

## Why Clinton will win

Between globalisation and populism

by John Kornblum in Berlin

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John Kornblum, a long-time US state department official, former US ambassador to Germany, and a member of the OMFIF advisory board, gave an [interview to Die Welt](#), the daily German newspaper (Andrea Seibel), published on 26 July, edited extracts of which are provided below.

**Die Welt** : Donald Trump has become the Republican candidate for the US presidency. Did you think that would be possible? And what does it mean?

**John Kornblum** : A year ago? No. Nobody did, including in my opinion Trump himself. His success is a sign of developments stemming from globalisation and the 2008 financial crisis which encompass the entire western world. Much time has elapsed since the second world war and even the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today many people on both sides of the Atlantic feel the social compact of the postwar period no longer functions. They feel betrayed. Trump plays cynically with such ideas without considering the consequences of his actions.

**Welt** : Some American critics are warning of approaching tyranny and that democracy will be overwhelmed.

**Kornblum** : I don't believe that will happen. Trump himself is the result of a many-layered democratic process. We should never get to the point where we only accept results with which we agree. Many voters feel angry at being left behind in what should be a time of prosperity, threatened neither by war nor economic collapse. They are not convinced by conventional solutions. They can't understand the world anymore. It was very disturbing to feel the hate and bitterness of delegates at the Republican convention.

**Welt** : Could a system led by Trump renew itself? Francis Fukuyama, the political scientist, has written about the 'vetocracy' which rules the American Congress. Increasingly the goal there is not policy-making but policy-blocking.

**Kornblum** : I am firmly convinced that Hillary Clinton will become the first female American president.

**Welt** : I don't want to rob you of your optimism, but isn't Hillary Clinton really a second class choice? If she were elected, wouldn't that only be by necessity, to firm up the establishment?

**Kornblum** : No. I know her personally. Like Angela Merkel, she will be a pillar of strength seeking change in difficult times. And what do you mean by 'establishment'? While Trump has been prancing around, Clinton has spent more than 40 years in active dedication to good government of the US. If one looks more closely, one sees an active, politically engaged woman, not the cool figure consumed by a desire for power and financial gain that her opponents often present.

At the same time I would have to agree that, despite her great competence and despite Trump, there are still doubts about her election prospects. She admits she is often too cool and distant in public. She finds it hard to project warmth and concern for the needs of those who feel left behind.

**Welt** : Many observers are using the term 'populism' to describe those who oppose classical representatives of the political and diplomatic elite. Why is such populism only seen as a bad thing?

**Kornblum** : Populism isn't always a bad thing. In fact, the US is based on a system of popular democracy. Many Europeans reject our system and the results it produces because they fear it is too vulgar and populist. America is not fettered by elaborate structures which suppress public debate. Our open and very representative electoral system often produces figures such as Trump. But pure populism can also get out of hand.

**Welt** : Trump is the first American politician to be rewarded for insulting women, blacks and immigrants.

**Kornblum** : Trump and Vladimir Putin are in many ways similar. They also make little secret of the fact that they admire each other. Trump had his own reality show for nearly 15 years. Just like Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister, he perfects his methods in an atmosphere of reality.

**Welt** : Everything can be tipped over. Look for example at Turkey or the Crimea.

**Kornblum** : What bothers me is the way in which my own country, which after two world wars and a devastating depression concluded that isolationism was immoral and impractical, is once again falling into intellectual seclusion. I am not only thinking of Trump. I am thinking of people I know well, politicians, journalists and experts on Europe, with whom I cannot find common ground any longer.

**Welt** : Why? Because they all consider the world too dangerous and complex?

**Kornblum** : America seems to have forgotten why the Atlantic community is different. It is not China or Russia, but rather an indispensable core of our own reality. My country neglects its role as a guarantor of freedom and stability too often. When I speak to the younger generation of experts about our magnificent European project, they don't contradict me. They simply don't understand me... We are squandering our great achievement of 1990. Our Atlantic sense of unity is perhaps unique in world history, but we have not built a new sense of common purpose on the foundations established 70 years ago. It's like gambling away a quiz show jackpot.

**Welt** : Your relatives came from East Prussia. Trump's from the Pfalz (in western Germany).

**Kornblum** : During a lecture tour to Deidesheim, I looked around Kallstadt, which is right next door. People from Kallstadt are said to brag continuously. German achievements in America have a great deal to do with German society and culture. They demonstrate what Germans can do when they are freed of the limitations of Europe.

**Welt** : How do you explain the continuing racism against black citizens of the US? Woody Allen, the film director, recently defined it as the result of an 'unbeatable crime', which was to bring slaves to America. Can history ever be healed?

**Kornblum** : I see it the same way. This is our original sin. We will never be liberated from it. This history can never be healed. I was still young when the civil rights movement began. Until that point, I was living in a white suburb of Detroit and had no idea how deep the problem ran. I would not agree that racism in America is increasing. But the underlying problem remains. Our society has never been able to find a way of building a sense of common identity between whites and blacks.

**Welt** : And what about the right to bear arms in the US? Is such a practice still relevant in a globalised world?

**Kornblum** : Absolutely not. Our fixation with firearms is horrible. The passage in the American constitution which establishes 'the right to bear arms' refers to the right to form a militia for common defence. It does not describe an unlimited right to have a personal weapon.

**Welt** : Hillary Clinton is almost 70 and already has two grandchildren. Can a grandmother become president?

**Kornblum** : She will make it. I am very certain. If Trump ever were to become president, we would probably experience a serious political crisis. He is a well-known type. A person who reacts impulsively and often explodes when he is unsure of himself. Many would probably refuse to work for him.

To read the full interview in German, click [here](#).

John Kornblum is a former US Ambassador to Germany and Senior Counsellor at Noerr LLP, and a member of the OMFIF Advisory Board. This forms part of [OMFIF's series of commentaries on the US presidential election on 8 November](#).