

The Changes to Come

In a few months, everything will be largely back to what it was within the United States. The big changes will be geopolitical.

by Conrad Black



The Democrats are taking their stand on the coronavirus crisis in an untenable position. It is like building a defensive redoubt in a valley surrounded by hills in the hands of the enemy (like the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1955, as President Eisenhower warned them). Whether this is tactical stupidity by the president's enemies or strategic genius by the president or—more likely—a bit of both, is not clear except to insiders.

Readers will recall that the Democrats charged out of the gate on the issue of taking science seriously and reacting comprehensively; the president picked up the gauntlet, brought prominent scientists forward, and “flattened the curve.” The Democrats wallowed in glee at the almost instant increase (in a month in fact) of unemployment by almost 30 million.

The president and the Republican leaders in Congress brought forth very generous and relatively simple financial assistance packages and the Democrats jumped aboard, trying to lard the payments with concessions to organized labor and the green terrorists, which the Republicans generally resisted.

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden was confined to his basement in Delaware and all he had to do was put on a shirt and Skype into members of the Trump-hating media. The fact that even this proved a syntactical challenge to him indicates the level of embarrassment self-distancing spared him.

The national Democratic leadership locked arms and deployed their media acolytes in support of a prolonged shutdown where virtually everyone in the country would be tested and those who test positively identify everyone they have been in contact with in the last two weeks and those people are chased down and the hunt for the last bacillus of coronavirus is pursued throughout the country to every attic, basement, homeless shelter, and rustic cabin. The president, under this scenario, would, in the greater national and human interest, commit political suicide like a kamikaze in a good cause, and patiently explain to the next scores of millions of Americans thrown out of work by the Pelosi-Biden-Schumer counter-virus strategy, that their sacrifice is noble and inevitable.

What a godsend the coronavirus crisis was supposed to be to a political party that struck out corrupting the upper ranks of the Justice Department and the intelligence services with a fraudulent narrative about illegal election-rigging with Russia, and struck out again with a fatuous presidential impeachment for unimpeachable acts with no serious evidence that the president committed the accused acts anyway.

On the heels of the total failure of their own skulduggery, the *force majeure* of nature, with the assistance of China's duplicitous and irresponsible government, rushed to the rescue

of Trump's enemies. The celebratory pleasure of Speaker Pelosi as she shows the nation her well-stocked freezer, and of presumptive presidential candidate Biden as he shambled through banal softball sessions with the likes of Joy Behar (a woman lumbered with America's most unsuitable first name), was palpable.

The NeverTrumpers have fallen in with this nonsense, more subtly, by calling for putting "safe ahead of soon." This is all piffle and the Democrats have turned the heat on under the frying pan and then jumped into it.

Despite all the unctuous asseverations that nothing will be the same again and that this is a human crisis that must unite the country, it is mainly political and rather tawdry politics at that. The anti-Trump media whipped up a state of frenzy and panic with no real evidence of the medical danger, initially to set the president up for responding inadequately. When he instead responded very effectively, they shifted course and without commending him on the lockdown, said that because he hadn't developed testing capabilities quickly enough, the lockdown must be long enough to give the Democrats a chance of winning the election. (An economic depression on the scale of some plague from the Old Testament is all that could put Joe Biden into the White House.)

In fact, testing only establishes whether a person has, or has had, the coronavirus up to the time of testing. It is no magic bullet, but it has enabled extensive research that permits us to estimate the scale of this problem. Extensive recent testing indicates that in the "hot spot" of New York, more than 20 percent of New Yorkers have had the coronavirus, but fewer than half of those realized it.

Since testing has been so uneven among the 40 or so Northern Hemisphere countries that provide reliable statistics, the ultimate relevant issue is deaths per million (or another unit) of population.

Sweden, which has not had a shutdown but has taken some measures of protection for vulnerable groups, has had 211 deaths from this cause per million people in the country. That is one for every 4,900 Swedes. The United States, with all its precautions and protections, has 156 per million, or 1 in 6,400 people.

For various reasons of circumstance and swiftness and thoroughness of response, Japan, Germany, Canada, and some smaller states have better results, but the British (1 in 3,300 people), French (1 in 3,000), Italians (1 in 2,450 people), and Spanish (1 in 2,100 people), have fared worse than Sweden. Since about 80 percent of fatalities in all these countries are people over 60 with additionally compromised immune systems, much depends on the effectiveness of protection of vulnerable categories of people, and not on shutting down everything.

The agreed facts deduced to date entitle policymakers to come to a number of reasonable conclusions. Even more elaborate measures should be taken for people with reduced immunity. (The Canadian measure this past weekend of dispatching the armed forces to some homes for the elderly is better public relations than epidemiology.) The rest of the shutdowns should be ended fairly quickly.

Here again, President Trump has acted wisely in leaving these decisions with the governors and creating conditions where Democratic governors like Gavin Newsom in California and even Andrew Cuomo in New York will have to break ranks with the national Democratic leaders. They are working now on their last plausible scenario for salvaging the presidential election, while the governors have their own voters' welfare to serve. Trump has got his eminent scientific cohort on his side, and lined up scores of eminent people in every conceivable activity to support his normalization plans, and respected the requirements of federalism in leaving precise decisions to local authorities.

There is no reason whatever to imagine the result of reopening the United States (with some precautions) would raise American fatality rates above Swedish levels, and there is every reason to believe, given the steps taken, that American fatalities will not be as high as 1 in 5,000 people when the crisis has subsided.

Every death is a sadness, but this is not a demographic threat or a public health assault that justifies pushing up to 1 million people a day into unemployment and the loss of trillions of dollars of value on the stock exchanges. It has been a severe crisis, but most of its severity has been the consequence of the panic generated by the irresponsible media, who thought they might destroy the Trump presidency at last.

They have failed again, and this is not such a watershed moment. In a few months, everything will be largely back to what it was within the United States. The big changes will be geopolitical: the mystique of the inexorable rise of China will be very faded, and the remaining credibility of the concept of the European Union will be in tatters.

Trump wins the political chess game at home in a clean sweep: the medical crisis, the financial rescue, the rebound of the economy, and at the voting places of the nation. And he will be the winner in the world. China and Europe have long been billed as rivals to the United States as the world's most powerful government and population. We will hear less of that.

First published in