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Engaging Proactively with the Risk of World Misleadership

Trump vs Clinton and the potential of carpe diem in the democratic process?

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Inspired by commentary on the first televised Clinton-Trump debate (26 September 2016)

Introduction

The future will no doubt be appalled by the current presidential campaign in the USA through which the leader of the world's superpower will emerge. But by what exactly might the future be appalled?

For many countries the American electoral process is a mess and a tasteless show, with every possibility that it will be rigged in some way, at least in some locations (Ronald Bailey, *Voter ID and Rigged Elections*, *Reason.com*, 12 August 2016; Roger Stone, *Can the 2016 election be rigged? You bet*, *The Hill*, 16 August 2016; Spencer Gundert, *Hillary Clinton and Electoral Fraud*, 28 April 2016; Richard Stallman, *Republicans actions to systematically rig elections*, 2016).

This would all be seen as a mockery of the democratic process -- or claimed as the epitome of what it stands for in reality. Is the pretence of standing for something the only thing for which the world's greatest democracy stands? On the other hand many countries currently experience similar distortions of the ideals of democratic election and may realize that their hopes for better governance are likely to be frustrated.

The media, most especially the American media, has embroiled itself fully in the presidential campaign. This started with systematic mockery of Donald Trump. Following his surprising success in gaining the Republican nomination, the preoccupation has been with details, savoured and framed as indicative and symbolic, by which his candidature could be condemned as the epitome of unreason (Leah Barkoukis, *Report: 91 Percent of Media's Trump Coverage Has Been Negative*, *Townhall*, 26 October 2016). Only the points made by Hillary Clinton are now to be framed as reasonable and of presidential calibre.

What to think? What might the future think?

Post-election addendum

Following the electoral triumph of Trump, against seemingly impossible odds, commentators and experts of every kind have desperately attempted to understand how their analysis proved to be so inadequate to the reality of the situation -- despite the assertion of President Obama (*US election 2016: Obama warns fate of world at stake*, *BBC News*, 3 November 2016).

As noted by Anthony Zurcher:

Very few people thought he would actually run, then he did. They thought he wouldn't climb in the polls, then he did. They said he wouldn't win any primaries, then he did. They said he wouldn't win the Republican nomination, then he did. Finally, they said there was no way he could compete for, let alone win, a general election. Now he's president-elect Trump. (*US Election 2016 Results: Five reasons Donald Trump won*, *BBC News*, 9 November 2016)

The more fundamental issue, however, is not "Trump" (as many now fear), but rather the evidence of an unrecognized level of dysfunctional [groupthink](#) with respect to global governance -- and those who need to be blamed and demonised. The issue for conventional thinking is then: **What else have arrogant democratic elites got radically, dangerously wrong?** Overpopulation? Radicalism? Ignorance?

In contrast with conventional strategic preoccupation with "9/11", the questions raised by the election of Donald Trump on 9 November suggest that "11/9" may prove to be of far greater significance. But, as noted by Rod Dreher:

Will this catastrophic failure of the media cause soul-searching and, dare I say it, repentance? Forget it. To do so would require the press to face up to its worst prejudices, none more deeply held than the belief that its members are on the Right Side of History. (*US election 2016: America's front-porch revolt*, *BBC News*, 9 November 2016)

Missing the point?

The unrestrained enthusiasm for condemnation can be seen as obscuring an issue which merits far more careful consideration. Given that opinion polls continue to rank Trump very close to Clinton, what is lost by focusing on the stupid arguments of Trump and on his boorishness? What is achieved by carefully counting the number of his lies, whether during the first debate with Clinton or otherwise?

The point is that vast numbers of Americans continue to favour Trump despite any lies -- however they may interpret these otherwise. They continue to favour him despite irrational, sexist, ill-informed statements.

The assumption is that people ought to be inspired by Clinton's mastery of the facts and her capacity to tell the truth in the light of those facts. The assumption is that her verbal skills in avoiding controversial statements will attract support -- especially when she goes out of her way to respond to the concerns of particular constituencies. The point is further clarified by Earl Ofari Hutchinson:

The comforting notion that Trump is so repugnant and repulsive, and that since so many routinely mock and ridicule him as an ego maniacal babbling idiot, that in a head to head contest the smooth, articulate, well-versed consummate policy wonk Clinton will make mincemeat of him in the debates and on the campaign trail. This is dangerous. The proof of that is from the moment that Trump declared his candidacy in June, pundits, much of the media, and the GOP and Democrats laughed him off as cheap, sideshow entertainment who would wilt in the GOP debates, collapse under intense media scrutiny, and fade away after the drumbeat attacks on him from the top tier GOP candidates. Well, months later they're all nearly gone. Not only is Trump still standing, he has gotten even more wildly popular in countless voting circles (*Thinking the Unthinkable -- A Trump White House Win*, *The Huffington Post*, 3 May 2016)

Why has this been the case, despite the overwhelming emphasis of large sections of the media on the merit of the Clinton candidacy and the appalling consequences of the Trump candidacy? Some perspective is offered by Nick Bernabe (*Who Lost Last Night's Presidential Debate? America Did*, *Sagacious News Network*, 27 September 2016):

America lost because Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are among the most unliked candidates in American political history. We lost because Trump is a billionaire who spent his entire career benefiting from politicians to make his fortune. We lost because Hillary is a politician who spent her entire political career benefiting from billionaires to make her powerful (and rich).

Some clarity has been brought to such questions by the remarkable article by [George Lakoff](#) (*Why Trump?* *The Huffington Post*, 3 March 2016). However those insights have not informed *The Huffington Post* after the first presidential debate -- despite its claim to being a model of quality journalism. Seemingly in a state of panic, like other news media, it has gone all out to condemn every facet of Trump's candidacy -- having systematically headlined his every statement over the past months. Few commentators have been as insightful as Lakoff. Why not?

Valuable analysis has however been provided by Stephan Richter (*Trump and the Fear of Hillary: a political psychogram of the 2016 race*, *The Globalist*, 6 September 2015). He distinguishes the *10 Roles of Donald Trump*: Siegfriedian super-provider; Anti-Hillary shield; American dreamer; Medieval lancer; Underdog; Mirror image; Devil incarnate; Killer executive; Gambler; and Greatest reality TV show producer.

Another remarkable exception is [George Monbiot](#) (*Donald Trump is no Outsider: he mirrors our political culture*, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2016). He remarks:

We love to horrify ourselves with his excesses, and to see him as a monstrous outlier, the polar opposite of everything a modern, civilised society represents. But he is nothing of the kind. He is the distillation of all that we have been induced to desire and admire. Trump is so repulsive not because he offends our civilisation's most basic values, but because he embodies them.... Trump disgusts us because, where others use a dog whistle, he uses a klaxon. We hate to hear his themes so clearly articulated. But we know in our hearts that they suffuse the way the world is run.... Yes, he is a shallow, mendacious, boorish and extremely dangerous man. But those traits ensure that he is not an outsider but the perfect representation of his caste, the caste that runs the global economy and governs our politics. He is our system, stripped of its pretences.

Monbiot effectively makes the remarkable point that, whether or not Trump represents US, he certainly represents us.

A question of style?

One might expect fruitful comment from [Paul Krugman](#), a Nobel laureate, and yet his insights in *The New York Times*, following the first debate, were introduced as follows:

Hillary Clinton was knowledgeable, unflappable and -- dare we say it? -- likable. Donald Trump was ignorant, thin-skinned and boorish. Yet on the eve of the debate, polls showed a close race. How was that possible? After all, the candidates we saw Monday night were the same people they've been all along. Mrs. Clinton's grace and even humor under pressure were fully apparent during last year's Benghazi hearing. Mr. Trump's whiny braggadocio has been obvious every time he opens his mouth without reading from a teleprompter. ([How the Clinton-Trump Race Got Close](#), 30 September 2016)

Missing from the discussion at this time is that Americans in large numbers are somehow persuaded by Trump's style and alienated by Clinton's style. Somehow he is seen by some to be meaningful to a higher degree than Clinton. In terms of style -- rather than substance? Again there is the assumption that just because Clinton makes her informed arguments rationally, and according to acceptable conventions, this should necessarily convince. Seemingly it does not. Lakoff offers valuable insights into Trump's appeal from a socio-psychological perspective.

Krugman misses the vital point that half of America probably considers its peers as "knowledgeable, unflappable and... likable", exhibiting "grace and even humor under pressure". The other half is however more than probably considered by them to be "ignorant, thin-skinned and boorish" and only too obviously characterized by "whiny braggadocio" every time their mouths are opened. Complementary perceptions would of course hold from the perspective of the other half. Typically they might be expected to include references to arrogance, self-satisfaction, complacency -- and "slick" (especially in the case of lawyers). Political correctness aside, the reality is that half of any democracy probably finds the other half distasteful and would prefer to avoid associating with it.

A similar argument can be applied to the post-debate comment of [Chauncey DeVega](#) offering insight into the [Dunning-Kruger Effect](#), and arguing that "Trump is Exhibit A of this dangerous form of idiocy":

Donald Trump is a political brawler. He is also a raconteur, a self-styled maverick, a political "outsider", an adult male adolescent, and the drunk guy at the local bar who picks fights with strangers by yelling racial and ethnic slurs or harassing women.... it occurred to me that beyond being merely unprepared to be President of the United States... that Trump is, in fact, supremely confident in his ignorance and sense of intellectual superiority over other people. This is the psychological concept known as the "Dunning-Kruger" effect -- put very simply, when stupid people don't know that they are stupid -- in action. ([Idiocracy now: Donald Trump and the Dunning-Kruger effect - when stupid people don't know they are stupid](#), *Salon*, 30 September 2016; [The Psychological Concept that Perfectly Explains Trump](#), *AlterNet*, 30 September 2016).

Thinking the unthinkable, is this the view of one half of the American population (for whom Clinton so elegantly speaks) -- regarding the other half for whom Trump speaks in a quite different mode? More commentary would be extremely valuable on any "effect" (seemingly unnamed) to which the former might in their turn be vulnerable, in their failure to recognize truths in the views so problematically presented by Trump. Would one half really regret the disappearance of the other in the proverbial puff of smoke?

Such insights need to be reconciled with a recent study indicating the lack of appreciation for the American people of 850 non-elected officials and others working in the nation's capital (Jennifer Bachner and Benjamin Ginsberg, *What Washington Gets Wrong: the unelected officials who actually run the government and their misconceptions about the American people*, 2016). As reviewed by Jill Rosen, the study notes:

The study found 73 percent of government officials think the public knows little or nothing about programs aimed at helping the poor, 71 percent think the public knows little or nothing about science and technology policy, and 61 percent think the public knows almost nothing about childcare. In fact, when it comes to fundamental policy areas like social security, public schools, crime, defense, and the environment, it was hard to find government officials who thought the public knew "a great deal". ([Washington 'insiders snub their noses at US public](#), *Futurity*, 29 September 2016)

As noted by the review, those holding such views have incomes far exceeding the poor deemed to having little understanding of poverty. As many have remarked, America is a divided society. Clinton and Trump naturally speak for the major divisions -- otherwise they would not be in competition as nominees for president. As stated by *The Economist*:

The first presidential debate exposed, with unhappy clarity, how the candidates are speaking to two different Americas. The Trump and Clinton coalitions do not just disagree about tax rates or health policy. Their worlds hardly overlap... Vitality, their coalitions subscribe to different value systems. To Mr Trump and his backers, politicians like Mrs Clinton have allowed jobs to be stolen, let murderous immigrants and terrorists stream across open borders, and spent American blood and treasure on naive attempts at nation-building in far-flung corners of an ungrateful world. And by failing to secure America, such self-dealing, rotten elites have lost the right to be heard on any other subject. ([No Happy Ending](#), 1 October 2016)

Any highly personalized criticism of one or other candidate needs to be recognized for what it implies -- namely criticism of half the

population of the USA with beliefs represented by those nominees, however inadequately. That one or other of the candidates may "win" the election will not for one moment eliminate the underlying deprecation of one half of the population by the other. As concluded in the same article in *The Economist*:

No consensus exists among American voters about what qualifies a leader to rule. Whoever wins the 2016 election, half the country will think them a disgrace on Day One. This is a drama with no neat ending.

The merit of Trump is that he makes evident this reality -- unpleasant though it may be. He is unpleasant in doing so, perhaps necessarily so in the larger scheme of things -- as was a challenge for a previous presidential nominee (*An Inconvenient Truth about any Inconvenient Truth*, 2008).

The problem with Clinton is that she cultivates the pretence that this is not the case -- and is successful in convincing those who cannot deal with that reality. Unwittingly, it is possible that Trump makes skillful use of his absurdities and irritants as distractors, perhaps best compared with use of [decoy flares as counter-measures](#) by aircraft seeking to reduce vulnerability to missile strikes. Commentators have assiduously followed the heat of the flares -- in a fruitless effort to bring him down. The point has been partially confirmed by others, including Trump's vice-presidential nominee, Mike Pence (S. V. Date, *Running mate Mike Pence lets everyone know not to worry about what Trump actually says*, *The Huffington Post*, 5 October 2016). Seemingly it is not Trump's style to say what he means. It is surprising to hear of the surprise that any politician would be expected to do so -- however much this pretence is assiduously cultivated.

It is sad to see so many commentators focusing on verbal stupidities in lynch-mob mode -- with the explicit aim of "bringing down" a competitor (*How to bring down the Donald*, *The Economist*, 6 August 2015; Andy Ostroy, *Here's What Could Finally Bring Down Trump*, *The Huffington Post*, 25 January 2016; Charles Hurt, *Hillary 'The Machine' is programmed to take down The Donald*, *The Washington Times*, 25 September 2016). Do political enemies relish and gloat over the prospect of the other party being "brought down" (Todd Domke, *Will Trump Bring Down The GOP?* 7 June 2016)? This is language only too reminiscent of the framing of deadly enemies of society that have to be "taken out" by any means possible -- with the "gloves off".

The process of that kind of democracy can be seen as going further through [negative campaigning](#) and the desperate quest for "dirt" of any kind, with the expressed delight in finding it -- as the key to political success, the "killer". A newly discovered video of Donald Trump using deprecated language regarding women makes the point (David A. Fahrenthold, *Trump recorded having extremely lewd conversation about women in 2005*, *The Washington Post*, 8 October 2016).

One commentator, the vice-presidential nominee of the Democratic Party, was righteously able to claim he could not use Trump's lewd language in front of his mother. As a senator he enjoys the company of his colleagues from the Republican Party, despite their sexual peccadilloes, as extensively documented (*The Shameful Record of Republican Sexual Misconduct*). Somewhat analogous documentation is available with regard to those of the Democratic Party (*The Democrat Sexual Misconduct List*). Is Hillary Clinton to be credibly framed as Snow White by comparison?

Which politicians of repute would endeavour to deny that they have not had conversations that women would find extremely offensive -- or had acted consistently with that attitude?

How hypocritical can democratic processes be when such language is now commonly used behind closed doors by the highest authorities and in most competitive and combat settings -- language which would have been variously deplored in decades past? Should the Trump video be assessed against [The White House Tapes of Richard Nixon](#) (*Infamous political lies*, *CBS News*; *In Tapes, Nixon Rails About Jews and Blacks*, *The New York Times*, 10 December 2010; *Nixon tapes shed new light on his views of women, gay people and Jews*, *CBS*, 11 July 2014)? The matter can be more generally discussed (*The Coalition of the Willy: musings on the global challenge of penile servitude*, 2004).

It is a shame to see alliances forming between parties holding purportedly distinctive values, "ganging up" to "block" another (perceived as a common threat to their possibility of election). There seems to be little capacity to recognize that contrasting views (however extreme) are otherwise acclaimed as a feature of democracy and merit being honoured as such. The media is of course complicit in this distortion of democracy -- as repeatedly remarked by populist movements elsewhere. Curiously populism and democracy are now recognized as antithetical.

Is [mudslinging](#) now the essential prelude to the election of a world leader whose moral and ethical standing will be promoted as above reproach? How is the last-minute evocation of the scandal of Trump's lewd comments to be assessed in the light of other insights (Benjamin Bergen, *What the F: what swearing reveals about our language, our brains, and ourselves*, 2016)? The latter makes the points:

Nearly everyone swears -- whether it's over a few too many drinks, in reaction to a stubbed toe, or in flagrante delicto. And yet, we sit idly by as words are banned from television and censored in books. We insist that people excise profanity from their vocabularies and we punish children for yelling the very same dirty words that we'll mutter in relief seconds after they fall asleep. Swearing, it seems, is an intimate part of us that we have decided to selectively deny.

Aside from any hypocrisy, how is righteous offence about the lewd to be compared with astonished western commentary about violent Muslim reactions to blasphemy? Does dissemination of Trump's language invite legal action against those doing so? As queried by *The Economist*:

America's Supreme Court allows them to be banned from public spaces, and permits heavy fines for their improper handling, making rare exceptions to the protections of the constitution's Bill of Rights. Guns? Only in a saner world. The weapons in

question are swear-words... The Federal Communications Commission may warn or even impose six-figure penalties on a broadcaster that allows even a "fleeting" expletive on air. (*Weapons of Crass Construction: most swearing is perfectly harmless*, 8 October 2016)

Perhaps the widespread preoccupations with Trump can be understood in terms of a style with which the US is unfamiliar. This perspective is discussed in an unusually balanced manner by [Brendan Simms](#) (*What would a Trump presidency mean for the rest of the world?* *New Statesman*, October 2016), making the following points:

- Trump's impact on the world will initially be a matter of style... This would be neither here nor there -- tastes differ, after all -- were it not that Trump's personality will translate internationally into an instinctive rapport with other "outspoken" leaders
- Trump's style will matter in international politics for another reason. First, despite all his rhetoric about deal-making, where his business experience is considerable -- and he has sometimes shown a capacity to compromise -- he seems to have a very limited and belligerent idea of what constitutes a successful diplomatic negotiation.
- Second, Trump favours a particularly intuitive style of decision-making. He has gone on record as saying that people "are surprised by how quickly I make big decisions, but I've learned to trust my instincts and not to overthink things".
- Style will soon become substance. At best, a Trump presidency will lead to the "Berlusconification" of international politics, which will become extended reality-TV events, at least in so far as they relate to the United States.

The negative campaigning, mudslinging and media [feeding frenzy](#) (recognized as maximally attractive to audiences) all highlight a poorly discussed point. This lynch mob pattern is the nature of the current response of a world power to those it disparages and frames as its enemies. Both Trump and Clinton, with the enthusiastic support of their followers, would seek each to "bring down" the other and annihilate the other triumphantly and without sympathy -- a pattern then acclaimed to be in the greater good. Such is the attitude with respect to those the US disparages in claiming the role of world leader and policeman. The attitude is unfortunately reinforced by that of the individual [Abrahamic religions](#) in acclaiming the primacy of their respective values.

The unprecedented level of interest in the presidential debates, titillated by the explicit sexual dimension, establishes a further point for consideration. It would appear that popular preoccupation with issues associated with sexual intercourse and [fornication](#) is immeasurably greater than is assumed in the conventional political or academic arenas concerned with policy making in terms of "demographics".

This is exemplified by the conclusions of reports of the most eminent authorities, as with that of [The Royal Society](#) (*People and the Planet*, 2012). Failure to consider the popular existential preoccupation with sexual intercourse is a theme of a critical review of that report (*Scientific Gerrymandering of Boundaries of Overpopulation Debate*, 2012). The point is worthy of consideration by international organizations, especially the United Nations, which typically prohibit any reference to such matters.

Will the future conclude that the lewdness featured by Trump's style was a greater danger to the globe than the [head-in-the-sand](#) approach of the United Nations to the population challenge (*Trump as president would pose global danger: U.N. rights chief*, *Reuters*, 12 October 2016; *Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008)? The point could be made otherwise through the adage, [people in glass houses should not throw stones](#) (*Child sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers*, *Wikipedia*; *U.N. peacekeepers accused of raping civilians*, *CNN*, 6 April 2016).

Business-as-usual versus Risky change guaranteed?

As has been widely remarked, Clinton is heavily handicapped in that she represents business-as-usual. However her primary funders are supporting and endorsing her for that reason. It is readily perceived and assumed that a Clinton presidency would change little. Her appeal to some voters may well be precisely that -- whether they admit it or not.

Lessons can be learned from the symbolic promise made by Barack Obama -- to shut the [Guantanamo detention camp](#) (Rupert Cornwell, *Guantanamo Bay Closure: why plans to close the notorious prison may be wishful thinking*, *The Independent*, 23 July 2015). Clinton would be similarly constrained. Like Trump she is obliged to market the pretence of change. Unlike Trump that pretence is most likely to be the outcome of her presidency -- then to be rated as successful by her primary supporters.

Missing from criticism of the campaign to date, and of the first debate, is any discussion of the capacity of either candidate to keep their electoral promises -- whether or not they have the intention of doing so. In the case of Trump it is readily assumed that some of his promises are so ridiculous that he will simply deny having made them in the manner in which they are later called into question. His style is government by bluster -- bullying where this is feasible.

Again this has its appeal to a very significant proportion of the electorate. Why? However problematic the side effects, it could well prove viable -- and be appreciated by those who already feel themselves to have been unduly exposed to being bullied in some way. There are curious parallels with the recently elected president of the Philippines -- however much the latter's policies are unpleasantly at variance with international norms. Why the appeal of populist politicians in a number of European countries?

The Clinton style is however potentially far more problematic. As was noted by commentators on the first presidential debate, Clinton is a well-trained lawyer and a talented one at that. She has considerable experience in public debate with people of every kind and culture.

It has long been recognized that politicians are not expected to tell the truth, rather they are expected to lie appropriately and convincingly in order to advance the cause they are called upon to plead. Lawyers are required to do just that and are trained to that end. The point is increasingly taken seriously, as recently themed in response to current circumstances (*Post-truth Politics: Art of the Lie*, *The Economist*, 10 September 2016). The issue raises the specific question: *Politicians have always lied. Does it matter if they leave the truth behind entirely?* The issue was highlighted with regard to the Brexit vote in the UK (Matthew Piccaver, *The biggest political decision for a generation was based on a lie*, *The Independent*, 24 June 2016).

By contrast, Trump has a quite distinctively abrasive style which has served him well in business. He employs many lawyers -- duly instructed to ensure that he achieves his business objectives by fair means or foul. Clinton is claimed to have "won" that debate. However all she did was to demonstrate her well-honed talents -- which otherwise include the failure to follow up as promised. Trump is mistakenly said to have "lost". This is questionable because he is primarily a "do-er" who succeeds on the ground -- and for whom any debate is secondary.

The success of Clinton in debate cannot be claimed to be related to any achievements on the ground. A more appropriate indication of her success in that mode is evident from her role as US Secretary of State in explaining to the UN Secretary-General why his office and that of his colleagues had been the focus of systematic US electronic surveillance (*Alleged Breach of UN Treaty Obligations by US*, 2010; Robert Booth and Julian Borger (*US diplomats spied on UN leadership*. *The Guardian*, 28 November 2010). She obviated any formal protest by the UN by indicating on which side his bread was buttered.

The art of the matter for Clinton is in dissimulating in such a way as to avoid any timely challenge to the points being made -- in this case before the election. After the election any electoral promise can be reframed or ignored -- as has long been the primary characteristic of politics. Both candidates are skilled in the fine art of saying one thing and doing another -- as succinctly expressed by Carl Hiaasen (*Vote comes down to Liar vs. Liar*, *Miami Herald*, 27 May 2016).

There is no legal contract associated with an electoral promise. Why should a majority of the electorate be especially persuaded by Clinton, given the legal skills that can be used to ensure such reframing?

It is useful to recall the nickname given to [Richard Nixon](#) as President of the USA (*Tricky Dicky: Nixon recordings confirm popular view*, *The Guardian*, 4 December 2008). It is also useful to recall the dubious skills of one of his chief security advisors, [Henry Kissinger](#) -- who has long been threatened with indictment in certain jurisdictions, despite having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize ([Christopher Hitchens](#), *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, 2001). Some claim him to have been a model for the central figure in a dystopian movie (*Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, 1964). To what extent might the acknowledged hawk-like destructive propensities of Clinton invite the nickname Mrs Strangelove?

The point can be made otherwise. Europe is now facing the reality of having elected people of Clinton's style and skill as [President of the European Commission](#), namely [Jean-Claude Juncker](#), the current incumbent, and [José Manuel Barroso](#), the previous incumbent.

Juncker is now the focus of controversy regarding his role in so-called [LuxLeaks](#), namely [facilitating extensive tax avoidance](#) by multinational corporations during his previous role as premier of Luxembourg. In addition to other controversies, Barroso has now highlighted the dubious implications of the conventions of election to such a position through subsequently becoming non-executive chairman of [Goldman Sachs International](#) (GSI). Both Juncker and Barroso are the epitome of business-as-usual. On their watch, Europe has evolved into a condition of crisis for which clues to any alternative style of governance are few and far between.

Dilemma for voters

Many Americans, faced by two candidates who in no way reflect their values, find themselves in a trap. In intending to vote, if they do, how to determine which candidate will do the least harm?

On the current socio-economic downslope, will the business-as-usual policies be of greater or lesser benefit, especially if there is little room for real manoeuvre and innovation within that framework? Can Clinton do less than exacerbate existing disastrous trends? Or maybe it would be her skill in claiming that all is basically well which would be most appreciated by many -- enabling people to remain within their comfort zones, calling nothing fundamental into question. The media would be of proven good service in maintaining that illusion -- encouraged by relevant government agencies cultivating the necessary promises.

Trump is an expression of the downslope that Clinton makes every effort to disguise.

Clearly Trump constitutes a risk of a more recognizable sort. As with any bully, he would continue to be unpredictable and cause discomfort -- even extreme discomfort and pain. For the future this might be far less significant than the reactions to which it gave rise. People would be obliged to invent other modes of action -- irrespective of whether these met with the formal approval of the presidency or other constitutional authorities. Trump would abuse processes of law and order -- but which American president has not? However, unwittingly, he would engender creative responses of social significance in total contrast to the business-as-usual cultivated by Clinton, who would abuse such processes in a far more subtle manner.

The distinction can be expressed in terms of the "shock learning" offered by Trump and the "maintenance learning" which Clinton would promote. These distinctions were made in a major report to the Club of Rome (James Botkin, et al. *No Limits To Learning: bridging the human gap*, 1981). Maintenance learning was recognized as reinforcing existing categories and paradigms, the disciplines to which they give rise, and the professional and institutional division of labour of which they are the basis.

Trump is a wild card. As a potential disaster it is what he evokes in society that will be of value, not what he asserts he will do. This has always been the case with any bully. Clinton will not evoke anything new, or be able to do so, rather she will apply her skills to claiming that her policies represent renewal --, even if they are designed to fail, or must necessarily fail in a system of business-as-usual. Clinton is not Obama -- and what was the effective consequence of "[Yes We Can](#)"?

Time for paradoxical strategies and carpe diem?

The world, and the USA, have been exposed to decades of strategies, taking the form of virtual "wars" on: hunger, drugs, discrimination, pollution, terrorism, and the like (*Review of the Range of Virtual Wars*, 2005). It is questionable whether any of these wars have been undeniably won -- or even successful to the extent hoped.

Rather than envisaging strategic initiatives in terms of more "wars" -- seemingly doomed to failure -- there may well be a case for reframing the challenge and the metaphors used to that end, as separately discussed (*Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998).

Surprises have forced fundamental rethinking, as noted by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2007). He goes further to advocate far more radical appreciation of strategic possibilities (*Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*, 2012). Is the institutional system of the USA something that would gain from disorder -- or that at the global level?

Is it to be assumed that there will be no surprises for the world under the leadership of either Clinton or Trump? To what extent do they have the capacity to call upon new thinking -- especially given Clinton's implication in the pattern of thinking leading to the intelligence failure of 9/11 and the disastrous response to it?

Is new thinking to be expected of Trump, or rather -- as suggested above -- will his idiosyncratic behaviour require that people become strategically nimble in ways not previously envisaged? The argument is that it is from the people provoked by his election and actions that new thinking will emerge. Learnings from the many [open-source software](#) initiatives, suggest comparison of Clinton and Trump in terms of the metaphor to explain their success (Eric S. Raymond, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*, 1999). Trump is a denizen of the bazaar, whereas Clinton thrives in the cathedral.

An unpredictable dinosaur necessarily elicits creative ingenuity. Rather than conventional strategic responses, would the Trump presidency elicit responses of a higher order? In martial arts terms, the viable response to a "white-belted" bully is not on his own terms but through exploiting the energy he brings -- "black belt" initiatives dancing between the feet of the dinosaur, or elsewhere.

The possibility can be explored in terms of unconventional strategies (*Liberating Provocations: use of negative and paradoxical strategies*, 2005). Rather than the numerous strategies based on vainly attempting to stop people doing something, with token punishment or impunity for any abuse (drugs, smoking, tax evasion, littering, gun violence, etc), what are the alternatives, as yet considered inappropriate?

In one commentary by *The Economist* on the Clinton-Trump debate, reference is made to the iconic movie *A Few Good Men* (1992), starring Jack Nicholson in the role of the "demonic" Colonel Jessup responsible for the Guantanamo installation. For Jessup, as cited:

We live in a world that has walls. And those walls have to be guarded by men with guns.... Time and again Donald Trump was baited by Hillary Clinton into outbursts of Jessup-like candour....

The commentary notes that Colonel Jessup meets a satisfying fate, raging as he is led away by grim-faced military police. This is because in court, laws beat personal honour codes. But it concludes, as indicated above:

No consensus exists among American voters about what qualifies a leader to rule. Whoever wins the 2016 election, half the country will think them a disgrace on Day One. This is a drama with no neat ending.

Recalling Jessup, much has been made of the irresponsibility of Trump in systematically using as a slogan *Build the Wall* -- despite its notable appeal to large numbers of Americans. Indeed Trump could be understood as giving concrete form to the current initiatives of Homeland Security.

This "walling of America" (and the creation of [Fortress America](#)) comes in curious contrast to the "unwalling of Europe", as promoted and sustained by Angela Merkel (as the head of Europe's superpower) with the argument "*wir schaffen das*" (we can handle it). The damage this has caused to Europe through the arrival of refugees of every shade is the subject of continuing comment. There is no end in sight to the disastrous consequences.

Although seeming to be the antithesis of Colonel Jessup, the dramatic complementarity is evident. Adding to the complementarity, whilst Trump's walling is the focus of ridicule by most authorities, Merkel's unwalling has given rise to an astounding response to critics within her party by its Secretary General in unusually strong language: *Wer hier nicht für Angela Merkel ist, ist ein Arschloch und kann gehen* (*Tauber bepöbelt Merkel-Kritiker in der CDU, Politically Incorrect*, September 2016). However, epitomizing the style of business-as-usual of that party, none seemingly demonstrated the courage to leave.

Value of a disastrous president of the world's superpower?

Framing the forthcoming election in terms of "least harm" or "lesser evil" may well be interpreted by the future as an abdication of responsibility in order to preserve existing comfort zones to the extent possible (*Clinton or Trump: who will do the least harm?* *Baltimore Sun*, 1 August 2016; Mike LaBossiere, *Voting for the Lesser Evil*, *Talking Philosophy*, 7 March 2016; By John Halle and Noam Chomsky, *8-Point Rationale for Voting for the Lesser Evil Presidential Candidate*, *AlterNet*, 6 August 2016).

The controversial Cold War security strategy of [Mutual Assured Destruction](#) (MAD) was called into question by the argument of [Herman Kahn](#) (*Thinking the Unthinkable*, 1962). The relevance of thinking of that quality continues to be evoked as argued by Nik Gowin and Chris Langdon:

Executive leadership at the highest levels of corporate, public service and political life faces new vulnerabilities that few in these positions are willing to talk about publicly. They are greater than at any time in recent history. A proliferation of "unthinkable" events since late 2013 has revealed a new fragility at the highest levels of corporate and public service leaderships. Their ability to spot, identify and handle unexpected, non-normative events is shown not just to be wanting but also perilously inadequate at

critical moment (*Thinking the Unthinkable: a new imperative for leadership in the digital age*, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, 2016).

The theme has been taken up with respect to strategy relating to the Trump candidacy -- a Trump presidency being "unthinkable" (Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Thinking the Unthinkable -- A Trump White House Win*, *The Huffington Post*, 3 May 2016; Henry M. Paulson Jr., *Thinking the unthinkable: a former Republican Treasury secretary on a Trump presidency*, *Alaska Dispatch News*, 28 June 2016; James W. Ceaser and Oliver Ward, *Thinking the Unthinkable: how to survive a Trump presidency*, *The Weekly Standard*, 9 May 2016). The latter argues:

In the case of the handful of political commentators for whom a strategic approach might hold some appeal, it seems that they are waiting until the GOP convention in July to see if Trump is nominated. That would be a serious error...Strategic analysis for the feared political crisis has the advantage of simplicity. No elaborate game theoretical models or mathematical equations are required. All that is needed is the willingness to examine the possible uses of features of the existing political system, including elements that now lie dormant and would need to be reactivated.

Does the "unthinkable" now suggest examining the case for electing a president who would in all probability be a total disaster? Why is it so readily assumed that a "good president" has the capacity to ensure appropriate governance in the present condition of the world? Is there not a proven track record of questionable success in that regard? Has that approach brought about the change for which people have so desperately hoped?

The obvious counter-argument is that a disastrous president would necessarily bring about disaster, causing loss of livelihood and death. Concern has been expressed as to whether it is appropriate to have confidence in Trump with respect to control of nuclear codes -- in comparison with Clinton's "sure hands". However both have expressed willingness to use the codes under circumstances they see as appropriate. The assured consequence would be megadeaths -- notably with a backlash on American society of unpredictable proportions.

Allegedly Clinton's proclivities in this regard have resulted in senior figures in the US Democratic Party to begin considering what was previously unthinkable, as indicated in the light of the views of political commentator John Walsh:

The bellicose Hillary Clinton, who has never seen a war she does not love, could tumble us into World War III, a nuclear conflagration. She will certainly lead us in that direction. (*US Democrats begin Thinking the Unthinkable: replace Clinton in presidential run*, *Sputnik International*, 15 September 2015)

How is this to be compared with the initiatives taken by US authorities in reaction to 9/11 -- initiatives claimed to be the epitome of responsibility, notably with the complicity of Clinton? The death count is already within the scale of megadeaths and the suffering is immense -- fortunately far from the USA. But, forgetting global society, what of the consequences for American society after the expenditure of trillions of dollars in that endeavour?

The case for electing a president of the USA with the most dubious track record can be made through the case previously made for the election of Tony Blair as president of the [European Council](#) in 2009 (*Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe: maximizing early collective learning in anticipation of future crises*, 2009). [Herman Van Rompuy](#) was finally elected to that position -- approved as a pair of "sure hands".

The argument made there was the need for Europeans to learn as rapidly as possible from the nature of misrule of which Tony Blair had proven to be an exponent in relation to the disastrous intervention in Iraq (as now confirmed by the [Chilcot Report](#), 2016). The argument focused on:

- [Learning from manipulative communication skills](#)
- [Learning from leadership with a problematic track record](#)
- [Learning from "creative democracy"](#)
- [Learning from inspirational decision-making](#)
- [Learning from the "creative accounting" processes of government](#)
- [Learning from the creative reframing of commitments by government](#)
- [Learning from the outcome of necessary tough decisions of governance](#)
- [Questions for urgent collective learning by Europeans](#)
- [Necessity for a European Lord of Misrule?](#)

In that light Trump might well be preferable in that his propensity for disaster is already more evident than that of Clinton (Paul Waldman, *Trump's disastrous campaign shows he'd make a disastrous president*, *The Washington Post*, 10 August 2016). In the unusually insightful commentary of [Brendan Simms](#), it is not the US that has reason to be concerned but the rest of the world:

As for the idea that a Trump presidency would be a disaster, that is completely wide of the mark. It is actually much worse than most people think. President Trump has the potential to be an unmitigated catastrophe -- if not for the United States, then certainly for the rest of the world... Cumulatively, all this will cause considerable disruption. It will unravel many of the webs of international society carefully woven over the past six decades or so.... In short, President Trump is likely to deliver a severe shock to both the US and the rest of the world. Although at home there are clear limits to what he can achieve, there are far fewer constraints abroad. There is little doubt, therefore, that the Americans, and probably the British, will survive Trump. The

question is: will the rest of us? (*What would a Trump presidency mean for the rest of the world?* *New Statesman*, October 2016).

It could however be argued that, in the light of her skills, Clinton bears a degree of comparison with Tony Blair. For dubious reasons her conduct, as with others implicated, has not yet been formally investigated and condemned, as has been the case with Blair. Although the issue of her e-mails may prove to be the tip of the iceberg, this cannot be said to have caused the harm associated with the actions in which Blair was complicit. However her complicity in the 9/11 response may yet prove otherwise.

The world is seemingly faced with ever higher degrees of misleadership, as argued separately (*Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?* 2009). The military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in George Bush being so perceived (*Bush the Misleader*, *The Nation*, 25 September 2003; Frank Gaffney, Jr., *Misleadership*, *Center for Security Policy*, 19 January 2004; Mike Hersh, *Right Wing "Misleadership" Alienates Republicans*, *American Politics Journal*, 28 March 2001; Simon Tisdall, *America's great misleader*, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2002). How might the challenge for the future be most fruitfully reframed?

Readily compared to a hypersensitive bull, Trump offers the intriguing possibility of a population developing the skills of bullfighting -- in metaphorical terms (*Viable Global Governance through Bullfighting: challenge of transcendence*, 2009). The skills and risks of the matador merit reflection, as do those of [red teaming](#) in enabling collective response to the unthinkable (*Red Teaming Guide*, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2013).

Two wrongs do not make a right. Choosing the worst of the two may however serve to engender the right -- from the people. As with [tough love](#), it is a case of voting for the wrong person for the right reason -- rather than for the right person for the wrong reason.

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