



Simon Marks, the Trump truth-teller

The veteran broadcaster's straight-talking dispatches from Washington DC in feverish times have seen him called the 'harbinger of daily astonishment'

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Photo: LBC

To no one's surprise, Simon Marks, Washington correspondent for LBC, has detected a pulse of anxiety in the American capital.

He tells me of how people in elevators speak of family friends turfed out of jobs in government; walkers in Rock Creek Park ask one another if they plan to "try to" tough out the orange tsunami, or else leave the country. And the time when at a local restaurant, in the ominous vacuum between the election and inauguration of Donald J Trump, he overheard a diner attempting to reassure a friend with the pallid words, "But you're a federal worker, you'll be okay, right?"

"I think there is cause for grave concern about the direction that this is all taking," Marks says. "I don't want to predict civil war on the streets, or armed confrontation, but you certainly cannot rule out an extremely tense period

here where the roughly 49... per cent of the public who didn't vote for [Trump] realise that there is nothing you can really do to stop him. We're only a month into this and the country's unrecognisable."

The quote is classic Marks. While other Beltway correspondents find themselves ensnared in the weeds of even-handedness, or else bamboozled by the torrent of excrement surging from Pennsylvania Avenue, with the merest sniff of the air, the 59-year-old dives straight into the swim.

His relationship with LBC began with an entry-level gig at the then-upstart radio station's offices in Gough Square, near Fleet Street. Today, 41 years later, Marks is a jewel in the crown of British broadcasting – one who thanks to this moment in history may finally get the widespread respect he is due. Of his numerous appearances on the air, the invariably essential 10-minute monologue *American Week* – 17:45 every Friday – is a particular highlight.

His freelance work for LBC is one of many radio berths. As president and chief correspondent of the Feature Story News agency, listeners in countries as distant as New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore, and more, are also privy to his willingness to call Trump exactly what he is – a menace and a liar.

In the wake of the shakedown of Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office on February 28, Marks told British listeners that "what we've witnessed in the last few hours is the real Donald Trump. The friend of Vladimir Putin, the man advancing Russia's agenda and Russia's priority every step that he takes...

"European leaders have now to acknowledge that they are not going to be able to work with this American president. He is going to align this country – I suspect formally, in some kind of alliance – in a friendly relationship, that is going to be announced at some point, with Moscow."

A week before the news of Trump's decision to curtail military aid to Ukraine hit the wires, he tells me, "Europe is very late to the party when it comes to realising how far this country has drifted from its ideological moorings. It was four years ago that Joe Biden made his 'America is Back' speech to the Munich Security Conference, and he later disclosed that Emmanuel Macron privately told him he didn't believe it.

"Macron himself actually came out and said that Europe needed to prepare itself to engage in what he called strategic autonomy from the United States. Because he thought there was a possibility of this snap back to Trump. But the Biden people completely dismissed it."

It isn't only the president who gets both barrels, either. The rest of his motley crew are regarded with the same unsparing eye.

Speaking with the late-night LBC host Nick Abbott, in a grim prognosis, Marks noted that the hooligans of the new administration are "absolutely getting rid of all the constraints, all the checks and balances, all the possible brakes, and all the people who would turn round to Donald Trump, the commander in chief, if he told them to set the army on peaceful protestors

on the streets of America – those people who would say ‘no sir, we’re not doing that’, all those people are gone.”

With a clipped English accent that has lost not a drop of its wryness, despite moving to DC during Bill Clinton’s first term in office, it is Marks’s cherished status as an immigrant that helps explain his frank but askance perspective. Alistair Cooke is an obvious influence, while the late Christopher Hitchens, to whose home he paid several visits, was a valued familiar.

Minus the booze stains down his shirt, at his drollest, Marks’s use of humour as a means of puncturing absurdities puts me in mind, even, of Barry Humphries’ Australian cultural attaché Sir Les Patterson.

“I have never been interested in getting US citizenship because... even today, it is super important to view myself as the outsider looking in,” Marks says. “I don’t want to be a shareholder. I want to be someone looking at this country through the prism of an outsider.”

Appearing on my computer screen from his office near the White House, with his salt-and-pepper hair and shirt and tie, at first glance Simon Marks could easily pass for the kind of reporter who makes nice over filet mignon and Chateaufort-du-Pape with influential politicians at the nearby Capital Grille. Instead, with words that are wise to the insurrectionists running amok in the corridors of power, he’s fighting a rearguard action in the name of journalistic standards.

In order to properly collate whatever “trauma and uproar” has bled from the fingers of a president who keeps the hours of a vampire, the working day begins at 6am-6.30am. He’s still at it long after nightfall. To his evident delight, a journalist in New Zealand dubbed him the ‘harbinger of daily astonishment’.

Good. The help is required. As the author Nafeez Ahmed points out in his recent, terrifying book *Alt Reich*, the lavishly funded network of (often) shady hard-right ‘think tanks’, lobbyists, special advisers and partisan hacks are hard at work knocking lumps out of the beleaguered wall that divides journalism from junk.

In this, the goal of chaos and division has realised its aims. Today, America is so riven by disagreement that phone-in shows on the non-profit broadcast network C-SPAN feature three separate phone numbers for Republican, Democrat and independent voters. Plans to change the membership rules of the White House press corps grants yet more access to unreliable narrators.

“What we’ve got going on here is a situation where the Associated Press is suspended from attending... events at the White House [for refusing to endorse the rebranding of the Gulf of Mexico], but the doors are open to a whole raft of new publications,” Marks tells me. “Breitbart News, One America News Network, Steve Bannon’s outfit [Steve Bannon’s War Room] – they’re all in there now.”

He continues. “This White House is creating a reality in which there will be far fewer tough questions and far more softballs asked of Trump, of [Elon] Musk, of Karoline Leavitt, the new White House press secretary. And that’s not good for American democracy, it’s not good for anybody. It’s not good for the Trump administration, either.”

Simon Marks has his doubts, even, as to whether or not it’s especially good for business. After all, in the wake of the election of Joe Biden, friends who worried that he would suddenly become bored, or else struggle to get on the air, were proved wrong.

As an equal-opportunities bruiser, it wasn’t as if there was any need to spare the whip when it came to the shortcomings of the last Democratic administration. Prior to the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, as far back as 2020, Marks was warning listeners that Biden wasn’t “the man he was” several years earlier. “There’s never a quiet day in Washington DC,” he says.

Maybe not, but barely a month into Trump’s second term, these are suddenly very noisy days indeed. Squirrelled away in an editing suite at 8am on a Friday morning, invariably, some of the items intended for American Week are left jettisoned on the cutting room floor. Thankfully, what remains is judicious and precise.

“If in the future, people want to understand what was going on [during this time], I want them to be able to go to the American Week archive and listen to it and [have it] stand the test of time,” Marks says.

Amid an especially sensational dispatch, the episode from February 2¹ featured a clip of Steve Bannon addressing a raucous crowd. “The future of MAGA is Donald J. Trump!” he shouted. “We want Trump in ’28. A man like Trump comes along only once or twice in a country’s history. Right?”

As the speaker began to chant, the audience responded in kind. “We want Trump!” went the call. “We want Trump! We want Trump!”

“He is not joking,” noted Simon Marks. “Neither are they.”

An archive of Simon Marks’ broadcasts can be found on the podcast series [Simon Marks Reporting](#).

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