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US POLITICS, PART 1.

An empire on automatic pilot.

This is the first of two essays on the state of American politics as November's elections draw near.

If these past weeks of political turmoil and tumult in America have anything to tell the world, it is that the United States has, before our eyes, lost control of itself. I would compare our moment with previous bouts of illogical excess as one finds these in American history—the Boston hangings of the late 1650s, the Salem witch trials a few decades later, the Great Awakening of the 1730s, the anti-papal hysteria of the 19th century, the Red Scares of the 20th—but what overtakes this nation now is fundamentally, frighteningly different. We are now watching what we can call the irrationality of hyperrationality—the diabolic consequences of technocratic power when it is exercised with no effective restraint.

An ordinarily alert American may object that there is no democracy left in American democracy, or that cynically hyperbolic rhetoric has brought America to the brink of political violence, or that Congress and the State Department have surrendered control of foreign policy to another power. But all this is just as intended among the elites who now openly determine the nation's politics and direction with no reference whatsoever to the citizenry. Any such objecting American would have to object most of all that his objections do not in the slightest matter.

America long ago compromised its democratic process, notably but not only with the ridiculous Supreme Court decision 14 years ago that corporations must count as people and money as free speech—yes, this was the ruling. Floods of cash have since tilted elections in favor of the wealthy and powerful, while liberal authoritarians have intently alienated the American working class, so exacerbating political and social tension, since Donald Trump was elected to a first presidential term in 2016.

But when Democratic Party elites and the oligarchy that backs them no longer trouble to conduct various anti-democratic operations out of sight or disguise their exercise of power, a turn has been taken. Pretense counts for nothing, of course. But let us use the question of pretense as a mirror. So long as it is necessary it suggests some lingering remnant of democratic process as inscribed in the Constitution. Have Americans become so somnambulantlly quiescent that even “democracy as spectacle” is no longer necessary? So it seems to me.

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Joe Biden, as I have asserted elsewhere, was an unworthy candidate when the Democratic Party nominated him in 2020, and this became embarrassingly evident as soon as he took office. His fundamental incompetence, especially in matters to do with foreign policy, were immediately apparent but did not distinguish him: The messes Biden has made—Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Gaza, China—are very considerable, but hardly is he the first president to make messes. It was Biden’s mental decline that quickly caught up with him.

Party elites enforced an all-but-complete silence on this problem until it could no longer. They did this in large measure because Kamala Harris, chosen as his vice-

president because of her gender and skin color, was dismissed across the board as a competent replacement for the declining Biden. Lose him and the party would lose this November: This was the reasoning.

The presidential debate of 27 June, as is now universally understood, made it clear that the Democratic Party and the media faithfully serving it had made the greatest mess of all. They had colluded—recklessly, narcissistically, indifferent to all matters of state and national leadership—to keep a man tilting into senility in the White House. Party elites—and forget media, as they will say anything they are told to say—have been frantic ever since Biden’s pitiful debate performance to cover up their responsibility for what may be, off the top of my head, America’s most serious political crisis of the past century.

It was as Biden stubbornly and publicly insisted “I’m not going anywhere,” as he said in several press interviews, that the veil dropped to reveal the astonishing indifference of the Democratic National Committee, the party’s unelected leadership, to democratic procedure. For a time after the debate, the D.N.C. planned to railroad through Biden’s re-election bid by way of an early “roll call vote,” as these are called. But with mounting objections among elected Democrats in Congress and the party’s powerful donors, the committee at last capitulated. The New York Post reported last week that, prior to Biden’s political surrender 21 July, high party officials had threatened to invoke a Constitutional amendment to remove him if he did not go voluntarily.

These same party officials have since been petrified that when the party convenes in Chicago next month it would have to be an open convention—meaning rank-and-file delegates from each state would choose the Democrats’ candidate to run against Donald Trump in November. This, a democratic Democratic convention,

was immediately out of the question. So is Kamala Harris now the presumptive Democratic nominee. So is she now cast as heroically right for the White House. So have donors, who had halted their contributions to Biden, come forward with more than \$100 million in campaign funding since Biden dropped out—\$81 million of this within 24 hours of Bidens announcement.

No democratic Democratic Party convention. No pretense of one. A figure once derided as an over-promoted fool with no discernible convictions and incapable of stringing two sentence together is now imposed as the party candidate. All determined above the heads of the electorate. No pretense otherwise. I do not vote, it is perhaps proper to mention here. And at this point I am utterly puzzled as to why any well-meaning American would put his or her name on this process.

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Having been given the Democratic Party's nomination in the way of a monarchic coronation this past week, Kamala Harris has continued to do precisely what Biden and his White House staff have done incessantly, day-in, day-out since it became evident that Donald Trump would run again for the presidency this autumn: She has proclaimed in each speech and at each campaign stop everything that is wrong with Donald Trump. It is next to impossible, turning this phenomenon upside-down, to tell anything for which Kamala Harris actually stands. This appears to be almost entirely beside the point. "Not-Trump," a negative value, is more or less the only value Democrats seem confident to express.

Even *The New York Times* has taken to remarking on this failure, this hole in the Democratic presentation. When *The Times's* Editorial Board speaks, it is The Liberal Establishment, capital "T," capital "L," capital "E," pronouncing with

unassailable authority. “She has begun to detail the dangers of a second Trump presidency,” *The Times*’s board wrote in Saturday’s editions. “But she needs to do more, and she needs to do it quickly.” This is severe language for a newspaper that has quickly and unequivocally come out for Harris. It then complained that she has said little to nothing about her plans for the economy, foreign policy, health care, and other such questions. As she has during the whole of her vice-presidency, indeed, Harris has said very little about anything—other than the fact she is not Donald Trump.

Over the past several years, Harris has been fully participant in the Democrats’ denunciations of Trump. He is a tyrant, he will rule as a king, he will end all elections and remain in office for life, he is the existential enemy of democracy: All this and more Americans have heard regularly, all of it reproduced faithfully in the liberal press. And among those who would surely have heard these things, for there is no escaping this stuff, was Thomas Matthew Crooks, who attempted to assassinate Trump during a campaign rally in rural Pennsylvania on Saturday, 13 July.

The 20-year-old Crooks is now dead, killed at the scene by a Secret Service sniper, so he will never tell us anything of his motivations. But can there be any argument that his attempt on Trump’s life with one of those AR–15 assault rifles Americans are permitted to own was other than an act of political violence? There is a long tradition of such violence in American political culture, of course. Can there be any serious argument, equally, that the Democrats’ irresponsibly inflated attacks on Trump have revived this tradition?

This is what democracy has come to in America. Thomas Matthew Crooks was the victim of demagogues who wage their political battles by manipulating the

electorate's emotions. They cannot appeal to voters by offering them superior ideas, the promise of new policies, or any kind of new national direction because they have none of either. Regardless of who is elected this November, America will continue to insist on its global hegemony while its domestic conditions continue to deteriorate and its citizens grow ever more desperate. This is the nation's bitter reality as the 2024 political season unfolds: It is an empire on automatic pilot.

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It is an empire that has marketed a considerable part of its foreign policy as a car dealer might market a new Chevrolet. And it has found a voracious buyer in Zionist Israel. Nothing could bring this home more squarely than Bibi Netanyahu's deluded, egregiously dishonest speech to a joint session of Congress on 24 July. The pernicious power of the Israeli lobby in Washington, notably but not only the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the notorious AIPAC, has long been kept from public view. Only the willfully blind—and there is a lot of this around in the U.S.—could fail to see it now.

The speech itself was a ridiculous agglomeration of lies. The Israel Defense Forces have conducted themselves commendably and morally in Gaza, civilian casualties have been minimal, Israel's fight is comparable to the war efforts against Germany and Japan, protesters supporting the Palestinian cause “stand with murderers.” There was an hour of this. Netanyahu understands well. The American Congress does not concern itself with the truth of things: It is interested in those delusions that flimsily, hollowly appear to justify U.S. support for a terrorist state conducting a genocide.

Our point here is Netanyahu's reception during this, his fourth address to Congress, more even than Churchill gave. He, Netanyahu, received more than 70 ovations, sometimes after each sentence, most of these standing ovations. Roughly 100 members of Congress absented themselves, to their credit. We can very safely assume almost all of those in attendance have received a bribe of one or another kind from AIPAC.

Netanyahu understood this, too. He understands very well that in the case of Israel America has not so much lost control of itself as it has given this control away for a price.

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