

The Political World After Trump's Win

The Democratic Party's long sojourn into corporate-friendly politics – and neglect of its old working-class base – has led to the shocking result of an erratic and untested outsider becoming President. But is there a route back, asks Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

A new political force in America was unleashed on Tuesday and how the Democratic Party reacts to it could determine its future as a major party. Millions of discontented Americans who have lost out to the computerization and the globalization of the economy – and who have been disproportionately called on to fight America's "regime change" wars – have made clear that they aren't going to take it anymore. And any party or politician going forward better listen or they will be tossed out, too, including Donald Trump if he doesn't deliver.

This election has struck what should be a fatal blow to the Clintons' Democratic Leadership Council movement. Bill Clinton moved the Democratic Party to the center-right at about the same time that Tony Blair did with the British Labour Party. Both parties cut many of their traditional ties to labor unions in the 1990s to embrace the economic neoliberalism of their 1980s predecessors Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: welfare reform, deregulation of the financial sector and "free trade."

The effect on workers across the old industrial belts has been devastating. Millions have been pushed out of a middle-class lifestyle. They have seen their plants close and jobs shipped to cheap labor markets overseas. Or they have lost out to robotics.

They've also seen the economy shift from production to financial speculation. And they've seen the greatest transfer of wealth in decades to the obscenely rich. Wealthy liberals who've benefited from this shift often act as if they are morally superior to the system's "losers" who hear Hillary Clinton put them in a "basket of deplorables."

On Tuesday, these downwardly mobile workers spoke out, giving Trump the votes he needed in the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin to put him over the top in the Electoral College (although Clinton appears headed toward a plurality of the votes nationally.)

That someone as eminently unqualified (at least in the traditional sense) could flip the electoral map in this way was stunning. But is the Democratic Party

listening and can it adapt to reflect the interests of these Americans? The future of the party may depend on it.

For the past two decades, Democrats have relied on the support of these Rust Belt states as a bulwark for their national candidacies. These states voted twice for Barack Obama.

But many of these blue-collar workers were counting on a significant change to their circumstances, but Obama had failed to deliver that and Clinton only vaguely addressed their concerns with a variety of mostly small-bore policy ideas. Many of these voters judged that the Democrats couldn't or wouldn't deliver. So, they rudely slapped the party in the face.

Parallel political trends are playing out in Great Britain, where a discontented working class spearheaded the Brexit withdrawal from the European Union and where Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is fighting to dismantle Blair's so-called New Labour movement and trying to restore the Labour Party's historic ties to the working class.

Last week, we learned in a leaked speech that Bill Clinton gave last year that he denigrated Corbyn, saying Labour "went out and practically got a guy off the street to be the leader" of the party. "When people feel they've been shafted and they don't expect anything to happen anyway, they just want the maddest person in the room to represent them."

Bill Clinton's remarks were typical of the Democrats' smugness and their contempt for ordinary people. So there was some satisfaction in seeing the humiliation of these careerist and corporatist Democrats on Tuesday.

Now, the Democratic Party had better figure out how they can serve the interests of those blue-collar workers or the party can expect more of the same. So far they are blaming everyone and everthing for having created this workers' backlash: sexism, the media, FBI Director James Comey (Clinton pinned it specifically on him), Vladimir Putin, Green Party candidate Jill Stein and even Clinton cheerleader Bernie Sanders (for "poisoning the youth vote").

A former Clinton operative speaking on Fox News said the day after an election loss is a time to engage in the "blame game." He said "everybody is being blamed but Secretary Clinton."

Pursuing Solutions

There are solutions to economic injustice but few in power pursue them because it's not in their self-interest. And politicians of any party act primarily on self-interest these days, which usually translates into the interests of their

wealthy financial backers and is thus inimical to real democracy.

Without a sharp turn to the left to regain workers' support, the Democratic Party risks becoming totally irrelevant. A new batch of Democratic Party leaders committed to workers must emerge. They have four years to prepare.

Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren tarnished themselves as leaders who can achieve this by supporting a center-right candidate in Hillary Clinton. They failed to acknowledge that Clinton was too alienated from many blue-collar workers (especially whites) who in the end abandoned the party to gamble on Trump.

Sanders, an independent who chose to run in the Democratic primaries, had been offered the top of the Green Party ticket. The party's presidential nominee Jill Stein, who was willing to give up that spot, said he never answered her. Had they run together they might have gotten the 15 percent in the polls to enter the debates where Sanders would have been a lofty alternative to Clinton and Trump – though had Trump still won on Nov. 8, Sanders surely would have been denounced as a “sore loser” and blamed for “dividing the anti-Trump vote.”

As it turned out, the Democrats managed to lose the White House to Trump on their own. Though the Democratic leadership won't admit it, they now know that Sanders was running the right campaign to defend workers' interests and would have been the right messenger to carry that message. However, to protect their own privileged class interests and those of their donors, establishment Democrats left the country open to the dangerous victory of Donald Trump.

Rust Belt working-class voters can't be blamed for the choices they were given. Without Sanders – and with the Democrats offering one more establishment candidate – these alienated voters instead sent a demagogue to the White House, clinging to the hope that he might keep some of his promises: to end ruinous trade deals, bring back manufacturing jobs to the U.S., create jobs by rebuilding the infrastructure, avoid new wars and clean the D.C. swamp of corruption.

Judging by the people being mentioned for his Cabinet, it's already looking dodgy: the usual cast of right-wing Republicans – the likes of Newt Gingrich and Rudy Giuliani – who have been part of the problem going back decades.

Yet, if Trump fails to fulfill his promises to improve the economy for common Americans, the voters he so skillfully riled up might well send him packing in 2020 unless, of course, the Democrats put up another corporate choice.

That leaves the notoriously difficult path for a third party that could represent the interests of ordinary Americans. But that possibility showed

little traction in 2016, with marginal vote totals for both the Libertarian and Green parties.

Media Also Repudiated

On the positive side, this election became a repudiation not only of the Democratic Party insiders, but also of establishment Republicans, Wall Street, celebrity culture (with famous people flocking to Clinton) and the mainstream news media.

The shock to the American political system also is prompting admissions one would never have imagined hearing. On Fox News the morning after the election, a group of personalities (calling themselves “journalists”) were suddenly talking about class in America, a normally taboo subject.

One of them said journalists didn’t understand this election because none of them know anyone who makes less than \$60,000 a year. Apparently, these pampered performers don’t even mix with many members of their own profession. I can introduce them to plenty of journalists making less than that, let alone Rust Belt workers.

Will Rahn of CBS News accused the media of missing the story “after having spent months mocking the people who had a better sense of what was going on. This is all symptomatic of modern journalism’s great moral and intellectual failing: its unbearable smugness.”

Rahn said working-class people have “captured the imagination of journalists, who have come to talk about them like colonial administrators would talk about a primitive inland tribe that interferes with the construction of a jungle railway: *They must be pacified until history kills them off.*”

These are stunning admissions that would never have happened without this election result. But one wonders how long such introspection in the corporate media will last. After the mainstream media got the Iraq WMD story wrong and contributed to the disastrous 2003 invasion, there were a few halfhearted *mea culpas* but very little accountability.

For instance, Washington Post editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who repeatedly wrote as flat fact that Iraq was hiding WMD and who mocked the few dissenting voices trying to warn Americans about the flimsiness of the evidence, is still the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

So, not surprisingly – with almost none of the “star journalists” suffering any career setbacks – the corporate media was soon joining more propaganda campaigns for more wars, which are mostly fought by young working-class men and women who

actually do suffer.

The difference now is that this new political force of fed-up voters – who “came out of nowhere” as far as the Democrats and the media were concerned although these voters were staring them in the face – might now force a re-evaluation. That’s because these voters are likely still to be there four years from now.

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Gambling on the Unknowable Trump

Donald Trump’s victory may have shaken up the System but it also revealed a recklessness (or a desperation) among Americans in handing over such immense power to someone so untested, says Michael Brenner.

By Michael Brenner

At this moment of unprecedented upheaval, it is striking that some things never change. We are being subject to a tidal wave of interpretation and speculation as to what a Trump administration means for American foreign relations in regard to inter alia Russia, Syria, the Iran nuclear deal, the “pivot to Asia,” trans-Atlantic ties and, of course, Mexico.

It is entirely natural for a distraught political elite to wonder what comes next from this unstable, quixotic showman who soon will be sitting in the White House. It is neither natural nor appropriate, though, to make believe that Washington in experiencing a transition of power to be approached in standard terms. The unpalatable truth is that we have no idea as to what Trump will do or not do.

Trump’s campaign remarks are the sole evidence available for indications of the direction that he will take. That is an extremely flimsy basis for forecasting actions abroad. For two reasons. Candidates’ calculated sound bites while running almost never are a reliable guide to their thinking – in its rudimentary form or as it takes shape under the influence of real life conditions and the counsel of advisers.

Consider Barack Obama, a far more thoughtful, sober and intelligent man. Remember the objective of eliminating nuclear weapons (rather than committing \$1 trillion to the development of a more “usable” arsenal). Remember closing Guantanamo and reining in electronic surveillance of Americans. Remember ending the engagement of American troops in the “GWOT” (we now are fighting in 38 places by one means or another).

Remember “resetting” relations with Vladimir Putin’s Russia to emphasize dialogue. Remember the stated goal of normalizing relations with the Mullahs in Teheran instead of treating them as inherently hostile to America. Remember promoting democracy as the long-term cure to what ails the Middle East (instead, backing full tilt the Gulf autocracies, including Saudi Arabia’s homicidal war on the Yemeni people; Sisi’s oppressive autocracy in Egypt; and Israel’s increasing brutalization of the Palestinians).

Points of Demagoguery

Second, Trump’s comments about foreign policy were mere points of demagoguery meant, as with everything else he said, to appeal to the primitive instincts of an aroused audience. There is not the slightest sign that he had thought seriously about any of it. Donald Trump finds serious thinking itself an alien mental activity.

Moreover, he has few experienced advisers in his entourage. Apart from some conversations with retired General Michael Flynn, the off-beat former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the chairman of his national security advisory panel, James Woolsey, former Director of the CIA, his “advisers” have been a collection of odd-balls, non-entities and dogmatists. Woolsey himself is an uber-hawk whose views on all matters of consequence align with those of the neocons, the Cheney-like hard nationalists and Hillary Clinton – and are diametrically opposite to Trump’s much publicized iconoclastic remarks.

So what we will be seeing between now and the Inauguration, and afterwards, is a mad rush by a horde of aspirants for the power and access to occupy Donald Trump’s mind – if they can find it.

This is the brutal reality. Since it provides little of substance for the habitual commentators, they are inclined to play a game of make-believe – conjuring supposedly meaningful evidence from what is a kaleidoscope of emotional outbursts and a fantasia of day dreams.

There is good reason to believe that within six months of Trump’s taking office, when his administrations undertakes its first half-baked measures abroad, the

think tank crowd will be writing articles and monographs on “The Trump Doctrine.”

In other words, the same mentality that helped get us into this mess. Americans have become committed to a new categorical imperative: I sound off, therefore I am.

If Truth be told, the America we have known and imagined is ended. It never will return. In terms of relations with others, image is of enormous importance. The United States has gained great advantage from being seen as exceptional. From its earliest days, it fascinated and gave inspiration as the first working democracy, as the embodiment of the hope-filled New World, as the land of the common man and common decency.

Later, as it grew into a world power, it held the allure for many as being somehow beyond the world’s pervasive tawdriness. These images held even as contradicted by slavery and racism, by imperial wars of expansion, by signs of hypocrisy. America did tip the balance in favor of the right side in two world wars; it did demonstrate uncommon magnanimity in its support for German and Japanese reconstruction and democracy. Even when playing the game of power politics, it retained a measure of credibility as the one underwriter and arbitrator to whom others might resort.

The resulting “soft power” or “soft influence” has been a unique asset. Already dissipated to a high degree over the decades of the Global War On Terror, it now is destined to fade into a shadow of its former self. A blatantly racist, xenophobic, studiously ignorant, and belligerent country cannot retain the respect of other governments or the high regard of their peoples.

A country so feckless as to choose Trump the buffoon as its President is mocking itself. The negative impact will be compounded as the United States is riven by internal conflicts of all kinds, repressive actions and perhaps another serious economic crisis.

The damage to America’s standing in the world should hardly be a surprise; yet many are inclined to underestimate the effect. One cannot appreciate what we have become by talking to foreign friends on the Washington circuit, or by listening to the polite regrets of those around the world who are interviewed by the media. Walk the streets of cities abroad for unscripted reactions to this historic act of national self-mutilation.

We can expect that whoever winds up in senior policy positions in a Trump administration will downplay these intangibles – if they even acknowledge them. In this, they will be encouraged by the tradition of self-delusion that has

become a feature of American thinking about its place in the world.

Think of the Middle East where just about everything that we have been doing since 2001 has been guided by a fantastical view of the region – from Iraq, to Syria, to Yemen, to the Gulf, to Turkey, to Palestine and Israel.

Divorced from Reality

This tendency to divorce ourselves from reality so as to perpetuate myths of American omnipotence and superiority is also witnessed at the operational level. Consider these examples:

–The U.S. habitually characterizes anybody who resists our use of force against them as evil and criminal. Thus, the insurgents in Iraq are “anti-Iraqi” forces; the Houthis in Yemen are Iranian proxies, the Palestinians are nothing but terrorists, the Russian population in the Donbas region of Ukraine are Russian commandos directed from the Kremlin with the aim of unraveling all of Europe and NATO, etc. etc.

–American policy-makers find it convenient to pursue strategies that entail squaring circles. The outcome is predictable. The outstanding case in point is Syria where for four years they have committed themselves to ousting Assad by force while continuing the fight against violent Islamist groups. That has placed us in the absurd position of allying with Al Qaeda (providing indirect material, and indirect political support) while still fulminating about the grave danger of terrorism.

–We present ourselves as the promoter and well-wisher of democracy while giving unstinting support to oppressive regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and elsewhere while facilitating the ouster of democratically elected reformist leaders in Honduras, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil.

These self-delusional practices have prepared the psychological ground for the grand illusion to come in assuming that the America of Trump will continue to draw the world’s admiration and its deference to American leadership.

Normalizing Trump

The inclination to “normalize” the transition in treating Trump, his utterances and his odd-lot entourage as if they somehow could be squeezed into conventional molds is understandable. It is a manifestation of an unwitting coping strategy for coming to terms with the shattering event of his election.

Americans in general are pursuing a similar psychological strategy for the sake of preserving the conception of themselves and their country deeply rooted in

their consciousness. Hence, the impulse to minimize the singularity of this revolutionary development without precedent – not only in the United States but anywhere in the democratic world. This is one instance where American “exceptionalism” is not prized.

This is a natural reaction to a brutal Truth about Americans – and its dire consequences. For the choice of Trump reveals most Americans as immature and prone to juvenile behavior. To vote for Trump is the ultimate act of political immaturity.

There are, of course, identifiable reasons why many were drawn to the flamboyant candidate, why his demagoguery resonated, why his exaggerated imagery struck a receptive nerve. However, for that emotional response to translate into the actual selection of this man to be President crosses a critical threshold.

Children – at times – let emotion rule their conduct. Children only weakly feel the imperative to impose logic and a modicum reason on their impulses. Children disregard consequences. Children overlook the downside in their implicit weighing of the balance in giving in to those impulses or not. Grown-ups do not.

Immediate satisfaction – at all and any cost – does not eclipse other considerations for adults. Even a child’s tantrum usually lasts no more than ten minutes or so. The tantrum of Trump voters has lasted 18 months.

That’s pathological – anyway you cut it. Admittedly, some Trump supporters share his perverted view of the world – even if contradicted by his own personal history. Let’s say 12 to 15 percent of the electorate. A larger slice was represented by dyed-in-the-wool Republicans who relished sticking it to the Hillary and the Democrats to such a degree that their thrill at the spectacle overcame their realization that Trump was unfit for the office. Indeed, many probably expected him to lose and, therefore, felt free to go along for the fun of it.

That leaves roughly 10 to 20 percent of the electorate who placed their emotional gratification above their responsibilities as citizens and above the wellbeing of the Republic. That is the difference between the nearly 50 percent he received and what a broad rejection would represent. They constitute the hard core of the culpable juveniles.

What about those who could not stand Hillary, who felt an irresistible impulse to express that feeling somehow? Many options were open to them: abstain, vote for one of the minor candidates, go to the gym and exhaust oneself on an elliptical trainer, get drunk, smoke some weed, pick a fight with one’s spouse. Any of these represents more grown-up behavior than voting for Donald Trump.

By comparison, in France when Jean Marie Le Pen – candidate of the racist far-right party, the Front National – FN, made it into the second round of their presidential election, he and his party were rejected by 82.2 percent of the electorate. In other words, the French rallied together to reject Le Pen. That is what a mature polity does. And Le Pen is sane, albeit a crypto-fascist.

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The World Sees a Diminished America

While there is hope that President Trump will end the bloody years of U.S. adventurism abroad, the initial shock from his victory could diminish America's standing in the world, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The impact of the election result on the standing of the United States in the world has too many aspects to encapsulate or even, in this early stage of shock, to comprehend.

This is particularly so with a president-elect who will have to construct a foreign policy largely unguided by previous thinking on his part that exhibits consistency and coherence beyond a few themes such as discontent with free-loading allies, admiration for powerful autocrats, and conceiving of economic relations in zero-sum mercantilist terms.

But we can already note some aspects of America's global standing that are related to the election itself and the campaign that preceded it. These aspects involve damage that already has been done, and that the result of the election punctuates and extends.

Some of the damage stems from the xenophobic content of Mr. Trump's campaign, with the disparagement, or what many overseas will take to be disparagement, of major parts of humanity, including among others the nearly quarter of the world's population that is Muslim. That such a campaign was a winning campaign reveals the underlying views to be held by much more of America than the president-elect himself.

The extent to which those views are held by Americans who are deplorable or by Americans who are merely discontented and easy prey for such themes matters less

to overseas observers than the content of the views themselves.

This pattern hits the American image hard in a place where it hitherto has looked rather good. Many polls conducted overseas have yielded results that couple negative views of U.S. policies with positive feelings toward the American people. Perhaps the latter part of such results will start to become less pronounced.

A Procedural Black Eye

Then there is the presidential selection process itself. The election to the most powerful post in the world of someone who is, by temperament and experience, so manifestly unqualified to hold it will be taken by many as a failure of that process.

And Mr. Trump himself provided voluminous rhetoric during the campaign about how the process is "rigged," how he would not accept an unfavorable outcome, and how if he won he would incarcerate his opponent, amid references to "Second Amendment solutions" and the like. A casual foreign observer only needed to listen to Mr. Trump to conclude that America's claim to having an admirable liberal democratic process for choosing its leaders is false.

A more careful, less casual, foreign observer might discount Mr. Trump's rhetoric as campaign bombast but would notice other disturbing things about the election. It appears that Mrs. Clinton won a plurality of the popular vote, making this the second out of the last five U.S. presidential elections in which the popular vote winner was denied the White House.

Foreign observers might not appreciate the background to why the Electoral College exists, but the disconnect between votes cast and offices won is even more apparent with the routine and blatant gerrymandering, which has served as an incumbent protection device as well as enabling the Republican Party in recent years to hold a majority of seats in the House of Representatives even while losing in total votes to the Democrats.

On top of that are the comparably blatant efforts by one party to gain or hold office not just by winning votes but by suppressing voting by citizens deemed more likely to support the other party. And on top of that in this election was the October surprise from the head of the top national law enforcement agency, a development that in an election this close could well have made a difference in the outcome.

All of this is prime material for anyone overseas wanting to disparage American democracy. Regimes with that motivation have been having a field day. Iranian propaganda writers have had an easy time, merely encouraging people to follow

the U.S. election campaign on television. Vladimir Putin didn't need to interfere in the U.S. political process to diminish any image advantage it has over his own.

The fact that the side that benefited from things such as voter suppression and Comey's surprise won the U.S. political contest is what extends into the future the already inflicted damage to the image of American democracy. That is in addition to this election demonstrating that in America, a xenophobic campaign is a winner. A victory by Mrs. Clinton would have been seen overseas both as a repudiation of the xenophobia and as an overcoming by the political process of the irregularities.

If there is any possible offsetting advantage regarding what American democracy in action displays to others, it is that we will be spared seeing Republicans doing everything possible to frustrate a President Clinton's ability to govern. The foreshadowing of such a scenario, had the election result gone the other way, was obvious. There was much talk of impeachment, which is supposed to be a remedy for high crimes and misdemeanors committed in office, before the target even took office or won an election to the office.

Victory for the Saboteurs

Also, as columnist Richard Cohen observed, Congressman Jason Chaffetz, "the chairman of what amounts to the Permanent Committee to Investigate Hillary (actually, the House Oversight Committee)," was promising before the election to conduct investigations "until the end of time or Fox News loses interest, whichever comes first."

Perhaps most stunning were the promises, after Republican refusal all year even to consider President Obama's nominee to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court, to block anyone a President Clinton nominated to the court during an entire four-year term.

Such a position not only would have represented a new depth in governmental dysfunction but also a direct assault on the concept of an independent judiciary, which is one of the most important things that separate stable liberal democracies that operate with the rule of law from a lot of other less admirable countries that don't. And this talk was coming not from Donald Trump but from the principal runner-up for the Republican nomination (Ted Cruz) and a previous presidential nominee (John McCain).

Of course, being "spared" sabotage and obstruction probably should not be considered an advantage when the alternative is to have the saboteurs running the whole show.

The defacement of American democracy, as well as the xenophobia, both of which are already unavoidably associated with Donald Trump's presidency before he even takes the oath of office, have multiple and significant consequences for U.S. overseas interests, however difficult it may be to limn precise effects that will appear over the next four years.

The consequences will include degradation of any claim by the United States to leadership of inclusive, liberal democracies. They also will include weakening of political advantages – especially among disparaged or excluded populations and the governments that lead them – that the United States has traditionally enjoyed as an object of admiration and emulation. They include a reduction of confidence in, and support for, democracy itself.

Anything that weakens, or threatens to weaken, Americans' own stable, inclusive democracy ought to be a source of dismay regardless of the repercussions overseas. But those repercussions are an added reason for the dismay.

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How Electoral College Cheats Democracy

Exclusive: A shadow over Donald Trump's "election" is the fact that Hillary Clinton appears headed toward a significant plurality of the national popular vote, a quirk from the archaic Electoral College, notes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

The election commentary now filling the Internet seems distinctly out of touch. Many analysts are castigating Hillary Clinton for all the things she did wrong, her failure to connect with [white workers in the Rust Belt](#), [her inability to sufficiently rally blacks](#), and so on. Or they're criticizing the American people for falling for a racist, sexist know-nothing like Donald Trump.

But these critics are ignoring the elephant in the parlor. The simple fact is that Americans didn't elect Trump. An ancient relic known as the Electoral College did. For better or worse, a plurality of the people voted for Hillary Clinton.

Indeed, her margin of victory is turning out to be bigger than many imagined. The latest count by the Associated Press has her ahead by about a half million popular votes, or Clinton's 48 percent to Trump's 47 percent. That's about the same as George W. Bush's *losing* margin in 2000 before a judicial coup d'état propelled him into office.

But Nate Cohen of *The New York Times's* "Upshot" team is predicting that by the time all mail-in, absentee, and provisional ballots are counted, it will end up even bigger, i.e., as high as 2.2 million, or 1.7 percent. That's ten times John F. Kennedy's margin of victory in 1960 and four times Richard Nixon's in 1968.

If true, then Clinton will not only have won in terms of the popular vote, she will have won *big* (or as Trump might say "bigly" or "big league" depending on how you decipher one of his favorite expressions). Yet thanks to an obscure constitutional quirk, she's not the one going to the White House. Instead, an orange-haired reality TV star is so that he possibly can do to the United States what he did to his own real-estate empire, i.e. drive it into bankruptcy.

A Failure of Democracy

Three things seem clear as a consequence. One is that America has a major problem on its hands. After all, this is the second time in 16 years that the people (or at least a plurality of the people) have been robbed of their choice for president. And both times political democracy has suffered a major body blow as a consequence. How much more abuse the democratic process can take without succumbing entirely is now open to question.

A second thing is that no one has foggiest idea how to fix it. A third is that the ruling elite and its minions in the chattering classes don't give a damn because, in contrast to the population at large, they benefit from the breakdown (it's much easier to control a demoralized population that has lost faith in the value of democracy) and are therefore eager to sweep the entire issue under the rug. So let's take these issues on one at a time and see where they lead.

First, the problem. The Electoral College is a very Eighteenth-Century affair, an example of what happens when New World pragmatism combines with the Age of Reason's love affair with ancient Rome. Faced with a tentative new republic in which "democracy" tended to be limited, local and individualist, the Framers concluded that a special body of elite electors was needed to hold the country together and ensure that a solid leader like George Washington took the reins.

The decision may not have been unreasonable given the exigencies of the day. (The proposed Constitution was a radical departure from the Articles of Confederation, which made the states supreme. The Constitution shifted

sovereignty to “We the People,” but the states, especially the small ones, still wanted a significant role in the new hybrid system.)

Unexpected Problems

But 230 years later, the device has turned out to have unexpected consequences. By awarding one vote for every senator and representative that a state sends to Washington, it triples the clout of demographic Lilliputians like Wyoming (population 586,107, according to the most recent estimate) at the expense of multi-racial giants like California (population 39.1 million). By forcing presidential candidates to concentrate on a handful of swing states, it sidelines Democratic strongholds like California or New York along with Republican bastions such as Indiana or the Deep South.

It also effectively cancels out millions of votes. Since Clinton carried New York State by 59 percent, it means that out of the 4.1 million people who voted her, some 632,000 might just as well have stayed home. Since she carried California by 61 percent, more than a million Golden State residents could have done the same.

Since it makes it possible to rack up a majority of electoral votes by winning a plurality in a surprisingly small number of state contests, one reform group has calculated that a candidate could conceivably win with as little as 30 percent of the popular vote overall. Indeed, if a third party makes a strong showing, it could even be less since all the winning candidate would have to do is win a 34-percent plurality in as few as 16 states.

As farfetched as such arithmetic may be, it shows how readily the two kinds of votes, electoral and popular, can diverge. The tighter the contest, moreover, the greater the chance that they will, which is why they did so in 2000 when Al Gore and George W. Bush were running neck-and-neck and again in 2016 when the race proved unexpectedly close. Rather than resolving differences fair and square, it’s a process all but designed to leave the majority (or a plurality) feeling cheated and scorned when races are hardest fought.

Undercounting Urban Voters

The Electoral College also tips the balance in favor of the Right by penalizing urban giants like California or New York, where ten times as many people ride the subways each day as live in all of Wyoming. Where Hispanics and racial minorities account for 44 percent of the ten most populous states, they account for less than 30 percent of the ten least. Yet it’s the latter who benefit.

This is unfair, undemocratic, and downright racist. But it’s also counterproductive because it prevents government from addressing human needs

where they are most likely to occur, i.e. in crowded cities or traffic-snarled suburbs rather than in the Big Sky country of Montana where hardly anyone lives and cows outnumber people by better than two to one.

Not that the Electoral College is the only institution that shamelessly flouts the principle of one person-one vote. The Senate is even worse since it gives equal weight to California and Wyoming even though the former's population is some 67 times greater. But not only do two wrongs not make a right, but it turns out that Democratic senatorial candidates collectively outpolled Republicans on Tuesday as well by 45.2 million to 39.3. But so inequitable is the system that the GOP still wound up with a 51-seat majority.

Something must be done, which brings us to problem number two: the solution. The answer is that nothing can be done because, under the current system, the tools to fix it do not exist. In 2006, a Stanford computer science professor named John Koza came up with a clever scheme to sidestep the Electoral College by calling on each state to pledge its electoral votes to whoever won the popular tally. Once states accounting for a majority of electoral votes – as few as 16 as we have seen – signed on, it would be a done deal.

But after ten states plus the District of Columbia lined up behind Koza's reform, the movement stalled. One reason is that Republican states have no incentive to support a reform that clearly reduces their clout. Another is that swing states are even less inclined since they reap real-life rewards from their role as presidential battlegrounds. So the idea of democratizing the Electoral College appears to be a dead end.

No Way Out

That leaves reform via a constitutional amendment. But this is the unlikeliest of all thanks to an arcane amending process that requires two-thirds of each house plus three-fourths of the states to approve any change, no matter how minor. The first is a non-starter since Republicans control both the House and Senate, while the second is even worse since it allows just 13 states to block any reform sought by the remainder.

Thirteen micro-population states representing as little as 4.4 percent of Americans are not likely to do away with an arrangement that augments their own power. By the year 2030, they'll be even less likely since their share of the population by that point will have shrunk to just 3.5 percent, according to Census Bureau projections.

Unfairness thus appears to be locked in – not for years or decades but for as long as the current constitutional arrangement persists.

Which brings us to item number three: the role of the political elite. As *The New York Times* pointed out on Friday, Clinton criticized the Electoral College during the “battle of Florida” in November 2000.

“I believe strongly that in a democracy, we should respect the will of the people,” she said, “and to me that means it’s time to do away with the Electoral College and move to the popular election of our president.”

Twelve years later, Trump lashed out at it as well, tweeting that it is “a disaster for a democracy.”

This time around, the silence is deafening. Trump didn’t mention it since he is obviously loath to quarrel with an arrangement that put him over the top. But Clinton said nothing in her concession speech about outpolling her opponent either. Why not?

One reason is that she had taken an oath to uphold the Constitution as senator and had then invoked it too many times on the campaign trail to talk about changing the rules now that they had gone against her. But another is that any mention would lead to questions about how such an outmoded and inequitable system had been allowed to persist 16 years after the political disaster of Bush v. Gore.

Why did the politicians fail to fix a system that is so obviously broken or – for that matter – even take any initial steps? How could they be so lax? These are questions that Clinton now finds inconvenient because she knows there is no easy answer, so she held her tongue. Her devotion to the constitutional status quo outweighs her loyalty to the plurality of Americans who voted for her. (One can only imagine how Trump and his angry supporters would have reacted if Trump triumphed in the popular vote but was denied the presidency. One might assume that he would cite that fact as proof that the system was “rigged.”)

Losing Credibility

But the problem is not going away. The system is, in fact, collapsing before our eyes. Elections are a mess because they’re in the hands of thousands of state and county officials with their own special rules and procedures – not because a system like this makes sense (it obviously doesn’t), but because that’s what the Framers decreed (or didn’t anticipate) and no one knows how to change it.

Congress is frozen and corrupt while democratic accountability is nonexistent in an age of filibusters and anonymous Senate “holds” allowing a single legislator to prevent certain actions, such as confirmation votes for senior officials, from reaching the floor. Poland disappeared from the map in 1795 because a bizarre “liberum veto” allowed gave each senator power to block any bill and

thus throw the entire government into paralysis. Yet today's Senate "holds" allow individual legislators to do much the same.

Meanwhile, the only thing worse than a rightwing thug like Trump is a rightwing thug whose legitimacy is in question and who therefore can be counted on to turn even more thuggish by way of compensation.

Something should be done but nothing will be because the Founders had no idea that the system would last as long as it has and therefore neglected to include a workable toolkit with which to perform the necessary repairs. It's not a pretty picture. But it will not get any better until the people face the problem of how to fix it on their own.

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The Establishment Strikes Back

Donald Trump's win shook up the System but the empire is already striking back as the same-ole powers-that-be seek to "guide" Trump back to establishment-friendly and pro-war policies that many voters rejected, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The immediate impact of Donald Trump's victory among those of us who favored his candidacy over Hillary Clinton's was triumphalism on the day after. This euphoric mood was very well captured on [a special edition](#) of the Russia Today's "Cross Talk" show, which registered an audience of more than 110,000 on-line viewers, a number which is rare if not unprecedented.

But much of the potential for positive change which came with Trump's victory will be dissipated if all of us do not do what Barack Obama and Donald Trump did a couple of days ago: reach out to shake hands with political opponents, who will remain opponents, and nonetheless move forward together in a constructive manner.

If left to its own devices, the U.S. foreign policy establishment will continue doing what it has done since Nov. 8: wishing away the whole Trump victory. At present, these think tank scholars and major media columnists are in denial, as we see from op-eds published by *The New York Times* and other anti-Trump

mainstream media. They question his mandate for change and his ability to execute change. They offer to hold his hand, bring him to his senses and ensure that his election (at least regarding its message about trying to cooperate with Russia on shared goals such as fighting terrorism) was in vain.

These spokesmen for the Establishment choose to ignore that Trump's first moves after winning were to reward those in his party who had first come out in support of him and who stood by him in the worst days of the campaign, of which there were many. I note the rising stars of Mike Pence and Rudy Giuliani, among others. This makes it most improbable that he will also reward those who did everything possible to stymie his candidacy, first, and foremost the neoconservative and liberal interventionist foreign policy loudmouths.

Perhaps to comfort themselves, perhaps to confuse us, these foreign policy elitists say Trump is interested mainly in domestic affairs, in particular rebuilding American infrastructure, canceling or modifying Obamacare. They call him an isolationist and then fill in the content of his supposed isolationism to suit their purposes. They propose to give him a speed course on why continued global hegemony serves America's interests and the interests of his electorate.

Yet, the record shows that Trump formulated his plans for U.S. military and foreign policy explicitly during the campaign. He said he would build up the U.S. military potential. He spoke specifically of targets for raising the number of men and women under arms, raising the construction of naval vessels, modernizing the nuclear arsenal. These plans are cited by the Establishment writers today as contradicting Trump's thinking about getting along with all nations, another major motif of his campaign rhetoric. They propose to help him iron out the contradictions.

Explaining Trump's Contradictions

But the answer to the apparent contradictions could well be that Trump was saying what he had to say to get elected. Consistency has not been at the center of Trump's style. I maintain that the apparent contradictions were intentionally planted by Trump to secure the support of unsophisticated patriots while a very well integrated program for the way forward has been there in his pocket all the time.

Expanding U.S. military might will cost a lot, at the same time Trump has said he will not raise taxes nor raise debt. This means, in fact, reallocation of existing budgets. The most obvious place to start will be to cut back on the number of U.S. military bases abroad, which now number more than 600 and which consume \$600 billion annually in maintenance costs.

The Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy recently described this spending rather colorfully when reassuring his compatriots that the U.S. is not as powerful as it appears. Said Zhirinovskiy, a lot of the Pentagon's allocations go to buying toilet paper and sausages, not military muscle as such. Moreover, the bases abroad tend to create local, regional and global grievances against the United States that, in turn, increase the need for still more bases and military expenditures.

If Trump begins by cutting back on the bases now surrounding and infuriating the Russian Federation, he would take a big step towards relaxation of international tensions, while saving money for his other security and domestic priorities.

Trump also has said he will require U.S. allies to pay more for their defense. This particularly concerns Europe, which is prosperous, but not carrying its weight in NATO despite years of exhortations and cajoling by the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. The U.S. pays two-thirds of the NATO's bills. Trump has declared that this is unacceptable.

The Pentagon budget represents a bit over 4 percent of GDP, whereas in Europe only several countries have approached or crossed the 2% of GDP minimum that the U.S. and NATO officials have called for. As a practical matter, given the ongoing stagnation of the European economies, widespread heavy indebtedness and the ongoing national budgets operating at deficits that exceed the guidelines of the European Central Bank, it is improbable (read impossible) for Europe to step up to bat and meet U.S. demands.

This will then justify the U.S. withdrawal from NATO that figures at the sidelines of the wish list of Trump supporters, not isolationism per se. Trump supporter and military analyst Andrew Bacevich wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs* that the U.S. may well pull out of NATO completely in the early 2020s.

As a fallback, the Establishment spokesmen speculate on how the President-elect will be taken in hand by members of his own party and by their own peers so that his wings are clipped and his directional changes in U.S. foreign and defense policy are frustrated before they are even rolled out during the 100 days of the new administration.

Very likely, that same foreign policy establishment will resume its howling in the wind if they are proven wrong after Trump's Inauguration on Jan. 20, 2017, and he proceeds precisely down the path of policies that he clearly enunciated during the campaign.

Why do I think that Trump as President will follow through on the foreign policy promises of Trump, the candidate? There is a simple explanation. His announced

policies regarding accommodation with Russia, renunciation of “regime change” as a U.S. government priority abroad and the like were all set out by Trump during the campaign in the full knowledge they would bring him lots of well-organized criticism and gain him few votes, given the electorate’s focus on domestic policy issues.

He also knew that his positions, including condemning President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq, would cost him support within his own party leaders, which is what happened. He even weathered Hillary Clinton calling him a “puppet” of Russian President Vladimir Putin during the third presidential debate and other McCarthyistic innuendo portraying him as some kind of Manchurian Candidate.

A Clash over Wars

Thus, we may assume that once he is in the saddle, he will not shy away from implementing these clearly stated policies. The impending clash between a foreign policy establishment with its supercilious attitude toward the new incumbent in the Oval Office and a determined President pulling in the other direction will surely create political tension and prompt many angry op-eds in Washington.

Accordingly, I have some constructive recommendations both to my fellow Trump supporters and to Trump’s opponents in the foreign policy establishment and mass media. I earnestly ask the editors of *Foreign Affairs* magazine and their peer publications serving the international-relations expert community to finally open their pages and give equal time for high quality contributions by followers of the “realist” school, who have been systematically excluded over the past several years as the New Cold War set in.

I address the same message to the mainstream electronic and print media, which has engaged in a New McCarthyism by blacklisting commentators whose views run counter to the Washington consensus and also publicly denigrating them as “tools of Putin.”

To put it in terms that anyone in the Russian affairs field and even members of the general public will understand, we need a six-to-nine month period of *Glasnost*, of open, free and very public debate of all those key international security issues which have not been discussed due to the monopoly power of one side in the argument.

I am calling for genuinely open debate, which allows for opinions that clash with the bipartisan “group thinks” that have dominated the Democratic and Republican elites. This concerns firstly the question of how to manage relations with Russia and China. Without any serious consideration of where the West’s

escalating hostilities have been leading, we have been plunging forward blindly, stumbling towards a potential nuclear war – precisely because alternative policy views were kept out.

For those of us who have been part of the silenced opposition to the Washington consensus of the Bush and Obama years, we must engage with our intellectual opponents. Only in this way can we strengthen our reasoning powers and the quality of our policy recommendations so that we are fully prepared to deal with the fateful questions under review.

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