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## Will Kelly Last Longer Than Scaramucci?

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John F. Kelly's front-stabbing Donald Trump's new White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci only hours after Trump named the four-star Marine general his chief of staff was a sublime first move. But unlike Ivanka or Jared Kushner, Trump isn't dad to Kelly. How long can it be before Kelly's service doesn't please the president anymore?



REUTERS/MIKE SEGAR

Kelly is a patriot and an honorable man. Yes, I've opposed some of the Trump administration policies Kelly has carried out as homeland security secretary, like the Muslim travel ban and the reranking of deportation priorities to include offenses like DUIs, but I opposed some of Barack Obama's deportation policies, too. What I fault Kelly's Cabinet stint for is enforcement rigidity, not xenophobia, demagoguery or constitutional recklessness.

But President Donald Trump is a poster boy for those failings, a hothead who fouls his office, flouts the law and endangers our nation. Duty may have motivated Kelly to say yes to Trump's West Wing summons, but he's about to find that deceit, disarray and derangement are daily specials at the White House mess.

Kelly's patriotism inevitably will come into conflict with Trump's narcissism. His loyalty to country will be tested by the fools he'll have to suffer, the lies he'll have to defend and the monarch he'll soon discover is mad. Not angry mad, though Trump is that, too, but *mad* mad, King George mad, "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" mad.

I have to believe that Kelly has a tipping point, and that resignation on principle is an option he'd consider. By principle, I don't mean what forced Sean Spicer and Reince Priebus off the island: losing a cockfight to Scaramucci. I mean what Trump's national security adviser, Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, wrote about in "Dereliction of Duty": the crime of enabling a president to con the country. That book is about the complicity in high places that mired us in war in Vietnam, but it's equally relevant to our current quagmire. It may be too much to dream that one fine day, McMaster and Kelly, disgusted by their boss, will walk, but it just may take something that big to awaken some more grown-ups in Trump's party to their responsibility.

"We could use more loyalty, I'll tell you that," Trump told the Boy Scout Jamboree on July 24, in between inviting the Scouts to boo Barack Obama, boo Hillary Clinton and imagine the sexual opportunities a multimillionaire's yacht could provide. You might think Attorney General Jeff Sessions — the first sitting U.S. senator to endorse him — could be called a Trump loyalist, but when Sessions refused Trump's demand to fire Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating him, Trump redefined the L word. "He was a senator," Trump told The Wall Street Journal last week. "He looks at 40,000 people [at campaign rallies] and he probably says, 'What do I have to lose?' And he endorsed me. ... So it's not like a great loyal thing about the endorsement."

When Trump says "loyalty," he means what he demanded from FBI Director James Comey: not a pledge of allegiance to the rule of law, but an oath of *omerta* to the Don. When Comey broke that oath — he refused to kill the FBI's probe of former national security adviser Michael Flynn's ties to Russia — Trump fired Comey. Kelly has to know it's only a matter of time until Trump tests him thuggishly, too.

When that happens, another former military man, Sen. John McCain, might inspire Kelly's next move. I hope Kelly doesn't mirror the McCain, who endorsed Trump in the Arizona primary to save his own political skin, even after Trump said McCain was "not a war hero. ... He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured." (Trump didn't add that McCain — putting loyalty to his fellow POWs ahead of

his own freedom — refused early release from the North Vietnamese because his father was an admiral). Instead, I hope Kelly emulates the McCain who, together with Sens. Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski — no matter how hard Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Vice President Mike Pence and Trump banged the hammer of Republican loyalty — voted a disgraceful health care bill down to defeat.

When Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who replaced Spicer as press secretary, was asked whether Sessions was on his way out, she replied with a common phrase about political appointees: “We all serve at the pleasure of the president.” Sessions, who was traveling to El Salvador while Scaramucci was trashing Steve Bannon in anatomically taxing terms, used the same words Sanders did when an AP reporter asked if he were going to quit: “I serve at the pleasure of the president.”

Two things about that idiom give me the willies. One is its feudal echo of fealty pledges. I am your obedient servant, m’lord. My loyalty is unwavering. Do with me as you wish. Something more like “at-will employee” is better suited to a democracy. It conveys the idea — they don’t need a substantive reason to let me go — but without the crypto-royalist servility.

The other thing about serving at the pleasure of the president, which didn’t give me the creeps until the present president, is its whiff of sadomasochism. Trump gets pleasure from humiliating people. Bullying turns him on. And his victims get off on their bondage. Sure, if you get power, you cling to it. But ambition alone can’t explain Spicer’s appetite for daily mortification, or the pornography of Scaramucci’s Trump-worship.

Trump has made loyalty kinky. That could be cool on Craigslist, and it may fly at Trump Tower, but the last time I looked, there’s no S&M in POTUS.

*This is a crosspost of my column in the Jewish Journal, where you can reach me if you’d like at [martyk@jewishjournal.com](mailto:martyk@jewishjournal.com).*