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Clinton vs. Trump: a Zero-Sum Game

By John Wight
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The 2016 US presidential election has officially descended into a snarling, hate-filled slugfest, and is probably the most vicious there has ever been. When you have one candidate, Donald Trump, threatening to put his opponent, Hillary Clinton, in jail if he becomes president, we are talking a race for the White House that is the political equivalent of a zero sum game.

While Trump is a bigot, megalomaniac and mysogonist—and this on a good day—he is also a tough and resilient operator whom you get the sense is actually revelling in the pressure cooker that is the US political arena. On the back of the release of the now infamous 2005 audio tape, during which he brags to “Access Hollywood” host, Billy Bush, about his sexual prowess with women, a media onslaught and the mass desertion of his ship by major figures within the GOP appeared to ensure that his campaign was all but destroyed.

But then out he comes in St Louis, a candidate with his back to the ropes, to immediately mount a ferocious and sustained assault on his opponent, one that succeeded in nullifying the tremendous momentum she had behind her going in. Over the course of the debate, Trump threw and landed major blows, bringing up Bill Clinton's own less than stellar record when it comes to the treatment of women, again reminding voters of the 33,000 deleted emails of his opponent, and calling out Clinton's hawkish support for the war in Iraq and her role as secretary of state in the destruction of Libya. His analysis of the conflict in Syria and belief in resetting relations with Russia also has the benefit of being sane when compared to his opponent, whose election would immediately bring the world closer to a major conflict than it has been since the Cuban missile crisis. When Trump vowed to direct a special prosecutor to investigate her over the aforementioned missing emails, if elected, followed later by his witheringly effective aside to put her in jail, you could almost hear the collective cheer of millions not only in America but across the world.

There is a method to the seeming madness of Trump's approach. Though his rhetoric comes over as out of control, he is reaching into a deep well of animosity towards Washington, with the Clintons the emodiment of the corruption, special interests, and machine politics that millions of Americans have grown to despise. He is a billionaire who has succeeded in positioning himself as an anti-establishment candidate. This is an achievement of which P T Barnum would be proud.

Unlike the first debate, which Hillary Clinton won hands down, this time round Trump managed to do what no opponent or critic of the Clintons ever has in breaching the veneer of respectability and propriety which they and their supporters have succeeded in maintaining in an insult to the truth of their collective record. While the polls after the second debate recorded a victory for Clinton, there is little doubt she left the venue bruised and wounded.

The average American voter respects strength; whether real or perceived it matters not, they admire and worship personal attributes of toughness that reflect what they consider to be the attributes of the country. In this regard Trump comes over as the political equivalent of a gunslinger, a man for whom the rules of polite society do not apply, who makes his own rules and changes them as it suits. He is the archetypal maverick in this sense, an image that plays well with people grown tired of the slick and on-message political mannequins that populate Washington. He is rude, vulgar, inappropriate, and unpredictable in a combination that brings a sense of frission to proceedings. That he is also a mysogonist, equal opportunites bigot and narcissist matters less to his supporters than the ocean of self confidence he exudes and the willingness to do and say whatever it takes to get ahead. In other words he is America with the mask removed.

When Hillary Clinton talked about establishing a no-fly zone in Syria a chill should have slid down the spine of all right-thinking people. This would be tantamount to a declaration of war against Syria and Russia. Then there was her utterly ludicrous depiction of the 'rebels' in Aleppo as freedom fighters. Freedom fighters? Nusra Front, the dominant faction among the opposition fighting in Aleppo, differs from ISIS in name only. In its methods and objective of establishing a pure sectarian Sunni state, it poses the same menace. As for the so-called moderate rebels, in what language is it moderate to kidnap and behead 12-year old children, as militants belonging to

the US-backed Nour al-Din al-Zinki Movement did a few weeks ago, filming themselves doing so in the process?

This is why it has been so revelatory following the mainstream media coverage in the wake of the second debate. With few exceptions it has been on Trump, depicting him as an out of control nut who would be dangerous for the country. In truth it is Hillary Clinton, with her penchant for war and the destruction of Arab countries, who is far more dangerous—not only for the people of the United States but a world grown weary of US hegemony.