

Clinging on to sanity

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As [I noted in this morning's video](#), I woke up yesterday relieved that genocide had not happened overnight.

That is not a sentence I was ever prepared to write. It is not a thought I ever expected to have. And yet it is now part of my lived experience.

That fact alone tells us something profoundly disturbing about the world we now inhabit.

It also tells us something very specific about the political moment created by Donald Trump and those around him. Let me try to explain why.

The collapse of assumptions

For most of my life, I, and I suspect many others, have operated with a set of implicit assumptions about politics.

First, that whilst I accepted that politicians could be reckless, self-serving, or even corrupt, there were still limits to what they would do.

Second, that while wars might happen, and civilians might suffer terribly as a result, the deliberate destruction of an entire people or civilisation - genocide, in other words - was something that belonged to history, not to the present.

Third, that political leaders, however flawed, still had at least some regard for the consequences of their actions beyond their own immediate gain.

All three of those assumptions now look fragile at best.

When a major world leader - the President of the USA, no less - openly articulates goals that imply the destruction of a people and does so without apparent restraint, something fundamental has shifted. The unimaginable has become imaginable.

And that matters, because once something enters our imagination as a real possibility, it changes how we perceive everything else.

The politics of fear

If government has a purpose, and I have always argued that it does, then one of its most basic roles is to deliver freedom from fear.

That is not an abstract claim. It is a practical one. We expect governments to create conditions in which:

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people are not in constant danger,

- *
basic economic, social and physical security is assured, and

- *
the future is not defined by existential threat.

What we are now witnessing is the inversion of that role.

Instead of reducing fear, political power is being used to amplify it.

Instead of providing security, it is creating instability.

Instead of offering protection, it is normalising the threat.

And this is not accidental. The cultivation of fear is now a political strategy.

It is being used to destabilise populations, weaken resistance, and create the conditions in which power can be exercised without accountability.

Corruption without shame

Please don't get me wrong. I am not naive. I have spent much of my professional life studying corruption.

In particular, I have examined how wealth is hidden and how tax abuse is facilitated through what are commonly called tax havens, which I helped to technically redefine as secrecy jurisdictions.

What I learned from that work was that corruption, for all its scale, operated within constraints.

Those involved in it wanted to avoid detection.

They relied on secrecy, complexity, and deniability to cover their tracks.

They did not want their activities to be known.

That is why measures such as automatic information exchange from secrecy jurisdictions, which I helped promote and then see implemented, have had such a profound impact. That process, by removing secrecy, has increased the risk of exposure and, in doing so, has reduced the scale of abuse.

In other words, what I had always suspected when promoting this measure was right: corruption depended on concealment.

What we are now seeing is something different. We are seeing corruption that is not hidden, but is almost performative.

We are seeing behaviour that is not constrained by fear of being found out, but liberated by the absence of shame.

And that is a far more dangerous phenomenon, because when there is no concern about exposure, there is no effective limit on the abuse that might be proposed or undertaken, as we are now, all too painfully, realising.

Power, profit, and destruction

There is another dimension to this that cannot be ignored.

War, destruction, and reconstruction have always created opportunities for profit:

- * Contracts are issued.
- * Resources are allocated.
- * Destruction happens.
- * Infrastructure is rebuilt.

And in each of these processes, there is scope for extraction, or as far as the corrupt politician is concerned, for taking a cut.

What is deeply troubling in the present context is the apparent willingness of those in the Trump regime to see human catastrophe created by war not as something to be avoided, but as an opportunity to be exploited.

If the destruction of a region creates future reconstruction contracts, then for politicians motivated primarily by personal profit, that destruction may not deter them. It may

even be an incentive.

That is a grotesque distortion of political purpose, but it is entirely consistent with a worldview in which everything is reduced to financial opportunity, as neoliberalism suggests to be the case.

The consequences

The implications of all this are profound.

First, our understanding of political risk has to change. We are no longer dealing with actors who are constrained by norms, expectations, or even basic human decency.

Second, the institutional safeguards that we assumed would provide protection look increasingly fragile. If those in power are willing to ignore them, their effectiveness is limited. They have, quite literally, thrown the international rulers based order aside. So far, there is nothing to replace it.

Third, the psychological impact is real. Living with the possibility of extreme events, including those we once thought impossible, alters how people think, act, and relate to one another.

And fourth, inequality and exploitation are likely to deepen. When crises are used as opportunities for enrichment, the costs are borne by the many, while the gains accrue to the few.

What follows?

We cannot simply observe this and move on. There are, I think, several necessary responses.

First, we need to reassert the purpose of government. It must be to serve people, to provide security, and to uphold the conditions for a decent life. Anything that undermines those goals must be challenged.

Second, we need far greater transparency and accountability. If corruption no longer fears exposure, then exposure must be made unavoidable and consequential.

Third, we need to challenge the economic narratives that justify this behaviour. The idea that everything can be reduced to profit is not just wrong, it is dangerous.

Fourth, we need political organisation. Fear thrives in isolation. It is resisted through collective action.

And finally, we need to recognise that this is not a normal moment. The shift that has taken place is real. The boundaries of the possible have moved. The question now is

whether we accept that shift or act to reverse it.

I am very clear where I stand. The role of politics is not to make us afraid. It is to give us hope, security, and the capacity to live well. Anything less is a failure. And anything that deliberately does the opposite must be resisted. Opposing the promotion of fear and hate is our political task now. It is, I suggest, the only way in which we can cling to our sanity.