

## This Is What Presidential Panic Looks Like

Tom Nichols

Donald Trump delivered a fear-drenched rant live from the White House.



Graeme Sloan / Bloomberg / Getty

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The president of the United States just barged into America's living rooms like an angry, confused grandfather to tell us all that we are ungrateful whelps.

When a president asks for network time, it's usually to announce something important. But tonight, Donald Trump did not give anything like a normal speech or address. He was clearly working from a prepared text, but it sounded like one he'd written—or dictated angrily—himself, because it was full of bizarre howlers that even Trump's second-rate speech-writing shop would probably have avoided, such as his assertion that inflation when he took office was the worst it had been in 48 years. (Why did he pick 1977 as a benchmark? Who knows. But he's wrong.) He read the speech quickly, his voice rising in frustration as he hurled one lie after another into the camera.

We could take apart Trump's fake facts, as checkers and pundits will do in the next few days. But perhaps more important than false statements—which for Trump are par for the course—was his demeanor. Americans saw a president drenched in panic as he tried to bully an entire nation into admitting he's doing a great job. For 20 minutes, he vented his hurt feelings without a molecule of empathy or awareness. Economic concerns? *Shut up, you fools, the economy is doing fine.* (And if it isn't, it's not his fault—it's Joe Biden's.) Foreign-policy jitters? *Zip it, you wimps, America is strong and respected.*

In effect, Trump took to the airwaves, pointed his finger, and said: *Quiet, piggy.*

I consider myself a connoisseur of Trump's speeches. I've watched them and [live-tweeted](#) them for years because I think Americans need to see what kind of man sits in the Oval Office. But even by Trump's standards, this was an unnerving display of fear. I can only imagine America's enemies in Moscow and Beijing and Tehran smiling with pleasure as they watched a president losing his bearings, berating his own people, and demanding that they absolve him of any blame when things get worse.

His rant contained no news, other than an example of his contempt for the U.S. military, whose loyalty he thinks he can purchase with a [onetime \\$1,776 bonus check](#). This is projection: Trump has shown his willingness to be bought off with [gold bars](#) and trinkets,

and he may think that the men and women of the armed forces are people of equally low character.

This was not a holiday address from the president of a great democracy to its citizens. This was a desperate tin-pot leader yelling into a microphone while cornered in his palace redoubt. Trump has been [unraveling](#) for weeks, and his speech tonight, like Trump himself, was unworthy of America and its people.