

Will the West Be Lost?

by Conrad Black



In an apparently predestined and inevitable manner, as occurs when there is weak international leadership, the United States and China are drifting into a state of prickly antagonism.

During the election, Joe Biden said the Chinese were not a threat to the United States and he has still only half-heartedly acknowledged a serious rivalry between the two countries. There is plenty of evidence that the new administration has made such a poor impression in Beijing that President Xi Jinping has concluded now is the time for China to humiliate and displace the United States—a conclusion he was certainly deterred from adopting during the Trump years.

Any analysis of Chinese policy must begin with the fact that the coronavirus pandemic has delivered Beijing the most decisive strategic victory in great power affairs since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The World Health Organization report on the origins of the pandemic is clearly

a Chinese whitewash—as even vehemently anti-Trump CBS News acknowledged over the weekend—and the eager Inauguration Day return of the Biden Administration to the WHO now appears particularly destructive of any claim the administration might make to cloak itself in moral resolution on the issue. On the basis of what has been revealed, it appears that though the Chinese may not have deliberately invented and propagated the virus, they dissembled and lied about it as well as facilitated its transmission out of China to the world while aggressively suppressing it within its own borders. This verged on, if it did not in fact constitute, an act of germ warfare.

The Beijing regime improvised skillfully, and with the assistance of the almost universally bungling Western response to the same facts, gained a huge economic advantage on the United States, as America's foremost allies, the NATO and EU powers, floundered contemptibly. Apart from the United Kingdom, the distribution of vaccines there has been an almost unmitigated fiasco.

All the European fantasies of standing on each other's shoulders to regain the status that they enjoyed before plunging the world into the Great Wars of the last century and elevating the fiendish heresies of Marxism and Nazism, are in tatters. Somehow, and without Britain, the most politically mature and astute of all European countries, the European idea will have to await new champions and mount a second attempt to achieve a respected status in the world. As it is, Germany, which since Bismarck united it in 1871 has been the most powerful European country, now imagines that it has some vocation to dicker with China and hold some balancing role in the world. One does not have to be a pessimist to be mindful of Germany's thoroughly indifferent post-Bismarck record of behavior as an autonomous great power.

The Danger of a Sino-Russian Alliance

What appears to have provided the final great impetus to escalate Sino-American rivalry to open antagonism was the Democratic Party's mindless baiting of Russia, culminating in Biden's description of Russian President Vladimir Putin as a "murderer" followed by Putin's recall of the Russian ambassador from Washington.

Russia, though one of the world's great cultures and an immense country, has not begun to recover from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the loss of more than half of its population. It has a declining population, has never in its history enjoyed one day of what a citizen of any Western democracy would accept to be good government (even under successful tyrants such as Peter the Great and Stalin), and now has a GDP smaller than Canada's. The only danger, apart from cyber-meddling and irresponsible arms sales, that Russia could present to the United States is one that the Biden Administration has unfailingly fomented: driving it into the arms of China.

The principal American advantage over China, apart from reasonably well functioning democratic institutions and a preponderant free-market economy, is that it is a rich country, while China has few natural resources, and is still 40 percent a command economy and has no institutions that command any respect, apart from the military. Moreover, the country is still hobbled by its one-child policy. China is not predestined to win this contest, unless the United States continues to misplay its hand.

If the United States cannot lure Russia back from its cooperation with China, eventually surplus Chinese manpower will be successfully exploiting the vast unpopulated treasure house of Siberia under some royalty arrangement, and the United States will find itself for the first time in its history in a severe competition with a deadly rival of

approximately equivalent geopolitical strength to itself.

What will be at stake is not just a matter of the prestige that accrues to the world's most powerful and successful country; it is the question which vastly transcends mere interstate rivalry of whether the world's foremost nation recognizes the value of human life and the entitlement of all people to certain rights, despite imperfect observation of these ideals in practice, or rather whether that nation is governed by a totalitarian government's imposition of collective values by surveillance and repression that are not subject to any canvass of the approval of the governed.

The People's Republic of China has largely renounced its Confucian and Mandarin intellectual and somewhat humanistic traditions, and as the only great nation ever to have lost that status and regained it, China today proclaims the premier efficiency of dictatorship, without any pretense to humanistic values, apart from increasing prosperity. The materialism of Marxism is retained even if its impractical egalitarian distribution is not.

Implications of Chinese Supremacy

The implications of the Western world not being paramount in the whole world, and of being infested—as it would be in any such scenario as is planned by the Chinese leadership—by admirers of repressive government, is profoundly disturbing to any constant believer in even the broadest definition of Western values.

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, after the fiasco of his meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister in Anchorage two weeks ago, appears at least to recognize the challenge. He will presumably abandon the imbecility of trying to discuss climate change with China, and celebrating being “back,” will think better of his proposal to ignore the past and think only of future prospects, and start to direct American diplomacy

toward holding China responsible for the exportation of the coronavirus, the rupture of its Hong Kong treaty with the United Kingdom, its religious persecutions and semi-genocidal oppression of the Uighurs, its incremental invasion of India, its gross violations of international law in the South China Sea, and its threat to the autonomy of Taiwan.

We presumably have the time before the Winter Olympics in China next year to pull up our socks. Despite the flabbiness of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their acceptance of the heresy of basic racial instruction for the forces, the administration will have to fortify Guam's anti-missile defenses and provide the Seventh Fleet and all aircraft carrier task forces with adequate defenses against hypersonic weapons if the United States is to retain any credible deterrence for Taiwan. China's oil purchase agreements with Iran and Venezuela will effectively defeat American sanctions and deprive both countries of any incentive to make concessions to the United States. Biden will likely now suffer the complete strategic defeat of the nuclear militarization of Iran and North Korea.

On the other hand, Ukraine's cancellation of the sale of an important defense contractor to China, in response to American intervention, is a sign that Washington is awakening. A unified and focused effort to rally all those who are rightly offended by the implicit insolence of China's "Belt and Road" plan for Eurasian hegemony could, like Jimmy Carter's belated awakening to the nature of the Soviet Union after it occupied Afghanistan in 1979, pave the way for an American response as imaginative and successful as that of President Reagan to the Soviet Union. The elements of containment, based on the alliance with Japan, India, and South Korea, are available.

The West should still win, without war, but traversing the next four years under the quavering leadership in Washington now will strain the patience and the faith of those who love liberty in every land. No one could have imagined that we

would so quickly squander the West's mighty and bloodless strategic victory in the Cold War.

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