

POLITICS AS USUAL: Fire & Fury

By Alison Collins Mrakas

Well, just one week into the New Year and we are yet again inundated with hysterical headlines about the titular head of the home of our neighbours to the south.

Folks are running out of hyperbolic phrases to use when describing the antics of their dear leader. Fast on the heels of the mania about the whole 'I've got a bigger button' tweet (and I mean really, good god, this is what the leader of the free world feels is appropriate discourse? Schoolyard taunts about who's got the bigger?whatever?? To a nuclear weapon wielding maniac?) came the release of the scorching 'tell all' (and more on that in a minute) book 'Fire and Fury' by Michael Wolff.

If you have been living under a rock somewhere, you may not have heard about this book. It's a supposed expose about the goings on in the Trump White House by a reporter who was given near unfettered access to staff of all levels in the nascent government; a curious decision by the Trumpian powers that be. Wolff is a reporter that even a 15 second Google search would reveal is quite famous for his scorched earth, scathing takedowns of his subjects.

Even if whatever Wolff says in the book is absolute garbage (and I think some of it definitely does not ring true), the one takeaway from the books is that the mere fact that he was allowed the incredible access to staff that he was given is evidence enough of the incredible ineptitude and poor judgment of the staff in Trump's office and indeed perhaps Trump himself.

Think about it in terms of your own self. Imagine yourself as Prime Minister. If someone you did not know, was sitting on a couch in the hallway near your office, with a notebook and tape recorder in hand, for literally months on end, talking to your staff ? a staff that you suspect is leaking unfavourable stuff about your government ? would you not say, 'who the heck is this guy?? Would a competent chief of staff not throw the guy out? For heaven's sake.

Yes, I bought the book. And, at the time of writing this column, I have read about 2/3 of it. It is an easy read. And I don't mean that as a complement. Woodward or Bernstein he is not. It reads more like Page Six than a serious New York Times Op-Ed. To be frank, it's kind of gossipy, full of tidbits of truly mortifying information about Trump, his inner circle and his flunkies.

Yes, there is a lot on the record ? and the on record comments are truly awful. But there is also a lot of stuff that has no discernible factual foundation ? and that's what I have trouble with. I am not talking about background or even deep background, the journalistic practice of using anonymous informants for dirt. I am talking about third and fourth hand reports from unknown people that are ginned up to be more than they are.

I am no Trump fan, but I have to say that I don't think the use of 'feelings' about 'what could have been said' by folks is a fair way to paint a picture of him. Is this a fictional account or a factual account? It can't be both.

Suffice to say that Trump was not pleased by the book, so much so that he tried to stop its release; which, in crisis management terms was perhaps the worst move possible. The author positively clapped with glee upon receiving the cease and desist letter from Trump's lawyers as he knew ? as frankly anyone with half a brain would know ? that the controversy would drive sales. And it did. It's already a number one best seller on Amazon and it's sold out in bookstores.

There's now a six week wait for hard copies.

Look, as many others have pointed out, if even a fraction of what is printed in this book is true, then Trump ? and, frankly, the majority of those around him ? is manifestly unfit to occupy the office of the President. The problem is the sizeable fraction that is either only kinda true or isn't true at all undercuts that message.