

'A Pitiful, Helpless Giant'

by Conrad Black



President Richard Nixon warned what America would become should it fail to have the determination and courage of a great world power. Speaking on April 30, 1970, he said: "If when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world." He was announcing a successful incursion into Cambodia that was welcomed by the Cambodian government and which he promised would be ended within a deadline—which was met.

In recent weeks, we have had the announcement of the withdrawal of the final 3,500 Americans from nearly 20 years in Afghanistan with the confident assertion that the heavily armed Afghan army would hold its own against the Taliban Islamist guerrillas, followed by steadily more alarming reports of Taliban progress to the point where 5,000 soldiers and Marines are being concentrated and sent to Kabul to assure

the safe evacuation of all American personnel from that country.

In the few weeks between the confident statement of American withdrawal and Afghan defense capability, the U.S. government, through Defense Department spokesman John Kirby (who has not been exuding confidence), first assured the press that the Taliban was sufficiently concerned with international acceptance that it would avoid provocative actions such as seizing the U.S. embassy. That state of official serenity lasted for approximately a week before the announcement that elite airborne forces would be entrusted with the evacuation of Americans and close U.S. supporters among the Afghan population.

The U.S. embassy was completed about 10 years ago at a cost of \$700 million. To the world, it will almost undoubtedly be represented as a reenactment of the dreadful and shameful fiasco in Saigon in 1975 when helicopters evacuated Americans from the embassy compound with desperate Vietnamese clinging to the runners and wheels of the departing helicopters.

This fiasco squares with the inexplicably stupid Biden Administration appeasement of the green extremists in stopping the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada and ending offshore drilling where the U.S. government has the jurisdiction to do so, thus tumbling the United States back into the status of an energy importer, only to go back, [cap-in-hand](#), to the avaricious OPEC cartel to ask them to increase production in order to reduce the cost of American oil imports. This request was made of such intimate and good-intentioned American allies as Iran, Venezuela, and Libya.

This disaster itself followed an invitation from the Biden Administration to the human rights specialists of the United Nations [to assess and report](#) on America's status in fighting racism within its own borders. The personnel of the United Nations and its agencies are notoriously hostile to the

principal Western countries and perversely confide such functions as the assessment of the state of human rights to countries that make no pretense whatsoever of having any respect for individual liberties—and frequently no respect for notions of racial equality either. It is inconceivable that any country could look upon this request by the United States to be monitored and evaluated by the United Nations as anything but an act of unimaginable naïveté or uncontrollable masochism.

Still, perhaps the most serious retreat into the appearance and conduct of a pitiful helpless giant has been on the southern border of the United States. Virtually every week for the first six-and-a-half months of the new administration, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has solemnly explained, “The southern border is closed.” Finally, on Thursday, he was overheard explaining to some border officials that the position was extremely serious and “unsustainable.” As people from all over the world are now flooding in across the southern border at the rate of more than 200,000 a month, and border control officials are giving interviews every day in which they indiscriminately tell the media what a desperate and hopeless situation it is with tens of thousands of the incoming migrants being COVID-19 carriers who are then released into the United States, the only excuse White House press secretary Jen Psaki can offer is the administration came into office and found an immigration system that was “badly broken.”

In fact, the southern border was in better condition than it had been since the time of Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. The Biden Administration immediately decided to stop construction of the wall that was within a couple of months of completion, not even bothering to paint it (which means it will have to be rebuilt altogether by the next administration), and to return to the “catch-and-release” policy that apprehends illegal migrants and then releases them

into the country on the theory they will return later for a court date (which, in fact, almost never happens).

And the Biden Administration dismantled the arrangements with the government of Mexico whereby the detention of those seeking entry to the United States as refugees was by the Mexicans and on the Mexican side of the border. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador directed almost three full divisions of the Mexican army to alleviate the strain of approaching migrants in northern Mexico toward the United States. All this has ended.

This administration has been extremely fuzzy and ambiguous about what it considers the legitimate national interests of the United States to be. The status of Taiwan in particular invites concern. The long-standing arrangement going back to President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 has been that both China and the United States accept the concept of a single China, a concept that Taiwan accepts also, and the People's Republic of China acknowledges that it will not attempt to reunite Taiwan to the mainland by force. The United States in turn asserts that it will not encourage Taiwan to declare its permanent separation and independence from China. Little has been stated officially about what the United States would do if, as the speculation goes, China decided to take advantage of America's present irresolution and sought to reunite Taiwan to China by force.

The entire security of Western civilization and the preeminence of the Western languages and alphabet and of governments officially devoted to the Judeo-Christian values of the rule of law and respect for individual rights, however imperfectly observed in practice, depends on the United States maintaining its position as the world's most influential country. That is to say: the almost undisputed priority in the world of the major Western powers that has prevailed since the Greeks repelled the great King of Persia, Xerxes at Salamis in 480 B.C., 2,501 years ago, also depends on the United States

retaining its status as a superpower with all the strength of example and deterrence and alliance leadership that it has successfully exercised since World War II.

The more serious and recurrent the failures and humiliations of the Biden Administration, the more China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea will push and provoke America and its allies, and the feebler and more appeasement-minded America's long-time allies will become. Americans should be in no doubt that with the fall of Kabul, the world, which has become rather tired of American leadership anyway and is not an inexhaustible reservoir of Americophilia, will, at least for a time, be mindlessly consolable in believing that "the land of the free and the home of the brave" has indeed become "a pitiful, helpless giant."

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