

A Coherent Foreign Policy Could Revive Biden's Fortunes



by Conrad Black

As America and the world watch the Biden administration sinking in every poll on its overall performance and in every specialized poll in each policy area, no one should imagine that the strategists of the Democratic Party, no matter how grim their reelection prospects may be right now, have resigned themselves to defeat.

By a hair's breadth, the indefinable but ineluctable genius of the American system that produces great leaders when they're necessary and prevents the political system from being hijacked by extremists who threaten it from time to time, seems to be steering clear of the attempted Democratic seizure of the long-term political advantage in registering voters and counting ballots. It's impossible to look upon the current attempts to prevent voter verification and voting list updates and to promote unlimited unverifiable ballot harvesting, as well as to flood the country with unidentified migrants and facilitate their ability to vote in presidential elections as non-citizens, otherwise than as an effort to create an uneven political playing field.

An intense effort has been underway, first to destroy the Trump administration with unfounded accusations of treason and of unconstitutional behavior, then to steal the election with

a comprehensive tainting of voting and vote-counting procedures in six key swing states. This effort was graced by the abdication of the judicial branch in its refusal to judge any of the 19 lawsuits challenging the integrity of the last-minute electoral changes, allegedly based on the need to facilitate voting during the COVID-19 pandemic. This seems to have originated in the horror at the thought of the bipartisan, post-Reagan soft-left political consensus being overturned by an advocate of America-first military alliances and trade and immigration policies who would adapt tax policy to put the unemployed to work rather than increasing their dependence on state benefit. This was the specter of Trump and Trumpism, and the Democrats and anti-Trump Republicans moved seamlessly from trying to deny him reelection to trying to prevent any chance of recurrence of such an electoral phenomenon.

Everyone who wishes America well always hopes that whoever is president will do well. In the current circumstances in which both parties are accusing the other of being a menace to democracy, and there's considerable evidence to support that charge against the Democrats, there's some consolation in the accumulating failure of an administration so negatively and dangerously motivated as this one. Every policy field is in a state of constant deterioration: Immigration is a self-willed disaster; urban crime rates are rising sharply; Omicron will probably solve the COVID disaster, which has been amplified by Biden's illegal attempts to impose the vaccination that he said previously he wouldn't trust because its development was accelerated by Trump. There's a shrinking workforce and more than enough jobs to fill than there are unemployed, but too many people still enjoy COVID relief more than a job. Inflation is rising at its highest rate in 40 years and is seriously understated by the Consumer Price Index.

There has been no coherent foreign policy, and the damage from the unimaginable fiasco of the pell-mell flight from

Afghanistan will accrue imperceptibly for years. Tens of thousands of Afghans who cooperated with the United States have been left in harm's way, along with billions of dollars of modern military equipment. In the meantime, America's allies, who were supposed to be reassured by the arrival of the Biden administration, have no idea what to make of the inconstant noises from Washington, and the insolences of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea never cease to multiply.

If there's an early chance of a revival in Biden's fortunes, it could lie in the foreign policy area. Despite all its huffing and puffing, China would have to attempt direct military coercion-invasion of Taiwan to retrieve it as a province, and however enfeebled the Biden administration, China will have to approach this option with great caution. The escalatingly belligerent conduct of the People's Republic toward its neighbors and its increasing totalitarianism at home are a powerful incitement for Taiwan to resist Chinese military threats. If the Taiwanese leadership keep their nerve and the Americans retain Taiwan's confidence, China will have no option but invasion to achieve reunification.

It would be simple for the United States to provide hundreds of suitably armed aircraft to the Taiwanese and allow them to be used by Taiwanese pilots to attack an invading force. Any such armada would have to make its way at speeds that would not exceed 15 knots over more than 120 miles of open sea carrying at least 500,000 soldiers and would be a sitting duck plodding across the Formosa Straits. The 1972 Shanghai Communiqué between President Richard Nixon and Premier Zhou Enlai was unspecific about how the other side would respond if China attempted to coerce Taiwanese reunification with the People's Republic or if the United States moved definitively to prevent such an eventual reunification. If China invaded Taiwan, it would clearly violate the 1972 agreement, and the United States would have the right to provide Taiwan the means of self-defense. This would not technically be a direct

American attack on the Chinese, and unless utter madness possesses the Chinese leadership, they would not consider a full-scale war with the United States. Given the solidarity of Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, Vietnam and most other neighboring countries, the People's Republic would find itself facing a daunting phalanx of uncooperative countries united by their dislike of Chinese aggrandizement.

Responding to Russian aggression against Ukraine would be considerably more complicated but much less dangerous since Russia is not really a remotely equivalent military power to the United States. Of course, NATO must not allow Russia to determine who is admitted to the alliance, but it would also be unwise, and not necessarily just, to assume that the Russian-speaking sections of Ukraine are happier being Ukrainians than Russians. The West can't go to war or even arm one side in a war to prevent millions of people from changing to an adjacent nationality. This was the practical difficulty at the Munich Conference in 1938: Chamberlain and Daladier were irresolute, but they couldn't go to war to prevent the Sudetenlanders who wished to be German, from becoming German. A durable settlement in Ukraine requires that the irredentist (Russian) elements either express a preference to remain Ukrainian or are permitted to join Russia if they're adjacent to it, and that Ukraine, with or without its large Eastern concentration of Russians, shape up as a seriously governed state meeting reasonable norms of democratic practices and acceptable levels of integrity in government to be eligible to join NATO and the EU. The United States and its allies should stake out such a position. If Putin was so unwise as to challenge the West in Ukraine, he could easily be defeated just by steadily supplying and training Ukrainians. Russia's GDP is smaller than Canada's, and it doesn't possess the resources to conquer a country of over 30 million people if its forces were properly armed.

Both Iran and North Korea could easily be put in their place

by conventional bomb and rocket attacks that destroyed their nuclear military facilities. In the case of North Korea this would also require the mountain of surface-to-surface missiles aimed at the South Korean capital, Seoul, to be de-calibrated by a shower of cruise missiles; one doesn't wish to be flippant about such an extensive intervention, but the ability of the United States to deal with both of those countries at little risk to itself and its allies is beyond question.

Any variant of this would be so purposeful it would present Biden in a new light as president.

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