

US Foreign Policy Cause for Concern

by Conrad Black



It's a worrisome time for those who follow or are to any extent dependent upon American foreign policy.

The Biden administration began very slowly on Cuba, having followed meekly in the tracks of the Obama appeasement of that appalling regime. The well-known pro-Castro enthusiasm of Sen. Bernie Sanders, chief author of the Democratic 2020 campaign platform and a longtime admirer of Fidel Castro, may have been an early inhibiting factor.

But after several days of huge anti-government demonstrations throughout Cuba, Biden at least started to make appropriate noises, and there may be hope that the United States will at least assist in reconnecting the Cuban population with the internet. A reimposition of sanctions would be welcome.

One fact that has clearly emerged is the total failure of the Obama policy of appeasing the Castros. There was no response whatever and the Castros did absolutely nothing to liberalize their totalitarian despotism that has been strangling the beautiful island of Cuba since 1959.

Unfortunately, this administration also appears to be enthused about reviving the nuclear arrangements with Iran that the Obama administration concluded but couldn't present as a treaty because of the certainty of rejection by the Senate.

In a gesture of hostility to the United States and the West generally, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei approved the election of Ebrahim Raisi as president. The former chief justice presided over thousands of barbarous executions. But he and Khamenei seem to want to revive the nuclear agreement, the so-called Joint Common Plan of Action (JCPOA).

If it were simply a matter of the United States returning to it unaltered, Iran would be at perfect liberty to deploy nuclear-tipped missiles in five years. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has clearly stated that the United States will not return in the same circumstances, but even if it were possible to start the timetable over again, it would still be a simple matter of acquiescing in conferring full nuclear power status on the principal terrorism-supporting state in the world in another 10 years.

Obama and presumably his then-vice president, Joe Biden, apparently thought the chances excellent of persuading Iran to forgo its ambition to be a nuclear power in the initial 10-year period of the agreement.

Obviously, nothing of the kind has occurred. The agreement dealt with the deployment of nuclear warheads on intermediate and intercontinental missiles, development of fissile material; it said nothing about the development of missiles, launchers, and warheads, and Iran has methodically advanced in

these areas.

Unless there is a radical change of the regime in Tehran—either spontaneously within Iran or as a result of outside intervention—acceptable conditions for that country to be a nuclear military power aren't going to be achieved. Ultimately, barring such a change, the only way to prevent that horrifying eventuality is by a heavy assault on the Iranian nuclear program from the air. This could be done, and both the governing and opposition coalitions in Israel have made clear that if necessary, Israel will do it.

The Arab powers would rejoice in this, and the Biden administration seems to be slowly grasping that the Trump administration was correct when it perceived that the encroachment upon the Arab world by their ancient foes—the Turks and the Persians (Iran)—made them natural allies of Israel, and it was on this basis that the outstanding Abraham Accords with Bahrain and the Emirates were achieved.

It's little wonder that Iran wishes a return to this JCPOA, which it regularly proclaims to be the greatest diplomatic success in the history of the Islamic Republic. The reassertion of sanctions by the Trump administration caused the Iranian economy to move from its 13.4 percent annual GDP increase following the JCPOA, with its relaxation of sanctions, to two years of net declines in GDP of 6 to 6.8 percent after Trump's return to sanctions.

This decline of revenue forced a serious reduction of Iranian funding to the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist organizations on the borders of Israel. This problem won't go away, but the determination of Israel not to tolerate the nuclear capability of the state that has sworn to destroy Israel, and the likelihood of a more purposeful regime in Washington being returned to office prior to the expiry of any reactivated JCPOA, may get us through and past the crisis of a nuclear-armed theocracy in Tehran.

But it will be no thanks to the Biden State Department in its present placatory torpor.

The problem of relations with China is bound to continue to deteriorate as long as the Chinese are confident they can inflict virtually any provocation on the United States and there will be no notable reply. They are steadily asserting pressure on Taiwan and have resumed systematic violations of Japanese airspace and threatening anyone who might contemplate military resistance.

The principal question is obviously Taiwan and the American response to a Chinese assault on the island is something that successive administrations have treated with ambiguity. It would require the United States under the Taiwan Relations Act to regard an invasion by the People's Republic as a matter of "sufficiently grave concern" to intervene.

Contrary to some speculation on the subject, I don't believe China could successfully launch and sustain an amphibious assault on Taiwan if there were any significant U.S. military contravening force. The Formosa Straits are three times as wide as the English Channel to Normandy, and China would have to destroy the Taiwanese Air Force on the ground, eliminate all its missile launching facilities, and largely eradicate the Taiwanese army in order to make a landing possible.

It's hard for me to imagine the Biden administration acquiescing in the lengthy and excruciating process as would be a Chinese takeover of Taiwan. Any such action by China would be extremely impetuous and it's more likely they're engaging in mere saber-rattling and trying to destabilize U.S. relations with Japan and India.

A related subject of much concern is the disposition of the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley. I thought he should have been fired after he joined the presidential walk from the White House to St. John's

Church, the presidents' church, the day after it had almost been burned down by the "peaceful protesters" of the Democratic "summer of love." The walk included most of the senior personnel in the White House at that time, as a general statement of the administration's determination not to be intimidated by the mobs that were all around the country last summer destroying the statues of great Americans.

Formally to join that walk in the full knowledge of what it was, then a couple of days later, after taking the heat from the rabidly Democratic media, apologizing for having done so, was unpardonable and indicative of a feckless, posturing, and over-politicized general.

His defense of critical race teaching and proud comments about reading Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo was further grounds for getting rid of him. Anyone can read what they like, but his representation of such reading as essential to give him a greater grasp of white abuse and privilege and of the CRT issue were the arrogant and narcissistic hawing of a senior officer who should have been handling real issues better.

But the general's last straw was apparently referring to the Jan. 6 invasion of the capital by Chewbacca and the other hooligans as a "Reichstag moment." He was referring to the Nazi burning down of the Reichstag in 1933 while blaming an innocent mental deficient and using it as a pretext for seizing absolute power.

Milley was likening Trump to Hitler and inciting underlings to believe the Trump supporters were Nazis. That's full grounds for court-martial, but unfortunately, it appears that he'll stumble and subvert his way to retirement age before a serious commander-in-chief can give him the order of the boot. This is a sobering time.

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