**[American plutocracy and the Bernie factor](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2020/american-plutocracy-and-the-bernie-factor" \t "_new)**

Junaid S. Ahmad February 11, 2020

Last week demonstrated political theatre at its finest - or ugliest - in the United States. Though that may be an exaggeration since we’ve become used to it in the ‘Age of Trump.’ For a country that deems itself to have God given’s right to anoint every other country’s election process as ‘free and fair,’ it was an embarrassment on a gargantuan scale.

These ‘caucuses’ that we incessantly hear about, a uniquely American political phenomenon that is supposed to result in the selection of the opposition - in this case, that of the Democratic Party’s - candidate to run for president, have begun the chaotic mess from the get-go. Or rather, it is those who really control the process and ultimately ‘selection,’ not ‘election,’ of the front-runner candidate - who have precipitated another elite, or ‘plutocratic,’ schizophrenic reaction to the ‘democracy’ the nation’s rulers say they love and want to export to the world.

Two things were reflected very clearly in the American body politic last week. The first was the fiasco of vote’ counting,’ ‘rigging,’ - whatever you want to call it - that occurred in the Iowa caucus, the first of all of these caucuses, and the second was Trump’s ‘State of the Union’ address, an annual ritual required for every American president.

The irony is that both events are eerily reminiscent of precisely four years ago, the elections of 2016 that brought Trump to power. On the one hand, it is crystal clear that, just like it did it 2016, the Democratic Party establishment is at war with this radically progressive candidate, Bernie Sanders, who refuses to disappear and is competing once again to be the opposition candidate to contest in this year’s presidential elections. He is now the ‘front-runner’ of all the Democratic Party candidates, yet both the political establishment and mainstream media continue to shamefully render fallacious assessments of his political popularity, ensuring every way possible that he remains as marginalised as possible as a significant political contender.

In the 2018 Hollywood movie, ironically named, “The Front Runner,” a highly popular candidate with progressive views, well in the lead of all other candidates, was discredited within just one week for an affair he had got caught with during his presidential bid. In Bernie’s case, the Democratic Party establishment has been ruthlessly maligning him for four years straight - stepped up to overdrive now that he’s getting close to capturing the nomination - based on absolutely nothing but his potent challenge to American policies that favour the very few over the very many.

As for Trump’s ‘State of the (Dis-) Union’ address, the rhetoric brought us straight back to his election campaign of 2016. It was a political rally speech, targeting the base of support that he knows he can count on - as well as those he can once again con into believing in his fight for the ‘common man’ (forget about women) in America. All he needed to do to reassure his solid base - white supremacists and the Christian right, or the country’s ‘Bible Belt’ - is to vomit his typical racist and xenophobic filth with the fake social conservatism on issues such as abortion to satisfy this lot. However, to mobilise more ordinary - but only white - working-class Americans, he had to resort to the same rigmarole that he regurgitated throughout the 2016 Presidential campaign: bring jobs’ back’ to American from overseas, increasing their wages, not touching their social security at retirement, etc. All lies coming from a president whose only accomplishment is his signature tax-break-for-the-rich legislation that generated the greatest upward transfer of wealth in American history.

Nevertheless, Trump is the ultimate con-artist, hence making him the fittest for the job of the standard duplicitous politician. And the tragedy is, having been impeached by the House of Representatives, his national approval ratings have now increased to the highest levels since his entire term in office. A twisted world, or certainly America, that some Americans have to endure, others relish in.

What both politicians understand, the principled Bernie and the charlatan Trump, is that the period of neoliberalism, particularly as it has been ruthlessly practised against ordinary Americans – across racial, gender, etc. lines – is the heart of the matter. The abysmal conditions of working Americans, with a health care and education system designed to exclude the bulk of the population, are the result of this age of ‘austerity’ for the have-nots, and ‘state socialism’ and largesse for the ‘haves’ and the rich. Trump knows that beyond his socially conservative and racist base, not to mention his friends in the ‘1 per cent,’ he needs votes of blue-collar America to which he’s required to make all sorts of promises he has no intention to think about again once the elections are over.

The bane of the American empire is not only its imperial overreach and arrogance but the scandalous domestic features of the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world. With tens of millions of its population without adequate health care, with lack of access to or ineffective indentured-indebted servitude merely to acquire higher education, the absolute social marginalisation of the country’s weak and poor, and on top of it, the current wave of a racist, xenophobic, and sexist successful assault on any gains made by the civil rights and women’s movements of the 1960s and 70s – all of this is a recipe for a sinking Titanic.

The American ‘republic’ had long been lost, if there ever was one. The deep state – the military-intelligence apparatus and their mega-financiers in Wall Street – select their approved candidates and either destroy or discipline a candidate like Trump who may have been an unpredictable steward of the American empire if not put in line by the deep state. But just as the republic has been long gone, the empire is in its death knells as well. This period bodes to be incredibly painful and violent for the world and for Americans. Wounded tigers rarely think rationally.

At this particular juncture of American history, Bernie Sanders may be the only hope to actually humbly embrace the soft landing/ending of that imperial legacy, as well as confront the shameful predatory corporate capitalist and racist-sexist state apparatus at home. This, of course, requires an incredible degree of optimism, first for Bernie to be selected as the Democratic Party’s candidate for president, then his victory as president, and most difficult at all, for him to ward off the deep state and its congressional lackeys to be able to remake and reshape the country meaningfully. If Bernie reaches the top, his only hope to survive is to rely on his incredibly popular mass social base to sustain 1960s-style mobilisation to assist him in implementing his progressive agenda.

Bernie is the only hope for America and Americans to save themselves from the worst of the violence that they will necessarily be engaged in when Uncle Sam’s ‘what we say goes’ approach is so definitively proven to be obsolete. This is why American plutocracy, which believes it can hold onto lost (bloody) glory, has so much contempt for the man, while tens of millions of Americans deem him one of the most decent, honest, and principled politicians in the entire history of the country.