

# Hobbes' Leviathan, Contemporary Global Society, and a Possible Outcome of the United States of America's 2016 Presidential Election

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## Abstract

This paper takes a comparative analysis of the circumstances of men in a “stateless” society which Thomas Hobbes calls a “state of nature” in his book *Leviathan* and the prevailing global security challenges facing mankind. In both circumstances, the essay notes, the “human condition” of mankind is the same: life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. Just as Hobbes draws the conclusion from this state of affairs to the inescapable need for a “strongman”, a powerful and frightening body, a State or Leviathan, to overawe and subdue the belligerent urge of men in order to establish a peaceful and ordered society, so does this paper see that factor as not only responsible for the success of Donald Trump's United States of America Presidential campaign so far but may also eventually determine the outcome of the United States Presidential election in November 2016.

**Keywords:** Human condition, state of nature, strongman, contemporary global society

## 1. Introduction

When in the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes wrote his controversial political work, *Leviathan*, the ultimate didactic import may not have been the accuracy of historical facts as much as the peremptory predilection for analysis (Sabine *et al* 1973: 429; Stumpf 1966: 238). This drive for analysis, to put things in perspectives and, therefore, make possible the clarification of rational choices, is also at the heart of the social /cultural sciences (Inoka 2006; Weber 1949:55-96).

It is in tandem with the aforesaid aim of the cultural sciences to further the explication of issues and events through analysis for the overall goal of a rational attainment of human choices that this paper seeks to make its modest contribution. Accordingly, this essay adopts a comparative analysis of the hypothetical facts of the existential condition of man as pictured by Hobbes in his *Leviathan* and the prevailing condition of violence and insecurity that abound in contemporary world society. This shall then form the basis for our deductions and pronouncements on the possible outcome of the November, 2016 United States Presidential election.

## 2. Rehearsing Hobbes' Human Condition in the *Leviathan*

Although Hobbes modeled his political theorizing along the geometrical deductive style of his days, he was also materialistic, mechanical, practically simulative and empirically oriented. Purporting to derive his axiomatic postulates from empirical observation, he anatomizes the psychoanalytic structuring of “human nature” before, during and after the formation of the “State”. Hobbes was therefore constrained to start from the beginning and to state the law of human behavior, formulating thereby the conditions upon which a stable society was achievable. According to Hobbes, “I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death....” (*Leviathan* Ch X1). Whether the end result of this power is a tangible product, “gain” or an intangible one, “glory”, the underlying motive for power remains the security of the individual's well-being.

Aligning this law of psychology to the fundamental law of mechanics, the law of motion, that objects remain in motion or at uniform rest except compelled otherwise by external force, then the cryptic description of human beings in a situation (state of nature) where there is no common superior follows as a matter of necessity. The overarching consideration in this ineluctable and inevitable human drive is the will to survive. This will to survive itself being engulfed by a pervading and trembling fear, the fear of death, especially the fear of violent death. The point then is, since everyone is roughly equal in strength, though not necessarily in terms of one to one equality, and “ in such a condition every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body”( *Leviathan* Ch 14 ) ; as long as there is no common power to regulate their behavior, what follows is a “ condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man” ( *Leviathan* Ch 13) . *Ex hypothesi*, therefore, man is selfish, greedy, always looking for satisfaction, whether for his biological survival or for psychological bolstering of his ego.

As Hobbes points out, under the circumstances aforesaid, no reasonable calculation of means and expectations of ends can be done, no industry, commerce or agriculture can take place. Worse still, learning and the crave for letters would be non-existent as the march and progress of human evolution – civilization – would become stunted. What better way to describe the human condition than in the cryptic phraseology given by Hobbes; “and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor,

nasty, brutish, and short” (*Leviathan* Ch 1).

Stated in simple syllogistic form, the Hobbesian argument then runs thus:

- (Major premise) **All objects continue in a uniform motion or state of rest until compelled otherwise by external force;**
- (Minor premise) **Human beings are objects in a uniform motion propelled by egoistic, greedy interest for their sadistic selfish ends;**
- (Conclusion) **The only way to check man’s egoistic and inexorable march to attain his selfish desire is a frightening and stronger (external) body (a Leviathan, state) to counter man’s sadistic and greedy impulse.**

When theoretically and analytically put in this form, then Hobbes’ deduction for a frightening absolute power to regulate the affairs of men in the society in view of man’s psychology and behavior in “the state of nature” can neither be assailed nor be met on its own ground. Indeed, one instinctively feels that in the climate of analytical opinion that sustains such an argument one can only gasp for breath!

It is therefore, immaterial, analytically, the contention of where the consciousness of a state (*Leviathan*), a frightening object or force, came from and entered into the brains of men at the point they were facing the “war of everyone against everyone” in the state of nature. That consciousness itself was analytical because epistemologically, the knowledge of that consciousness was analytic knowledge. Though this consciousness may be given different qualifications in terms of its *telos*, or end, as C.B. Macpherson calls it mercantilist rationality (Brown 1965: 176-177), the origin of that rationality or consciousness, it appears, still remains an analytic “revelation”.

To reiterate the point, we are not engaging in academic debate here as to what suggested convenient articles of faith upon which the state in Hobbes analysis resulted. Our argument is that of factual question of what the nature of that state must be. Our position then, is that, flowing from the analytic “revelation” contained in the analytic consciousness that stormed men’s brain in the state of nature, the nature of that state must of necessity be frightening, bullish, absolute, more powerful than even the collective power of the “fighter men” in the state of nature.

From this reading then, there was no room for a soft, effeminate, diplomatic or “civilized” state in Hobbes analytical calculation. It was to be “a measure for measure” state, non-pretentious and daring. This was the only state that could guarantee peace, security, order and wellbeing that were lacking in the state of nature. The only state that could fertilize the soil and conduce the environment for the growth of industry, navigation, arts and learning, space discovery, religious tolerance and respect for different cultures. It was the only state that could halt the craze for nuclear power acquisition and adventurous military expedition by individuals and groups in the civil society.

### 3. Human condition in contemporary global society

Having rehearsed the condition and situation of man in the hypothetical state of nature as pictured by Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, can we say, then, that there is a parallel, an analogy, or a semblance with what is happening in contemporary world society? We think, to a large extent, the answer can be given in the affirmative. Contemporary man is beset with problems and crises as great as ever led to the destruction of great empires and civilizations. The margins of global world are today haunted by the clash of cultures, the fantastic idea of the superiority of religion, the craze for nuclear armament for the sole threat of a nuclear holocaust, the ravaging and increasing wave of terrorism and “egoistic” pursuit of a subduing mission, greedy and selfish wars and violence such that the condition of contemporary global society is, in many respects, akin to a war of “everyone against everyone”.

A graphic catalogue of events and conditions that make contemporary global life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” abound. As Steve Chapman (2013) in his piece puts it, Americans had become despondent and assumed, after 9/11 that they were in for weeks, months or even years in which savage acts of political violence would become the order of the day on American soil. Similarly, Ned Parker and Maria Golovnina et al (2014) in their piece also give the following morphology of terrorism: “in Iraq, an Al Qaeda splinter group is threatening Baghdad after seizing control of two cities. In Pakistan, the Taliban attacked a major airport twice in one week. And in Nigeria, Islamist militant group, Boko Haram, was blamed for another mass kidnapping”.

Gory details of acts of cruelty and savagery perpetrated by a deliberate and concerted “gangsters” against innocent and defenseless folks around the world are all too familiar. If it is not the bombing of a Belgian airliner over Lockerbie, then it is the downing of a Malaysian airline that disappeared into the Atlantic Ocean. Either it is the broad day attack on people in Paris or it is the detonating of explosives at Brussels airport or still the taking over of a supermarket with thousands of shoppers by Al-Shabaab terrorists in Nairobi, Kenya.

According to Russell Goldman (2016), while referring to the Global Terrorism database, a federally financed project at the University of Maryland, USA,

in the 1970s and '80s, 'there was much more of an emphasis of symbolic events, ... terrorists would call in a warning. It would be terrorizing, intimidating, coercive but nonlethal. Nowadays, terrorist groups like the Islamic State and Boko Haram are not looking to simply send messages; they are looking to kill people.

These acts of collective and group aggression must be distinguished from isolated cases of an individual psychopath running amuck as happened in a few instances that we have come across. These collective and group attackers, moved by what is their motivation and driving force, and with no visible voice or force as frightening, bullying and "cow boyish" as in the days of Ronald Reagan of the United States, the global society has become a theatre of "war and fear of violent death".

What does all this portend? It portends a gradual but assured slide of world society into chaos and anarchy. Every country or state appears to be hounded and boxed into a corner by an audacious and daring global intimidation of terrorist groups and organizations. There seems to be a hypnotic lull on the world by terrorism and violent group activities. Worse still, the "police man of the world" in those days of cold war, the United States of America, seems to be taking a deep and long nap, in pretty much the same description as that given by deistic cosmogony, of a god, who, having created the world, withdrew and stood aloof, while letting it roam on its own.

The lead and vibrancy of America in world affairs seem to have nose-dived over the years – principally because the "mortal god", the "Leviathan" American State, singularly symbolized and manifested in a strong, vibrant and powerful American Presidency, had waned over the years!

#### 4. A Possible Outcome of the 2016 Presidential Election in U.S.

Can we then say, as Stephen Hawking, the world-renowned expert in theoretical physics, that the success of Donald Trump's Presidential campaign so far is a mystery? Hawking, when asked in an interview program, Good Morning Britain, by ITV, an affiliate of CNN, whether an explanation for Trump's success can be given, is reported to have answered "I can't"; however, he seems to have de-mystified the success by the obvious rational and scientific statement when he "called Trump 'a demagogue, who seems to appeal to the lowest common denominator'" (Hume 2016).

The point is that what Hawking calls "lowest common denominator" is precisely one of the crucial dynamics of politics! As the saying goes 'politics is perception' and the majority of the Republican Party members have perceived something in Donald Trump. Not only the Republicans but it appears to us that a majority segment of the American society have themselves perceived something too - and this is the last burden that this article seeks to discharge.

When Hobbes listed as one of the laws of Nature the law of self preservation, was he talking about 'the lowest common denominator?' Yes, for sure; for what is Nature, if not base existence, or to use Hawking's phrase, 'the lowest common denominator'. When Hobbes chronicled the circumstances of men in the state of nature, he was detailing the base facts of human existence. What, therefore, acted as premises of Hobbes political argument in the *Leviathan*, from which deductive logical structure the drastic political conclusion of a frightening monster so powerful as to overawe all was drawn, were no less base or lowest common denominators of mankind than what is so far firing Donald Trump's Presidential campaign success?

By the way, what are these base facts or lowest common denominators for the average American currently? Is it the economy? Yes, of course, the economy is a base factor. But in the scale of base factors for the average American now the economy is pitifully at the lowest rung. The topmost, the most sought after base factor for the American citizen, and by extension, the world citizen, now is safe and secure America in particular and the world at large.

We can now replay the Hobbesian logic as it reverberates in the psyche of the American citizens. After the attack of September, Eleven and other pockets of attack, and with terrorism becoming more daring and audacious, what can make America safe and secure for her economy to boom in order for her to continue to be the leader and defender of the free world? Reduced to simple syllogistic form the strongest base factor for the American Republicans runs thus:

- (Major premise) **All parts of the world, America inclusive, will continue to experience Terrorism unless a 'strong man' who will be able to strengthen and embolden the American Presidency to confront, overawe and subdue terrorism emerges;**
- (Minor premise) **X Presidential candidate appears to be the 'strong man' who will be able to Strengthen the American Presidency;**
- (Conclusion) **X's Presidency will be able to confront, overawe and subdue terrorism in America and across the world.**

By simple psychological theory, it follows that the emergence of Donald Trump as the Republican

Presidential nominee should not have come to people like Hawking as a mystery. Trump's emergence is rooted in contemporary world 'human condition' facing us. Some may argue, 'and so what? After all, the American people have not yet spoken'. This is true and no one can deny the weight of this response, especially in a robust and mature democracy like America. Indeed this is even more so after both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have emerged as nominees for their respective Republican and Democratic parties and Trump's opinion poll allegedly plummeted.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that opinion poll remains opinion poll and nothing more! It cannot substitute for the expression of the autonomous will of the people. Being a statistical device, it is enmeshed in technicalities that rob it of the realities of the lived world. The United Kingdom's European Union (EU) membership referendum result on June 24, 2016, is very didactic in this regard. Against all expectations and wise counsel (perhaps, what people like Hawking would refer to as 'higher denominator'), the people of the United Kingdom voted to exit their EU membership.

What we are trying to argue is that these are hard and difficult times for the people of the world and, therefore, conventional thinking and ways of doing things are bound to give way. The oddities that are happening in the world demands that we think outside the box. The particular madness that is tormenting the world right now demands that it be confronted with another type of madness. It is a trite law of mechanics that only a force of superior proportion can subdue the extant one. So then, the voters in the United States of America are likely to reason along this line: if Donald Trump is the 'madness' that will cure the prevailing madness of terrorism and violent syndrome of insecurity plaguing the world, so be it!

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to draw an analogy between the circumstances faced by Thomas Hobbes' men in what he called 'a state of nature' and the prevailing global condition currently facing mankind. While one may say that Hobbes' circumstances of men were allegedly hypothetical, mainly serving as heuristic for the warranted conclusion that he drew, the present circumstances of our global life are a factual issue. Yet the logical connection between Hobbes' premises and that of our today's world remains the same. Accordingly, it is our considered view that although the economy and other social factors would play a dominant role in deciding the outcome of the November 2016 United States Presidential Election result, the determinant factor appears to be who the American voters would view to be the "strongman" amongst the two contending candidates: Donald Trump of the Republican Party and Hillary Clinton of the Democratic Party. Using the theoretical framework of Hobbes' analysis in the *Leviathan*, the odds appear to be in favor of Donald Trump.

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