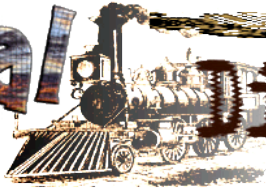


Substantial Disruption



May the Best Psychopath Win

By Mike Tully

Do you remember the “[Rumble in the Jungle](#)?” Most of my generation does. It took place 45 years ago next month in what was then known as Zaire, currently the Democratic Republic of Congo. Muhammad Ali, a huge underdog at age 32 and mounting a desperate comeback, upset the reigning world heavyweight champion, George Foreman. (To younger readers, yes, it’s the grill guy.) A year later, Ali defended his crown in a brutal contest with Joe Frazier known as the “[Thrilla in Manila](#),” Ali won the fight with a 14th round TKO, the second time he defeated Frazier in three fights.

There have been many epoch duels throughout American history, many of them in athletics. Possibly [the most dramatic upset in boxing](#) also featured a heavyweight match, the dangerous Mike Tyson against 42-to-1 longshot Buster Douglas. Another famous duel foreshadowed history’s greatest calamity. In a [1938 match in old Yankee Stadium](#), Joe Louis knocked out German Max Schmeling in the 12th round. Four years later their countries were at war. Not all great athletic duels involved boxing. When Jesse Owens [captured four gold medals](#) in the 1936 Olympic Games, he humiliated Adolph Hitler. More recently, who can forget Larry Bird versus Magic Johnson in the [national championship](#) and the NBA? Many of us recall the epic hardwood duels between [Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell](#).

Some duels occur in tennis, such as the [seemingly endless match](#) between Boris Becker and John McEnroe in 1987. There was an even more famous contest between [Billy Jean King and Bobby Fischer](#) in 1973. That match was nothing more than a made-for-television event, yet it helped advance the cause of gender equality. It [was recently made into a movie](#) starring Emma Stone and Steve Carrell. The history of American duels, of course, is not confined to sporting events and television spectacles. The most famous – or infamous – is the 1804 duel in which [Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton](#).

As I write this, the news media and cable talkocracy are buzzing over the most recent uniquely American duel. I’m speaking, of course, of the atomic slap-fight between Donald Trump and John Bolton. This was not simply another routine Trump Administration “you’re fired!” moment. It was a competition between two powerful and influential psychopaths whose visions of foreign policy suggest a need for medication on both of their parts. Fortunately, the more acceptable psychopath apparently prevailed. The President, whose addled view of the world could lead him to stumble into an inadvertent war, dispatched the National Security Advisor who encouraged him to charge into one.

Make no mistake about this: it's in the national interest to get John Bolton as far away from government as possible, most assuredly any position that allows him to influence foreign policy. The best use of Bolton's time would be for him to become addicted to video games and squander his waking hours gleefully blowing up imaginary enemies while licking the stalactites of his baleen mustache. He could annihilate digital virtual Irans and North Koreas to his black little heart's content. Instead of countless human casualties, the only victim would be a pulverized computer mouse.

But Bolton's demise is not a reason to party because the man who sent him away, Donald Trump, is no less crazy. While Bolton exists in a Hobbesian world of hostile forces and foreign dangers and his policy go-to is military action, Trump lives in a fairy land in which the Great Wise Emperor can resolve ancient conflicts with the force of his incandescent personality and masterful ability to make a deal. Bolton sees North Korean rocket tests as military provocation that should be addressed with a military attack. Trump is blinded by "love letters" from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. While Bolton wanted to bomb the rocket launchers, Trump wants to cuddle the dictator. Trump waved away the rocket tests as meaningless while Bolton angrily chewed on his mustache.

Bolton regards Vladimir Putin as a dangerous adversary who should be constrained with force, including sanctions, weapons placement, and military action when needed, while Trump has an obvious, and discomfiting, man-crush on the homicidal kleptocrat. Bolton has argued for years that the U.S. should strike Iran militarily. Trump said he wants to make a deal. The final straw apparently was Trump's decision to invite the Taliban to Camp David as the nation was preparing to commemorate the anniversary of the Taliban-assisted 9/11 terrorist attacks, a decision so stupid that even Trump supporters denounced it. Conservative columnist Marc A. Thiessen, writing in the *Washington Post*, [referred to the invitation](#) as "one of the most shameful moments of the Trump presidency." Bolton saw it the same way and, apparently, made the mistake of saying so. Disagreeing with Czar Trump is what passes for treason in the sycophants' symphony of his presidency. When all bow down, those who stand become targets.

Bolton has bolted and Trump abides. The combative psychopath lost to the pathologically narcissistic one. Bolton believed the world will bow under the weight of American military power. The President believes the world will bow to his immense powers of persuasion. The great Trump-Bolton duel of 2019 was a battle of delusions. It appears – let us hope – that the less dangerous delusion prevailed.

The stakes will be high for the next great American duel, the 2020 presidential election. Delusion will be on the ballot, seeking re-election. Let that sink in.