

Conrad Black: China's pattern of 'sociopathic behaviour'

by Conrad Black



The prime minister should be congratulated for refusing to be bullied by the People's Republic of China into returning Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou to China, though she is being detained in Vancouver for extradition on a demand from the United States for alleged commercial offences. And while we should probably extradite Meng to the United States, we should not ratify an extension of the extradition treaty with the U.S., not because of this particular case, but because we should not be sending anyone to a jurisdiction where practically all prosecutions are successful. In its criminal law, the United States is not a society of laws, it is a prosecutocracy, and we should not feed it. Nor should we be concerned about the non-return to Canada of people whom we believe to have committed crimes. If they did, we don't want them back; if they did not, they should come back and establish that fact. But we should have no part in stoking the

fetishistic American criminal justice apparatus.

The Meng case is a side show and no one disputes that China is an important country and a great historic civilization, and few have any desire to withhold from the Chinese the deference due to them as, along with the Indians, the world's most numerous nationality, and next to the United States, the largest economy in the world. But there is increasing evidence that the government of China is behaving in an aggressive and deceitful manner in a wide array of activities. It so overplayed its hand in Myanmar that even the docile colonels who transformed that country into a despotic hermit kingdom threw the Chinese out and brought in the long-suffering democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The famous Chinese Belt and Road Initiative enunciated in 2013 is nothing less than the blueprint to put much of Africa, Asia and Australasia directly into a Chinese-dominated orbit that disturbingly revives thoughts of the Japanese East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: an outright plundering of neighbouring countries, which the Japanese attempted to disguise in racist terms, and which was disposed of by the outcome of the Pacific War between 1941 and 1945.

China's Communist government has exploited the coronavirus crisis, which it was itself responsible for inflicting upon the world, as cover for shredding its treaty with Great Britain over Hong Kong and imposing what amounts to a hobnailed jackboot on the windpipe of that splendid and enterprising city. There remain allegations that Chinese authorities deliberately allowed the coronavirus to be exported from their country, even as they took draconian measures to suppress the spread of it within China. But even if that unhappy sequence of events was merely a series of accidents compounded by negligence and a fog of false statements about the virus, with or without the collaboration of the World Health Organization, China's conduct was outrageous and antagonized the whole world.

This all constitutes a clear and disturbing pattern of sociopathic behaviour and a reversion to Chinese conceptions of their natural right to impose their will on their neighbours, exact tribute from smaller countries and generally require a level of deference to their wishes that's incompatible with concepts of international law that have arisen and been generally embraced since the last time China was ruled by a strong government, 400 years ago. We can all take some comfort from China's success in being the first country that declined from the status of a great power and eventually resurrected itself, rebuilt its strength and re-emerged as a great power. As a development story, the rise of China since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 has been an astonishing chapter in what can be done to raise the wealth and productivity of a vast and heavily populated nation in a short time. Unfortunately, and unlike other uplifting development stories such as South Korea and Taiwan (and in some respects, Israel), there has been no comparable maturation of political institutions, reduction of corruption or development of a credible and respectable rule of law in China.

We are certainly not dealing with another Nazi Germany or even a Soviet Russia. And at this point there is no reason to think that the world is in need of a containment strategy such as was devised by the Truman administration and executed by the United States and its allies under successive regimes, until without a shot being fired in anger, the Soviet Union disintegrated and international communism collapsed. China is not occupying foreign powers that it had pledged to vacate as the Soviet Union did in eastern Europe following the Second World War. And it is not purporting to spearhead an ideology claiming the vocation and the destiny to convert the whole world. It is only behaving in the traditional manner of China in the strongest phase of its many national cycles over 3,500 years to be pre-eminent in its vast zone of interest, an area expanded by the revolution of transport and communications

that has effectively shrunk the world and enabled China to claim a greater sphere of influence.

Of course, China has to be accommodated up to a point. But that does not include a continuation of commercial arrangements in which in order to gain access to the Chinese market, we allow the handover of patented technologies, and a built-in assurance of huge trade and balance of payments surpluses for the People's Republic, reinforced by the artificial manipulation of the Chinese currency by that country's central bank. Nor does it include tolerating Chinese industrial espionage on a massive scale such as, it is generally believed, effectively bankrupted the great Canadian company Northern Telecom, to stoke the growth of Huawei.

Practically the whole world bought into the wishful theory that if China was facilitated in its quest for prosperity, it would become a co-operative and reasonable member at the top table of the family of nations. This was not how Germany, Russia or Japan developed. There is no serious justification for the policy of the Western states led by the G7, including Canada, to have been so indulgent of China's excesses and provocations for so long. The major countries of South Asia, Australasia, Europe and the Americas should all concert on trade and sanctions policies and related matters, including the reported targeting of some Chinese nationals studying at Western universities to be potential spies. Many of China's foreign trade and diplomatic posts are simply places of espionage. The United States in particular possesses a vast arsenal of potential measures for achieving its goals with China, including encouraging a definitive statement of Taiwanese independence, raising the American naval presence in the Formosa Strait in the South China Sea, cancelling many or all of the 300,000 Chinese student visas in the United States and closer co-operation in economic and military matters with the leading states in the Far East and South Asia, especially Japan, Indonesia and

India. Those and neighbouring countries comprise a huge block whose economic and military strength substantially exceeds China's. There is a role for Canada as the fourth Pacific Ocean economy (after the U.S., China and Japan), in developing a system of incentives for the world's major countries to adopt to help the moderate and constructively internationalist forces prevail in Beijing.

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