

BALL OF THREAD: TRUMP'S NARCISSISM MAKES HIM EASY TO TRIGGER

This post is part of a Ball of Thread I'm putting together before I attempt to explain how Trump trained Republicans to hate rule of law. See this post for an explanation of my Ball of Thread.

Discussions of Trump's cultivation by Russia (and other authoritarian countries) always founder on discussions of his formal recruitment.

There is abundant evidence that Russia, like other countries, did at least attempt to recruit Trump. Craig Unger has written two good books on the subject.

But many attempts to describe why and whether that happened, particularly in the hands of pundits, are easily discredited. That's true, in significant part, because people imagine recruitment is an either/or thing: that people come fully recruited spies one day and from that point forward they are puppets of their handlers. The reality, as I understand it, is a gradual process of creating the preconditions via which people can be persuaded to act in ways that benefit another country.

On top of being an all around annoyance, for example, Jonathan Chait's consideration of whether Trump had long been recruited was sloppy and made the entire Russian investigation easier to discredit.

And the thing is, such efforts are unnecessary.

All you need to explain Trump's actions (and all I'll rely on for this series) is Trump's narcissism. Trump is such an epic narcissist, and narcissists' reactivity and paranoia and pathological need to feed their own ego are so

predictable, that the only explanation you need for *how* Trump could be manipulated is that narcissism. So long as you could reliably trigger Trump's narcissism, you could fairly reliably trigger a predictable narcissistic response to a given trigger.

Trump's habit of releasing highly classified documents is a great example. Trump almost blew the Vault 7 investigation by revealing details that made it clear FBI considered Josh Schulte as the prime suspect to Tucker Carlson the day of his first search; Trump did so to try to blame Obama for the compromise. Trump burned an Israeli counterterrorism program by giving it to Russia, which he did to show off. Trump burned the satellite imagery targeting Iran, which he did so to dickwag Iran. Trump attempted to release *all* the backup materials to the Russian investigation because some dopey advisor convinced him that it would help to disprove his critics. Trump shared details of DOD's plans to attack Iran with Mark Meadows' ghost writer because he thought it would help him discredit Mark Milley. A master spy might have *asked* Trump to release all this intelligence for him. Maybe one day we'll learn the documents that went missing from Mar-a-Lago were specifically requested. But you don't even need that master spy request (and if there were a master spy, he might not ask for documents in the form of a request): because all it takes to get Trump to release highly classified documents is to suggest that in some way doing so will harm his detractors.

The Trump Tower Moscow deal – or really, any deal – is another example. It is not important whether the Trump Tower Moscow deal pitched to Michael Cohen (or any of the several other Russian Trump Tower deals) to be real, or plausible. Russia could, with great certainty, dangle offers for free money and the biggest tower in Russia, and Trump was bound to act irresponsibly, as he did.

There certainly could be more: but there doesn't

have to be. All you need to manipulate Donald Trump is to trigger his narcissism.