

A Perilous (But Not Hopeless) Time on the International Stage

A vacuum was created 30 years ago by the peaceful collapse of both the Imperial Russian state constructed over centuries from Peter the Great to Stalin, and the Bolshevik dictatorship of the Soviet Union that was purporting to perfect Marxism and spread it to a yearning and grateful world. That vacuum has been filled by China, assisted at least tentatively by selected opportunistic allies. So thorough, sudden, and bloodless was the American-led triumph over the Soviet Union, that it has required 30 years for a serious replacement challenge to the West to emerge.

At the end of World War I, when Germany effectively surrendered but was not occupied, the supreme Allied commander, France's Marshal Foch, correctly described the 1919 Treaty of Versailles as "a 20-year armistice."

In contrast, the rivalry between the two most powerful victorious nations in World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union, began within just a couple of years of the end of the war. When Stalin violated all of his promises in the Yalta Conference agreement to vacate the countries the Red Army had "liberated" from Nazi Germany, he also violated the spheres of influence agreement with British Prime Minister Churchill in Moscow in October 1944, with respect to Greece and Yugoslavia. The ensuing confrontation continued for nearly 45 years.

The tactics of re-occupying the vacuum have been for the supposedly communist People's Republic of China to maintain a communist dictatorship but shift to a primarily capitalist economy, the exact opposite of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform of

the Soviet Union: retention of a command economy while democratizing the political process, a fairly predictable recipe for the complete breakdown of the Soviet state.

While China has been executing what is probably history's most remarkable story of national economic development, and the first return to Great Power status of a country that had long lost that status, the ragged shards and fragments of defeated international communism have quickly rediscovered their supposed true vocation as conservators of the environment and therefore the future of the planet. They have assisted vitally in the confection of an anti-capitalist dogma based on retardation of economic activity, and almost unbelievably, have sold it as a Green inspiration to the Western elites.

The luxury of having no rival in the world and only the comparative irritant of almost stateless terrorist organizations, which inflict tragic outrages but cannot threaten the existence of great nations, induced the United States into the first bout of self-hate in its history.

Centuries of often excessive but certainly not unfounded self-commendation as a free and virtuous meritocracy, a champion of freedom in the world, that has made the greatest effort of any in history to raise up a subjugated racial minority to a status of equality, have degenerated into an acutely self-critical disorder and caused the United States to detach from its legitimate global strategic interests.

This providential facilitation of Chinese aggrandizement has come in stages. The Clinton, Obama, and both Bush Administrations assumed that concessions and preferments to China would result in that country becoming a progressively more cooperative member of the international community. They all also underestimated the capacity of Russia, sundered though it is, to create problems by conniving with China, Iran, and Turkey in particular, to aggravate and destabilize American interests and alliances. In this process, most of the

Western alliance has become soft and useless, a military parasite of the United States that has failed to maintain its comprehensive military superiority over China. Germany is almost a neutral state and an energy vassal of Russia.

The West should start by recognizing the skill of its principal rivals. The Chinese leadership picked the financial and intellectual and scientific pockets of the West for decades, manipulated the Chinese currency, and dumped their manufactures on the world, exporting unemployment to the West while seducing it. Their supreme triumph was translating their own incompetence in releasing a dangerous virus, communicating it to the world, and shuttering down the economy of the Western world for over a year. It was dishonest and uncivilized but it was a masterstroke, and as the news every day tells us, our governments are still floundering and flailing as a result. It enabled the defeat of President Trump, who was resurrecting a satisfactory strategic balance in the world, a cause that history will judge should have motivated his countrymen to be more tolerant of his stylistic infelicities.

For good measure, the last few U.S. secretaries of defense, despite the enormous investment that the Trump Administration made in upgrading America's military capacity, failed to see the possibilities for hypersonic missiles and apparently failed to assure adequate defense for the Nimitz class aircraft carriers which project American power but are currently vulnerable to sophisticated weapons in the hands of America's rivals. The media, academia, the oligarchic social media cartel, Hollywood, Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and major league sports, have all generally failed shamefully to maintain national self-esteem and even to permit elemental vigilance about the dangerous deterioration of America's position in the world.

Fortunately, the people are wiser; they were snowed, if not swindled, by the massive coalition of Trump's enemies last

year, who had 95 percent of the media and outspent Trump two to one. Conditions are eroding so swiftly, the country is seeing that this woke idiocy isn't affordable, and they are almost certain to opt for national renaissance and peace through strength next time.

China and Russia have been so successful in the last 18 months that they may be overconfident. If China attacks Taiwan, any substantial deployment of U.S. airpower to that island, cooperating with the Taiwanese, would destroy an attempted amphibious attack of the 500,000 soldiers that would be needed, as they attempted to cross the Formosa Strait, which is four times as wide as the English Channel at Normandy. The United States would have to send the message that it would not escalate hostilities or extend them beyond the defense of Taiwan; it would be tense, but if the People's Republic is insolent enough to attempt such a thing it could certainly be defeated.

Ukraine is more complicated. It has not been a successful independent country, though post-Soviet Russia is no marvel of good government, either. It is not improbable that many ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine would rather be Russians than Ukrainians and we cannot go to war to prevent that any more than the British and French could go to war to prevent Sudetenland from joining Germany in 1938.

But to the extent that Russia attempted to subdue non-Russian Ukraine, the West could frustrate that by heavily supplying the Ukrainian armed forces. Russia remains a sophisticated armaments maker but it does not have the economic or political strength (its GDP is smaller than Canada's) to subdue a seriously motivated and well-armed Ukraine that, without its Russian fifth-column, would still have a population of more than 30 million.

The strategic equation is complicated and increasingly dangerous because this administration is so feeble and the

U.S. military has been so incompetently directed recently. But the United States is fundamentally a much stronger country than China or Russia, and if it inspires and leads its allies, it is at the head of an overwhelmingly powerful coalition of free states.

We have three more years to muddle through before the leadership that is all that is really lacking, can be installed. It is perilous but far from hopeless.

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