

The logo for CAPX, consisting of the letters 'CAPX' in a white, serif font, centered within a solid black square.

Trump has ushered in an era of unprecedented hypocrisy

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Donald Trump's election has broken much new ground, including what I believe to be an unprecedented outbreak of hypocrisy on both sides of America's political divide. Sure, hypocrisy has always been a handmaiden of politics, but the verbal somersaults made by Democratic and Republican partisans in print and on television is worthy of a note – and, perhaps, even a full column.

My first inkling of what was to come took place a day after Hillary Clinton's surprising loss to the New York real estate magnate. I overheard two of my progressive acquaintances discuss the “need for checks and balances” to keep Trump from “destroying the country”.

Think about that for a second. The same people who kept quiet throughout Barack Obama's eight years in office, with the former President increasingly relying on executive orders to get around Congress and push through his progressive agenda – without public, let alone legislative, support – now bemoaned the fact that all the awesome power of the presidency was about to fall into the hands of someone they did not like.

Well, tough. Now drink your medicine along with everyone else.

For decades now, the power of the presidency has been increasing far beyond the original intent of the Framers of the Constitution. A hundred years ago, President William Howard Taft referred to himself merely as a Chief Magistrate. Today the presidency has become, as my Cato colleague Gene Healy put it in *Cult of the Presidency*, a Caesaropapist institution, with the President seen not only as a Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, but also Commander in Chief of the Economy (Hillary Clinton's phrase) and, even, a sympathiser in chief ("I feel your pain," as Bill Clinton put it).

Barack Obama, as was his wont, took the remit of the presidency to new rhetorical heights, preposterously stating as he won the Democratic primary in 2008, "I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless; this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal; this was the moment when we ended a war and secured our nation and restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth."

And, the blessed Michelle Obama reassured us, "Barack will never let you [the great unwashed masses] go back to your lives as usual, uninvolved, uninformed." Gee, thanks for that, Michelle. We, the plebs, salute you.

Are we really so surprised that a narcissistic megalomaniac like Donald Trump took to all that power like a duck to water and started signing executive orders with the ravenous gusto of Chris Christie at an all-you-can-eat buffet?

Just as the Democrats suddenly rediscovered the eternal wisdom of the Constitution (a document they only recently dismissed as a relic of a by-gone age), so the Republicans suddenly became very forgiving of the transgressions of the leader of their own party.

One of the Republicans' constant criticisms of Obama was that he kept on going around the world apologising for America. Obama's apology tours (from Berlin to Cairo to Havana) made them apoplectic with rage. Obama, they said, was putting America down. How quickly times change. Consider the following exchange between Fox News's Bill O'Reilly and Trump during an interview that aired ahead of the Super Bowl last Sunday.

Trump, it is well known, has a lot of "respect" for Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, a man accused, with much justification, of ordering the murder of journalists and dissidents in Russia. "I do respect him [Putin]," Trump said. "Putin is a killer," O'Reilly retorted. Unfazed, Trump doubled down and compared Putin's actions to that of the United States. "There are a lot of killers. We have a lot of killers. Well, you think our country is so innocent?"

No, our country is not innocent and policy mistakes – from Iraq War to the Libyan intervention – have caused much death and destruction. That said, our political leaders do not go around ordering assassinations of their political opponents and outspoken journalists.

There is, in other words, a difference between an honest policy mistake and premeditated murder of inconvenient individuals. Had Obama said what Trump did, he would have been accused of

treason by his Republican opponents. In any event, and with the exception of a few individuals like the Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse, Republican criticism of Trump's verbal incontinence ranged from subdued to non-existent.

A well-functioning democracy requires the public and its representatives to be committed to principles, not persons. Unfortunately, all indications are that in the years to come we shall see less of the former and more of the latter.

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