

OPINION

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher

DEAN BAQUET, Executive Editor
JOSEPH KAHN, Managing Editor
TOM BODKIN, Creative Director
SUZANNE DALEY, Associate EditorJAMES BENNET, Editorial Page Editor
JAMES DAO, Deputy Editorial Page Editor
KATHLEEN KINGSBURY, Deputy Editorial Page EditorMARK THOMPSON, Chief Executive Officer
STEPHEN DUNBAR-JOHNSON, President, International
JEAN-CHRISTOPHE DEMARTA, Senior VP, Global Advertising
ACHILLES TSALTAS, VP, International Conferences
CHARLOTTE GORDON, VP, International Consumer Marketing
HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS, VP, International Circulation
HELENA PHUA, Executive VP, Asia-Pacific
SUZANNE YVERNES, International Chief Financial Officer

TRUMP'S FRIGHTENING CLOSING ARGUMENT

The president returns to campaign combat mode.

A flurry of pipe bombs targeting political figures and the media. A black man and woman gunned down in a grocery store, allegedly by a white man who had, moments before, tried to storm a black church. A mass shooting at a synagogue. The past two weeks have been ones of heartbreak and fear for many Americans. Even for those not directly touched by the horror, it is hard to escape the feeling that something has gone very wrong.

In the face of such tragedy, a president is expected to serve as the consoler in chief, setting aside the petty elements of politics to comfort a scared and grieving nation. Historically, the role has been pretty straightforward, as the presidential historian Michael Beschloss noted this week: "They heal. They unite. They inspire. It's not exactly rocket science."

But with this president, observed Mr. Beschloss, things don't work that way: "It's not in Donald Trump's software to do this. He's a one-trick pony. His single political m.o. is to try to divide and conquer, to pit groups against one another and benefit from it politically."

The violence of late has driven home just how reluctant President Trump is to focus on matters beyond the purely political. He knows, or at least is told, what he is supposed to say or do in such situations. But he has a devil of a time staying on that message for more than a few hours — especially with a high-stakes election just days away. The president's carefully scripted calls for national unity are brief and ephemeral, abandoned for more visceral ones of political warfare. It has been painfully easy to distinguish which are coming from the heart.

With both the bomb plot and the massacre in Pittsburgh, Mr. Trump issued reassuring statements, condemning the acts of evil and expressing the need for Americans to come together — then promptly chased those sentiments with overheated partisan talk, political scaremongering, and attacks on the media, which he repeatedly has blamed for the ugly mood of the nation.

For Mr. Trump, a mass assassination plot was little more than a distraction from what truly mattered: his team's political fortunes. Mr. Trump managed to make it through his visit to Pittsburgh on Tuesday without incident, avoiding public remarks altogether. Nonetheless, several residents, most notably Pittsburgh's mayor, Bill Peduto, had publicly requested that a presidential visit be delayed until after the community was done "burying the dead." The immediate focus, they explained gently, should be on the grieving families. But a White House official told CNN that a trip later in the week would have been complicated by Mr. Trump's tightly packed campaign schedule. Once again the president made his priorities clear.

Mr. Trump is hardly the only president to wade into politics during times of crisis. After the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, President Bill Clinton called out the militant antigovernment sentiment coming from conservative corners of the political world, denouncing the "purveyors of hatred and division, the promoters of paranoia."

More pointed still, in the aftermath of more than one mass shooting — some 17 of which he had to address during his tenure — President Barack Obama pleaded for stricter gun laws. In response to the 2015 blood bath at a community college in Oregon, Mr. Obama went so far as to assert that gun violence is "something we should politicize."

But Mr. Trump has not been seeking to find a broader political lesson in recent tragedies so much as he has been eager to blow past the events and return to campaign combat and the adulation of his followers.

Last month, as Hurricane Michael ripped across the panhandle of Florida, Mr. Trump stuck to his stump schedule, appearing at a rally in Pennsylvania. "I cannot disappoint the thousands of people that are there — and the thousands that are going," he tweeted in justification.

A heartbeat after Mr. Trump's Pittsburgh visit, he was back in full brawler mode, ratcheting up the fear-mongering and immigrant-bashing that he is counting on to drive his base to the polls. He touted his proposal to end birthright citizenship and talked of tripling the number of troops being dispatched to combat the migrant "invasion." The online ad released on Mr. Trump's Twitter feed Wednesday, which pairs footage from the migrant caravan with that of an undocumented immigrant convicted of killing two California police officers and binds it all together with claims that Democrats want to let criminals flood the country, was xenophobic demagoguery in its purest form.

At this point, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect anything different from this president. Like the snake in his favorite parable, Mr. Trump cannot rise above his fundamental nature. And even in the face of national tragedy, his perspective remains fixed: The presidency is all about the politics, and politics is all about him.

The last gasp of Northern Ireland

Richard Seymour

LONDON The Democratic Unionist Party, the hard-line Northern Irish Protestant party that essentially has both Prime Minister Theresa May and the Brexit process in a death grip, is not merely stupid or fanatical. The party understands that its fortunes depend on an increasingly threatened British nationalism.

Unionism is dying in Northern Ireland. During the 30-year war, the Protestant majority was mostly loyal, even though Northern Ireland was one of the poorest parts of the United Kingdom. With a dwindling industrial base, it was subsidized by war, infused with money for an occupying army and giant, garrisoned stations full of police officers.

When I was growing up in the 1980s, in a small Protestant town in the east of the six counties, Protestants could believe that those men of violence were there for us, that the Union was ours. Electoral gerrymandering shored up Unionist power. There were jobs for the "Prods," as Protestants were known. Protestants occupied most of the skilled work and the few professional and managerial jobs available.

The south of Ireland was poor, and everyday chauvinism said Catholics were poor because they were backward and dirty, and brought it on themselves. "That's a Protestant-looking house," mothers would chirp after tidying up.

The annual Twelfth of July bonfires and parades, celebrating the history of Ulster Loyalism, saw effigies of wicked Papists burned for public edification and the delight of inebriated Loyalists. This was "our culture." These festivities helped create a lynch mob atmosphere, leading to the murder of Catholics. Every year, the stories were the same:

Bonfire night was a night for petty terror and bricking Catholic windows. Parades day was a day for blood. I recall that one year during my childhood, members of a local Loyalist flute band stabbed a Catholic bus driver repeatedly; a woman tried to stanch the bleeding by wrapping him in towels, but when the ambulance arrived, he was dead. We heard this story on the radio, on the way back from watching a parade. Many paid with blood for Protestant loyalty to Britain.

What, today, is the point of Northern Ireland? Built for perpetual war to keep the British in Ireland, it has lost its war, and with it the enormous, animating reservoirs of feeling and meaning that kept the "Prods" loyal. The barracks are gone, the stations empty hulks. Peace brought multinationals and chain stores, and the town centers grew deathly quiet. The bunting, flags and murals still appear in some Protestant heartlands, if local councils don't dare to remove them. But they cut a faded figure in just another north British region struggling to lure investors with lower corporate taxes.

Parades draw diminishing, aging crowds. Young, working-class Protestants once waved banners celebrating Ulster plantation lords, as though their lives were connected to such vicious men. Now they want out. Every year, more than a third of students flee Northern Ireland. More would if they could: A Belfast Telegraph survey of young people found that two-thirds want to leave. Ironically, the communal institutions bequeathed by Good Friday prolonged sectarian allegiances, running Stormont, the Northern Irish assembly, on the principle of communal power-sharing.

Hence the Democratic Unionist Party's ability to stalemate the government.

Prime Minister May formed a coal-

ition with the D.U.P. after losing her parliamentary majority in last year's snap election. In exchange for keeping her in office, she gave the hard-line Unionists veto power over Brexit negotiations. The D.U.P., which has a history of ties to gunrunning and paramilitarism, has never been easy to deal with. Its leadership is based in the Free Presbyterian Church, the fundamentalist sect founded in 1951 by the former D.U.P. leader Ian Paisley. It has been described by the journalist Owen Jones as "the political wing of the 17th century."

During the 1980s, campaigning against Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's negotiated settlement with

A hard-line loyalist party has British politics in its death grip, because it knows that its cause is dying.

the Irish Republic, its slogan blared from every lamppost in Northern Ireland: "Ulster Says No."

Ulster is saying no again. Mrs. May, to satisfy her party, has to get Britain out of the European customs union, restoring a customs border between the United Kingdom and

the European Union. The D.U.P. welcomes that. But the Good Friday agreement presupposes a "soft" border between the north and south of Ireland. Mrs. May, to preserve the agreement, proposes keeping Northern Ireland in the customs union. That means a customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain. There, the D.U.P. draws a "blood red" line. That, it says, mortally threatens the Union.

The panic has a basis in reality. In the Northern Ireland Assembly elections of 2017, Unionism lost its majority. Sinn Féin came close to beating the D.U.P. as the biggest single party. In the 2016 referendum, most people in Northern

Ireland voted against the D.U.P.'s pro-Brexit position. Census figures show a long-term decline in the share of Protestants, who tend to be Unionist voters, with a Catholic majority possible by 2021. An ironic turn for a statelet built to preserve a loyal Protestant majority.

For the theocrats at the core of the D.U.P. leadership, this is a threat to the political self-defense of Protestants against, as Ian Paisley used to put it, the Papal Antichrist. Hence, the D.U.P. obstructs gay marriage, abortion rights and Irish language rights. The party and its Loyalist base are waging a cultural war to defend "Britishness." They'll spoil a deal with the European Union, even if the Good Friday Agreement must be rewritten or collapses.

In mainland Britain, the Brexit right laps this up. These politicians, representing the right wing of the Conservative Party and those who have broken from it over Europe since the 1990s, have seen the crisis coming, too. The Union, forged by empire, looks purposeless; Britishness forlorn. The institutions of government are losing legitimacy. The Conservative Party has been in a state of decline, particularly since the 1990s. Scotland almost seceded in 2014. A resurgent left under the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn poses its own solution to the pervading sense of collapse.

The Brexit right blames all of this on a liberal establishment allied to Europe. It claims that European rules have held back business, weakened the pound and eroded national self-determination. By quitting the European Union, the Brexiters hope to break that establishment and empower the Conservative Party's small-business base.

The D.U.P. and the Brexit right don't have identical priorities. Brexiters want a low-wage, low-tax economy to compete with the European Union. The D.U.P., with a more working-class base, often votes with Labour on issues like public spending. But they share the vocabulary of "Britishness," and the D.U.P. would go along with "free market" reforms as long as Northern Ireland received generous funding.

If they succeed in forcing a "hard" Brexit and imposing their post-Brexit settlement, they would further weaken the Union. They would exacerbate the regionalized class inequalities that brought Scotland to the brink of departure.

In Ireland, north and south, Sinn Féin is a growing power. It is heading to a plurality in the Assembly. A crisis for the Good Friday Agreement, already stretched by D.U.P. obstructionism, is leading Sinn Féin to put a united Ireland back on the agenda. Though unlikely in the short-term, it seems more plausible than Brexit did just five years ago.

Loyalists, faced with a threat to the Union, would put up a fight. The paramilitaries still exist. But in the pebbledash, gray concrete, rained-on estates of Northern Ireland, Unionism is slowly dying. And with it, an idea of Britain.

RICHARD SEYMOUR is an editor at *Salvage* magazine and the author, most recently, of "Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics."



Bullet holes marked a sign post at the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland last July.

There's no going back for the G.O.P.

Daniel McCarthy

Donald Trump's conservative critics have one last hope: defeat. If Republicans suffer humiliating defeats in the midterm elections, they suggest, President Trump will get the blame. Influential donors and grass-roots Republicans will turn on him, and the party will get back to normal. Not so long ago this was the party of Paul Ryan and free trade. This was the party of George W. Bush and compassionate conservatism. This was a party whose self-performed autopsy after the 2012 election called for more minority outreach. After Mr. Trump, why can't the G.O.P. be that party again?

The ranks of anti-Trump Republicans grow thinner by the day. They're retiring from Congress. They're writing memoirs blasting their former friends. But they hold out hope for the future. If the Republican Party could undergo such a profound change in personality and policy thanks to just one man in a mere three years, who's to say it can't change back? The Trump coalition seems so impermanent, after all, a motley mix of Southern evangelicals, businessmen who think like the Chamber of Commerce and disaffected white voters from the Rust Belt. Throw in foreign-policy hawks and anti-interventionist America Firsters, and Trump's Republican Party looks like an impossible contradiction. It can't last. Can it?

Yes, it can. In fact, the party that President Trump has remade in his image is arguably less divided and in a better position to keep winning the White House than it has been at any

time since the 1980s. What Mr. Trump has done is to rediscover the formula that made the landslide Republican Electoral College victories of the Nixon and Reagan years possible. Mr. Trump's signature themes of economic nationalism and immigration restriction are only 21st-century updates to the issues that brought the Republican Party triumph in all but one of the six presidential elections between 1968 and 1988.

Some of the parallels are obvious. President Trump talks about crime and left-wing agitation in much the same way that Richard Nixon once did — and Ronald Reagan, too, especially during his time as governor of California. Mr. Trump's combination of force with an aversion to large-scale military interventions and nation-building also bears a resemblance to the policies of Republican presidents past. Dwight Eisenhower and Mr. Reagan also preferred to build up military strength without engaging in the kinds of prolonged wars for which Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush are remembered. And while Mr. Nixon was mired in Vietnam, he ran as a candidate eager to find an exit.

Mr. Trump's willingness to deal with even as repellent a dictator as Kim Jong-un has a precedent in the creative diplomacy pursued by Mr. Nixon with Mao Zedong. If Mr. Trump is mocked for saying that he fell in love with Mr. Kim after an exchange of letters, Mr. Reagan was once mocked, too, and by conservatives at that, for his love affair with Mikhail Gorbachev.

But the most important ways in which Mr. Trump recapitulates the winning themes of earlier Republicans are less direct. Throughout the Cold War, Republicans presented themselves as the

party of greater nationalism in the struggle against a global threat. If the United States was to survive in a world that seemed increasingly subjugated by international Communism, the country would have to embrace the party that was most anti-Communist.

The Soviet Union is long gone, but our national distinctiveness — the American way of life — is perceived to be under threat by new global forces, this time in the form of competition from China and international economic and regulatory bodies that compromise national sovereignty. Many voters see immigration as part of this story. They

The president has reclaimed the formula that made the landslide victories of the Nixon and Reagan years possible.

want America to control its borders by political choice, not to admit more immigrants because a global labor market insists that more must come for the good of all. Even in the area where Mr. Trump seems most different from Republicans past, on trade, he has really returned to an older style of politics. Mr. Reagan was an economic nationalist, too, not just because he protected a company like Harley-Davidson against competition from Japan but more important because his pro-growth policies of deregulation and tax cuts were themselves the appropriate forms of economic nationalism for the 1980s. In the decades before the rise of China as an industrial superpower, economic nationalism was chiefly a matter of keeping the American economy entrepreneurial — defending it against red tape and busi-

ness-unfriendly policies at home rather than the predatory economic strategies of foreign governments.

By the early 1990s, the Reagan economic strategy — a mix of entrepreneurship, tough bargaining and limited protection — had succeeded against stiff competition from Japan. That victory was squandered, however, by Republicans and Democrats starting later in that decade who pursued economic policy not in terms of national industry but as an exercise in global ideological consumerism.

The business side of President Trump's coalition still puts its bottom line ahead of its theoretical commitments: Mr. Trump has produced a very good environment for business, no matter what the businesspeople think about his tariffs. They want to win elections so that they can continue to prosper, and if that means electing more protectionists after Mr. Trump, that is a price they are readily willing to pay.

Grass-roots evangelical Christians and Rust Belt workers, meanwhile, both find something to like in an America that reaffirms its economic exceptionalism and sovereignty. That, no less than Mr. Trump's loyalty to Christian conservatives on abortion and other issues, is why evangelical voters have not abandoned him.

Few Republicans running this year seem to understand what gave Mr. Trump his edge in 2016 — it was not that he was simply combative and rhetorically right-wing. It was that he had a vision of what it meant to make America great again, by making the Republicans a party for the nation again.

DANIEL MCCARTHY is editor of *Modern Age: A Conservative Quarterly*.