

Biden Has a Relatively Good Week Trying To Manage Through Gaza, Ukraine, and Treat With Communist China



by Conrad Black

Contrary to widespread opinion, President Biden did not have a bad week last week, trying to manage through Gaza and Ukraine and negotiate with the president of Communist China. Considering other key elements of his administration's record, such as immigration, inflation, crime, education, the mindless excesses of the Green Terror, and the woke cancer gnawing at his administration, he got through the week quite well.

They are three entirely distinguishable problems and the connections between them are not close or obvious. Ukraine

came first and Mr. Biden did not help matters by implying that if Russia only wished to take back a few Russian-speaking districts in Ukraine, that would be fine. Nor did the credulous assurance from the ponderous chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, that Kyiv would fall within a few days and all Ukraine within a few months.

So Mr. Biden effectively started out as President Eisenhower did with Hungary – on the assumption that nothing could be done. He offered President Zelensky and his family safe passage out of Ukraine. When it became clear that Ukraine was determined to put up a much more strenuous fight than had been anticipated, the president had still not got over his well-known acute condition of foot-in-mouth disease.

That is, he denounced President Putin as a “war criminal” while contradicting his own Secretary of State and presumptuously declaring that Ukraine “doesn’t need” advanced fighter aircraft. Once it was clear that Ukraine was going to make a good fight out of it, the administration and most Republicans were absolutely right to ignore Mr. Putin’s belligerent piffle about nuclear weapons and support Ukraine with practically all the equipment and ordnance it requested.

The cost of the Ukraine war for the United States has been about five percent of its defense budget, one of the most brilliant investments the Pentagon has made since the development of the atomic bomb. If Russia had snaffled up Ukraine it would have exposed the Western Alliance as a paper tiger, and would have enabled Russia to regain the largest single component of the overwhelming and bloodless defeat it incurred in the Cold War.

Ukraine, failed state though it has been, indistinct and nationality-riven though it has also always been, is an important jurisdiction at the heart of Europe. As Churchill said of Finland in 1940, “it has shown the world what free men can do.” It is scandalous and unconscionable that many

otherwise very perceptive Republicans have on this issue drifted down the road of mindless paleoconservative isolationism.

Letting the Kremlin get its hands on Ukraine again would effectively have turned our brilliant Cold War victory into round one of a two-out-of-three contest. Mr. Biden and Senator McConnell, though they don't seem to notice a lot of other important concerns, have got this one right. They have rehabilitated the Western Alliance in the process.

What is needed now is an exit strategy that the country can comprehend and believe in. It is there, and everyone from Mr. Putin to President Trump has referred to it. Unless the Ukrainians can dislodge the Russians from those parts of Ukraine that they have occupied, they are going to have to be conceded to Russia, as long as all Russians who wish to live in Ukraine and all Ukrainians who wish to live in Russia are free to move to the country of their preference.

Russia and its allies and all of NATO must unconditionally guarantee the revised Ukrainian borders, and everyone must understand that any further violation of them will be considered an act of war by the entire Western Alliance. This would end all uncertainty over the viability and legitimacy of Ukraine as an independent country, and would give Mr. Putin enough to avoid a total humiliation.

Russia must not be humiliated, so the West can attain its other and coequal goal in this war, apart from Ukraine's confirmation as an independent sovereign state, which is to create conditions in which Russia can relinquish its bear-hug with its improbable Chinese ally and enable the culture of Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy and Chekhov to return to the West where it belongs.

Since Peter the Great 200 years ago, there has been a contest in Russia between the Western emulators and the nativists, and

more recently a debate such as long raged in Germany, over whether Russia was an Eastern- or Western-facing country. We must disabuse Russia of some of its lingering Tartar traits.

Until 1990 the eastern border of the Western world was only 150 miles east of the Rhine at the East German border; then it moved to the western border of Poland and then to its eastern border, and when this war ends satisfactorily it will move to the eastern border of Ukraine, from the Rhine to the Elbe to the Vistula to the Don.

This is the real contest of civilizations. Having rebuffed an attempt to reverse modern history by taking Ukraine back into Russia, we must assist Ukraine in bringing Russia into the West, which will then extend from Vancouver to Vladivostok, both ways.

In the Middle East, the Gaza War is progressing well. The monstrous provocation of October 7 gave Israel the duty and the opportunity to eliminate such an evil and fanatical force of terrorists that it is now obvious that no durable peace could ever have been made between Israel and Hamas. There is no point to Israel negotiating with any regime that does not accept the right of Israel to survive as a Jewish state.

Iran unleashed Hamas in a last-ditch attempt to stop the rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iran and Hezbollah have both made clear in the last week that they will not get into direct war with Israel. The Hamas strategy was to turn out large demonstrations throughout the West to exploit the notorious inability of Western governments to resist internal protest.

It hasn't worked. A larger demonstration came out for Israel at Washington last week. Informed opinion knows that Israel has a legitimate *casus belli*, and the Palestinian extremists have no reliable friends or even serious apologists in the world. There is a consensus in the United States, the only

place where it is needed, to assist Israel in finishing this task so brutally thrust upon it.

Issues with Communist China are not so difficult to resolve. All talk of the People's Republic imminently surpassing the United States as the world's greatest economy ended within a few weeks of Mr. Trump's inauguration in 2017. It is a beleaguered and over-indebted country and is in no position to engage in costly and risky experiments.

Taiwan is three times as far across open water from China as Normandy was from southern England in 1944 and the Chinese do not possess unchallenged control of the air and sky as the Western Allies did in 1944. Mr. Biden has pledged that if Taiwan is attacked the United States would intervene, which means that no such invasion would succeed.

Mao Tse-tung told President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger in 1972 that China would not focus on Taiwan for 100 years and to leave it under the formula of a notional United China but not to be reunited by force. We are settling back to that and have another 50 years for the status quo.

In the meantime, it would be in order to facilitate the armament of Taiwan and to assure that the People's Republic gets its fingers scorched but not severed as a penalty for its recent overextension, including the pompous boondoggle of the wildly oversold Chinese "belt and road." As the United States repatriates more vital industry and resources, China will have to tighten its belt and won't be able to hit the road as a full challenger to America anytime soon.

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