist economic nationalist other than Steve Bannon' inside the administration. (p. 12) To be fair, he is also full of praise for General Flynn, who, as far as he was concerned, 'was taken out by a group of rogue FBI agents and Democrat operatives . . . one of the worst abuses of government power in US history'. (p. 177) This man was a university professor!

The venom with which he engages other members of the administration, those out to thwart the President in his mission to save America, is remarkable. Steven Mnuchin, Trump's Secretary of the Treasury, for example, was 'another Goldman Sachs alumn, had raised and made millions from Communist China prior to joining the administration, and he had his jaundiced, pieces of silver, Judas Iscariot eye on making billions more'. And these were not beliefs that he kept to

himself. According to Mark Meadows in his memoir, *The Chief's Chief*, on one occasion, 'There was a lot of screaming between Steven Mnuchin, who wanted to protect the economy, and Peter Navarro, our resident expert on all things China, who yelled at Steven at the top of his lungs for being "soft on China". The fight went on for nearly fifty minutes' while Trump sat there and watched. (Meadows p. 70) As far as Navarro was concerned, there were too many 'Wall Street transactionalists who viewed Communist China more as a capitalist piggy bank than an existential threat' inside the administration. He was bitterly hostile to all these 'Wall Street jackals' while they apparently saw him as 'their only real obstacle to reining in the president's tough on China, pro-tariff policies'. (pp. 12-13, 16) As for Trump, his China tariff strategy was 'absolutely genius'. (p. 14) He was going to do to Communist China what Reagan had done to Communist Russia despite the attempted sabotage by the 'coterie of Panda-hugging transactionalists within the West Wing . . . secretly collaborating with a small but powerful cabal of billionaires' – the likes of Steve Schwarzman, CEO of 'the notoriously globalist Blackstone Group', among others. (pp. 15, 16) Despite all the battles and infighting, Navarro thought everything was going in the right direction. He believed that Trump would likely win a second term, during which the humbling of Communist China would be completed. Then the pandemic struck.

Navarro tells his readers that right at the start of the outbreak – he was worried that the coronavirus – or 'CCP Virus', as he insists on calling it – 'might be some sort of bioweapon explicitly designed to attack an ascendant America now firmly led by the first president in history to challenge the economic aggression of the Chinese Communist Party'. Was it possible that Chinese diplomats had been deliberately infected with the virus? Were they, in effect, 'possible assassins . . . shaking not just the hands of US trade team members like myself, but also the hands of both the American president and vice president?' (p. 18) Now, looking back, he is pretty certain that the pandemic was 'Pearl Harbor and the Twin Towers all rolled up into one massive biological Chernobyl'. (p. 19) The United States was under attack.

And assisting in the attack was Dr Anthony Fauci, or 'Saint Fauci' as Navarro insists on calling him. Fauci was determined to use the pandemic in order 'to take down the president. *That* was becoming clearer and clearer to me'. (emphasis in the original) More than that, there is evidence that the development of the virus in Wuhan might have been 'sanctioned by none other than Saint Fauci'; that he was, in fact, 'the likely Godfather of the Pandemic'. (pp. 129, 140) He made this allegation

in the *Washington Times* as early as June 2020; an allegation that, in the USA, would certainly have put Fauci's life in danger. Navarro is inevitably a strong supporter of hydroxochloroquine for Covid and accuses Fauci of 'stoking Hydroxy Hysteria', aided and abetted by *The Lancet*! The only possible reason for this was Fauci's 'desire to take down the president'. (p. 98) Both 'Fauci and his Deep Administrative State henchmen . . . must be held legally and ethically accountable'. (p. 279) But the CCP Virus attack did not work because, despite all Fauci's efforts, Trump still won the 2020 presidential election.

As early as September 2020, Navarro was apparently convinced that the Democrats were getting ready 'to steal the election with absentee ballots and vote harvesting'. (p. 209) Their plans could still have been thwarted, if only Trump had not been betrayed by so many of those around him. Mitch McConnell was busy waging 'a behind-the-scenes war against the Boss' and Trump was absolutely right when he described him as 'a dumb son of a bitch'. (p. 240) After the election, Navarro prepared his own report *The Immaculate Deception*³ 'proving' massive fraud. This, of course, made it unequivocally true; but anyone who pointed out that the election was being stolen found themselves facing 'the Cancel Culture wrath of the anti-Trump media; a censoring, deplatforming, and fascist social media'. A key figure in this was Mark Zuckerberg who made 'massively pernicious contributions – both financially and strategically – to the theft of the 2020 election'. Navarro points out that there was only 'one degree of separation between George Soros and Mark Zuckerberg'. But what really 'frosts' him about Zuckerberg are his 'expressed sympathies for Chinese Communist Party ideology'. Indeed, Zuckerberg has shown 'open sympathy for a totalitarian prison-state that is jailing and torturing its people on a scale not seen since the 1930s'. (pp. 261-262)

Even so, all was not lost. Navarro and Steve Bannon came up with a plan, the Green Bay Sweep, to which they recruited over a hundred members of Congress. This could, he insists, have foiled Democrat plans and seen Trump installed as President. According to Navarro, it was absolutely peaceful in intent and was unfortunately derailed by the 6 January 2021 storming of the capitol. The insurrection very conveniently gave the politicians an excuse for not overturning the stolen election, with

³ According to Kevin James Shay, *The Immaculate Conception* 'relied on numerous right-wing sources like The Epoch Times, Washington Examiner, Newsmax, One America News Network, and even Bannon's War Room podcast and YouTube videos'. See his *Operation Chaos: The Capitol Attack and the Campaign to Erode Democracy* (Washington, DC: Random Publishers, 2022), p. 144.

the Democrat Nancy Pelosi and the Republicans Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy all complicit. One cannot help feeling that this is a rather transparent attempt by Navarro to provide himself with a (not very convincing) alibi.

The key figure in this American tragedy was Vice President Pence. He was 'our last, best chance to snatch a stolen election from the Democrats' jaws of deceit', but in the event showed himself to be 'a Brutus who will betray this American Caesar [. . .] the Brutus most responsible both for the final betrayal of President Trump and the unceremonious burial of election integrity'. And Steven Mnuchin promptly showed his true colours by joining 'a chorus of Democrats condemning the president' for the 'Capitol Hill riot'. (pp. 3, 252, 271) Nevertheless, Navarro is convinced that the future lies with 'Donald Trump and a Republican Party built in his image and built to last'. (p. 282) Once again, it is worth remembering that incredible though it might seem, this man was a university professor!

'Our Work is Not Done. President Trump will be Back'

Mark Meadows, the author of *The Chief's Chief*, is another Trump devotee, another coprophiliac, still working for him, even after the Big Steal. As far as Meadows is concerned, the United States is now being run by 'a pack of deranged, incompetent socialists' with everyone, from 'our leftist politicians to our celebrities . . . sucking up to the Chinese'. Indeed, he can see Biden sending his son, Hunter, 'over to Beijing with a white flag . . . to negotiate the terms of our abject surrender'. (p. 4) He approvingly quotes Trump describing the USA under Biden and 'the Radical Left Democrat Communist Party' as already being 'a Communist country'. (p. 7) It is important to remember that these are not just the ravings of some drunk down the pub, with everyone moving away from them, but of the people who have captured the Republican Party and have millions of followers and supporters, and might well once again capture the Presidency in 2024!

Meadows took over as Trump's Chief of Staff in March 2020 and cannot praise the man highly enough. Trump 'worked harder than anyone I had ever seen in my life [. . .] there has never been a president who worked more, or accomplished more, than President Donald J Trump'. (p. 20) He really 'was shaking Washington to its core'. (p. 37) And this was on top of watching hours and hours of TV news every day and playing golf every chance he got! Somewhat inadvertently, he brings out the role that TV viewing played during Trump's Presidency. One example of this he recalls is the time, before he joined Trump's staff and was still a

congressman, when he had taken part in a joint telephone conference discussing how to destroy Obamacare, with Trump himself, Vice President Pence, then Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and . . . Sean Hannity from Fox News! Another example comes later, from his time as the Chief of Staff. He recalls how impressed he was when Trump took the decision to ban Critical Race Theory training from the federal government after seeing it denounced on the Fox News show Tucker Carlson Tonight. Under any previous President 'this kind of thing would have taken months, if not, years to draft and enact [. . . .] But President Trump was at the helm'. And this 'wasn't the first time we had been tipped off by a good report on Tucker Carlson Tonight'. (p. 127) Even more astonishing, although Meadows does not recount this episode, on another occasion, in June 2019, when Trump was considering air strikes against Iran, the President actually phoned Carlson to ask his advice on whether to go ahead and decided to follow the Fox News correspondent's urging not to authorise the raids. An adviser to the Iranian President tweeted in response that Trump should 'listen to @TuckerCarlson' more.⁴ There was never a President like this.

But while Tucker Carlson could be relied on, the same could not be said of the US military. The Defence Secretary, Mark Esper, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, were 'a two-man obstacle to just about everything President Trump wanted to get done. They were perfect representations of the establishment rot that had taken over the Pentagon'. They were 'rogue actors who tried to destroy the Trump agenda', mounting 'many covert attempts' and launching 'a negative PR campaign against President Trump'. And General Milley spent more time 'reading the latest politically correct textbook than worrying about the rigorous demands of his job'. (p. 95) As far as Meadows was concerned, the US military leadership was 'clearly swinging toward the radical left' and were clearly 'woke' in their sympathies. (p. 61) And the intelligence agencies were not much better.

There are a number of things to be said about this. First of all, how astonishing it is to have a President and his closest advisors actually condemning the Pentagon as a bastion of leftism. What provoked this response from Trump and his people? Two things: the military were wholly committed to maintaining the United States' global position, including its system of alliances and network of overseas bases. Trump was seen as a threat to all this, which is only to be expected. More

⁴ Brian Stelter, *Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News and the Dangerous Distortion of the Truth* (New York: One Signal Publishers, 2021) pp. 261-262

astonishing is that the Generals made clear, repeatedly, that they would not countenance Trump trying to overthrow the election result. They refused to be a part of the kind of coup Trump was clearly plotting – which would have put in place an authoritarian regime modelled on those he so openly admired. If they had made it clear that they were on board for such an attempt, then there is every likelihood that Trump would still be President, with his administration ruthlessly crushing the resulting protests and demonstrations. The US military actually played a crucial role in preventing an authoritarian takeover in the USA, incredible though it might seem. Of course, if they were ever to be confronted with the election of a left-wing President, who threatened the wealth and power of the US super rich and the global position of the United States, then one can confidently expect that the US military would have had no compunction whatsoever about assisting in the overthrow of that election result.

As far as Meadows is concerned though, Trump won the 2020 election, only to be robbed by massive, blatant fraud. The trouble was that the great man was betrayed by nearly everyone. Even Fox News turned on him. Whereas Fox News had been 'one of the rare networks that would cover us accurately [. . .] during the later months of the campaign, something had begun to change. Fox's coverage of the Trump White House had taken a distinctly negative turn'. According to Trump himself, Fox News was 'swinging way to the left' and, of course, as far as Meadows is concerned, 'he was absolutely correct [. . .] right on the money'. (p. 234). The Fox commentariat, the likes of Hannity and Carlson, remained loyal, but the actual news coverage began to bear some relationship to the real world, which was a disaster as far as Trump was concerned. What followed saw 'the political establishment, up to and including the United States Supreme Court [. . .] content to ignore credible allegations of fraud and simply move on, happy to turn a blind eye'. (p. 257) The Great Steal went ahead even though some 250,000 people peacefully protested in Washington DC on 6 January 2021. The violence that took place on that day was nothing whatsoever to do with Trump; indeed, he was 'mortified'. (p. 261) But all is not lost because 'Make no mistake. Our work is not done. President Trump will be back'. (p. 277) Even more disturbing, in many ways, he raises the prospect of Donald Trump Jr stepping forward to take up the fight. He has no problem connecting with all those Americans 'that loved freedom, loved guns, loved America's greatness, stood for our flag and hated the swamp'. (p. 268)

One last point. As part of his job, Meadows was continually trying to root out anti-Trump leakers inside, the White House. One of those he had under suspicion was Stephanie Grisham, the White House press secretary and communications director. She held those positions from July 2019 until Meadows ousted her out in April 2020. She remained Melania Trump's Chief of Staff and press secretary.

'A conversation with the President of the United States about his penis'

While Meadows thought Grisham was a possible leaker, as far as she was concerned, he might well have been 'one of the worst people ever to enter the Trump White House'. He was 'a phony', would tell 'people what they want to hear', would kiss 'the ass of whoever is the boss' and if he had been a character in a film, 'you would hear thunderclaps in the sky and menacing organ music whenever he entered a room [. . .] I did not like Mark Meadows'. (pp. 260-261) Point taken.

One of the things that is interesting about her account is that she was involved with the Trumps for nearly six years and only finally resigned on 6 January 2021, appalled by the storming of the Capitol. This was the last straw. Looking back, it was what she thought 'leaving a cult would be like'. (p. 323) Her memoir, accordingly, 'is part chronicle of a chaotic administration, part therapy session, and part personal reckoning.' (p. 2) Why on earth did she not resign earlier? After all, in attempting to describe the experience of working in the White House, she came up with 'living in a house that was always on fire or in an insane asylum where you couldn't tell the difference between the patients and the attendants or on a roller coaster that never stopped'. (p. 196) And the wholly unpredictable Trump always managed to surprise her. She recalls, at the time of the Stormy Daniels scandal, when she was working for Melania Trump, how the President phoned her from Air Force One. It was 'All lies', he told her. Not the affair, but what Daniels had said about the odd shape of his penis! Not in her wildest dreams or worst nightmares had she ever imagined 'I'd have a conversation with the President of the United States about his penis.' (p. 119)

Trump was, of course, 'fixated on dictators [. . .] admired their toughness and aggression [. . .] seemed to want dictators to respect him'. (p. 211) This is hardly new, but she does recount an interesting conversation she had with Fiona Hill, the administration's Russia expert, during Trump's G20 press conference with Putin in Osaka in June 2019. Putin 'never seemed to be charmed by Trump or even impressed by him.

If anything, the Russian seemed to look down on him'. This made him all the more desperate 'to earn Putin's respect'. Trump 'was a very easy mark' for Putin's 'head games'. Hill pointed out to her that Putin's translator 'was a very attractive brunette woman with long hair, a pretty face, and a wonderful figure'. She thought the woman was there 'to distract our president'. And Putin coughed on a number of occasions, which Hill explained was, once again, to interfere with Trump's concentration, because Putin knew 'full well the president doesn't like germs'. Putin, she thought was 'messing up his head big time'. (pp. 212-213) To be fair, she confesses to being fascinated by Putin herself: he was 'handsome in a "power is an aphrodisiac" sort of way [. . .] proud to be an allegedly coldhearted killer'. (p. 211) This perhaps helps explain why she stayed at the White House so long. Far more congenial were the meetings between Trump and the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, one of the few European leaders Trump was prepared 'to tolerate'. 'Conversations between those two, both pudgy white guys with crazy hair, redefined the word random.' Apparently one interesting discussion between these two world statesmen was about how powerful kangaroos were. (p. 209) Johnson, very much a mini-Trump, was intent on learning everything he could about fake populism from Trump and his people for use back home.

Grisham's response to Trump's first impeachment is also very revealing. Both she and other White House staff had trouble grasping what the furore was all about, after all:

'the president frequently said insane things to foreign leaders. Sometimes they were just silly or offensive, sometimes they were offhand remarks that would inadvertently upend the carefully crafted policies of our diplomatic and national security professionals, sometimes they were just sheer bluster. The point is over time we had all grown numb [. . .] His behaviour had become normalized.' (p. 223)

One thing she bitterly regrets, however, is letting Trump personally dictate her response to an attack on him by his former Chief of Staff, General John Kelly. She was required to put out a statement that read: 'I worked with John Kelly, and he was totally unequipped to handle the genius of our great president.' She did not enjoy doing this. It made her 'sound like a complete idiot, your typical crazy Trump cultist [. . .] It was another weird test of loyalty and I was determined to pass it.' She now takes the opportunity in the pages of this memoir to apologise to 'General and Mrs.

Kelly', sorry that she 'didn't have the nerve to say no. It is one of my biggest regrets'. (pp. 238-239) One cannot help feeling that there are a lot more people to whom she should apologise.

'Trump was completely transparent about his admiration for autocrats and authoritarians'

By far the best written and most interesting of these memoirs is Fiona Hill's *There Is Nothing For You Here*. There are really two dimensions to her book: first, a very powerful account of how she got from a working-class family in County Durham to be working in the White House; second, her account of the Trump administration and its significance. Her father had been a coal miner turned hospital porter and she makes clear that, as far as she is concerned, coming from that background and being a woman, her only way to get on was to move to the United States in 1989. She became a US citizen in 2002. As she tells us, 'I came to the United States to escape poverty and class discrimination.' She does acknowledge the terrible potency of race in the USA though. More than that, her personal social mobility in Britain was 'a fluke. My story is the exception that proves the rule of class or socioeconomic immobility in the early twenty-first century'. (pp. 4, 6) Indeed, socioeconomic developments since her own career success, have actually made what she achieved virtually impossible for anyone coming from that same class background today. She considers this pulling up of the ladder of social mobility to be one of the factors fuelling authoritarian populism globally. What may surprise many readers is that, coming from a working-class background, recognising the deliberate impact on working-class families of Thatcher's deindustrialisation strategy and being so aware of class and gender discrimination, her ambition was nevertheless to go and work for 'the Man'. But that is what she did, becoming an expert on Vladimir Putin and Russia – her massive 500 page co-authored book, *Mr Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, published by the Brookings Institution in 2015 sits, sadly so far unread, on my bookshelf. She served as 'the top intelligence officer for Russia on the National Intelligence Council (NIC) under George W. Bush and Barack Obama' – although she was 'paid far less than the men'. (pp. 8, 143) According to her own account, she took part in the massive 21 January 2017 anti-Trump Women's March in Washington DC, only to be offered a job in the administration the following day. Her name had been put forward, as we have seen, by K T McFarland (she had appeared on McFarland's Fox News show 'Defcon 3' a number of times). Incredibly she accepted. She became 'deputy assistant to the president and senior director for European and Russian affairs'. (p. 8)

Hill regarded Trump's election in 2016 as 'a triumph for Russian president Vladimir Putin', but nevertheless hoped that in her new post she could play some part in 'mitigating the damage Russian operatives had done and heading off future interference'. (p. 3) This was all the more important because she saw Russia's authoritarianism as 'America's Ghost of Christmas Future, a harbinger of things to come'. (p. 10) She had no idea just how bad things were to be under Trump. Any hope of briefing Trump personally quickly went out the window. He had no need for advice from 'experts' when dealing with the likes of Putin. She was put firmly in her place in May 2017, when Trump took a phone call from Putin and she expected to be asked what she thought of the exchange. How naïve! She was merely required to type up the press release he had written; her failure to grasp this quickly enough nearly provoked a tantrum. She had 'just had a crash course in Trump's psychology'. (p. 205) As she quickly realised, Trump 'wasn't someone you could engage with in any meaningful way'. (p. 203) Instead, she found herself on the outside, watching what Trump and his people were about, and doing her best to mitigate the damage they were doing. In the process she was denounced as 'the Russia bitch' within the administration and was even unmasked, as early as May 2017, by Alex Jones and Roger Stone on the InfoWars website, 'as George Soros's mole in the White House'. Inevitably the abuse and death threats against her and her family piled up. (pp. 245, 247).

One extremely useful thing she does is explore the origins of the George Soros scam. She sees it as following 'the pattern of a classic, historical anti-Semitic conspiracy theory . . . The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', but as having originated with Viktor Orbán, the right-wing authoritarian Hungarian politician. He was friendly with Bibi Netanyahu who recommended two New York political consultants, Arthur Finkelstein and George Birnbaum to him in 2008. They urged Orbán

'to create an external political enemy to help . . . his bid to become Hungarian prime minister. They selected Soros, a prominent Hungarian Jew whose family had fled Budapest during the Holocaust [. . . .] The Soros ploy was successful. Orbán won the ballot and became prime minister. Soros became his permanent political foil, rolled out at every election. Finkelstein and Birnbaum then refreshed the Soros conspiracy for political figures elsewhere, including in the United States. Finkelstein was a political player in Republican circles and connected to Roger Stone. By 2016, Soros was also one of Trump's political enemies.'

She discussed the danger of whipping up anti-Semitism that this scam involved with Trump's ambassador to Hungary, David Cornstein, a New York Jew, a long time friend of both Trump and Finkelstein, and a staunch supporter of Orbán. He dismissed such fears – after all, 'It was just politics' – and refused to take seriously the death threats that both she, and more particularly Soros, had received as a result. (pp. 248-249)

Even more interesting is her exploration of the Trump phenomenon and its significance, and how we face a danger from both Britain and the United States embracing authoritarianism. As far as she is concerned, once in office, 'Trump began to follow "the authoritarians' playbook" scripted by Vladimir Putin and other "strongman" leaders' so that by the end of his term 'America had embarked on an authoritarian swing of its own'. (p. 11) Trump actually envied the power of so-called 'strongmen' like Orbán, but his real idol was Putin. He was 'rumored to be the richest man in the world, the billionaire to top all billionaires. Trump seemed to look up to Putin because of his wealth, and he admired the way Putin ran Russia like his own private company'. (p. 221) Indeed, as time went on, 'Trump would come more to resemble Putin . . . than he resembled any of his recent American presidential predecessors'. (p. 219) And as recently as the day before the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, Trump was still singing Putin's praises, describing him as a 'genius' at a super PAC fundraiser in Florida. As far as a foreign policy was concerned, under Trump, she saw it taken out of the hands of 'career public servants' and 'appropriated by Trump loyalists carrying out parallel foreign policy efforts behind the scenes often for purely partisan political purposes or personal gain'. There had been what amounted to a 'kind of privatization of national security'. (p. 253) Rudy Giuliani immediately springs to mind in this regard. This was to lead to her giving evidence at Trump's first impeachment, a key witness whose testimony took 10 hours to deliver.

But what fuelled this swing towards authoritarianism was the socioeconomic changes underway since the 1980s which saw the super rich becoming more and more wealthy and powerful. At the same time, ordinary people, both middle-class and working-class, were being left behind. Their living standards were falling, housing and working conditions deteriorating, and – her own personal bugbear – there was less social mobility. The result was that they were falling prey to right-wing authoritarian populism in both Britain and the USA – the kind of authoritarian populism that actually bolstered the position of the super rich. In this way, both countries were going down the same road that Russia had already travelled, with the likelihood of a similar corrupt

authoritarian outcome sooner or later. This discussion has to be taken seriously, engaged with.

There is no doubt whatsoever in her mind that Trump was absolutely determined to hold onto power, by means of a coup if necessary. The storming of the Capitol 'was just one episode in a long series of provocative moves to bend the system to his will [. . .] the culmination of a slow-motion coup attempt, perpetrated by Trump to keep himself in power'. (p. 270) She puts his failure down to the stand taken by the US military leadership, arguing that if the Generals had supported him 'the outcome . . . could have been completely different'. (p. 273) While she is spot on here, it also has to be acknowledged that the US capitalist class in the main did not support a coup overthrowing the election result. They saw Biden as their tool rather than as a threat, which resulted in the Supreme Court refusing to support Trump – much to his fury. It was abundantly clear that the super rich did not face any threat or challenge, either from the centre or from the left. Consequently, there was no need for a coup – particularly one that could have, potentially, kept an incompetent narcissist like Trump in office indefinitely. The danger is clearly not over, however. In 2016 just under 63 million Americans voted for Trump. Four years later 74 million Americans voted for him and millions of those people absolutely believe that the election was stolen, that the USA is being governed by the radical left and that America's Christian way of life is under threat. Authoritarianism is still very much on the march.

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His latest book is *Chosen by God:*

Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,
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