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Why I Fear and Loathe Trump Even More Now Than On Election Day

By Andrew Levine
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Long before Hillary Clinton was parachuted into New York State to become its Senator, I was certain that she was a disaster waiting to happen. Nothing that has happened in the years since has disabused me of that belief. Now that the Democratic Party has taken up her reckless anti-Russia campaign with a degree of enthusiasm that only sore losers in denial can muster, I am more convinced than ever that I was right.

For a variety of reasons that I have discussed many times on this site and elsewhere and that I will not go back over now, I opposed lesser evil voting in the 2016 presidential contest. I am as confident now as I ever was that this was the right thing to do. In elections for President, it almost always is.

Nevertheless, I had no doubt that of the two god-awful choices voters faced, Trump was worse. I never gave this much thought, however, because it seemed inconceivable that any Democrat, even one with a proven record of failing at everything she does, could lose to such a buffoon.

The conventional wisdom has it that Hillary is a “pragmatist,” who has been around the block a dozen times and who knows how to get things done. I, along with many others who had been paying attention, knew better. I knew that as a First Lady she was no prize, that she had done a lackluster job as a Senator, and that, as Barack Obama’s first term Secretary of State, she brought

chaos, destruction, misery and death to every geopolitically significant project the two of them undertook.

There was Libya, of course, but that was only the most blatantly tin-eared and wrong-headed example of Clinton's interventions into Middle Eastern politics as the Arab Spring unfolded.

She left her mark on large swathes of Africa and Asia, creating humanitarian catastrophes in her wake and helping to bring on the refugee crisis now spilling over into Europe. Latin America and East Asia suffered from her cluelessness and ineptitude too. In short, she caused or exacerbated problems all over the whole world.

Still, I never thought that she would lose to Trump. She is a certifiable world-class fuck up, but there are limits.

Obviously, I was wrong. I was wrong about Trump too. He has turned out to be even worse than I thought.

Hillary was only partly wrong years ago when she spoke of herself and her husband as victims of "a great rightwing conspiracy." There was no conspiracy, but the rightwing was certainly on their case. Trump coopted their fervor and, insofar as they had any, their ideas; he gave the "deplorables" an outlet and a home.

Not all Trump supporters were deplorable; some were good people expressing contempt for the neoliberal political order that the Clintons had done so much to fashion. They were, however, in the thrall of false beliefs about Trump. They deserve blame for deceiving themselves or allowing themselves to be deceived.

Some Hillary supporters were – and still are — similarly blameworthy. In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, they too stood by unjustified false beliefs about the merits of their candidate.

However, on Trump, their instincts were sound. They mostly still are, though now that Trump seems to be dropping his "populist" pretenses and falling into line behind the foreign policy establishment, there have been signs of defection within their ranks.

It is amazing what a willingness to inflict senseless violence on Syrians and Afghans, and to risk an exchange of nuclear weapons with North Korea, can do. There is actually a movement afoot in Clintonian political and media circles to depict the Donald as a man fighting his way up a steep learning curve and becoming "presidential."

Evidently, our defenders of the status quo cannot oppose power for long, no matter how great the provocation or how preposterous the inhabitant of the Oval Office. Servility has become a habit for them, and it is too ingrained not to prevail.

I have no idea whether the pundits pushing the line that Trump's is becoming a normal presidency believe it themselves, but I have enough faith in the good sense of the general public

to be confident that, outside the corporate media bubble, they won't find a lot of support for that view.

I would venture that I am far from alone in thinking that Trump is a lot worse than anybody thought last November or even before his first hundred days, and that, from this point on, he will only get worse, and it will only get worse for him.

I cannot speak for others, but I can say that one reason why I underestimated Trump's vileness was that I focused too much on what he would say while campaigning, and not enough on his character and life.

Another reason, related to the first, was that, in several respects, Hillary seemed even worse. She seemed more wedded than he to neoliberal economic nostrums, and more eager to fuel America's perpetual war regime.

The main reason, though, was that I did not know enough about Trump to take the full measure of the man.

I was aware, of course, that he had been, and maybe still was, a fixture in the tabloids, and could therefore surmise that there was a lot of dirt out there about him. I also knew that he had a lot of public exposure on reality TV. I knew next to nothing about the shows he starred in, but it was a safe bet that they were anything but thoughtful or edifying.

I had some awareness too of his shady business dealings in Manhattan, Atlantic City, and elsewhere, and I knew that the name "Trump" carried a certain cachet for people around the world who are fond of glitz and who have more money than taste.

I was also aware that shallow and unaccomplished people could be famous nowadays just for being famous. I admit, however, that I don't understand how this works, and that Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian are just names to me.

Until he started trumpeting "birther" nonsense, so was Donald Trump. The difference was that I couldn't pick the first two out of a lineup if my life depended on it, while Trump's look is unmistakable and unforgettable; gaze upon a picture of that face just one time and it stays imprinted forever in that part of the mind where monsters dwell.

Even after it became apparent that Trump would be more than just a sideshow in the 2016 election, I had only a vague understanding of how much his fortune depended on his father's money and connections, and on the mentoring of such miscreants as Roy Cohn. Over the years, I must have glanced at news reports about Trump's connections to nefarious financiers around the world; the stories were out there, but I never paid them any mind. Why would I? There are too more inherently interesting things to think about.

The Donald has too little depth to be interesting in his own right, and, even as the primaries and caucuses got underway, the idea that he would be the nominee still seemed too preposterous to

take seriously, notwithstanding the undeniable fact that he was trouncing each and every stooge the Republican establishment could scrape up to run against him.

I would say, though, that, as the campaign wore on, Trump did become more interesting in at least one respect: from time to time, he would say something true about how corrupt American politics is. He broke other taboos as well, but this one actually served a useful, educational purpose.

Centuries ago, fools and Court Jesters would also say what others would never dare to utter publically. Trump was too full of himself to play the fool role outright. But he stood out from the crowd nevertheless. All of the candidates for the Republican nomination were bad jokes, but Trump's coarseness and bluster made him special.

He was not the only one to strike a "populist" chord, but he was the only one to outflank Hillary from the left on such issues as trade, infrastructure and "regime change." Later, of course, Russia could be added to the list.

Needless to say, most of it was only talk; Trump was not about to turn back the neoliberal tide even if he could, and he was hardly a man of peace. Still, the contrast with Hillary was refreshing, as was the fact that, along with Bernie Sanders, he was raising pertinent questions and stirring up discontent.

The difference was that the discontent Sanders stirred up was salutary. Even when Trump would voice similar themes, the impact he had was ominous.

My view, before Election Day, was that it was of paramount importance to combat the racist, nativist, and Islamophobic stirrings oozing out of the Trump camp, but that the danger would fade after Trump's all but certain defeat, and that the hell he was raising might even be useful, in its own demented way, for encouraging opposition to the next President Clinton and therefore to her neoliberal, liberal imperialist warmongering.

I confess that I also thought that at least part of Trump's overblown faith in his own abilities had to be at least somewhat justified. He did start out, as they say, on third base, but he went on from there to enrich himself egregiously, and he did manage to become the Republican nominee. Surely, a complete dunce could not have done all that.

Moreover, I didn't, and still don't, think that Trump is a reactionary at heart. I thought he was a conman and an opportunist, and that, he was coming on like a troglodyte in order to win against his Republican rivals, and then to keep them fired up as he ran against Clinton. I never thought that he meant most of it – not that this would matter one way or another because he was bound to lose in any case.

Therefore, after he won – or, rather, after Clinton lost – I found consolation in his insincerity. If he could go from endorsing positions that pass for normal in New York City to positions reactionary enough to win over the hearts and minds of retrograde Republicans in the Deep South, why wouldn't he again take up positions that fall more or less in the normal – or at least

not profoundly disturbing — range when there would no longer be any percentage in coming on like Ted Cruz?

However, as news of his cabinet and cabinet level appointments started to trickle in, it became clear that this was wishful thinking; even Cruz could not have done worse. The people Trump assembled were a Freedom Caucus member's wet dream.

The only high level Trump appointees who fall anywhere near the normal range are two retired Generals who, according to reliable reports, are a good deal fonder of murder and mayhem than most of their colleagues, some hyper predatory Wall Street buccaneers, a fossil fuel promoting ex-honcho from Exxon Mobil, and an Ambassador to the United Nations whose highest qualification for that job is an undergraduate degree in accounting. These are the adults in the room. How pathetic is that!

It is true that Trump has neither an ideology nor settled convictions that he wants to promote. But he isn't just an opportunist who can be counted on to adjust his course when public opinion calls for it.

He flits from one position to another and flip-flops shamelessly not because public opinion is leading him, but because he is a narcissistic bully with the disposition of an adolescent boy afflicted by a mildly out-of-control case of Attention Deficit Disorder.

His mind, such as it is, goes wherever his attention alights; and that, it seems, depends mainly on what Fox News has on at the moment. This is why efforts to discern consistency or rhyme or reason in his tweets are almost always in vain.

Trump decimated the Republican Party. This is no longer as clear as it used to be now that Republicans are riding high after Clinton blew a sure thing, taking down ticket Democrats down with her. Nevertheless, Trump did do the GOP in; this will become clear again in due course.

Despite their limitations, it is a good bet that the Party's leaders understand this well. For the time being, though, they remain determined to see what they can get by playing along with their standard-bearer. Their support, however, hangs by a thread.

Trump has no fondness for them either. But, having no organization of his own to help him govern, if that is the right word for what he is doing, he needs Republicans even more than they need him. Therefore, he is playing along too.

If the latest polls are on track, Trump's base has not yet deserted him, though his approval rating in general is abysmal and tracking downward.

But since Trump is now deserting his base – renegeing on one campaign promise after another – it is only a matter of time before all but his most willfully blind supporters follow the public's lead.

The excuse that Trump needs more time to do what he said he would is starting to get old; and his defenders cannot blame the other party, the way that Obama's supporters would blame Tea Partiers and "moderate" Republicans for making the words "hope" and "change" stick in the craw. Republican obstinacy was indeed a factor back in the (seemingly long ago) Obama days, but there is no real counterpart to anything like that now on the Democratic side. With the likes of Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer calling the shots, there never will be.

Therefore, how much longer can it be until even his most ardent fans realize what a loser he is?

That is the crucial question because their support for him, in the first place, was based in large part on their patently ridiculous belief that he would somehow make "deals" that would set the world aright and "make America first again." They hardly counted on him making himself, and America with him, a laughing-stock.

Republican leaders must realize by now that the way to make the best of the situation would be to dump Trump as soon as they can. How much better off they would be with one of their own, Mike Pence, a bona fide reactionary with deep ties to the libertarian and theocratic wings of the party, in command!

This is one of those rare instances in which what is good for the Republican Party actually is good for the country and the world — if only because with Pence in charge instead of Trump, there would be less danger of a nuclear conflagration being set off in a fit of pique. The "darker angels" of our nature would also get less encouragement from the commanding heights.

But how to get from here to there?

The best way would be for the anti-Trump resistance movement to grow to a point where it could force Trump out. This is only a pipedream, however. To be more than that, there would have to be an organized political force in place capable of taking the lead and showing the way.

Unless it somehow manages in short order to transform itself beyond recognition, the Democratic Party is worse than useless for that. It is something to resist in its own right

Meanwhile, Democratic Party spokespeople and pundits are working overtime to coopt every bit of resistance there is. With lucidity in short supply within the resistance movement and generally within our political culture, and in the absence of a clear alternative, they could well succeed.

But even if deeply entrenched practices, institutions and modes of thought make it all but impossible for a "third" party to take the place of the Democrats, insurgents probably could take over the Democratic Party in much the way that the Tea Party took over the GOP. As of now, this isn't likely either. There are so many Clintonites, and there is so little time.

But there are less than ideal ways that could lead to the defeat of the Trumpian menace.

Ideas and convictions don't motivate the Donald; vainglory and cupidity do. This is why, as the level of disgust he evokes rises, and the more it affects the buying habits of the kinds of people his enterprises target, the better off we all will be.

By going after his vanity and his and his family's bottom lines, a far-reaching boycott-all-things-Trumpian campaign just might suffice to get Trump to "self-impeach," as the hapless Mitt Romney might put it.

A problem with that strategy, though, are all those damn foreigners — not the "bad" (actually good) "hombres" whom the Donald vilifies, the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" or, more realistically, to be free from the horrors brought on by American military and trade policies, but the filthy rich of the less developed world, eager to curry favor with America's Commander-in-Chief.

There may be no effective way to influence them, but we can shame our fellow citizens who patronize Trump hotels and resorts and who buy the crap he and his children peddle. This would probably be more effective than piling on yet more marches and demonstrations; it would certainly be easier to organize. Indeed, there is no need to organize anything at all; everybody can boycott the Trump brand on his or her own.

For removing the menace, there is also the way that the Constitution prescribes — impeachment. Democrats would have to make this a priority however, and "therein lies the rub."

The pusillanimity of the average Democratic politician is limitless; to get any significant number of them to move on impeachment, public opinion would have to sharpen to the point where even they could not stay back.

Democratic politicians also tend to be too clever by half; some of them might figure that the presence of a dangerous and despicable ignoramus in the Oval Office helps their electoral prospects.

Republicans generally have better sense.

As more people in Trump's base come to realize how thoroughly he conned them, the Donald will become even more of a liability to the Republican establishment than he already is. Perhaps then they will take the lead and do what their less odious counterparts in the other bought and paid for capitalist party would otherwise be too timid to attempt.

Of course, with the Donald, anything could happen.

So far, it seems, scandals — "conflicts of interest" that would do any other politician in — have only strengthened his hand. There are so many of them, though, just as there are so many grounds for impeachment; indeed, the two are often one and the same. It is hard to see how Trump can keep evading their consequences much longer. But where Trump is, absurdity reigns and anything could lie in store.

I have high hopes for Melania. There is every sign that she concluded long ago that her association with the Donald is too high a price to pay for whatever benefit she once thought she could gain from his riches.

If she were to free herself from her gilded prison, leaving her repellent and misogynistic husband in the lurch, she just might be able to do what nothing else so far has: embarrass the man in a way that would diminish, not strengthen, his standing with his base.

That alone would make her by far the most meritorious presidential consort, official or otherwise, since Eleanor Roosevelt; and, no, I haven't forgotten Hillary Clinton.

Her only serious competitor would be Monica Lewinsky. She served her country well, albeit unintentionally, by involving Bill Clinton in a scandal that kept him from going after Social Security. Were Melania to hobble Trump by humiliating him, her contribution to the public weal would make Monica's seem almost petty.

On the other hand, I have no hope whatever for Ivanka or her husband Jared, two fruits of poisonous trees (only one of which has so far done time). The idea that either or both of them could save the world from the Donald is unadulterated wishful thinking.

The two of them do seem to have the Donald's ear, but this is no more comforting than knowing that the pseudo-intellectual *fascisant* guru Steve Bannon and his minions do. Ivanka is better turned out than her father and more poised. But she is all the more insidious for that.

Meanwhile, Jared, Trump's de facto Secretary of Everything, may be good for boosting the morale of the Israeli Right as the BDS movement gathers steam, and good for causing thoughtful people to despair of the human race, but not for much else. His only virtue is that, unlike his father-in-law, he doesn't talk.

For keeping the Orange Menace at bay, when all else fails, there is still, of course, a functioning federal judiciary. It is chock full of Republicans and Democrats, however; and therefore not good for much except introducing a moderating influence. There is not much solace in that.

But, for now, this is the best we've got – beyond what we, the unorganized people, can muster in the face of Democratic Party efforts to coopt all the "resistance" they can.

Sanders and his remaining supporters call for a "political revolution." What they have in mind is a good deal less radical than that, but their words, if not the ideas behind them, are on target.

It is either that or more degrading electoral spectacles guaranteed to produce pernicious outcomes that will make life worse for the vast majority of human beings, and that could well prove fatal to humankind itself and to many of the other plant and animal inhabitants of our planet.