

Substantial Disruption



The Trump Administration's Dr. Evil

By Mike Tully

Omar Abdel-Rahman, the infamous “Blind Sheikh” and mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing who died earlier this year, issued a Fatwa in 1981 calling for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Later that year, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad carried out his wishes and [killed Sadat](#). Ronald Reagan was only months into his presidency and decided not to attend the funeral, instead asking three former Presidents to represent the United States on his behalf. All three were present at a reception before departing for the funeral in Cairo. So was Senator Robert Dole. During the reception Dole looked over at the former Presidents, Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and Richard Nixon and [deadpanned](#): "There they are. See no evil, hear no evil and ... evil."

Robert Dole has a brilliantly mordant sense of humor, and his quote from 1981 may never be rivaled for its sharpness, accuracy, and hilarity. It's unique in using the loaded term “evil” to describe an American politician without triggering a listener's gag reflex. Evil is a four letter word in politics and rarely necessary. It's acceptable to call the opposition misguided, misinformed, and misdirected, but usually not evil. Years ago a Pima County Supervisor characterized a fellow Board Member as evil and I tensed up when he said it. I was acquainted with both Supervisors and neither one was evil. I was disappointed in the speaker and felt sorry for the target. Calling her evil was just plain wrong.

Definitions of the word “evil” include [harmful](#) and [causing harm](#). Since political actors do cause harm, sometimes deliberately, the four-letter “e” word is occasionally appropriate. Congressman Ted Lieu used it recently, [calling President Trump evil](#) after Trump said he was willing to passively watch the Affordable Care Act collapse. The demise of a health system would logically result in avoidable disease and death, and Lieu assumes Trump knows that and doesn't care. He may be right, but Trump relentlessly acts like a buffoon and, while buffoonery is not a perfect inoculation against evil, it clouds the analysis. Lieu [also told](#) MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell that Presidential Adviser Steve Bannon is evil. Bannon, who reportedly [described himself as a Leninist](#) who wants to [destroy the administrative state](#), may fit the bill -- but a guy who believes you can run an administration without administrators is too bone-headed to match the description. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt satisfy the definition for some and there is a case to be made. However, both gentlemen are consistently acting on principles they have long advocated. Their principles are misguided and horribly damaging to life on this planet, but are they evil? Maybe.

There's no “maybe” about Mick Mulvaney, the blue-eyed devil Trump selected to direct the Office of Management and Budget. Budgeteers are never popular because they have to crunch the numbers and say “no” a lot, but Mulvaney seems to bring a particularly cheerful heartlessness to the process. He casually embraces hunger as a legitimate budgetary goal by dismissing “Meals On Wheels” and after-school nutrition programs as [ineffective](#). "They're

supposed to help kids who don't get fed at home get fed so they do better at school," Mulvaney said of the latter. "There's no demonstrable evidence they're actually helping results, they're actually helping kids do better in school." Has Mulvaney ever tried to teach a hungry kid? Heck, has Mulvaney ever *been* a kid? The "results" he refers to are what researchers call "measureable outcomes." The measureable outcome for a fed kid is that the kid is able to concentrate. The measureable outcome for a fed elder is avoiding suffering. Isn't that enough?

Mulvaney [insists](#) that he is compassionate -- toward those who have to pay taxes to support feeding kids and the elderly, as if those are equal considerations. The ten bucks I pay in taxes might deprive me of going out to lunch, but might help a fellow human being avoid hunger. Mulvaney does not seem to understand the difference between inconvenience and suffering.

Mulvaney's compassion clearly benefits one person: himself. Mulvaney, who [neglected to pay](#) more than \$15,000 in payroll taxes for a household employee, ripped off Lancaster County, South Carolina by [promoting a phony real estate scheme](#) that promised a massive development with a business park, town center, hotel, and 2,300 new homes. He talked the County into passing a \$30 million bond issue to support the development. Then, he sold his interest in it, pocketed \$11.2 million, and [stuck locals with the bill](#).

Now this charlatan, the Trump Administration's Dr. Evil, is in charge of the federal budget. God help us.