



**I** *l cavaliere* still proudly remembers her words, six years ago: “We have no better friend, we

have no one who supports the American policies as consistently as prime minister Berlusconi has,” Hillary Clinton told reporters as the two met in Kazakhstan for the first time (December 1, 2010) since the then 74-year-old Italian prime minister had been dismissed as “feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern leader” in US State Department cables released by WikiLeaks.

“Silvio” had already made light of the leaked cables, laughing off the suggestion in one that his “frequent late nights and penchant for partying hard mean he does not get sufficient rest.” “Unfortunately, I have never in my life taken part in any ‘wild party’” he said. “They may be interesting.”

The decision to select Mr Berlusconi as one of only three out of thirty eight national leaders with whom the US Secretary of State held a one-to-one meetings at the Summit, underlined the urgency with which the US felt it needed to repair the relationship with Italy.

Then, in 2014, the real estate tycoon-turned-politician was one of the most interesting characters portrayed in *Hard Choices*, a *memoir* of former Secretary of state, her account of her tenure in that position from 2009 to 2013. Berlusconi is described as somewhat vulnerable, he is shown to be incensed by France’s lack of consultation before military action in Libya and is clearly hurt

when WikiLeaks publishes U.S. diplomatic cables.

“Why are you saying those things about me?” Clinton recalls Berlusconi saying, hinting at the US diplomatic cables that portray him as “feckless, vain, and ineffective.” Had Clinton some sympathy for Berlusconi, who was convicted of fraud after quitting Italian office?

Today, were he an American registered voter, Berlusconi would support Hillary and vote for her in November, despite a now large literature that overlaps his figure on the Donald Trump’s. Yes, the two have a lot in common. Modern times *Parallel Lives* sort of.

Roger Cohen on *The New York Times*:

*Widely ridiculed, endlessly written about, long unscathed by his evident misogyny and diverse legal travails, Berlusconi proved a Teflon politician. Nothing stuck. He had the gift of the gab. He had a tone. He connected. He owned a soccer club, for heaven’s sake. Many Italians thought they saw in him one of their own. He served three terms and nine years as prime minister before an ignominious downfall.*

*Nobody who knows Berlusconi and has watched the rise and rise of Donald Trump can fail to be struck by the parallels. It’s not just the real-estate-to-television path. It’s not just their shared admiration for Vladimir Putin. It’s not just the playboy thing, and obsession with their virility, and smattering of bigotry, and contempt for policy wonks, and reliance on a tell-it-like-it-is tone. It’s not their wealth, nor the media savvy that taught them that nobody ever lost by betting on human stupidity.*

And yet Berlusconi firmly rejects the association with the “*American Berlusconi*”.

On the one hand he is flattered by the success of his American alter ego. In a way it’s “his success”. Across the ocean in Italy, Berlusconi’s sins – his infamous “bunga bunga” parties – took center stage for several years, and left a permanent stain on his already tarnished reputation. Now Trump’s triumph is somehow a vindication of this narrative. On the other hand, “Silvio” does not mirror himself at all in his misogynist American twin. His language. His style. His way of being macho. Has nothing to do with “Silvio”’s.

The big fan of models and attractive young women, who once said that in order to prevent rape, “we would need as many soldiers as there are beautiful Italian women,” and defended his licentious reputation by saying, “it’s better to be fond of pretty girls than to be gay” considers himself a charming, romantic, Latin lover. The opposite of Trump who “just hates women”. Manliness versus masculinity.

More over, Berlusconi is disgusted by the rude attacks against “my friends Bill and Hillary”, “the very low level of Trump’s innuendos on the Lewinski affair”. There is something “personal” in his

defense of the Clintons' intimacy. He still feels offended and rattled by a media campaign, "a mean campaign", which, he says, intruded in his private life.

With some of his close friends and confidantes he shares views on the current American scene: former Italian ambassador to United States, Gianni Castellaneta, MP Lucio Malan, senator and formerly journalist Augusto Minzolini.

The top choice, at the beginning of the American presidential race, was Jeb Bush. Silvio Berlusconi bet on the former governor of Florida, foreseeing the presidential competition as a dynasty feud, Bushes-Clintons.

Yes, "Silvio" and "*the Donald*" have much in common. Above all the two of them are not professional politicians. Both have been successful by referring directly to the people, to the voters, without the mediation of the organized politics. But after more than two decades in the political arena, *il Cavaliere* sees himself as a consummate politician, an eminent part of the political establishment, and, paradoxically enough, watches with growing suspicion and uneasiness the possible victory in November of a maverick: his Berlusconi American clone.