

Trump Faces Down the China Threat

He knows their weaknesses and isn't afraid to apply pressure.

by Conrad Black



Of much greater importance to the political and strategic course of the United States than the shabby attempt to portray President Trump as a racist is the developing showdown between the United States and China. The febrile Democratic effort to unseat the president by unconventional means is no longer the result of the shock of Trump's having defeated the entire political class nearly three years ago. It is in some measure a credit to his invulnerability in most policy areas, especially the economy, in moving to reduce illegal immigration, and in strengthening the country's strategic position. The overt attempt by the media and Democrats to build, in the ashes of the nasty fairy tales of Russian collusion and obstruction of justice, the semi-discarded fraud that he is a racist is pitiful, as well as contemptible. This was the Siamese twin of the misogyny fraud, which seems to

have vanished into the ether, leaving behind only the pink pussy headgear of the post-inaugural demonstrators.

The racism claims got early traction from the controversy over suspension of entry rights for people from terrorism-plagued or -exporting countries. The left-wing West Coast judges the Democrats shopped around for were all overturned in serious higher courts, and Democratic Senate leader Schumer is no longer warning us that the Statue of Liberty is blubbering, as he himself did in a passable piece of improvised histrionics on the Senate floor. The other starting pistol for the racist charges was one of the greatest frauds perpetrated by Trump's enemies since the Clinton-Steele dossier, that he had defended Nazis and Klansmen at Charlottesville. He said that the people legitimately debating what to do with the statue of General Lee were good people, but the media managed to deform this so severely into the whitewashing of Nazis and the Klan that Carl Icahn and other eminences retired from various White House committees whose existence was unknown outside their memberships. The president also made the point that Antifa, which was being defended by social commentators such as Chris Cuomo, is no better than the Nazis. It was odd even for the terminal sufferers of Trump dementia to link Trump to the Nazis, given that almost half his family is Jewish. Perhaps Senator Elizabeth Warren, whose qualifications to discuss racism are blurred by her fraudulent claim to be a native American Indian, reached the most absurd extreme in this area last week by accusing the president of "environmental racism." This is where the Democrats have arrived: at what Kafka called "nameless crimes."

What Trump is doing, adapted to different times, regimes, and circumstances, is what Mr. Churchill urged when he opposed the appeasers in the 1930s. China is not a threat as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were, has not overcommitted to an arms race with an entirely command economy, and is not as overtly threatening as Hitler, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev were.

But China is explicitly aiming to become the world's greatest power and is, accordingly, a very serious challenge. Being the world's most powerful country means different things to different countries and different regimes. Under President Carter and President Obama, there was some embarrassment about America's preeminence, and both men thought the United States was as much part of the problem as it was the solution of the world's ailments. Obama apologized for the high-handed manner in which Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill conducted the war effort, and for President Truman's use of the atomic bomb, and for President Eisenhower's role in overthrowing the Iranian government of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. The three presidents mentioned were among the most distinguished in American history and far more accomplished than their apologist.

China's conduct in Myanmar (Burma), where they were so heavy-handed that they were eventually pushed out, and in parts of Africa where they are large investors, and their attempt to reduce the South China Sea to Chinese territorial waters all demonstrate China's will to dominate and exact exaggerated deference, unlike anything in America's international behavior. This is the time to have a nonviolent showdown, which will require reform, at least insofar as they apply to the U.S., of Chinese practices in "forced technology transfer and cyber theft, intellectual property rights, services, currency, agriculture and non-tariff barriers to trade." China purported to agree on all this in April but declined to consider any enforcement mechanism. This is a familiar Chinese method of negotiating, which has been imitated by the North Koreans. If there is a reason for optimism in the present raucously antagonistic American political atmosphere, it is that the Democrats have generally supported the president in these positions, indicating that the old adage that "partisanship ends at the water's edge" retains some applicability.

Yet the stock response of the president's reflexive media critics is an absurd solicitude for their country's principal rival, a chronic cheat in world trade matters by universal agreement. China is a poor country with few resources while the United States, with a year to retool and reorient itself, would not have to import any necessities except perhaps small quantities of rare earths. China still has 300 million people who live pretty much as they did 2,000 years ago, a 40 percent command economy, no institutions that command any respect except the People's Army; and not a word or figure it publishes about its economy can be unreservedly believed. It is trying an end run around the entire world economic system at the same time that it asserts itself with conjoined military and economic expansionism in susceptible areas. Of course this president will save China's "face" if that's what it comes to, but in contrast to all the hivering ninnies in *The Economist* and like-minded places, the strongest cheering section President Trump enjoys in the execution of his China policies consists of China's neighbors: Vietnam, India, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. They are a ready group of important states to resurrect a refined containment policy slightly modeled on the North Atlantic alliance but with more emphasis on economic issues.

The booming American economy that defies all the prayerful warnings and expectations of Trump's enemies can steadily eliminate Chinese imports and compensate the agricultural sector that sells to China – it can resupply those countries that replace U.S. agriculture sales to China, as there is no great surplus of food in the world that would make American production superfluous. Loss of the American export market would be a heavy blow to China, as would the continued reduction of the value of its currency (renminbi). Chinese manufacturing, much of which migrated to it from Japan via South Korea, is already moving on to Vietnam, India, and Mexico (now America's biggest trading partner). China cannot

force its way into the U.S. market, or replace it as an export market. The much-vaunted threat to sell their 1 trillion dollars of U.S. debt is a paper tiger – it is only 7 percent of the outstanding total of U.S. federal debt, and China would take a loss on its position, which could easily be absorbed in the world bond market.

The United States is finally expanding its sphere of substantial economic integration to Mexico (and moving to regularize the demographic flow on its southern border) and is in preliminary economic discussions with the new Brazilian government, and provisionally with post-Brexit Great Britain. Such a grouping, including Canada, would have a population of 750 million people and a GDP of \$30 trillion, with room to expand in Latin America and Australasia as conditions recommend, and to remove the potential Chinese advantage of a comparatively immense population. It would dwarf both China and a truncated, post-Brexit European Union. This is intelligent grand strategy. He may have to wait for the historians to get any credit for it, but President Trump has an excellent natural judgment of the weaknesses of interlocutors and of negotiating techniques. He is dealing with national irritants, including Iran, patiently, firmly, and from strength. He will succeed where his post-Reagan predecessors did not.

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