

Can Joe Unite Us?

If Biden's idea of unity is to try to impose the far-Left Biden-Sanders Unity Program on the country his administration will be a prodigious one-term fiasco.

by Conrad Black



It is now almost a platitude to express concern about the apparent gap between Joe Biden's call for national unity in his inaugural address and his identification, in the same speech, of opposition elements and policies that had to be overcome. A variant of the same concern is that the implications of several of the executive orders that he signed in his first three days as president appear to be uncompromising reversals of widely supported policies and are hard to reconcile with the pursuit of national unity.

Biden, like all incoming presidents, deserves a following wind and a period of indulgence, illustrative of the hope and wish that he proves an effective and successful president. The fact that instead of such a honeymoon, President Trump received a

malicious and unfounded investigation of his relations with the Russian government should not be taken by those who did not support Joe Biden in the late election as a justification for withholding from him the civility normally accorded new presidents.

The Antithesis of Exhausting

The burning question about Biden is whether he will seriously impose upon the administration and an adequate number of his fellow Democrats in Congress the duty and burden of compromise. The sudden flourishing of revived NeverTrumpism among Republican senators makes it clear that on several of the urgent matters that could not be successfully addressed by either party alone and on which compromise was impossible in the Trump and Obama eras—such as healthcare and infrastructure renovation—agreement could probably be reached between the comparatively moderate section of Senate Democrats and the majority of Senate Republicans. The far-Left of the Democrats would howl like banshees, but since Biden is unlikely to seek reelection, he is uniquely situated not to have to truckle to them, and anything they approved of would be unacceptable to all of the Republicans and probably some of the Democrats.

Where the president called in his inaugural address for everyone to “treat each other with dignity and respect . . . Join forces, stop the shouting and lower the temperature . . . To listen to one another, hear one another, see one another, show respect for one another” and asserted that “[p]olitics need not be a raging fire destroying everything in its path, every disagreement doesn’t have to be a cause for total war”; in these and similar passages, the new president incited hope for an instantly improved atmosphere.

As a strong supporter of most of President Trump’s policies, I can yet acknowledge that the greatest problem of his time was that he was such an exhausting leader even to his supporters. He was in the faces of the whole country and the whole world

all day every day and all night tweeting, and many grew tired of him and most of the nearly 48 percent of American voters who supported him were also made tired by him.

Joe Biden is not going to exhaust anybody by his strenuousness; Donald Trump is a force of nature, in his slightly manic way, a demiurge. In Joe Biden, we have reverted to a less assertive president, a bit like Gerald Ford following the tumultuous but talented Richard Nixon, or even, without the immense distinction of his prior career, a Dwight D. Eisenhower delivering peace and prosperity after the tremendous challenges successfully met in the administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman—the Great Depression, World War II, and the start of the Cold War.

More worrisome was when the new president cited “a once-in-a-century virus, a cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making . . . The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer; a cry for survival comes from the planet itself . . . That can’t be any more desperate or any more clear; and now a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat.” And to do this he called for unity and cited Abraham Lincoln who said as he signed the Emancipation Proclamation “my whole soul is in it.” This president said the same for his commitment to gain unity in his approach to the problems enumerated.

One rarely goes wrong quoting Lincoln, but the Emancipation Proclamation only applied to slaves in liberated areas which, on New Year’s Day 1863, were not extensive. (It was more of a call for a slave revolt or promise of things to come than an act which, in itself, changed the lives of many people. The North was fighting to suppress the insurrection not, for the most part, to free slaves, though most Northerners disapproved of slavery). Biden nevertheless called for unity “to fight the common foes we face: anger, resentment, hatred, extremism, lawlessness, violence, disease, joblessness, hopelessness.”

Unity or Else

In the history of democracies, you only get unity when there is an overarching threat that produces a spontaneous and uniform determination to achieve a goal, most conspicuously in wars of national survival and great principle. Beyond that, the democratic process generally functions by reconciling diverse views and hammering some sort of compromise out of inevitable divergences. This is not exactly unity and it is not clear from the president's remarks whether he proposes to seek unity by the complete political destruction of those who don't share the views of the Democratic Party, or whether he is prepared to appeal to reason, to compromise, and to ask the nation to unite behind compromise solutions of the legitimate problems that he mentioned.

He has expressed the determination to vaccinate 1 million people a day for 100 days, without mentioning that the Trump Administration reached that level of vaccination in its last days in office. There is not, in fact, a great deal of racial discrimination in the United States now; that battle has largely been won. So it ill behoves the leader of a party who ignored the worst rioting in the United States in more than 50 years, in Democratic governed cities by urban guerrilla white-hating mobs and professional hooligans masquerading as crusaders for civil rights, to pretend that such racists as there are, are not in his party.

Nor is there any desperate or clear cry for survival from the planet, and the return to the Paris Climate Agreement will just create unemployment and unnecessary costs for American businesses and families in increased energy costs, reduced competitiveness, and *ex gratia* advantages to America's only rival, China, which happens also to be the world's foremost polluter and which is doing absolutely nothing to improve environmental conditions.

Killing the Keystone XL pipeline and stopping drilling on

federal lands may not, as has been feared, be an attack on fracking as only 12 percent of it is conducted on federal lands. But it does push America back into energy dependence on untrustworthy foreigners (not the always-reliable Canada), higher energy costs, and the immediate unemployment of more than 20,000 Americans and 40,000 Canadians. This is not the best way for Biden to accomplish his goal to “rebuild our alliances.”

This administration will quickly discover that unity will not be achieved by throwing people out of work to satisfy hysterical environmentalists. If the president is making gestures to the large and agitated Left of his party preparatory to trying to reach some sort of consensus that is the closest anyone can get to unity in peacetime, he may prove a skillful tactician, as he was for many years in the Senate.

If his idea of unity is to try to impose the far-Left Biden-Sanders Unity Program on the country, he will not get much of it through the Congress, will lose control of both houses next year, and Biden’s administration will be a prodigious one term fiasco.

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