

PATHOLOGY HERE & THERE

The United States is rampaging around the world like a rogue bull elephant in must. No inhibition, no regard or feeling for others, driven by compulsions and obsessions, no planning or design, random, often self-contradictory actions, one goal – to dominate its environment, to glory in each triumph at the moment and to imagine that supremacy as unending. An exaggerated sense of threat is constant – it is free-floating, capable of being triggered by anyone, be it foe, former friend or a new entrant into the field of vision. Everything is contingent according to the every-shifting emotional needs of the voracious, insecure self. Perceived challengers in the present or prospectively must be eliminated. The aim is total freedom from constraint whether arising from one's own inner self or externally.

No one else has any intrinsic worth; no one else is privileged to act/think in terms of their wellbeing unless it conforms to yours. If they cannot be easily crushed, they are to be intimidated &/or crudely manipulated. For any opposition to American designs is taken to be a hostile act against the U.S.; armed resistance to

American invasion (e.g. Iran, Iraq, Yemen) is denounced as aggression *against us*. This mindset is well beyond the normal range in foreign affairs – it is demented, by objective standard.*

(Appendix)

This is the portrait of an extreme malignant narcissist. One with a Fascist mentality. It is Donald Trump. But it would be a grave mistake to interpret the erratic, unhinged behavior of America in the world as simply the emanations of one psychopath. There exists a complex of factors and persons involved: facilitating, enabling, encouraging, reinforcing, normalizing – especially the normalizers.

Over the past decade or so, America's perspective on the world, its attitude toward foreign countries, and its actions have been those of an unbounded megalomaniac. Let us take a close look at the distinctive traits of the individual malignant narcissist to see how they can manifest themselves in the foreign policy behavior of a country – the United States.

We should preface the enquiry by highlighting a critical feature of the phenomenon: namely, the interplay between the undeniable successes of Trump's extreme abuse of arbitrary power at home and abroad. The demonstrated ability to get away with campaigns of intimidation and coercion in each domain has a reciprocating effect

in the other. His outrageous affronts and demands on foreign leaders have generated victories for him personally and, more arguably, positive gains for the U.S., beyond all reasonable expectation. Appeasement, concession, and deference have been the norm from the supine Europeans to Japan, from Latin America to the feeble Gulf satraps.

Even Putin approaches Trump with kid gloves for reasons mysterious and inexplicable – despite a plethora of kinetic provocations. His many critics within the Kremlin power structure, apparently a substantial majority in the Security Council, increasingly believe that he is allowing himself to be played the fool by the madman in the White House - the man who tried to murder him and whose Intelligence operatives in and around Ukraine make it possible for Zelensky to rain explosives on Russia.**(*Appendix*) Only China and Iran have come to understand that only way to deal with Uncle Sam is to smack him in the face – hard – thereby forcing Trump and his gang to trim their sails. [Canada's Carney- rhetoric notwithstanding - has been a serial appeaser and concession giver until outlandish American demands, a clear assault on the nation's sovereignty, forced him to confront Washington lest he commit political suicide.]

Each of Trump's indisputable triumphs abroad emboldens him in his conviction that he is destiny's child endowed with unlimited powers. That leads to ever more audacious moves like claiming ownership of the Strait of Hormuz (thereby, endowing citizens on both shores with American citizenship).

Moreover, in his own addled mind, they strengthen belief in his own omnipotence. A truly crazed Malignant Narcissist profits from emotional 'escalation dominance' in confrontation with adversaries.

The narcissistic self is engaged in a constant struggle for self-confirmation. That becomes the compelling, overriding goal of life whatever pursuits the narcissist undertakes, whatever prosaic gratifications (s)he seeks, whatever the social circumstances in which they find themselves. That is why, in inter-personal confrontations with adversaries, a truly crazed malignant narcissist normally benefits from a greater tolerance for risk. That is to say, as the storm of conflict intensifies, he is less sensitive to either the indecency of what is being said or its consequences. That places the onus on the interlocutor to exercise restraint for fear of the very things to which an enraged narcissist has become oblivious.

Victories, real or perceived, increase that advantage since protagonists rightly fear that Trump actually might do something

disastrous – even if it hurts the United States. That might be a factor in Putin’s wariness about taking any action that could lead to a direct confrontation. The Iranians, by contrast, have overcome that fear in recognition that acquiescence would mean the end of the country’s integral existence.

External bullying that feeds Trump’s megalomania spurs him to take ever more drastic, arbitrary actions in the United States. The obverse is equally true. Trump’s stunning ability to remake the now post-Constitutional America in his own warped autocratic image, with similar ease, reinforces his conceit and hubris. Confident in the inevitable triumph of the Trumpian will push him toward ever more radical, risky escapades in the international arena.

Simply put, every time that Trump gets away with some scandalously perverse act – like destroying part of the White House while desecrating all Washington with grotesque monuments to his follies or running a gulag for abusing migrants of all ages or dictating how citizens may vote – there is a rise in the credibility of his threats to nuke Iran’s nuclear sites or slap 50% tariffs on all Indian exports. Too, every time that he gets away with coercing the Europeans to spend big sums of their dwindling cash on buying American military hardware to counter a fanciful foe or being

anointed as the Emir of Palestine, he finds it easier to do wacky, destructive things at home.

Iran is the termination point of this reckless path to war that will finds us despised in the world - whatever the immediate military outcome. At home, the nation will demonstrate once again that it has become incapable of shame, and that whatever self-respect survives will be in the form of that confected adulation that egoists apply to themselves. A pariah despised abroad and a sullen, autocratic nation look to be our ignominious destiny.

II.

Over the past decade or so, America's perspective on the world, its attitude toward foreign countries, and its actions have been those of an unbounded megalomaniac.** The post-9/11 period. Let us take a close look at the distinctive traits of the individual malignant narcissist to see how they can manifest themselves in the foreign policy behavior of a country – the United States.

COMPULSION/OBSESSION

A malignant narcissist's attitudes and actions are not the product of analysis/deliberation and implemented with careful

planning. They are driven by forces rooted deep in his psyche. Often, they are keyed to fixations and obsessions.

Narcissists live their lives to the pulse of an inner beat: I want! I need! “I need! I want! *THUS, “Evil Incarnate” Putin must go!...Maduro must go!...Assad must go!... The Iranian mullahs must go!...Castro must go!...The Germans must swallow destruction of the Nordstrom II pipeline!...China must curb its manufacturing capacity...China and the BRIC states must stop divesting themselves of dollar denominated securities!... Magical beliefs of all kinds become reasonable (I want Greenland, I want Canada, I want the Strait of Hormuz as states of the USA).*

Note that first 5 fixations were manifest in the policies and declarations of the Biden White House. The first is a direct quote of the then President. This complicates our line of analysis since Biden in those pre-dementia days was mentally normal. At the same time, it supports the proposition that the pathologies ascribed to Trump are not his alone and should not be looked at in isolation.

The malignant narcissist is incapable of acknowledging mistakes.

The record is void of occasions when the United States officially, or a leader individually, expresses apologies for egregious actions or even

regret for costly mistakes – whether the costs registered abroad or at home. “I’m sorry” is not in their vocabulary.

The malignant narcissist is incapable of admitting losses.

The total absence of self-reflection precludes doing so. The only errors admitted tacitly are tactical ones, things that fell short in failing to bring the outer world into conformity to demands of the self. They typically are blamed on poor advisers or the perfidy of others (“Iran’s leaders are amazingly deceitful”). Repeated failure of schemes in Ukraine to deal a fatal blow to Moscow, or at least to spare the Kiev regime by luring Russia into phony ‘ceasefires’. So, too, the far more dire defeat with historical consequences in the mad Iran adventure where American leaders are desperately searching for some way to blunt that humiliating truth while plotting to rebuild its destroyed base network and alliance network around the Persian Gulf. *Iran is the termination point of this reckless path to war that will finds us despised in the world - whatever the immediate military outcome. At home, the nation will demonstrate once again that it has become incapable of shame, and that whatever self-respect survives will be in the form of that confected adulation that egoists apply to themselves. A pariah abroad and a sullen, autocratic nation look to be our ignominious destiny*

We Americans remember nothing, learn nothing enduring from our gross misdeeds. True of Vietnam. So, too, Iraq and Afghanistan. We are seeing the first signs of a repeat in regard to the Iranian debacle, while the shameful complicity in the Palestinian genocide never has been acknowledged and soon will be expunged from the national memory book. In its place, is a fantasy world. *In this respect the narcissist is like a juvenile. Ukraine: the Russians have suffered immense casualties, their economy is at the breaking point, they have failed to reach their goal of swallowing all of Ukraine (“you shoulda seen the other guy!”). Afghanistan: we didn’t make the necessary commitment and didn’t have the staying power (Frankie didn’t show up and Jimmy had to quit early because his mother was calling him to dinner”) Iraq: we got rid of Saddam and strengthened our presence in the Gulf (“it turned out easier than we expected, only a few of our guys got hurt”). Capitulation to China on tariffs: it served out purpose of getting them to the bargaining table (“now she knows how much it means to me, I think she’ll come to the prom”).*

Empathy by narcissists is superficial and fleeting. They have neither the capacity nor the inclination to relate to others except at a very superficial level. Attentiveness to the feelings and emotions of others risks subordinating the imperial self to someone else. Lights flash and bugles sound whenever that threat looms. **Avoidance behavior is companion to a total lack of self-understanding.** Consequently, that results in

constant tension as the narcissistic self, always on guard, struggles to protect the sanctuary while carrying on social discourse.

Thus, the Biden presidency disregarded how German opinion might be affected by the blowing up of the critical Nordstrom Gas Pipeline which has been a body blow to the country's industry. Nor does it fully appreciate that its drive for Taiwan independence resounds across a China hypersensitive to its century of humiliation and its sense of betrayal by the United States' de facto abrogation of the historic 'One China' accord reached 50 years ago. Nor that Russians cannot sleep securely at night knowing that a U.S.-led NATO - which has declared Russia an enemy - is planning to surround it with bases and nuclear capable missiles.

A peculiar version of this mentality is the strong tendency of American leaders to see the United States as a projection of themselves. Praise is craved not just as confirmation of the nation's but also as their individual exceptionalism and superiority. Consider the obligatory Stars & Stripes lapel pin that only made its appearance when 9/11 sowed the first doubts as to whether the United States was still Destiny's child. Opposition is offensive. This tendency is especially pronounced among leaders whose own self-esteem, independent of official status, is insufficient. Thus, the U.S. prizes allied leaders as much for their vassal-like deference – confirming American singularity and

superiority - as for any tangible contribution to the advancement of American interests

Narcissists typically have *no sense of history*. This is true both in the conventional sense of past events and in the personalized sense of being unmindful to what they did and said earlier. Remembrance of things past can be an unwelcome restraint. Studied ignorance is an emotional ally. This is true both in the conventional sense of past events and in the personalized sense of being unmindful to what they did and said earlier. The narcissist is by nature an existentialist. For that approach offers the maximum freedom to do whatever the need of the emotional moment is, and to avoid doing anything that is uncomfortable or inconvenient. That makes a narcissist uninterested in precedent, in the norms observed by others, in lessons as to what falls within the realm of the impossible, the painful, the costly. Inattentiveness to how one's behavior registers on others similarly increases freedom. The narcissist just does not care – unless there is a clear utilitarian interest in caring. Repetition of pet themes – grievances, complaints, judgments, wants – evinces how they are woven into the fabric of the narcissistic personality. The impulse to express them follows. The past as void removes any inhibition on reiteration.

The full-blown narcissist who remembers nothing cannot deepen/refine his understanding of the world and his protagonists.

They are assisted in this instinctive reaction to failure by two cardinal features of American political life today: the resounding silence of any potentially critical voices from among influential sources; the pervasive consensus that the United States should observe the dictates of the Wolfowitz Memo that we should extend and reinforce American global dominance as an imperative for national well-being.

Thus, in the discourse about Ukraine/Russia in policy circles, there is never any mention of the American inspired coup in Kiev against a democratically elected President in order to install a government under the sway of anti-Russian ultra-nationalists. Also, Western duplicity in tricking Putin into signing on to the Minsk accords of 2015 which the Western powers now publicly admit they never intended to implement. Sublimation of this sort is commonplace; it facilitates lying as all governments do. The practice can be very costly, though, when leaders fail to see how other governments experienced the same events. For an understanding of their mental make-up is essential for all future dealings. That is crystal clear in the Trump administration's unceasing flailing tries at getting Moscow to agree to terms of settlement that, given those earlier experiences, it obviously could never accept. [Biden policy toward Russia was aware of the Ukraine conflict's history. After all, it was Obama/Biden who initiated the Maiden Coup – after which Biden became the

administration's Ukraine "czar." He simply decided knowingly to lie about it in the relentless drive to bring down Putin]

Collective, institutionalized memory is crucial in making diplomacy possible. However, sublimation of inconvenient events has become the norm at the highest policy-making levels of the American government. Indeed, one might say that it is now a generalized societal characteristic. In this sense, we collectively are acting in a manner that is a facsimile of the narcissist in power.

Narcissists are FANTASISTS. They indulge in magical thinking. Under certain stressful conditions, they can lodge themselves in an alternative universe. Trump genuinely believes that his scatterbrained tariffs scheme will solve all of the country's economic problems while security prosperity forever anon). *Comprehending how the narcissist relates to truth and falsity begins with the cardinal factor that the distinction is of marginal concern to him. It is not a primary guide for orienting either thinking or behavior. Beyond the basic recognition of incontrovertible realities that all must observe in order to survive, it is the plasticity of reality that is at once principle and goal. Life's imperative is to find ways of making others pliable or, if necessary insulating oneself from them and their influence. Each narcissist is the self-appointed gatekeeper to reality;*

deciding what is, what happened, what did not happen, how it happened, whether important or not, who is who. US: Gaza

Thus: Israel does not obstruct humanitarian aid to Gaza civilians; Russia initiated the 2008 war with Georgia; the United States' paramount objective in the current Middle East conflict(s) is ending the hostilities; the Nordstrom gas pipeline was blown up by seven guys in a yacht or Ukrainian General Zaluzhnyi or Captain Nimo and the crew of the Nautilus.

As has been said in another context, *“his own grip on truth or falsity is so fluid, so subservient to his desires, that it matters little to him what is true and what is false; so he is able to act as if something is true if that serves his purposes best. Belief has become a creature of his will: he will treat an unfounded suspicion as if it were a Cartesian certainty. He has contempt for people who are candid and trusting, who can respect the truth.”*

CONCLUSION

Contemporary America as a whole exhibits a number of the cardinal traits that mark the individual public narcissist as depicted above. They are:

- A deeply-rooted belief in the country's exceptionalism, innate superiority,
- inability and disinclination to understand what makes other countries tick
- the automatic sublimation of anything that counters the core faith and national narrative
- the cultivated forgetfulness of past failures
- a readiness to blur the line between reality and convenient fictions
- a readiness to command/ dictate/punish other states without authority or justification
- Immunity from the restrictive standards that apply to others
- Feelings/emotions play the predominant role in shaping attitudes and animating actions; abstractions in any form are suspect
- A tendency to act impulsively and to expect quick returns
- The widespread tendency by senior office-holders to abuse their authority independent of cause
- Our elites are engaged in a full-time effort to obscure from the public (and themselves) unpleasant realities that do not conform to the comfortable narratives of "Americanism." This is especially true of the MSM and the politicians

- A culture wherein attraction to and admiration of persons is overwhelmingly emotional
- Mistaking motion for action

“Everyone rushes everywhere and into the future, because no one wants to face one's own inner self” – *Montaigne*

This degradation of American political culture and institutions has multiple, intertwined causes. Some have a genealogy in the nation's history now given point and distorted expression by stunning events and experiences laden with emotion. 9/11 is perhaps the most telling; more exactly the drama played out between the 'victory' in the Cold War and that humiliating tragedy. The country went through the emotional wringer: exultation to hubris to trauma to apprehension. Disoriented, it now feels a compulsion to regain its sense of prowess but fears that Destiny offers no guarantee of a happy outcome.

Tell Generation Z that they “have a rendez-vous with Destiny” and they will hesitate in apprehension that Destiny's decision might not be to their liking. Indeed, they may well propose that the rendez-vous be put back until their successor generation is in place.

*The drama of the American experience, our collective pageant of progress, used to be the great booster of morale and imparter of meaning. That tonic has lost much of its potency- in good part because it's not the same country, and we no longer reign supreme in the world. So, crude attempts at restoration become the imperative for a shaky collective identity and impoverished individual self-esteem. In the past, American mythology energized the country in ways that helped it to thrive. Today, it is a dangerous hallucinogen that traps Americans in a time-warp more and more distant from reality.*** (Appendix)*

APPENDICES

* Trump's implicit sociopathology as a character trait had been summed up by the idiosyncratic Portuguese writer/poet of the last century *Fernando Pessoa* :

“The world belongs to those who don't feel. The essential condition for being a practical man is the absence of sensibility. The chief requisite for the practical expression of life is will, since this leads to action..... All action is by nature the projection of our personality on to the external world, and since the external world is largely and firstly made up of human beings, it follows that this projection of personality is basically a matter of crossing other people's path.... To act, then, requires a certain incapacity for imagining the personalities of others, their joys and sufferings. Sympathy leads to paralysis. The man of action regards the external world as composed exclusively of inert matter - either intrinsically inert, like a stone he walks on or kicks out of his path, or inert like a human being who couldn't resist him and thus might as well be a stone as a man since, like a stone, he was walked on or kicked out of the way. Rulership requires insensibility.”

**** PUTIN**

Another possible consideration. In all likelihood, there lurks in the back of Putin's mind the dread fear that an unhinged Trump, roiling in the coils of his twisted psyche, could do something truly insane that endangers all. Keeping company with him – however tenuous – is seen as mitigating that risk by ensuring that Trump didn't disconnect from reality totally. However, in fact Putin's accommodating attitude has created conditions wherein resort to radical actions are more likely. By pulling his punches, by prolonging the conflict, by crediting Trump with a genuine desire to terminate the war and resolve the underlying issues, by his addiction to emollient words, by allowing Washington to cross red line after red line without being held accountable, by projecting the image of being malleable and manipulable – by following this script Putin has raised the stakes for Trump just when Ukraine's defeat is in sight (if still unrecognized by the White House). Under acute stress with no way out that keeps his ginger narcissist's ego intact, anything is possible.

In this instance, it is a foreign leader - Vladimir Putin - who has failed to perform due diligence in ascertaining the nature and the background of his protagonist, along with the context in which he is operating. Never in Donald Trump's life has he entered into a transaction in a good-faith effort to reach a mutually agreeable outcome. For him, it's all a zero-sum game - failure or loss is psychologically intolerable; therefore, the only viable terms for settling the Ukraine affair (as with Iran) are beyond his capacity to handle. So, he lies, cheats, deceives, obfuscates in order to control the narrative – in lieu of reality – counting on the gullibility of his domestic audience, the credulity of foreign protagonists – and, above all, to protect the grandiose, infallible sense of self.

It is almost cartoonish to observe the unending sales trips to Moscow by the Kushner/Wittkop tandem – spawn of the NYC real estate rackets - whose carpet bags display absolutely nothing that might interest the Russians – just the same old shelf-soiled wares. (Look Vladimir! Do I have something for you!) This commuting notwithstanding, the American understanding of Russia remains superficial and grossly distorted, for the fantasy world the Trump people occupy is inner directed

rather than reality based. The Kremlin door stays open only because of Putin's own delusion that Trump offers the best chance of a reconciliation with the West.

****The United States' aggressive behavior nowadays is not animated by ideology or doctrine. Instead, we have a perverted Americanism. An artless blend of myth, doctored history and chauvinism, it has been inflated into an encompassing revelation that explains all, inspires all, justifies all. A one-size-fits-all creed cum faith that embraces every person, every circumstance, every act. Americanism acts as a Unified Field Theory of self-identity, collective enterprise, and the Republic's enduring meaning. When one element is felt to be in jeopardy, the integrity of the whole edifice becomes vulnerable.*

Today, while the global project remains intact for elites and the vast majority of the public, we do witness dramatic changes in methods and national mood that emerged post 9/11. Emotions play a more prominent role in what we aim for, what we do and how we do it – be they aggressiveness, righteousness, or the impulse to denounce, scapegoat and punish others who obstruct us. We pick fights with whomever we perceive as hostile. We resort to violent force as the first resort rather than the last. We engage in acts of gross inhumanity – directly or as accomplices.

A post 9/11 catharsis has eluded us, though. We still seethe with emotions – most below the surface, most of the time. We suffer from the embedded anxiety that is dread, from uneasy feelings of vulnerability, from a seeming lost prowess and control. A society that talks casually about 'closure' on almost all occasions cannot find closure on 9/11. Instead, it has a powerful need to ritualize the fear, to pursue the implacable quest for ultimate security, to perform violent acts of vengeance that neither cure nor satiate.

History will record that Osama ben-Laden won his bet. American leaders, and their vassals, misdiagnosed the problem. Their reaction overlooked its causes, exaggerated the threat, and then devised a prescriptive strategy that has proven seriously counter-productive with consequences that may prove fatal. A classic case of iatrogenic suicide. OBL was prescient in his reading of Western societies. Even he, though, didn't count on the monumental stupidity of our political class.