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The wonderful thing about teaming with Jim Hoagland is that he can give you a perspective based on reality, while I speak about the version of reality that we call politics.

The events in Paris have brought back echoes of 9-11 in America. Every American remembers the headlines that ran in French newspapers after 9-11: “We are all Americans.” I hope that the French felt that same sense of solidarity the week of the Paris attacks, as every American newspaper headline blared with the shock and horror of the events in France.

However, there is another way in which we will see an echo of what happened after 9-11, which is that this is about to become a political football. Recall how Paris and the French were reviled in some circles in the US when the French government did not support the US position on military action in Iraq in 2003: French fries became “freedom fries”, and wine was poured down sewers on Capitol Hill. In the months ahead, Paris and Syria will become one-word epithets that will be hurled across political voids in the midst of a very heated primary election season.

Turning to those elections, let me share some thoughts on how they will play out. The horrific events in Paris and what has followed will accelerate the narrowing of the fields of candidates on both the Republican and Democratic sides. On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton stood up at a Democratic debate the day after the attacks and spoke in a grave tone and with deep knowledge about foreign policy. Many of us felt she hit her stride in that moment. By contrast, many people thought that Bernie Sanders, her leading opponent, missed the mark when he said two sentences about Paris before turning his focus to the US economy and repeating his signature contention that the US economy is “rigged” against the “little guy” and in favor of big banks. You can begin to see a sense that while Democrats have absorbed the anger of Bernie Sanders and appreciate the issues regarding income inequality that he has brought to the table, they are now focused on consolidating behind their more serious candidate, Secretary Clinton, and moving forward.

The Republican side is much more chaotic. On the Democratic side, the debate ranges from “status quo plus” to “status quo plus-plus,” but on the Republican side, the range is more “bomb and invade,” to “really bomb and really invade.” To be blunt, some of the angrier candidates are some of the ones who are least knowledgeable on foreign affairs. When Ben Carson and Donald Trump, whose backgrounds are in neuroscience and business, not politics, talk about these issues, they lack credibility, frankly. In a recent news show interview, Dr. Carson was asked by his interviewer which Arab leaders he would call first, and in what order, to put together a coalition, and his answer was, “all of them.” This is the same answer that Sarah Palin gave in 2008 when she was asked what newspapers she read and, because she could not really remember which she read, her answer was, “well, all of them.”

Subsequently Dr. Carson published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* to try to make up for this, but his approach was in essence still, “well, all of them.” He suggested that the US ought to lead a coalition that would include Kurds, Syrians, Turks, and Iraqis. Anyone who thinks such a coalition would be easy to assemble—particularly someone who does not really know who the Kurds are, and how they differ from the Turks—would have a complicated task ahead of him.

What we will now see on the Republican side is consolidation. Though the Republican base is angry and unhappy, they are also going to begin looking for a candidate whom they think can stand up to a very serious Hillary Clinton. That will mean that Ben Carson will fade, and Donald Trump will fade. Does that mean that the anger in the Republican base, which motivates their support, will fade? No. However, it might be redirected toward a candidate whom they find just as angry, just as anti-establishment, but who perhaps projects more seriousness and more intellect—for example, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who appeals to the Republican base on the right, but is also a graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School, a former Supreme Court law clerk, and actually one of the brightest people to run for president in a long time.



If the “angry” vote does go to Ted Cruz, we will then see establishment Republicans begin to panic. Ted Cruz is widely disliked in Washington because he has always traveled his own path in the Senate. Mitch McConnell, the Republican majority leader in the Senate, makes a carefully crafted deal with Democrats—and then Ted Cruz stands up and says he will filibuster, and spends the next 36 hours talking and blowing up the deal. Republicans do not like him, and if they see him surging in the polls, they will look for the anti-Cruz. Could this be Jeb Bush? Perhaps, although despite being liked by many, even some of us on the Democratic side, Jeb Bush has struggled in the polls. He has also failed to achieve the serious sense of purpose on foreign affairs that his father and his brother brought.

It is more likely that the candidate they will go to is Marco Rubio, a Senator from Florida. Senator Rubio is extremely articulate, very bright, and from a younger generation. He served on the Senate Foreign Affairs committee, so he can speak intelligently on foreign affairs, though I disagree with him strongly on most things. This means that it is possible we could see a head-to-head race between Senators Rubio and Cruz on the Republican side. What is ironic about this is that people’s criticism of Ted Cruz is that he is too far to the right, too harsh, and does not want to work with people, whereas the criticism of Marco Rubio is that he is young and inexperienced. However, Ted Cruz is exactly the same age as Marco Rubio—both are 44 years old—and has two years less experience in Senate. Therefore, if I am right, we will have the least experienced pair facing off for the Republican nomination, in an establishment versus anti-establishment vote, and on the Democratic side we will see a quick consolidation in favor of Hillary Clinton. From that point on, the race is anybody’s game.

I worry very much that it will be difficult to make serious, nuanced policy in the presidential election season that lies ahead. Having seen this happen before, I am concerned that in the months to come, very important decisions about America’s alignments going forward, about America’s alliance structures, about how America deals with Syrian refugees and immigrants, or deals with the French and with NATO, will be determined in the context of a very angry, hard-fought political campaign. This is not very comforting.