

# COMMENTARIES



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“In America the majority erects a formidable barrier around thought. Within its limits, a writer is free but woe to him who dares to go beyond” Alexis de Tocqueville



## *AMERICA AT BAY*

I.

When Pompey the Great made his triumphant return to Rome in 61 BCE from his stunning conquests in the East, a spectacular ceremony was planned. Pageantry on a grandiose scale was designed both to satisfy his outsized ego and to display superior status in his rivalry with Julius Caesar. The centerpiece was to be a towering throne where a regally costumed Pompey would pass through a Victory arch installed for the occasion. A small problem arose, though, when a rehearsal showed that the throne was 4 feet taller than the height of the arch.

That is a neat metaphor for the uneasy position in which Uncle Sam finds himself these days. We proudly pronounce our enduring greatness from every lectern and altar in the land, pledge to hold our standing as global Number One forever and ever; yet, we constantly bump our head against an unaccommodating reality. Instead of downsizing the monumental juggernaut or applying ourselves to a delicate raising of the arch, we make repeated attempts to fit through in a vain effort to bend the world to our mythology. Invocation of the Concussion Protocol is in order – but nobody wants to admit that sobering truth.

Our engagements in the world over the past 20 years reveal a grim record of failed ventures. Most have been caused by unrealistic goals, blinkered views of the field of action, overweening pride, an ignorance of foreign places and their history, and an unseemly readiness to take complacent comfort in fantasy worlds that exist only in our own imagination. In short, American foreign policy has been misguided – badly and consistently.

The inevitable frustrations and failures owe equally to sheer incompetence. An endless string of errors – diplomatic/military/political – is as difficult for the nation to reconcile with its ‘can-do’ self-image as

is the admission of the glaring discrepancy between the belief in the country's Providential mission and its increasingly evident ordinariness. Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach, often is quoted as declaring: "Victory is not the most important thing; it's the only thing." That has been an implicit American motto from the beginning. However, in the global arena over the past generation, we have been setting records for failure and futility. Unmatched since the supreme ineptitude displayed by the World War I generals who sowed the fields of Europe with millions of corpses.

1. The era began with the success of evicting al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and the toppling of their Taliban hosts. It's been downhill ever since at an accelerating pace – culminating at the crack-up at the Kabul airport where the obtuseness and criminal irresponsibility of the Pentagon brass (abetted by the CIA's habitual faulty Intelligence) produced a human and political disaster. The Taliban are back in power thanks to our misbegotten actions in seeking the liquidation of Taliban adherents who had fled their organization and retired to their homes, and our unbounded reliance on feuding clans of corrupt warlords.

Al-Qaeda evolved from a fanatical jihadist cadre numbering in the double figures to an international conglomerate with franchises in a dozen countries and a free-lance fan club operating in Western capitals. The alleged training camps and indoctrination centers had no more tangible existence than did Saddam's WMD.

2. The Afghan fiasco pales compared to the multi-dimensional tragedy created by the Iraq invasion/occupation. The scorecard:
  - Hundreds of thousands dead, wounded, orphaned.

- The fostering of sectarian blood-letting that institutionalizes the country's political fragmentation
  - The massive destruction of economic infrastructure.
  - The welding of ties between Shi'ite majority government in Iraq with Iran's clerical regime (our avowed enemy – justified or not)
  - Torture and abuse in dedicated camps that permanently blemished our cultivated image as the champion of human rights
  - The spawning of the Islamic state – conceived, organized and recruiting in American prison camps
  - The resulting mayhem in Iraq and Syria with deleterious effects across the region
  - One effect: the flood of refugees into Europe that fueled the rise of far-Right and neo-Fascist movements across Europe – disrupting political life in friendly countries and undermining the EU
  - In Syria, prioritizing the overthrow of Assad's regime over the fight against the al-Qaeda affiliates who led the insurrection (a failure that is probably a success for Syria, for us and for the region)
3. Redoubling our unqualified support for Saudi Arabia under the leadership of the cocaine addicted megalomaniac Mohammed bin-Salman. Thereby, allying ourselves with the Sunni side in the historic contest between them and their Shi'a rivals. That led to the disgraceful policy (continuing to this day) of supporting and participating in the unwarranted assault on Yemen's Houthis which has devastated the country and destroyed lives in what amount to massive 'war crimes.' Yet, an official State Department just last month declared Saudi Arabia "a force for progress" in the

Middle East. The resulting shredding of what remains of the American pretense of being the custodian of human rights globally has made risible such events as Biden's League of Democracies summit.

4. Similar suffering and destruction inflicted on Somalia by American meddling and military intervention with no discernible American interest at stake.
5. Tearing up the JCPOA – and then setting onerous, unacceptable conditions for its resurrection. Steps counter-productive whether the U.S.'s goal is foreclosing any prospect of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon or regime change (Washington's preferred solution)

An abysmal record unmatched since the infamous performance of the WW I generals on the Western front – equally honored with medals and laurels – who sowed the fields of Europe with millions of corpses.

This long litany of failure and incompetence is overshadowed by the strategic blindness of treating Russia and China as implacable enemies. By doing so, Washington has not only obviated any alternative strategy for developing a stable, long-term relationship. It also has cemented a formidable power bloc that is now well able to contest the United States in whatever sphere we want to cross swords with them. (Recent commentaries expound on the illogicalities and erroneous presumptions of our approach to both great powers. No need to restate them here).

This mosaic of misconceived strategy and rampantly amateurish maneuvers strongly suggests that America's foreign policy elites are living in a delusional world – dissociated from reality. That raises three basic questions: 1) what are the causes?; 2) why the uniformity of



attitudes towards foreign affairs by the political class?; and 3) why is there so little dissent from policies that have produced a steady stream of abject setbacks?

## II.

Americans are struggling to draw into focus their exalted image of themselves and reality. They are not doing a very good job of it. The gap is wide and growing. That is due in good measure to what has been happening beyond the country's shores as well as at home, and over which it lacks the skills and the means to exercise decisive influence. Our response has been one of avoidance and reaffirmation of thought and deed. We seem to fear that if we stare at reality squarely, we will find reality staring back at us in a discomfoting way.

Fading prowess is one of the most difficult things for humans to cope with – whether it be an individual or a nation. By nature, we prize our strength and competence; we dread decline and its intimations of extinction. This is especially so in the United States where for many the individual and the collective persona are inseparable. No other country tries so relentlessly to live its legend as does the U.S. Today, events are occurring that contradict the American narrative of a nation with a unique destiny. That creates cognitive dissonance.

America's exalted sense of self is rooted in the belief that we are pace-setters and world beaters in every domain. The state of affairs sketched above - marked by impulsive enterprises that underline our foredoomed, audacious ambition to gain global dominance - does not represent cool strategic judgment. It is the national equivalent of ostentatious iron-pumping by bodybuilders worried about losing muscle tone. Those worries never disappear, though, even as one becomes muscle-bound striving ever more energetically to reassure oneself that nothing is creeping up behind you. The mirror is much preferred to the backward glance. More important, they fool themselves into the false belief that

other, more relevant adjustments to reality are either unnecessary or intolerable.

At the psychological level, this approach is understandable since it plays to the United States' strength: overweening self-confidence coupled to material strength - thereby perpetuating the national myths of being destined to remain the world's No. 1 forever, and of being in a position to shape the world system according to American principles and interests. President Obama declaimed: "Let me tell you something. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. It's not even close. Period. It's not even close. It's not even close!" So? Is this meant as a revelation? What is the message? To whom? Is it any different than someone shouting: "ALLAH AKBAR!" Words that are neither a prelude to action nor inspire others to act - nor even impart information - are just puffs of wind. As such, they are yet another avoidance device - a flight from reality.

The tension associated with a nation so constituted encountering objective reality does not force heightened self-awareness or a change in behavior if the dominant feature of that reality is the attitudes and expressed opinions of others who share the underlying delusions. Today, there is no foreign policy debate whatsoever. In addition, our vassal governments in Europe and elsewhere either have a national interest in preserving the warped American view of the world (Israel, Poland) or have been so denatured over the decades that they are incapable of doing other than to follow Washington obediently - despite already having tumbled over a number of cliffs and staring at a potentially fatal abyss re. China and Russia. Reality testing, in these circumstances, leads to conformity in viewing the world through the shared delusional prism - rather than it being a potential corrective.

## Background

Americanism provides a Unified Field Theory of self-identity, collective enterprise, and the Republic's enduring meaning. When one element is felt to be jeopardy, the integrity of the whole edifice becomes vulnerable. In the past, American mythology energized the country in

ways that helped it to thrive. Today, it is a dangerous hallucinogen that traps Americans in a time warp more and more distant from reality.

There is a muted reflection of this strained condition in the evident truth that Americans have become an insecure people. They grow increasingly anxious about who they are, what they are worth and what life will be like down the road. This is an individual and collective phenomenon. They are related insofar as much of our self-identity and self-esteem is bound up with the civic religion of Americanism. To a considerable degree, it's been like this since the very beginning. A country that was "born against history" had no past to define and shape the present. A country that was born against tradition had no rooted and common sense of meaning and value that cut deeply into the national psyche. A country that was born against inherited place and position left each individual at once free to acquire status and obliged to do so for insignia of rank were few.

That changed over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within just a few decades, America became a great world power, a superpower, a champion of democracy and freedom and the defender of the West against Soviet led communism. It was the "heroic" century which culminated in the triumph of victory in the Cold War. After the collapse of Communism, the United States ruled the roost. In its own eyes, this unique hyper-power had seen history confirm its anointed role as both model and agent for the construction of a better world. American "exceptionalism" now meant emulation of America – pure and simple.

That confirmation should have strengthened the belief in the pageant of progress. It should have given a boost to self-esteem. It should have compensated for the creeping insecurities associated with socio-economic-cultural changes within the United States. That has not proven to be the case. Strenuous displays of patriotism have a contrived cast to them. They suggest strained efforts to overcome doubt more than they do genuine pride and conviction. National self-confidence is not demonstrated by gigantic flags seen everywhere from used car lots to hot sheet motels, the ubiquitous lapel pin, the loud and gaudy

demonstrations of chauvinism at sporting matches, the bombast of shock jockeys, or the belittling and condescending treatment of other peoples. Rather, those are sure signs of weakness, doubt and insecurity. The compulsive militarization of foreign relations fits the pattern; the same psychology is at work. A society that sees reality through the screen of violent video games is juvenile and immature.

We are close to a condition that approximates what the psychologists call “dissociation.” It is marked by an inability to see and to accept actualities as they are for deep seated emotional reasons. Those you are dissociating are not aware that they are sublimating on a systematic basis. “Dissociation is commonly displayed on a continuum.<sup>[5]</sup> In mild cases, dissociation can be regarded as a coping mechanism or defense mechanisms in seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress – including conflict.<sup>[6][7][8]</sup> Conflicts of purpose, conflict of aims, conflict of ideas, conflict between idealized reality and actual truth. Dissociative disorders are sometimes triggered by trauma (9/11?).

This psychological appraisal of the American body politic does not explain adequately, however, either the exaggerated response to a single (if singular) event or the intensity and acuteness of the delusional thinking in the absence of evidence from the real world that the fearful images are justifiable. The objective truth of the real world is overwhelmed by the subjective virtual truths that shape their perception of reality.

What do these developments foretell for the United States’ relations with the rest of the world? The most obvious and important implication is that Americans will be ever more dependent on maintaining that sense of exceptionalism and superiority that is the foundation of their national personality. A fragile psyche weak in self-esteem and prowess is sensitive to signs of its decline or ordinariness. Hence, the obsession with curbing China. Hence, the country will

continue to exert itself energetically on the global stage rather than become progressively more selective in its engagements and choice of methods for fulfilling them.

Continuity is a lot easier than reorientation. It doesn't demand fresh thinking and different skills. Quite frankly, today, the caliber of high and mid-level personnel would have to be upgraded. Less amateurism and careerism, more experience and sophisticated knowledge. Equally, a President would have to seek out people with a different mindset. That is to say, a more nuanced view of the world, more acute awareness of other countries' political culture and leadership, and a talent for dealing with other states on a basis other than the assumption of American superiority and exceptionalism. Attempts to dictate the internal affairs of foreign countries would become the rare exception rather than the norm. All of this is a tall order. It appears to be beyond us.



***Is that Blinken or Sullivan with the tape measure? and Kamala Harris with the aspirin?***

***DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA – THEN & NOW***

Alexis de Tocqueville is a name nearly all recognize. So, too, his classic work *Democracy In America*. Its contents are less familiar. Yes, it is widely recognized that he said nice things about the United States' historic experiment with popular democracy. The reconciliation of democracy with security of individual liberties from both the "mob" and tyranny lit the path that would guide so many peoples over the next 175 years. Yet, the intricate, subtle analysis that led Tocqueville to his brilliant insights is hazy in our minds. For it is an intellectual challenge of the sort that is out of fashion – and the work itself seems somehow musty and antique. Generations 'X' through 'Z' find it distinctly retro – if they have glanced at a dusty page or two.

This is a shame. Numerous passages read not only as luminous in their insight of the perpetual American mind and spirit. They also dazzle as penetrating commentary on today's affairs. Tocqueville was more than a brilliant political theorist and analyst. He was a cultural anthropologist as well. Probing the very soul of the American democrat, and thereby the soul of modern man, he fully appreciated the 'software' of United States' egalitarian society and how it sustained the nascent democracy's institutional 'hardware.' These unique insights are worth noting – along with some brief annotation to highlight the connections between then and now.

References are a bit confusing since de Tocqueville wrote two books with the same title. Normally, they are presented as parts of a single volume. In fact, Book II is a distinct work of its own expressing the author's reconsideration of the theses that run through Book I which, upon reflection, he judged inadequate.

Travelling in upper Michigan among frontier settlements on the edge of the wilderness, Tocqueville and his companion the Duc de Beaumont chanced upon a log cabin in whose doorway stood a young woman of

uncertain nationality. “Etes-vous Francaise?” they queried. “Non, messieurs.” “Are you English?” “Not that either.... I am a savage.” This native American married to a trapper from French Canada was an American – of triple cultural identity – displaying little deference to the itinerants or interest in what they might make of her. Not quite a new species under the sun, though. Elsewhere in the Americas, mixtures of blood and culture were the norm: in Mexico, in much of Spanish America generally and the Caribbean and in Portuguese Brazil. The avoidance of such a mingling would prove America’s curse. But to Tocqueville, the multi-lingual ‘savage’ housewife was emblematic of how different, in so many respects, the United States was from the Europe which had spawned it. Misleading similarities with the Old World confuse us to this day. That distinctive Americanism still explains who we are, how we think, and how we behave – at home and abroad.

(Oddly, the English had little aversion to intermingling with the natives in India in the latter half of the Eighteenth Century; that is, until the arrival of European ladies disturbed the convivial practice. There, the ladies found husbands, privilege and the likelihood of early death from exotic diseases).

The Anglo-American:

**“is cold, tenacious, and relentless in argument. He attaches himself to the land and seizes from life in the wild all that it can yield to him... He holds that man comes into the world only to become well-off and to enjoy the conveniences of life.” (369)**

Is there a more apt explanation of the deep psychology that underlies American’s materialism – especially in its various expressions? These words are figuratively engraved beneath the logo of every MBA program in the land; emblazoned on corporate banners from Silicon Valley to Wall Street; they suffuse our popular culture; taken as eternal truth by market fundamentalist economists; and guide the writing of our most influential behavioral psychologists.

”His features which are lined by the cares of life, display practical intelligence and a cold persevering energy...his words measured and his appearance austere.’(79) “Dull but capable, severe but just,....genuine.”

‘I often met, in the farthest wilderness, women who had been raised among the all the refinements of the big cities....Neither fever, loneliness, nor boredom had broken the springs of their courage. This woman is in the prime of life...but her delicate limbs are weakened, her features are weary, and her gaze is gentle and grave. Her whole face reflects religious resignation....” (75)

Yet this is the same American who birthed a country that is the world’s pornography hub, that is wracked with addictions of unmatched number and variety, that revels in popular entertainments of exceptional vulgarity and juvenility, and that elected Donald Trump as its President along with Governors and Congressmen distinguished by the singularly large number of outright wackos and blatant hypocrites. Many of his contemporary ancestors, at the same time, are devout Evangelicals and members of other sects who claim to live by the strictures of the Bible while awaiting the End Days of Armageddon. **“Religious insanity is very common in the United States.”** (404)

This transmutation represents one of the great mysteries of the American experience.

**“Americans consider the forest the symbol of wilderness and therefore of barbarism, so it’s against the woods that they mount their attacks... Among ourselves one cuts down only for us; in America they do it to destroy. The country dweller passes half his life in combat against his natural enemy – the forest; and he wages it relentlessly.”** (72)



The despoilation of the North American continent is unique – in speed if not in extent. Fauna as well as flora were targeted. It took but a few generations to kill 50 million buffalo, to decimate untold millions of migratory birds. The great forests are reduced to sparse reserves ever threatened by commercial interests and ex-urban expansion. The period of conservation ushered in by Theodore Roosevelt salvaged only a small fraction of the natural world we first encountered. Now, it is being fritted away. “Tree huggers” are ridiculed and Presidents declare that “when you have seen one redwood, you have seen them all.” This is Americanism every bit as much as the sacred Constitution and the devotion to freedom.

“Once an idea has taken a hold of the American people’s minds, whether it’s a just one or an unreasonable one, nothing is more difficult than to uproot it....the greatest liberty of thought and the most invincible prejudices....Where social conditions are equal, as in America, public opinion presses with an enormous weight upon the mind of each individual; it surrounds, directs, and oppresses him. As men grow more alike....he mistrusts himself as soon as they assail him.... When an opinion has taken root among a democratic people, and established itself in the minds of the bulk of the community, it afterwards subsists by itself and is maintained without effort, because no one attacks it. Those who at first rejected it as false, ultimately receive it as the general impression; and those who still dispute it in their hearts, conceal their dissent.” (524)

Think of the entrenched ideas and obsessional thinking that today defy all honest questioning or earnest contestation or inconvenient facts.

- The deepest impulse of other peoples is to emulate the United States and to achieve what we have achieved
- Americans are the most generous people in the world
- Americans are the most tolerant people in the world
- Other countries don’t appreciate how much the United States does for them

- China aims to displace the United States as the world's dominant power. All of its policies are oriented by that overarching goal
- China's autocratic government is incompatible with peaceful engagement internationally
- Hence, the battle between American-led league of democracy and the Sino-Russian autocratic bloc is a contest of historic dimension that will shape the world system
- Vladimir Putin is an incarnation of Evil whose aggressive impulses and implacable hostility to the United States make him a clear and present danger to the United States.
- Russia is a greater threat than the Islamic State and al-Qaeda combined
- Russia interfered massively in the 2016 presidential elections
- By contrast, the 2014 instigation of an armed coup against the democratically elected government in Ukraine by Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, represented a justifiable and selfless support for the cause of democracy, freedom and self-determination
- The American invasion and occupation of Iraq with no legal mandate bears no comparison with Putin's occupation of Crimea. Nor does the U.S. led military intervention in Kosovo in the cause of the province's secession from Serbia
- Putin tried to kill the Skripals and Navalny
- The Iranian regime is an aggressive state, and unrelenting foe, whose very presence is an existential threat to our close partners in Israel, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf
- Russia was an accomplice in Assad's use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria
- Unseating Assad has been the correct priority in Syria - even if that has meant allying with al-Nusra (the al-Qaeda spinoff - especially since those jihadis are actually part of the 'moderate' opposition. Like Susan Collins and Joe Manchin in the Senate).
- The "White Helmets" are a great humanitarian organization deserving of consideration for the Nobel Peace Prize - even if they obediently trail ISIS & al-Qaeda from place to place like camp-

followers, fabricate incidents and run a public relations operation with unacknowledged money from MI – 6 (their Godfather) and the U.S. State Department

- The causes of the drug problem in the United States lie in Mexico, Colombia, etc. The huge demand for drugs is due to readily available supply rather than in the flaws of American society
- The American health care system is the best in the world – regardless of what the World Health Organization, the OECD, or anybody else says
- It's okay not to talk about the abandonment of Puerto Rico since Puerto Ricans are not really Americans Ditto New Orleans Lower 9th Ward post-Katrina

Close-mindedness, of course, is not a peculiarly American phenomenon. Nor is it an unvarying constant. It is considerably more pronounced nowadays than it was 40, 50 or 60 years ago. Propositions such as those noted above could be questioned and debated to a degree that is impossible today. Check the media. Check the politicians. Check Congress. Check the churches. Check the think tanks. Check the universities. Check the AMA and the American Bar Association.

**“In America the majority erects a formidable barrier around thought. Within its limits, a writer is free but woe to him who dares to go beyond... When you go among your fellows, they will shun you as an impure being, and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you for fear the others will shun them as well” (404)**

Michelle Wolf got it exactly right at the Correspondents' Dinner when she correctly observed how panels of news commentators these days remind her of why we are reluctant to go home for Thanksgiving. Conformity of thinking is accompanied by the disturbing habit of seeing communication as a form of self-affirmation rather than an exchange of thoughts and feelings. Tocqueville: **“An American doesn't know how to converse; he debates. He doesn't discourse; he holds forth.” (405)**

Uniformity in American culture and thought is powerfully reinforced by American conformism. The affinity between a democratic culture and a uniformity of attitude is a prominent Tocquevillian theme.

Anyone who has been so imprudent as to cast aspersions at the rooted untruths that buttress American foreign policy these days can testify to the strength of conformist pressures. My anecdote about the encounter with Karl Rove a few weeks back is an exhibit of present realities and the accuracy of Tocqueville's depiction. A related incident occurred a couple of years earlier on the occasion of a visit by then CIA Director John Brennan. He addressed an assembly of 400. It was studded with numerous lies (factual and other), distortions and deceit. Remarkable even by Brennan's mendacious standards. The University of Texas audience gave him a standing ovation – 399 of the 400 in attendance, anyway.

Admittedly, this is Texas. Of all the places I have lived in the United States, Texans are far and away the most conformist, the most uniform in opinion and the most deferential to authority of all kinds. They are the exemplars of what Tocqueville was describing – self esteemed “rugged individualists” who are anything but autonomous and independent.

The outlier is rarely condemned; (s)he is simply ignored – shunned. This phenomenon crosses all lines of class, ethnicity, and education. The “intelligentsia” is at least as prone to it as is Joe Six-pack. In truth, settled thinking may be all the more impenetrable among the former. Anyone who has attempted to persuade multi-degreed professionals of progressive disposition that Barack Obama was something less than an enlightened leader dedicated wholly to the cause of virtue can attest to that proposition.

The shunning of non-conformists occurs in academia as well. That includes high prestige institutions of higher education like Harvard. Consider the case of the renowned scholar who came to

Cambridge to fill a named Chair with the understanding that promotion to tenure would follow the next year. She made the mistake of speaking up when the administration under the President Drew Gilpin Faust was sweeping under the rug serious allegations of rape on campus. Her long yet temperate letter pointing out the inadequacy of the actions taken resulted in her being summarily sacked within weeks. The near unanimous silence was deafening. Her mortal sin was to suggest that the tepid response by university authorities sprang from some basic institutional flaws rather than “misunderstandings” and “honest disagreements” that could be resolved by a university wide “conversation.” Incidents like this have taken place right across the span of the American university scene from Columbia to George Mason to Stanford to NYU.\*

Is this deviation from the modern American norm? Will the pendulum swing back in the other direction? Tocqueville alerts us to the likelihood that the situation will worsen – as is evinced in each week’s news events.

INDIVIDUAL /ALONE/LONELY

“Egotism is a vice as old as the world, which does not belong to form of society or another; individualism is of democratic origin. The conditions of life on an untrammled continent have crystallized this sentiment.... Consequently, Americans believe that they owe nothing to any man(368)

“American individualism throws for ever each man back upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart” (Read smartphone) There, each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object, namely, himself.” (213)

Where does this lead? The self-absorbed persons; the narcissism; the egotism; the greed; the imperative of looking after “number one.” “I and

“me” are the only operative words in “communication;” instant gratification is demanded; pervasive childishness and the resistance to growing up. These are the stark features of twenty-first century American culture and society.

## WHY THE AMERICANS SEEM SO RESTLESS IN THE MIDST OF THEIR WELL-BEING

The individual’s sense of being unfulfilled and insecure is a hallmark of today’s American. It is more pronounced now than ever before. We are a neurotic people. In part, that is due to the blunt truth that the much vaunted American individualism arises from that self-absorbed preoccupation with.

A related cause is the absence of rites of passage, of marks of distinction, of settled status – now exacerbated by economic dislocation (the gig economy) – which deepen diffuse feelings of disappointment and discouragement. All the more so when we are subjected to graphic images of those who have “made it,” i.e. the celebrity culture along with the money mania. In the United States, a scientist can be referred to as a Nobel Prize winner – but someone “who hasn’t done much recently.” Write four books, take a long breath, and you are “dead wood.” Coach your team into the championship, lose out in the 7<sup>th</sup> game – and the General Manager tells reporters that your contract renewal is under review while the management looks at other options. Be in standout on a squad that reaches the final round 3 straight years, have great teammates, love the city – but decide to test free agency to see how much more dough you might rake in. Above all, you dream of getting the limelight exclusively on yourself. To write your name on the wind – forever. (The average person dreams of getting on TV – even if it’s a local daytime show).

Part of every American yearns for that elusive ultimate prize even as they sense the presence of oblivion always there looming over their shoulder, gnawing at them. The relentless competition that animates

American society in all domains is cause and reinforced effect of this existential distress.\*

Escapes take multiple forms: binge drinking, drugs, mindless TV, Facebook, comfort food, reinventing oneself. When all else fails, melancholia sets in.

“Given the total absence of formal status distinctions and external distinctions, wealth presents itself as the natural scale by which to measure men’s merit.... That explains the mercantile spirit that shows up in everything the Americans do and say.” (215)

My portfolio is richer than yours.  
My Presidential library is bigger than yours.  
My smart phone has more useless features than yours.  
My yacht has entertained more billionaires than yours.  
My barbecue has more burners than yours.  
I paid more for a forged piece of art than you did.

THEREFORE, I am a superior person.

“A native of the United States clings to this world’s goods as if he were certain never to die; and he is so hasty in grasping all within his reach that one would suppose he was constantly afraid of not living long enough to enjoy them. He clutches everything, but holds nothing fast, and soon loosens his grip to pursue fresh gratifications.” (396)

The lure of Apple’s next smartphone, the next tantalizing sitcom, the status accoutrements one rung up the ladder; the three-peat while the repeat is still warm. Tocqueville saw us as hyper-active doers in search for some elusive gratification until, exhausted, we lapse into inert melancholia. Marooned in the middle lane on the road of life with the exit ramp approaching.

“They encounter good fortune nearly everywhere, but not happiness. With them the desire for well-being has become an uneasy burning passion that keeps on growing even while it is being satisfied.” (215) BINGO!

The DARKENING HORIZON (579)

At the very end of Tocqueville’s second book, his guarded optimism about American democracy, and what it portends for the inexorable spread of democracy everywhere, yields to a different, troubling vision of the future. He vividly describes a benign dystopia:

“In America I saw the freest men, placed in the happiest circumstances that the world affords ; it seemed to me as if a cloud hung upon their brow, and I thought them serious and almost sad in their pleasure....Endlessly they are going to seize it (happiness), and endlessly it escapes their grasp. They see it from close enough to know its charms, but they never get close enough to enjoy them, and they die before fully tasting its delights. These are the reason for the singular melancholy .... they sometimes experience in the bosom of abundance, and for the disgust with life that often seizes them in the midst of their easy and tranquil existence.”

“They encounter good fortune nearly everywhere, but not happiness. With them the desire for well-being has become an uneasy burning passion that keeps on growing even while it is being satisfied.” (216)

The Pursuit of Happiness – to coin a phrase

Compare that picture with this offered 180 years later:

“The rest are told that, to avoid falling into this soul-destroying “precariat,” they must invest in their own brand every waking hour of every day. Before posting any tweet, watching any movie, sharing any



photograph or chat message, they must remain mindful of the networks they please or alienate.

When lucky enough to be granted a job interview, and land the job, the interviewer alludes immediately to their expendability. “We want you to be true to yourself, to follow your passions, even if this means we must let you go!” they are told. So they redouble their efforts to discover “passions” that future employers may appreciate, and to locate that mythical “true” self that people in positions of power tell them is somewhere inside them.

Their quest knows no bounds and respects no limits. They try to work out what average opinion among opinion-makers believes is the most attractive of their own potential “true” selves, and simultaneously struggle to manufacture this “true” self online and offline, at work and at home – indeed, everywhere and always. Entire industries of counselors and coaches, and varied ecosystems of substances and self-help, have emerged to guide them on this quest.”

(Varis VAROUFAKIS “Liberal Totalitarianism” PROJECT SYNDICATE April 30, 2018)

Either could have been composed by George Orwell. The same emotional message can be experienced by participating in a Trump rally.

**“In a democracy readers are very numerous and very easy to please, due to the absolute need for novelty that they feel. Thus, one can make a fortune by endlessly turning out a mass of new but imperfect books. In this way it’s easy to acquire a modest fame and a big fortune.” (109)**

Only the former boon refers to commentaries as well.

P.S. Most the Tocqueville quotations are from Democracy In America Translated by Henry Reeve Ed. Henry Steele Commager (Oxford University Press 1955). Page numbers are in parentheses – in RED. The rest, in BLACK, are cited in the excellent work of Leo Damrosch: Tocqueville's Discovery Of America (Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2010). The most comprehensive and authoritative study of Tocqueville is Sheldon Wolin's monumental; Tocqueville Between Two Worlds (Princeton University Press 2001)

- The Faustian Pact made by members of an egalitarian democracy implicitly offers limitless opportunity in exchange for inescapable discontent. For individuals all crave social status – the public requisite for self-esteem. Yet, status is a finite commodity. The amount available is not commensurate with the need – even for all those who merit it. Professional attainment is too widespread, and marks of distinction too evanescent. Anyone familiar with the academic world sees this silent drama played out routinely. No matter how many terrific books are written, no matter how many brilliant lectures are given, there are only a limited number of endowed chairs, deanships, discipline awards, or prestigious editorial board positions to be had. The alternative, for all of us, is to seek confirmation and adulation where it is freely available with no restriction as to numbers. Electronic Esalen groups serve this purpose for many. There, everybody is “awesome,” or ‘totally tubular’ or “lit.” No one ‘disses’ you, no one ‘casts shade’ at you, no one ‘side-eyes’ you. Nothing but positive reinforcement.
- Back in Baseball's heyday, the World Series was dominated by the three New York teams: the Yankees, the Dodgers & the Giants. Those were tribal battles that aroused the passionate emotions of each club's loyalists. It was sectarianism with a vengeance. A 'mixed marriage' was a mesalliance between different partisan families. The invariably taut 7-game series pervaded homes, offices, shops and streets. The games were played in the daylight - as was decreed by Heavenly authority. His blessing was evinced by fair weather - not a single game ever was rained out. So, as fans went about their business, they found ingenious ways to keep a running tab on the action. On retail streets, each shopkeeper made sure that the radio/TV broadcast was audible by passersby, the volume on loud and the door open. So, one could walk and stop, without missing a pitch. Each team had its own network, its own announcers; so, each borough's loyalties were identifiable by the voices that accompanied you as you made the rounds.

This is roughly analogous to what hears in Washington as one follows the sound-bite trail along the think-tank trail in Washington. One favored route takes you from 'R' & New Hampshire where the German Marshall Fund is located, to Dupont Circle, down Mass Avenue (Power Row) to 16th Street where a turn either right or left will keep you in the Establishment ambit (CSIS).

If, over the course of a week, you were to stop at the numerous ports-of-call along the route to listen to a seminar, a talk or a colloquium, you would experience something closely akin to the continuous broadcast of those legendary baseball games. It would feel like one discourse - in language, in tone, in depictions, in interpretations. The difference being in the multitude of voices and accents. Moreover, you would hear no significant tribal contradictions or debate. Just one, big self-satisfied tribe mulling over what to do at the barbarians on the horizon. Not an extension or elaboration of the discourse - just an alliteration. The only element of rivalry is that of publicity, sponsorship, underwriter (U.S. government, corporate, foreign government, or foundations as secondary benefactors that apply a coating of integrity). Sech tension as is evident is generated by mild disagreements of which external threat we should crush first: Russia, PRC, Iran or Venezuela. Islamo-terrorism? That's so retro you might as well be talking about hitters without batting gloves.

*OPERATION MARSUPIAL*

## Proto-Conclusion

This affair should be viewed as a school-boy prank rather than a serious, consequential strategic move. The United States, as currently constituted and led, is incapable of designing and executing a strategy of scope and sophistication.

## BASICS

- The initiative came from Boris Johnson whose tousled head is full of sepia-tinged fanciful visions of how to restore “the land of hope and glory” to its eminence East-of-Suez pre-Singapore and Europe post-Wellington. He easily sold the idea to Scott Morrison, the pliable Prime Minister of Australia, who feels privileged to be a member of the Anglo-American club. The scheme resonated with Washington’s dominant school of hegemonic big thinkers whose own thoughts were running in the same direction. They feel strongly that America is in a titanic struggle with China to be the world’s king of the hill. Australia was an ‘Asian’ feather in America’s cap. These are the same people who fixed on John Bolton’s bright idea of taking hostage, and holding in detention for three years, the CFO of Huawei (and daughter of the founder) as a thumb in the eye of Beijing and a warning to all and sundry that the U.S. would stop at nothing in its project of imposing its will on Iran. (Imagine the uproar were China to seize Sheryl Sandberg in Hong Kong). She was detained on totally specious charges that have no standing in international law except as customized for the occasion by the Department of Justice and its subordinate authority in Ottawa.

- The transaction will not be consummated before 2040 – if then. That means that the submarine project can have no military impact for at least a generation
- On the technical side, France could have provided a nuclear-power submarine fleet with the same capabilities had Australia chosen to contract for them (rather than conventionally powered boats) either in 2016 or in a modified contract his year
- Australia lacks the technical/industrial assets and skilled manpower to maintain and operate nuclear submarines; it can barely manage to keep at sea its present boats
- The U.S. Navy will gain access to a modern naval base on the Indian Ocean (Perth) which Canberra will pay for. It also will staff and command the developing submarine fleet on a lease basis until such time in the unforeseeable future that the Australia will be ready to relieve them
- 39% of Australia’s exports go to China. It receives 27% of its imports from China

## Military Effects

- The submarines in question are attack submarines (hunter-killer) rather than missile platforms (‘boomers’). They are intended a) to protect ‘boomers’ and large surface vessels; and b) to attack both types of the enemy’s fleet. Nuclear-powered varieties have greater range and can stay on station longer than conventional-powered ones
- This project, in straightforward military terms, is a commitment to a large expansion of American naval capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region

- Perth is 4,250 miles from Shanghai; Honolulu is 4,800 miles from Shanghai; Guam is 1,400 miles from Shanghai; Subic Bay in the Philippines is 2,160 miles from Shanghai; San Diego is 6,000 miles from Shanghai
- In the event of a conventional war with the United States (the Taiwan Straits), the Pentagon simulations point to a Chinese victory
- Question: would the United States be prepared to escalate to the nuclear plane e.g. deploying Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs)? Would China reciprocate in kind? Could such nuclear exchanges stop short of strategic exchanges (Doomsday)?
- At present, the United States has a strategic nuclear ‘advantage.’ That is to say, the American arsenal is much bigger (3,820 vs <300); are solid-fueled – therefore can be launched much more quickly – than the liquid-fueled Chinese missiles; and probably more accurate – a factor of little importance if the target is cities not missile silos. It is estimated that China has deployed 250-300 nuclear missiles; there is no certainty whether they have multiple warheads. The PRC also has 7 nuclear ‘boomer’ submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles. Like the American missile-launching submarines, the latter are not detectable and could not be neutralized in the event of strategic war
- China has initiated a program to upgrade and to increase its nuclear force. Washington has condemned evidence of its doing so as provocative and another concrete sign of its strategy to expand its global power, i.e. diminish American nuclear ‘superiority’
- How might the United States exploit that nominal ‘superiority’ in the event of war? Theoretically, it could attempt to intimidate the Beijing leadership by issuing a threat that either China cease to press an advantage in the conventional combat or risk escalation –

the presumption being that the U.S. would have ‘escalation dominance’ – and, that the threat was credible. In effect, Washington would be saying that it could devastate all of China – and neutralize some part of its land-based strategic nuclear forces - while China’s retaliation would produce ‘tolerable’ damage in the U.S. For the sake of Taiwan’s independence, we would be prepared to expose the country to attack by minimally 24 nuclear warheads delivered by undetectable Chinese ‘boomers’. That is to say, our stake in a non-Communist Taiwan is so high that we’d be ready to sacrifice: Dallas, Fort Worth, Amarillo, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin, Beaumont, Laredo, Abilene, Biloxi, Nacogdoches, Silicon Valley, South Beach – Miami et al.

Credible?: probably not, but our main adversaries do now see the United States as a rogue power, politically unstable and under weak leadership (until a Super Trump reenters the White House.

- No nuclear power has ever threatened another nuclear power in this manner. Indeed, none has overtly threatened a non-nuclear power - albeit Nixon and Kissinger did contemplate their use in Vietnam and Eisenhower did convey vaguely such a message to North Korea as the Panmunjeom armistice talks stalled. It has long been thought that Israel actually primed for launch its nuclear weapons at the depths of the 1973 war, but that is now proven to be untrue. Finally, the United States has refused to make a declaration of “no first use” - as have Russia and China. Indeed, a possible resort to Tactical Nuclear Weapons has been the centerpiece of official NATO strategy in Europe for almost 60 years

## Political Effects

\*To the extent that anyone in Washington is doing any actual strategic thinking, the motive behind the Australia move is diplomatic. In the past, Canberra has striven to maintain cordial relations with Beijing while doing nothing to weaken its dependent ties with Washington. As to the latter, since it shifted in the direction of hostility and confrontation with China under Obama, Australia has felt it expedient to emulate the U.S. Prime Minister Morrison is a strong believer in the America First conception of his country's external relations. He also is a weak person and not the sharpest tool in the kit. So, he was easily convinced to go along with the slapdash Anglo-American scheme at the cost of Australia's designation as an "enemy" by China.

\*The net effect is to lock Australia tightly in the grip of Uncle Sam while antagonizing China. If that means a deterioration in economic relations between Australia and China, so much the better as far as Washington is concerned. The latter have dogmatic faith that an American-led coalition of democracies can stymie Chinese growth and influence.

\*The American approach to the challenge from China is a simplistic 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Maginot line. Totally unsuited to the 'threat,' it is well-suited to the mindset of our foreign policy elites whose diplomatic aptitude and strategic acumen are severely limited

\*Biden was obliged to telephone President Macron of France so as to apologize for the United States' insulting treatment of Paris, to promise to make amends at a personal meeting in Europe, and to support – in principle at least, Macron's pet idea of a European Defense Force under EU auspices, something that Washington has been implacably opposed to for 25 years. The call was similar to



the one he made to President Putin of Russia in the spring when American encouragement to Ukraine's President Zelensky led him to mobilize his military for an assault on the secessionist provinces of the Donbass only to pull the rug out from under him when Russian counter moves portended disaster for Ukraine and humiliation for the U.S. It also bore a resemblance to Biden's call a few weeks earlier to President Xi of China reassuring him that the United States did not want a 'fight' with the PRC and urged that both sides observe restraint. That call was necessitated by a series of moves and declarations by senior administration officials indicating that Washington was considering promotion of Taiwan's independence – actions that were in direct violation of the historic 1972 accord whereby we recognized the 'one China' principle. The clear implication is that Biden is not in full control of his government.

\* What does the Australian electorate think about this? What will they be thinking if the national economy tanks? In dim awareness of this awkward reality, the Morrison government is hoping to complete desultory negotiations with the EU on a broad free-trade agreement – diverting a portion of its international commerce away from China. Success will depend on the attitude of two countries: Germany and France. Bonne chance!

## *SCRIPTURE*

On a whim, I wrote to a cross-section of our leaders and celebrities requesting that they tell us what passage of the BIBLE they find most moving and touches their lives most directly. The response was remarkable – all except 2 replied. Jill Biden emailed that unfortunately Joe was using the holidays to catch up on his napping. Kamala Harris said that she was busily occupied sending New Year’s cards to the legions of donors to whom Willie Brown had introduced her over the years. It is comforting to see that the people who shape the world we live in spend Christmas week immersed in the Good Book to draw spiritual uplift and inspiration to guide them in the year ahead.

“The Lord giveth & the Lord taketh Away” Queen ELIZABETH

“Seek – and ye will find” EXXONMobil CEO Darren WOODS

“Ask – and you shall be given” EU Council President Charles MICHEL  
(beseeching Russia to bail them out of their energy mess)

“In the beginning, there was darkness” Ted LAKE Chairman, Texas  
Public Utility Commission

“Let there be light!” – Greg ABBOTT to Ted Lake

“Temptation, get Thee behind them” Mike PENCE (re. Ted Cruz, Nikki Haley, Mike Pompeo, Ron DeSantis)

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” Jerome POWELL, Chairman U.S. Federal Reserve Bank

“The Meek shall inherit the Earth” Charlie SCHUMER

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged” Robert MUELLER

“Forgive them; for they know not what they do” William BARR

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” ~ Hillary CLINTON

“To sin is human, to forgive is Divine” Ghislaine MAXWELL

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.” Victoria NULAND

“Except ye become as little children, ye will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” ~ Mark ZUCKERBERG

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” EU Commission President Ursula von der LEYDEN

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Barack OBAMA

“The last shall be first, and the first shall be last” Christopher JOHNSON Owner, New York Jets

“Put not your trust in princes.” Mikhail GORBACHEV

“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge”  
Victims of RITTENHOUSE, EPSTEIN/MAXWELL, HOUSE, TRUMP,  
KUSHNER

“The kingdom of God is within you.” Oprah WINFREY

“With Faith, everything is possible” MEGHAN MARKLE

“And a child shall lead them” Tony BLINKEN

“He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” ~ Bernie SANDERS

“Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”  
Donald TRUMP

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his  
friends.” Boris JOHNSON

“Why hast Thou foresaken me?” Volodymyr ZELENSKY

## *NOBLE NOBEL*

Amidst all the turbulence created by the many dubious American encounters around the globe, it is easy to overlook those who have made a positive contribution. The outstanding example is General David Petraeus. I believe that the man is little understood. His actual mission is to foster PEACE. In order to do so, he was obliged to represent himself as the general's general. Look closely at the record and the truth shines through. Remember that he bore the primary responsibility for training the Iraqi National Army and the Afghanistan National Army. To say that their performance falls well short of the German Panzer divisions is an understatement. Petraeus' armies were doves masquerading as hawks. They were imbued with a strong distaste for fighting and, at times, eschewed any form of violence whatsoever. Moreover, they demonstrated unique "common ground" skills for conciliating with the enemy. Think of Mosul. think of Kandahar.

Now that Petraeus' remarkable contribution to the cause of peace can be fully revealed, we few who recognize this singular achievement no longer should feel inhibited by honoring him publicly. So, I propose that we jointly prepare a nominating letter and devote ourselves to promoting this virtuous cause.

Awaiting the favor of an expeditious response.

## *2024 OLYMPICS*

There is a stunning development in regard to 2024 Olympic games slated to be held in Paris in 2024. They will go ahead as scheduled but the locale has been shifted. The news has been kept under wraps due to concerns as to possibly fierce opposition, including the prospects of violent street demonstrations. The IOC characteristically pays no attention to public opinion. In today's circumstances, though, they understandably worry that the mobs might be a COVID spreader; thereby, risking yet another postponement as occurred last year.

My highly placed, reliable source in Lausanne has revealed to me how and why this unprecedented drama unfolded. It was triggered by a late-night call from President Macron of France to IOC President Thomas Bach. Macron reported that a hush-hush analysis by experts at the Ministère des Finances had reworked the budgetary figures for the Olympic infrastructure in the light of adverse forecasts for the global economy and their impacts on France, in particular. They appraised the projected costs as in excess of 70 billion Euros. That would greatly increase the French budget deficit already forecast to break through the EMU mandated ceiling of 3% of GDP (a falling GDP). That would put the country in the same league as Spain, Italy, Portugal and other 'losers.' They envisaged with dread the onerous penalties - along with implicit loss of sovereignty - that would be imposed by Berlin and Frankfurt. Not quite what was planned in 1914 but still intolerable. Moreover, it would torpedo whatever small chance that Macron still had for reelection next year.

A stunned Bach, realizing that Macron could not be budged, called an emergency video meeting of the 15-member Council. After much head-scratching, hand-wringing and pearl-clutching, they did the only reasonable thing possible when faced with a dire financial crisis. Bach retrieved from his safe the Davos secret list of ambulatory billionaires, divvied up the names and asked council members to make urgent calls. By the evening, they had their response: universal rejection of the suggestion that they help bail out France. The excuses included: "I have a big, expensive Obama-esque birthday splash scheduled for the Seychelles, I may have to make a more than token tax payment next year to burnish my image, I have a big investment project in the works to buy up every soccer team that ever won a European Champions Cup or a Latin American Champions Cup, my wife wants a new kitchen."

Then a bolt of illumination struck. Why not contact the authorities in Los Angeles who had bid for the 2024 games and were rewarded with the 2028 games as a consolation prize. Doesn't everything move faster in Southern California! Thanks to the time differential of 9 hours, they were able to make a quick call to Mayor Eric Garcetti. They got a cool reception. Garcetti did express his gratitude for LA being considered, his admiration for the Olympic movement, and his recognition that the Olympics Number One event - beach volleyball - originated in his city. Indeed, Santa Monica was the Rift Valley of Beach Volleyball (among other things). But - he reluctantly had to decline citing the stress placed on municipal services by the COVID epidemic, uncertainty as to how much infrastructure money would manage to make its way to the West Coast and, not least, his time to oversee such a giant project was limited since he was planning to run for state office (which office as yet to be determined).

Stymied, the Council adjourned until the next morning. A distraught group of council members were welcomed by a sunny, cheerful Bach. Had Macron unearthed a rich vein of gold (or cobalt) underneath the Elysee? No. Instead, by a brilliant stroke of improvisation, he had found a replacement country, a replacement city - and replacement financing. It was the fruit of a battery of midnight phone call made by his fellow international sport czar: Gianni Infantino, Head of FIFA. The latter magically had contrived to fashion an imaginative form of public-private partnership. The city was Naples, Italy! Funding would be provided by three benefactors who insisted on remaining anonymous. My source, though, at considerable risk to himself, has divulged their identities. They were the legendary 'guardian angels,' protectors, and Robin Hoods of the Mezzogiorno: the Comorra Capital Investment, the 'Ndrangheta Trust and the Sicilian Mafia Private Equity Associates. (The Comorra share: 34%) Comorra would manage the refreshment franchise, 'Ndrangheta in charge of security, and the Mafia would handle negotiating the broadcast rights for North America. All that the consortium requested in return was : 1) a generous slice of the construction contracts; and 2) a few modifications in the events program. The first was no problem - it conformed to long-honored local traditions, one of the few things in this ever-changing world that held its value. What about the other?

The Big 3's demands were simple. First, some deletions: no more namby-pamby so-called sports like wall-climbing, skate-boarding, balletic hula-hooping and mixed-team 8 person kayaking. Their key demand was the introduction of a new event - as was Italy's right in its capacity as host country. PIZZA TWIRLING!



To be held in local sites scattered around the city with finals in the atrium of the Palazza Reale. There would be separate competitions for men and women; individual events for 10' 12" and 16" pizzas. Winners would receive not only a gold medal but also a lifetime credit for the pizza of their choice. Silver medalists would receive a 20-year certificate. Bronze medalists a 10-year certificate. Toppings included.

Bach himself is toying with the idea of inviting Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky to bestow the awards jointly.

I trust that when this earth-shaking news breaks in the MSM, you will restrain the impulse to smile smugly.

## *ARITHMETIC*

Arithmetic is a word that gone out of fashion. Most everyone now says 'Math(s)'. Arithmetic's use seems limited to calculations whose sums are in single digits. 'Math' begins when we need to figure out what percentage of 49 does 17 represent. What practical consequence is there? Not much if you're carrying your smart phone or tablet. However, innumeracy does have serious consequences where public spending and public policy is concerned. For many self-interested parties abuse numbers - whether through over-complication (the economists' retreat into algebra), fudging them, studied avoidance of comparisons, or outright lying that assumes the innumerate never will notice.

Here is one simple example of how a sense of numbers and what they mean can illuminate issues otherwise overlooked. Let's consider the 'infrastructure' bill getting its last messages in Congress. It is being widely celebrated by the White House, by Senate leaders, the Democratic leadership in the House (with a few misgivings) and, of course, the media. This is essentially a concrete and bricks bill. Over the 5-year life of the program, \$146 billion is earmarked for roads (mainly) and airports. Public transit: \$39 billion. Power - private and public - gets \$73 billion; water: \$120 billion; broadband: 68 billion. Clean energy gets stiffed: 0. (However, the latest draft bill would make fossil fuel companies eligible for at least \$25 billion in new subsidies). The program has been shorn of everything else that seemed tantalizingly close: that is, nothing for housing, schools, home/community care, states & municipalities or, for that matter, manufacturing R & D. Most remarkable, it struck off the idea of expanding the resources of the IRS so to endow it with the means to tackle the tax escapism of the rich.

The total amount of the program hashed out in the Senate and sent back to the House amounts to \$550 billion. What of the 1 trillion-dollar number we see highlighted in the news? Well, that is an illusion since it includes \$450 billion already appropriated in pre-existing programs. Deception? How dare you – Ye of little faith in the probity of your elected officers! A small rounding error surely. Yes, even \$550 billion sounds like a lot - even in these profligate Covid times. That's the headline number. Read down a couple of paragraphs and you learn that the \$550 billion is the total to be spent over 5 years.

We might also note that that comes to about \$110 billion a year. Sounds less impressive. Moreover, it includes drawing on about \$70 billion by further delaying an agreed Medicare rule that would give beneficiaries rebates that now go to insurers and middlemen. The Congressional Budget Office had projected that the delay would increase taxpayer costs by \$177 billion over 10 years - \$17 billion per annum, or \$88 billion over the life of the Infrastructure program. \$550 billion - \$88 billion - \$462 billion or roughly \$92 billion per annum. But let's bracket that.

To put each number in perspective, here are a few comparative numbers.

Defense budget (nominal) : \$750 per annum. Actual (+medical services, pensions, etc): \$1 trillion per annum. So, Infrastructure dollars will be 14% of the military dollars.

Afghanistan \$2.25 Trillion (Highest Per Annum Expenditures: Obama Years)

All Middle East Wars 2001 - Present \$6.6 Trillion

Intelligence budget: about \$85 billion per annum.

Tax breaks to very wealthy (2002, 2009, 2017): \$2 - 3 trillion, approximately

Monetary Easing by the Fed 2008 - present : \$4 trillion, approximately. By far the largest part is interest free cash to big financial institutions to play with. Little of it is invested in productive enterprise; most is used speculatively to drive up asset prices - that includes stocks. At the height of the COVID-driven economic crisis in Spring 2020 when 9 million or so suddenly were laid off and GDP plummeted, the stock indexes hit new highs. There is in fact a disconnect between financial markets and the 'real' economy)

Do these numbers surprise you? Well, if so, that is largely due to the calculated decision of successive presidential administrations, the leadership of the Democratic Party, and the compromised MSM to ignore them or to mask them.

Let's break down the program's proposed expenditures by looking at one component: Public transit is to receive \$39 billion over the 5 years. That comes to less than \$8 billion per annum - for the entire country. Chuck Schumer trumpets that his triumph will enable NYC to renew its subway system, extend the fabled 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue line project - whose tunnels were first dug in 1949 - A.D. (3 stations cost about \$2.5 billion a few years ago), build new tunnels under the Hudson and East Rivers, etc. This is pure fantasy. The arithmetic tells us that NYC likely will get just about enough cash to power wash its 472 grimy stations - long overdue, but not exactly 21<sup>st</sup> Century standard. People used to get prosecuted for less egregious false advertising than this.

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell was one of 17 Republicans who voted for the bill. A smart move. He's succeeded in protecting his rich backers from any threat of being forced to shell out a reasonable amount of tax, brought serenity to the minds of the financial parasites in big banks, hedge funds and private equity who can concentrate on looting the economy without distraction, and he has denied the Democrats of anything substantial that they might deliver to their increasingly disaffected constituencies.

Most important, McConnell has framed the Republicans pitch for next year's Congressional election. See, they will argue, we have taken fiscally responsible action to strengthen the nation's infrastructure, we have done so without raising our taxes, we have blocked the Democrats' program to introduce a host of costly new Socialist, bureaucratic heavy programs, and we have shown that as a party we are ready to participate in constructive forms of bipartisanship. That line is a winner. Combined with the crude election rigging by Republican controlled state governments - which, for some inexplicable reason, Joe Biden has refused to contest seriously - and you have a Republican Congress come January 2023.

One suspects that people like McConnell perceive the Democratic leadership from the Oval Office on down pretty much the way Lenin and Trotsky perceived the inept, quavering Kerensky government in 1917 St. Petersburg - ripe for the plucking.

## *MILLEY TRUMPS APA*

The astounding news of the intervention by General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to forestall the possibility of Donald Trump pressing the nuclear button has seized the attention of the public. The matter's singular character has aroused a spate of speculation and theorizing. Amidst this cacophony of commentary, there is one aspect of cardinal importance that has been neglected. We might venture that it is 'the dog that didn't bark' phenomenon. I refer to the total absence of critical examination of the key question as to whether Trump was mentally competent. Was he able to think and to act logically? Was he susceptible to irresistible impulses? Did he suffer from any disabling illness that impaired his reasoning?

We do not know the answers. Nor did General Milley at the time that he took his fateful decision. That judgment was made on the basis of observed behavior that he had neither the credentials nor the clinical experience to evaluate. In short, it was subjective. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us as responsible citizens to consider the implications. What precedent has been set that could be abused in the future by persons of less probity than Milley? These are deep waters, indeed.

It would be prudent to set in place guidelines and procedures by which such a grave matter of state should be addressed. Since we are dealing with an issue that is, at its heart, one of psychology, it seems appropriate that that the central role be accorded the American Psychiatric Association. It is manifestly the case that Milley violated the principle ensconced in the sacrosanct Goldwater-Trump, Ludwig II, George III, Nero, Caligula Rule." In fact, it was double violation: he reached a definitive conclusion about Trump's mental state without engaging the President in a clinical interview; and he lacked the competence to do so. Much is at stake: the sanctity of the psychiatric profession, the guild privileges of the APA, and the well-being of our society which should have the full benefit of the expertise that only the APA can provide.

For those compelling reasons, we strongly recommend that any decision taken by a government official that obviates, restricts or constrains the President's authority to act in conformity with the obligations of his office as defined by the Constitution should be reviewed by a panel of credentialed psychiatrists selected by the APA Council. Any such proposed intervention would require approval by a majority of the 5-person panel. Its composition is of crucial importance.

Membership should represent a cross-section of the populace. As follows:

- 2 males, 2 female and 1 transgender
- 3 Caucasians, 1 African-American, 1 Latino (preferably with some Asian ancestry)
- 2 registered Democrats, 2 registered Republican, 1 independent
- 4 native-born, 1 nationalized citizen
- 2 natives of states North of the Mason Dixon line, 2 natives of states South of the Mason Dixon line, 1 native of the D.C.

- 4 academics; 1 private practitioner

The determination of the panel will be final.

The panel will be expected to issue its judgment within 21 days of its constitution OR the detonation of a nuclear weapon that liquidates the members - whichever comes first.

### *SINO-U.S. CEASEFIRE?*

The United States is facing a momentous question of historic dimension. How we respond will determine the shape and tenor of relations among the world's powers. Yet, it has not been recognized – by official Washington or the country's political elite. Hence, our answer to date has been implicit rather than the outcome of deliberate thought. Time is not on our side.

There is mounting evidence that the leadership in Beijing is offering the United States a Geo-political ceasefire. (See below) The same can be said for Putin's Russia that has been conveying a matching message, likely in concert with its Chinese 'strategic partner'. The substance has been obscured by the static engendered in a series of meetings between senior American officials and their counterparts whose adversarial tone stems in large part by Washington's peremptory attitude – as if a superior remonstrating with an inferior delinquent.

Here are the proposed terms, in summary form.\*

1. The United States recognizes China as another great power to be addressed on terms of equality.



2. Just as the U.S. has its red lines demarcating its core interests, so does China. They encompass Taiwan as mutually agreed in the historic 1972 accord that officially inscribed the “one China” principle, and the littoral waters of the South China Sea and East China Sea. They constitute what Beijing calls “zones of interest.” (Not ‘spheres of influence’ – as they stress). The Russian counterparts are Ukraine, and other former parts of the Soviet Union, whose conjectured membership in NATO is unacceptable to them.
3. The PRC, in turn, recognizes a far more extensive American “zone of interest” that covers its European allies, Japan and Oceania.
6. China is in the process of establishing conventional military superiority in and around its “zone of interest.” That gap will widen over time, as the Pentagon’s war games clearly indicate. (MB: Washington’s infatuation with the so-called ‘QUAD’ will not redress that configuration of forces. Both India and Japan’s newly installed Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, already have taken steps to distance themselves from the idea of a security alliance dedicated to countering the PRC. The latter went out of his way to initiate expressions of goodwill and cooperation with President XI. Modi, for his part (along with the country’s political elite overall), has no inclination to play second fiddle (viola?) in Asia to the U.S. in the manner of the British in Europe. Joining the U.S. in a quixotic plan to protect Taiwan’s independence at all costs is an extremely high-risk strategy that comes close to being a suicide pact. It is far more likely that Japan and India each will seek a modus vivendi, accommodating their own interests to those of their powerful neighbor. Their current points of dispute are minor; painful historical memory is not salient enough to jeopardize their well-being. Neither the Indians nor the Japanese are willing to go to war with China for

the sake of Americans' identity crisis or Washington's hegemonic ambition. So, at best, the Quad will end up a patched together Isosceles Quartet – if not a duo).

7. Russia aims to establish a similar conventional military superiority in and around its “zones of interest” – as it demonstrated at the height of the Ukraine crisis this past Spring
8. China rejects the idea of a comprehensive global arms race. Strategically, it does not harbor the ambition of replacing the United States as the strongest military power around large swathes of the globe. If Washington is desirous of spending vast resources in fruitless efforts to control regions far from its shores that is the Americans' decision to make. Beijing believes that it is wasteful, pointless and works against international peace and stability.
9. Moscow shares that assessment.
10. An implicit exception is those places and instances where a jihadist movement is taking hold which could pose a terrorist threat to themselves (Chechens, Uighurs). Their stated preference is to address those situations on a multilateral basis. Russia, specifically, cites the American abetting of al-Qaeda & Assoc in Syria along with tolerance for the Saudi, Qatari and Turkish sponsorship of the Islamic State.
11. China will not allow the United States to as much as contemplate using a nominal nuclear superiority to intimidate the PRC - most specifically in the eventuality that it is on the losing end of a conventional war. Toward that end, it is strengthening its nuclear deterrent forces in both quality and quantity. But it has no intention of entering into a nuclear arms race

12. Russia's technical advances at all levels of armaments is animated by the same considerations.
13. China does not accept the United States' assumed privilege to meddle in the country's domestic affairs, to pass judgment on our social institutions or to lecture us about moral values. Respecting the autonomy of each country to manage its internal affairs in its own way is the bedrock of peaceful, mutually beneficial relations between them
14. On these grounds, cordial relations can be fostered among the powers in the interest of global stability and economic engagement. Mutual respect and the abjuring of coercive methods are the sine qua non.

This is the message that comes across from a close reading of public statements from Beijing and Moscow as well as from the extensive readouts of recent private discussions with their American counterparts. To date, it apparently has not been heard or comprehended. Its rejection has been a priori insofar as the United States remains committed to maintaining global superiority, escalation dominance militarily in all spheres, and the prerogatives of self-appointed overseer of international affairs. Sound, serious foreign policy activates all the faculties: listening, reading and thinking – as well as talking.

It behooves the American political class to take a step back in considering those premises in a long-term perspective. Prominent in that review should be a close examination of alternatives. What are they? War? – with the probable result suffering a humiliating defeat or nuclear annihilation? Fantasizing about regime change in Moscow or Beijing (albeit more likely in Washington than over there – objectively speaking)? Persisting in the puerile game of disparaging/denouncing China and everything Chinese. That latter tack is on display daily in The New York Times, in the New York Review of Books, in the incestuously repetitious

publications of the think tanks, in the yelps of politicians, in the smoldering words of NATO's robotic marionette Jens Stoltenberg in the cliched punditry of TV commentators, and – not least – in the conduct of our amateur officials who confuse diplomacy with the metronome of accusation and insult. That path through fantasy land leads ultimately to shock and trauma as reality inevitably catches up to us. At that point, accumulated paranoia and anxiety could place an unbearable stress on the already fragilized institutions of the American body politic.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1236704.shtml?id=11>

## *Veering to the Abyss... U.S. and Allies Are Intellectually Comatose*

Finian Cunningham

We'll need something like the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when the U.S. and Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war in order to get peoples' heads screwed on straight, says Michael Brenner in an interview with SCF's Finian Cunningham.

In a stark assessment of U.S. international policy and that of its allies, Professor Michael Brenner says there is an abject failure of political leadership and strategic thinking. This is clearly seen with regard to Washington's persistent antagonism of China and its inability to conduct meaningful dialogue and diplomacy with Beijing for resolving major issues. That is also the case with regard to Europe's frigid attitude towards Moscow. Such crass conduct of international relations is not only self-defeating for the United States and its Western allies, it is creating the dangerous conditions for fatal miscalculation leading to war. Brenner contends that the world might have to face the brink of destruction before some level of sanity prevails in Washington and other Western capitals. It is lamentable that the lack of strategic thinking and political leadership in the United States is driving the rest of the world to the abyss.

Michael Brenner is Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the University of Pittsburgh. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, SAIS-Johns Hopkins (Washington, DC). Previously, he held teaching and research appointments at Cornell, Stanford, Harvard, MIT, Brookings Institution, University of California – San Diego, and was a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the National

Defense University. He has authored several books on international politics including *Toward a More Independent Europe*.

## Interview

QUESTION: U.S. President Joe Biden has repeatedly said he does not want a Cold War with China. Yet Biden has made provocative moves to antagonize Beijing, for example, his vocal support for militarily defending Taiwan against alleged aggression from the Chinese mainland. Is this deliberate “strategic ambiguity” or plain incoherence in U.S. policy towards China?

MICHAEL BRENNER: Any ascription of a coherent strategic design to the Biden administration is misplaced. There clearly isn't any. Second key point: Biden's control over his national security team is tenuous. For example, the day after telling China's President Xi Jinping on the phone that he doesn't want a “fight” with China, senior U.S. officials were meeting with Taiwan officials in Geneva to discuss the opening of a “representative” office in Washington – in violation of the 1972 accords that formed the basis of the One China Policy established in 1979 under then President Carter. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, national security advisor Jake Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman et al. are unanimous in their view of China as a lethal threat to American dominance and they believe that a confrontational approach is the only logical response. There is no minority view inside or outside the Biden administration. Only Biden's domestic advisers are skeptical on strictly political grounds – war or near-war is an electoral loser.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that the U.S. is lurching towards an all-out war with China?

MICHAEL BRENNER: That is not the intent. The danger is miscalculation. Washington thinks that it can bluff the People's Republic of China; they're wrong. Look at Hong Kong. Washington thinks only in terms of coercion because that is the only thing they are capable of – and because winner-take-all is the only strategic concept they are mentally capable of understanding. There is not a diplomatic statesman anywhere in the Biden administration. It is the Pentagon that is cautious because all their war games tell them that the U.S. would lose in a conventional war with China.

QUESTION: Washington blames China for the deterioration in international relations, accusing Beijing of malign expansion and of domineering Asian neighbors. Are there any grounds to substantiate these American claims? Or is it blatant U.S. hypocrisy and scaremongering?

MICHAEL BRENNER: The record is clear – the balance of responsibility for deteriorating relations lies with the U.S. The only exception perhaps is over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea where Beijing has built controversial military aircraft landing facilities. Washington's rhetoric is relentlessly hostile to the point of insulting; and we are shredding any remaining bilateral agreement over Taiwan – the PRC's Red Line.

QUESTION: The new military pact between the U.S., Britain and Australia known as AUKUS took international media by surprise, seemingly announced out of the blue last month. You have expressed doubts about its strategic capability, describing it as a “slapdash” arrangement. Should China or Russia be worried about this new AUKUS pact in terms of their security?

MICHAEL BRENNER: I suspect that only their military people are taking it seriously; and in practical terms, the U.S. naval base in Perth, western Australia, won't be operational for another 25 years or so. The U.S. would like to see it as a key base where submarines armed with nuclear weapons could harbor. The Australian electorate probably has other ideas. Otherwise, it is another political gesture to achieve two ends: place an immovable obstacle in the way of cordial Sino-Australian relations, and tighten the United States' grip on Canberra's foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

QUESTION: All three AUKUS members stand to lose economically if relations with China slump further. The economies of the U.S., Britain and Australia rely heavily on China's vast markets, so what accounts for the self-defeating antagonism of their governments towards Beijing? Could they be so stupidly shortsighted?

MICHAEL BRENNER: Yes – just as the Europeans are in regard to Russia. There is not a strategic mind in a position of authority anywhere in the West. The United Kingdom is run by a bunch of buffoons who live in a “Jewel in the Crown” mental world. While Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison is just posturing. He will be brought up short when the economic losses inevitably hit Australia's population. Against that, however, the big news is in Japan where Fumio Kishida, the new prime minister, has shifted the country's attitude towards the PRC by at least 90 degrees. In a breakthrough cordial exchange with China's President Xi last week both leaders reportedly agreed to pursue “constructive and stable relations” based on increased dialogue.

QUESTION: Do you see the U.S. eventually coming to accept the emergence of a multipolar world and desisting from its hegemonic ambitions? What needs to happen in U.S. politics for that to happen?



MICHAEL BRENNER: In the short to middle-term: No. There is neither the mind nor the political leadership. I fear that we'll need something like the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when the U.S. and Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war in order to get peoples' heads screwed on straight. At both the elite and popular level, it is only fear of war that, on a purely pragmatic basis, will break the comatose intellectual/political state that the United States is in.

## *PFIZER RULES*

There is little in the news that surprises us nowadays. Everything and anything happens in a society and in a polity that is permissive to the point of nihilism. Still, most of us remain susceptible to shock- shock by the extremity of actions, by their depravity, by their unsatiable manic greed and, not least, by the placid response that they engender among our elites. Oddly, if understandably, some of the most singular expressions of unscrupulous behavior and of political corruption receive scant attention and little comment. That is the most telling indicator of our times. Here is a stunning example.

The subject is Pfizer's ruthless exploitation of its dominant COVID-19 vaccine by all means open to it: extortion, embargo, price-rigging, corruption of government officials. Its aim was to cripple the sovereign authority of states, to obviate their judicial powers, and to neuter opposition/victims. Racketeering. The lives of the millions held hostage to this unbridled greed were of little or no account. Pfizer's campaign was global – although its most brutal actions concentrated on vulnerable countries with weak or corrupt leadership. Moreover, the company used its clout in Washington to make the U.S. an accessory to its nefarious project. Not surprising – our government has been aiding and abetting Big Pharma in exploiting American consumers for decades.

The story was carried in a number of regional papers-but not The New York Times or its affiliates. Maybe, the editors thought it necessary to reserve the space that they had assigned to their big national story: "FINALLY REVEALED: WHY SPACEX HAS A LEAKY TOILET." (20 column inches). Or, maybe our media

nanny found the grotesque Pfizer affair as unfit for our immature minds since it punctures the American myths and legends that sustain us. Maybe they're right on that score.

So, what does the future hold for this latest episode of corporate blackmail, influence peddling and governmental abdication of its ethics and responsibilities? No great mystery: oblivion. It already is being swept into the black hole where it will join the other dark matter sealed from view lest they disturb the public peace and tranquility: the Epstein/Mossad/CIA affair; The Panama Papers; the multiple felonies of Trump and family; the 'London Whale' conspirators; the Yemen mass homicide; connivance with al-Qaeda in Syria; the extrajudicial abduction, abuse and disappearance of 5,500 migrant children; etc. etc.

There, they can rest in peace undisturbed by prying eyes or the lamentations of bleeding hearts. So it goes.

## PFIZER'S POWER

In February, Pfizer was accused of “bullying” governments in COVID vaccine negotiations in a groundbreaking story by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.<sup>[1]</sup> A government official at the time noted, “Five years in the future when these confidentiality agreements are over you will learn what really happened in these negotiations.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Public Citizen has identified several unredacted Pfizer contracts that describe the outcome of these negotiations. The contracts offer a rare glimpse into the power one pharmaceutical corporation has gained to silence governments, throttle supply, shift risk and maximize profits in the worst public health crisis in a century. We describe six examples from around the world below.<sup>[3]</sup>

TABLE 1: SELECT PFIZER CONTRACTS REVIEWED[4]

Purchaser	Date	Type	Doses	Price Per Dose	Total Cost
Albania	Draft[5]	Draft Definitive Agreement	500,000	\$12	\$6 million
Brazil	03/15/21[6]	Definitive Agreement	100 million	\$10	\$1 billion
Colombia	02/02/21[7]	Definitive Agreement	10 million	\$12	\$120 million
Chile	12/01/20[8]	Definitive Agreement (Redacted)	10 million	Redacted	Redacted
Dominican Republic	10/29/20[9]	Binding Term Sheet[10]	8 million	\$12	\$96 million
European Commission	11/20/20[11]	Custom Advance Purchase Agreement	200 million	\$18.6[12]	\$3.7 billion
Peru	17/9/20[13]	Binding Term Sheet	10 million	\$12	\$120 million

United States	21/07/20[14]	Custom Advance Purchase Agreement (Redacted)	100 million	\$19.5	\$1.95 billion
United Kingdom	12/10/20[15]	Custom Advance Purchase Agreement (Redacted)	30 million	Redacted	Redacted

Pfizer’s demands have generated outrage around the world, slowing purchase agreements and even pushing back the delivery schedule of vaccines.[16] If similar terms are included as a condition to receive doses, they may threaten President Biden’s commitment to donate 1 billion vaccine doses.[17]

## *UKRAINE*

1. Russia is NOT preparing an invasion. Washington and its vassals are shouting 'WOLF' because that are panicked that the internal situation in Ukraine is spinning out of control – and they're setting up Putin as the scapegoat in the event that the crazies in Kiev launch their own assault on the secessionist Donbass provinces.
2. Ukraine is well on its way to disintegration as a state. Its President, Mr. Zelensky, is a professional comedian who receives no respect – from the hardline neo-Fascists who dominate in the security services and in the street, the oligarchs or the populace I general. The economy is on the brink of collapse thanks to incompetence, rampant corruption, the rupturing of commercial ties with the successor states to the Soviet Union, runaway inflation and the spike in spot market oil prices it must pay after breaking long-term supply contracts with Russia at the behest of the U.S., Brussels and 'expert' consultants from the UK. Moreover, it soon will see a drop in the transit fees it currently receives for the natural gas pipeline that runs from Russia to the West because its dilapidated condition will accelerate the shift to much more efficient Nordstrom II now on line.
3. Ultra-nationalist and neo-Fascist elements in Kiev are tempted to try a political 'hail Mary' by attacking the Donbass. Preparations were made for such a move last spring, with the encouragement of some in the West, but the Ukrainians were forced to back down when Moscow sent a blunt message that it would respond massively. That would man the end of post-Maidan Ukraine, the country's fragmentation, and humiliation for the West. For there is absolutely nothing that the U.S., NATO or EU could do about it.

The loudmouths in Washington, Brussels (both ends), London, et al would have to eat crow before a global audience.

4. The West entered this strategic trap willingly and voluntarily; also, sealed in their own ignorance and hubris.
5. The alternative is to reactivate the Minsk II accords which Kiev

has adamantly refused to honor over the past 7 years with the backing of the US and its European allies/vassals. The Biden administration has refused to press the Zelensky government to do so. Instead, it has sent one senior American official after another to Moscow (Blinken, Sullivan, Wendy Sherman, and finally William Burns) to cajole Putin to bury the Minsk accords in favor of some as yet unspecified plan that would spare Kiev the agony of decision, keep Ukraine intact, and lure Russia into an all-party series of meetings led by the United States. Nothing doing.

6. Fears have grown in Washington because their grip on Kiev decision-makers is slipping. They now are sweating over the possibility of a Ukrainian strike against the Donbass. A major objective of the Burns mission, in addition to convincing the Russians to drop Minsk, was to extract a pledge that in the event of such an assault Moscow would exercise restraint and not respond with the promised massive military retaliation.
7. Despite having failed at this futile mission, the White House still refuses to rein in the Ukrainian red-hots. Hence, their desperate contingency plan to blame it all on Russian aggression. That's what the alarums about a Russian troop buildup are all about.

## Conclusion

American leaders, and our political class in general, are now facing the consequences of their living in a comfortable and convenient fantasy world. If

by sheer luck, they avoid a catastrophe in Ukraine, they are still in course for an even greater disaster in the Taiwan Straits.

The country at large is complicit in this tragic indulgence of juvenilia.



## TWEETS

I've always had a strong aversion to tweeting. It seemed just another of the tell-tale signs announcing the degeneration of American civilization – like slow-pitch softball. That explains the shock I felt when a friend, who shares my jaundiced attitude toward current trends, confided that he clandestinely tweeted on a pretty regular basis. He decision to come out of the closet, tablet in hand, carried no suggestion of shame for his deception. Instead, he urged me to follow his example, touting the virtues of tweeting. “Look,” he said, “those short punchy messages could get you the big audience you deserve, instead of the 3 or 4 responses that straggle into your Inbox after each weekly commentary. Your present method just doesn't hack it with a post-modern audience. How many people are prepared to wrestle with one of your prolix, interminable essays? In all honesty, they seem to be written for passengers stranded on an Orient Express train snowbound in the Balkans with no fresh homicide to divert them.”

“Try it – you'll like it!” That was the challenge. Crestfallen, my resistance flattened like a soufflé. So, I agreed to make an attempt – with the qualification that the strict character/space limits be eased. Here is the result of the trial run.

### *TWEETS FOR OUR TIMES*

1.

SWEDEN is one of the West's most hawkish countries when it comes to Russia. They vociferously denounce the Kremlin – and Putin in person – for a myriad of alleged hostile deeds. They call for ever tougher sanctions and rigidly oppose

diplomatic engagement. Why have the famously conciliatory Swedes taken this ultra-tough line?

The answer is Walter Mitty. Sweden missed all the great dramas of the past century. They were idle observers. Now, they can compensate by throwing themselves body & soul into the reenactment – at no real risk. Scan Swedish TV, and you encounter a diet heavy on spy thrillers, super-agents, terrorism in Stockholm, murderous drug cartels, heinous human traffickers, hostage crises – at home and abroad, perilous Baltic intrigue, endangered peacekeepers, high tension midnight Cabinet meetings, etc. Enough to generate an adrenalin rush – thrills and chills galore. Psycho-drama without commercials.

As for the Western powers, they are delighted to have as an ally a military with unmatched expertise in anti-submarine warfare. One that might be the ideal tutor for the Australians. There is even speculation in Stockholm that Sweden might apply for NATO membership on the principle that mingling could produce herd immunity protection against Russian aggression.

The Swedish profile also helps us make sense of the archaic thinking that now prevails among a younger generation - in Washington, London and Brussels - that missed out on the Cold War. (See '13' below)

2.

In the recent past, I have expounded on our big-brained hominid cousins – like the Neanderthals and Harbin man – who seemingly lacked vital mental capacities for meaningful communication. Perhaps, the best surviving representative of the intelligent hominid who has trouble communicating anything meaningful is the Micro-economist!

3.

The Taiwanese army is composed of hollow infantry divisions where only 60% of the assigned slots actually are filled. Young Taiwanese don't want to fight and die for their homeland. The government does little to remedy the manpower problem overall. Overall, its defense spending is a tiny 2% of GDP. Their chief of staff was quoted just a few weeks ago as saying that Taiwan's military would be overrun by PRC assault with two weeks – or less. Clearly, those favoring independence expect the U.S. to come to their rescue. So, our increasingly overt pledges to protect Taiwan (if credible) are on a par to our Cold War iron pledges to protect West Berlin. Are the American people ready to go to war with the PRC? Or, even aware that it is looming on the horizon?

4.

I ran into a member of the Texas State Assembly the other day in my auto body shop where he'd dropped off his piano for its annual tuning. Our intermittent chat soon got around to the Virus. He confided: "I gotta admit; there's one thing I've never understood about this COVID-19 business. Why don't they just handle it the way they did the first 18?"

5.

If we get into a war with China over the Taiwan Straits, there is a strong possibility that it will escalate to the nuclear level – exchanges of tactical nuclear weapons if not intercontinental strategic A-bombs. I can envision The New York Times headline: 'First Woman To Drop A-bomb Flattens Guangzhou.' The

following story would begin: “U.S. Airforce Major Marie Clare, daughter of immigrants from St. Kitts, made history yesterday in more ways than one.”

Then later that week, she responds to Oprah’s opening question: “Major Clare, tell us how it felt when you saw that mushroom cloud rising over the city? Was this the fulfillment of a childhood dream you first had as a young girl playing video games in your 4<sup>th</sup> floor walk-up apartment in the Bronx?” Answer: “Well, Oprah, I have to admit that I never imagined something like this when I joined the Airforce ROTC. I just wanted to be a model officer, and to give something back to this great country which welcomed my family and me way back then. The explosion, and mushroom cloud itself was not that tremendous; we’re talking a 1.5-Kiloton TNW after all”

6.

Has anybody noticed that the much ballyhooed infrastructure bill appropriates only \$550 billion of new money over a 5-year period - \$110 billion each year? That is roughly 1/8 of the annual defense/Intelligence spending. If we were ready to appropriate an equivalent sum to address domestic needs, the overall expenditure for the 5-year period would be \$8 Trillion as the headline number and \$4.4 Trillion in new money. Think of what that could mean for the newly created POLAR COMMAND or our 1 trillion program for a superfluous upgrade our nuclear force of 3,800 nuclear warheads. Think of what that might mean for the Lexington Avenue Express.

7. The Federal Reserve Bank, since 2008, has served big financial institutions – and indirectly, the entire corporate sector – by following an easy money strategy:

Quantitative Easing. This approach has two main components. One is the printing of trillions of dollars that it makes available in nearly unlimited amounts at zero – or near zero – interest rates to financial institutions. They are free to do what they wish with the cash. Very little is loaned for productive investment. The other is buying up trillions of debt obligations issued by those institutions at face value despite their actual value, if placed on the markets, of cents on the dollar. If this were not done, several of our biggest banks would go bust – in effect, they have been zombies for more than a decade. The outstanding example is CITIBANK which fell into parlous health under the helm of the legendary Robert Rubin – and then saved from collapse by the Washington bailout. He is the person who has the singular distinction of being the driving force behind suicidal financial deregulation under Clinton, putting a great bank at the brink of ruin, and then being requested by Obama to staff his government with Rubin subordinates and acolytes. The trifecta of successful failure. Robert Rubin, President of the Council On Foreign Relations – a monument to his times.

What would be the effects on the national economy, if – instead – A) those trillions of no-interest loans were made available to any qualifying citizen; and/or B) a general debt holiday were proclaimed for mortgage, credit card, student debt?

8.

How much value-added is provided by prized baseball managers over their run-of-the-mill counterparts? Relative to pitching coaches and, secondarily, batting coaches? After all, baseball is now a game where nobody bunts, nobody tries the hit-and-run, where almost nobody steals a base; where the choice of starting pitchers and relievers is done by algorithms, where starting line-ups also are

algorithm driven. A manager's primary job is to foster a harmonious clubhouse by feeding egos and feeding bellies. Finding the right caterer is what it's all about.

9.

How do we explain the positive correlation between, on the one hand, the extraordinary development of programs for professional athletes that involve customized training regimes, crafted diets and round-the-clock physical therapy treatment with, on the other, the high frequency of serious injuries? Does over-scheduling have something to do with it (think soccer worldwide); does flying coast-to-coast have something to do with it? Too much emphasis on strength training?

10.

The idea of free public higher education is derided. Bernie Sanders' proposal is called 'pie-in-the-sky,' utopian, socialist, a budget-buster, a threat to the country's financial solvency, etc. etc. Yet, there is an elementary fact that proponents as well as opponents ignore. The United States once did indeed have 'free' universities, colleges, technical schools, community colleges. That was true right through the 1960s. When I attended graduate school at Berkeley, there was no tuition charged – albeit I was obliged to pay \$62,50 per semester as a student activity fee which covered amenities like the outdoor pool in Strawberry Canyon overlooking San Francisco Bay.

That was the generous state of affairs until Ronald Reagan drove his load of 20-Mule Team Borax from Death Valley into the Governor's mansion in Sacramento. The University of California was not alone – nearly all state university systems

were established the same way. This salient history, though, gets no mention in Congress, in media coverage, on the dreary talk shows, among the pundits and academic specialists. Not even The New York Times editorial board. A void that could be remedied by a 90 second internet search. Case in point of how far public discourse in the United States has been degraded.

11.

The EU is in a huff because thousands of Kurdish refugees are gathering at the Belarus borders with Poland and Lithuania. The ultimate destination for these 4,000-14,000 is Germany. Originally from Iraq and Syria, they have been temporarily settled in Turkey for years. Their sudden transport to Belarus has been facilitated by Lukashenko and Erdogan. The former's motivation is retaliation for the heavy sanctions imposed on Belarus by EU governments in coordination with the Biden administration. Brussels response is to expand the travel and trade sanctions. That has led the Minsk government to enter into a set of long-term pacts with Russia that it had been avoiding. Hence, the outcome is diametrically the opposite of the West's objective to topple Lukashenko and to remove Belarus from the Russian orbit as they did Ukraine in the 2014 coup.

In 2015, Erdogan extorted major ransoms from the EU by setting off a tidal wave of 1-2 million refugees languishing in Turkey. As the crisis mounted, opening wide fissures in EU's wall of solidarity, the Europeans paid \$5 billion for him to close the flow and made other concessions. What logic leads them to take the opposite course with Belarus?

The answer: the obsession with Russia that eclipses everything else – even when their actions are counter-productive. This is the same Russia the Europeans are

beseeking (when not denouncing) mainly via the newly opened Nordstrom II (which many of them tried to kill at Washington's urgent demand) to provide them with exceptionally large deliveries of natural gas (unavailable) in order to alleviate the energy emergency they themselves created by ending long-term contracts in favor of risky spot market buying. And they want the critical deliveries immediately – before Russia is convulsed by the next 'color revolution' they are encouraging. Such is the caliber of leadership in Brussels and in major European capitals. Remind you of another Western government?

(Will the EU get its act together? Well, the Council is about to issue a long-awaited report, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence "For a European Union that Protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security." An imperative, it concludes, is the creation of a Hybrid Toolbox. Discrete inquiries in Brussels reveal that the hybrid refers to its 'fluid' contents: including pamphlets extolling the virtues of democracy and free markets, emergency first-aid pack, and the cell number of a contact in northern Virginia).

12.

Can somebody confirm the rumor drifting around Windsor Castle that Meghan's Christmas present to Harry will be an extra-long 12-foot leash with a diamond-studded choke collar?

13. A stroll through You Tube one evening led me to the broadcast of a 'Debate' sponsored by the high establishment Center for Strategic & International Studies



(CSIS) on 'Modernization of Nuclear Missiles.' It was instructive. First of all because the chairwoman and 4 panelists represented about a 22% slice of a 360% circle of viewpoint on the subject. Diversity there was; 3 of the 5 were female. Secure on that front, the organizers skimped on intellectual diversity. A former head of the United States Strategic Command, a defense consultant who was a Special Advisor on nuclear issues to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a Fellow of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs who as Senior Advisor to President Obama oversaw implementation of his nuclear modernization program; and an English university Lecturer set about tutoring us on present and future nuclear realities. They shared 4 key propositions: 1) our nuclear arsenal of 3,800 warheads was outdated and in desperate need of replacement (preferred) or refurbishment (to be ready for dealing with emergencies in the near term without stalling in winter weather); 2) budgeting was a central concern – insofar as it might be necessary to consider the relative priorities of a technologically cutting-edge nuclear force, trade-offs among the 5 components of our present 'deterrent,' and the conventional weaponry "we use on an everyday basis;" or the value of "strategic infrastructure" (c4i) vs hardware; 3) skepticism about arms control treaties that constrain what the U.S. does to meet its own self-determined defense needs; and 4) the imperative to break out of the Cold War mindset that shaped our now anachronistic nuclear pentagon of power. The Harvard/Obama man was big on the last; after all, that's where you go to learn how to think out of the box. He spoke about the security challenges of a more complicated world as demonstrated by recent wars and prospective ones. He didn't specify what scenarios he had in mind, but with a little imagination one could fill in the blanks. For example: small, nimble a-weapons to eliminate by avalanche Osama bin-Laden at Tora-Bora; to support the heroic defense of Mosul by Petraeus' outgunned garrison; to provide Israel with a mini neutron bomb to be

planted in the lunch room where Iran's top nuclear engineers gather; to demonstrate to Afghan poppy growers that there is more to life than opium induced bliss; to boost the firepower of Ukraine's would-be liberators of the Donbass (an idea that NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg already has proposed); to trick the PLA's coastal command into thinking that the petit TNWs hitting Chinese airbases were actually coming from the Amur River valley; to do whatever needs to be done in North Korea to stall its weapons programs without provoking Beijing or losing Seattle.

This same high-powered, cutting-edge thinker also glibly resurrected the idea of mobile ICBMs roaming U.S. Interstates to secure the survival of our deterrent from a disarming first strike attack. It's a notion that created a bit of a ripple in the mid-1970s before disappearing from the discourse because no such threat was technologically possible, deterrence was ample, and soon after we had no strategic enemy. However, collective memory no longer exists when the dogmatism of the day rule and careers are to be made. (Imagine an ICBM with MIRVED warheads sitting on the flatbed of a truck stuck on the Long Island Expressway at 5 P.M. on a Friday evening – a sitting duck for the silo officer in Siberia who salivates as he practices centering his crosshairs on the GMC logo. Another option redolent of the times, and ready to be unearthed, was the 'San Anita remedy' – deploying ICBMs in a figure 8 racetrack rail pattern).

Nuclear weapons are a very serious subject. All of its facets have been closely examined by very serious and capable minds since 1946. The thoughtful conclusions were assimilated by a very broad consensus worldwide. None of that figured in the mock 'debate' at CSIS where a bevy of totally ahistorical 'experts' are using their moment in the sun to play fast and loose with the world's peace and security. Very Washington circa 2021

14.

At last month's Valdai Conference, Vladimir Putin presented his annual tour d' horizon of world trends. He devoted a portion of it to a reflective appraisal of the discourse on prominent gender issues – gender identity, in particular. It was cogent, informed and articulate – uncommonly so. He offered a sharp critique of the strong momentum pushing contemporary societies toward a blurring of gender identities/roles and the ethical as well as practical implications. Putin was singularly candid. (He is not homophobic-although he resists gay 'affirmative action' and the promotion of 'alternative lifestyles').

That segment of his speech - as with most of what Putin writes and says, was ignored by Western elites. The caricatured image of Putin as satanic boogeyman permits us the luxury of dismissing him, even as Russia increasingly stymies Washington's plans for domesticating the European continent as a neo-liberal appendage under American tutelage. That combination of distortion, disparagement and delusion has become essential to shore up a Western persona fragilized by anxieties and insecurities.

This particular incident bespeaks another unbecoming trait of our collective elites. They are fearful of speaking with candor and honesty about the core questions of our times. No public figure in the West, much less a politico, could conceivably pronounce in public the views that Putin expressed calmly and logically. Is that because they universally adhere firmly to the dogmatic consensus about gender and sexual 'fluidity?' Of course not, they are simply cowards – cowards liberated from conviction.

A stunning phenomenon. How bizarre that Western societies unable to reform any of the several serious conditions that bedevil them, are nevertheless daring –

with a minimum of forethought – to alter suddenly our basic conception of human nature itself.

## *ISPY - IN D.C.*

Intelligence is thriving. It is a growth industry nearly everywhere. That has been due mainly to the Terrorism phenomenon. Think of the multiple stake-holders: terrorist organizations, their promoters (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar), target states, those caught up in associated inter-state conflicts especially across the Islamic world, consultants galore, purveyors of high tech equipment, NGOs. Add to that the New Cold War with Russia, and China's historic challenge to Western supremacy, and one can readily see why so much effort – and money – is spent in trying to find out who is who as well as who is doing/planning what.

Americans look at this from their own national perspective. Yet, for most of the world Washington is the target. We are the biggest, the strongest, the wealthiest, the most dominant, the most assertive power on Earth. Nearly everybody has reason to get a better fix on what the powers-that-be in the imperial capital are up to. The United States poses several unique challenges to Intelligence offices abroad. Let's take a look at them.

1. Washington is a veritable sea of information. System overload is a constant danger. It is one-industry town: government and politics. Everyone communicates with everyone else incessantly about not just the news, but – far more deliciously – what is happening behind the scenes. A relatively clement climate and the chronic failings of the local sports teams encourage this monomania. So, too, do two other peculiar factors: the legions of people who are associated with the politics/policy world, and their extreme mobility. Persons are constantly moving in or out of government, making lateral transfers, aspiring to a position more prestigious/powerful,

protecting a vulnerable sinecure, or plotting a political campaign. Only the latest sex scandals have a chance of distracting Washingtonians from this obsession. Even they have, on average, a 48-hour life cycle unless politically tinged (a hardy perennial like the Monica Lewinsky affair is entering its 4th decade). Who remembers Gary Hart or Fannie Fox and Wilbur Mills in the Mall reflecting pool? Or, indeed, Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski except the directors of Harvard's Institute of Politics who made him a much celebrated Fellow?

2. There are few true secrets in Washington. Rather, it is as a situation where some people don't know certain things. This is the reality insofar as "soft" Intelligence is concerned. Our masters do manage to keep under wraps a few highly sensitive items: like the nuclear codes, the exact details of the SIOP (does Isfahan figure before or after Qom on the priority scale for an all-out assault on Iran) – and, of course, day-to-day tactical maneuvers. In that last category we can put items like: e.g. why Biden chose Victoria Nuland as his personal envoy to deliver a message of 'tough love' to Putin in the Kremlin; what Wendy Sherman will say to Uzbek leaders to win their approval of American bases to serve as toll gates on the lucrative new Silk Road; how we sought to cajole Beijing into China boycotting Iranian oil even as Washington tightened the screws on the American sanctions against the PRC; what diabolically clever ploy Jake Sullivan had in mind when he 'forgot' to tell Macron of our plan to stab France in the back later that afternoon: the reasons for hastily abandoning the logistically critical Bagram air base on the eve of the evacuation rather than sacking it; why the CIA chose this moment to release its sponsored report on the massive abuse

of illicit global financial facilities – after scrubbing the names of ALL American miscreants?

Otherwise, these delicate matters aside, Intelligence collection is largely a matter of placing oneself at communication hubs where conversation reveals an enormous amount of ‘insider’ information.

A few suggestions. Get your agents on the invitation list to the innumerable seminars, talks, and informal discussion groups that abound in the think-tank/foundation universe. This is very easy to do since these gatherings are not at all exclusive. Even a nominal affiliation with one of them, or a chat with a principal, normally suffices. A reporter’s credentials are not an asset since there is a degree of sensitivity, in principle, about the risk of a wayward remark appearing in print – especially if attributed. Most often, there is a significant contingent of ex-officials, aspiring officials, minor current officials, and public intellectual influence peddlers at these meetings. Their value goes beyond the hard nuggets of specific information they might divulge. Equally, if not more important, is the exposure of mind-sets, doctrinal alliances, personal rivalries, etc. which constitute the software of American policy-making. These days, group think in line with conventional opinion predominates. Less exchange, less probing, more tactically oriented. That itself is an important datum. In addition, glimpses of the deeper reasons why all these good brains take shelter deep within the box help one to understand the American psyche.

Confirmation of the above assertion is provided by the massive data releases of WIKILEAKS and Edward Snowden. Some of this vast trove is revelatory

– and a fraction of that surprising. However, the largest portion of the material already was known to conscientious observers. Any scholar, analyst or investigative journalist who focused on a particular piece of it was familiar with an even larger fraction. It was the specifics and the technical stuff that, for the most part, broke the classification barriers. For example, anyone paying close attention could rightly assume that the NSA was sweeping up communications on a global scale, that this vacuuming included the conversations of private citizens in the U.S., and the communications of foreign leaders. Anyone who didn't know these things while being in a position to know them simply wasn't doing their job. Indeed, all anyone had to do was to read James Risen's detailed expose of the secret plan's clandestine origins in his 2006 book – written to elude censorship by his New York Times editors and publisher.

As to the video clips depicting the slaughter of civilians by helicopter gunships, that sort of atrocity by both American forces and their rabid mercenaries was common knowledge to everyone on the scene – with the exception of The New York Times' ace correspondents.

3. Speaking personally, I have pursued several research studies that involved the reconstruction and interpretation of decisions made and actions taken on matters of national security (as well as sensitive non-security topics) – and prospective decisions, too. My only credentials were academic and contacts of various sorts built up over the years. I can fairly say that I almost never missed anything of consequence.

Admittedly, access has narrowed in recent years. This owes to the sharpening of doctrinal loyalties, the paranoia of the War On Terror, and



the government's intrusion into domains previously considered off-limits along with actions (torture) that have produced a keener effort to keep things hidden from public view. So, the days are long gone when a visitor could leave the office of official 'X' then to stroll State Department corridors – dropping in on acquaintances and getting a subsidized snack in the canteen.\* These days, you not only are you escorted personally onto “C” Street but you are hounded by either John Kerry's Alsatian beast or Rex Tillerson's mobile militia patrols. Although the main purpose of these latter seemed to be the uprooting of any squatters who may have taken up residence in the great empty spaces opened by his purges.

Still, there are ways to circumvent these restrictions. Egotism and rampant ambition are the outsider's allies. Washington policy circles are a Hobbesian world – for the reasons noted above. In this Age of Narcissism, the old proverb: “Put Number One First” is taken as a universal truth and categorical imperative. That translates into behaviors that can be useful to the spy (Intelligence operative). First, if you are seen as a writer (reporter, free-lancer, academic), immediately you become interesting. For everybody wants their version of the truth to be publicized. It promotes their ideas, it makes them personally look good, and it downgrades rivals, i.e. everyone else involved. The last is not least. This impulse is driven variously by ambition, a faltering self-esteem, or the simple accumulation of frustrations ingrained in an environment where most people feel under-valued. This feeling is accentuated as the standards for holding high office (appointed or elected) plummet drastically to the point where the implicit question “Why not me?” sounds entirely reasonable.

There is a sub-species taking root in Washington that deserves attention: the malignant narcissists. They are not to be confused with the garden variety egomaniacs who are the native fauna holding the position of D.C.'s apex predator forever. This invasive challenger is personified by Donald Trump. Others of similar deformation are being sighted in considerable numbers – whether the original type with this personality aberration as an inborn character defect or one who developed the syndrome over time – the ANSs (Acquired Narcissistic Syndrome). Ted Cruz, Mike Pompeo, Rudi Giuliani and Michael Flynn fall into the latter category. The malignant narcissist is a quite dangerous critter to be avoided whenever possible as they act as if there were nitroglycerine belt strapped around their sweaty egos. They are useless as respondents or reliable witnesses to events but voluble. In other words, they testify not by their thoughts but rather by their performance. Their antics are the data.

4. The key for a foreign Intelligence agent is to establish a presence. Get an affiliation – any affiliation. “Associate” or “Non-Resident Fellow” or “Visiting Scholar” will do fine. And it will be yours for life since nobody bothers to check these things. Attend everything. Strive to make some comment on each and every occasion, no matter how brief and/or anodyne. An unusual accent helps since it lends deeper meaning to the most superficial remark. Cultivate the persona of expertise. Doodling in Cyrillic script ostentatiously can be helpful. Or quote T.E. Lawrence from “Seven Pillars Of Wisdom” (even better: Ibn-Khaldun) – throwing in 2 or 3 Arabic words pronounced more or less correctly. If you’ve forgotten the exact quote, make it up – no one will ever know the difference. It’s advised to

avoid Peter O'Toole's shouted command 'NO PRISONERS!' – unless you're in an all-Republican gathering at the Heritage Foundation.

Cultivate a serious air while maintaining an amiable demeanor. Small talk while grabbing a sandwich or filling a coffee cup is an opportunity to make some "Washingtonian" remark. Sports are the common currency of American culture; they cross all boundaries. Just keep in mind that the football "Redskins" are "pitiful," the baseball Nationals "disappointing" and the basketball Wizards "can't get their act together."

Once you become habituated to the ethos and mores of this setting, you can begin to think of refinements in your demeanor that could pay dividends in fashioning an image of gravitas. Body language is a subtle yet effective way of doing so. Here's one example; it's called the 'lean-back maneuver.' Simply put, when the speaker makes a particularly salient or controversial point, drop your scribbling pen and lean backwards in your chair – silently, and shift your gaze towards the far wall or ceiling. This inherently ambiguous gesture can convey either one of two things: thoughtful contemplation or "what the Hell is this guy going on about?" Let the others around the table guess which one it is; ideally, each will project their own feeling in appraising your gesture. For some reason, the impression is enhanced if you're in shirtsleeves. With a little practice before the mirror or, better, in front of your video camera, you should be able to perform a passable lean-back.

Join the National Press Club. These days, it is a pale imitation of the powerhouse it used to be. Only a handful of American newspapers maintain full-time Washington correspondents – much less State, Pentagon, etc. specialists. It's cheaper and easier to pay The New York Times or Washington Post to feed you their stories and columns. You simply take their stenographic notes of government releases and reprint them under the local rag's name. Still, there are some useful contacts to be made – in and around government offices. Membership is available for the asking – they're desperate for dues-paying members. (Low dues, decent food, good bar).

In addition, some accredited journalists can be useful sources in themselves. Especially foreign journalists. Often, they have been around many years. They know where bodies are buried, where graves are being dug, and who is wielding the executioner's axe. And who is giving the commands. Most also have close contacts with their fellow-countrymen in the embassies. As a bonus, they can offer a better informed, more subtle interpretation of political attitudes back home than is provided by some monolingual Times correspondent sipping a frappuccino in a chic Beirut or Nicosia cafe.

Don't be too effusive in offering lunch invitations. That can cast you as a lobbyist or some other outsider. You want to be just another insider – a member of the loose foreign affairs community who participates in the moveable feast. So, leave it at "Let's get together for lunch one day." Rest assured that you'll run into that person again within a few weeks at another

one of the watering holes. “I’ll be seeing you, in all the old familiar places” – Sidney Reilly.

Do not ignore Congressional staffers. Congress is becoming more aggressive in asserting its prerogatives, albeit it very selectively, so it counts. Most important, they have access to Executive Branch officials – frequently as allies in some struggle or other. Senators or Representatives themselves may be relatively diffident about leaking anything but gossip. Also, they are notoriously unreliable – whether intentionally or due to the awkward fact that nowadays they are not the brightest bulbs in the pack. Staffers, on the other hand, are invariably sharp, energetic, motivated and voluble. They usually know what’s going on.

As to transaction currencies, great care should be taken in making a selection from those with proven records for soundness. Money, sex and status are the enduring triad. In dealing with staffers, forget money – at least anything like a direct payment. That is too chancy and most actually have scruples about dealings with foreigners. Besides, they do not see themselves as “selling” or doing anything improper. In this respect, they diverge from money-hungry elected politicians who are ever desperate to build up war chests. Offering opportunities for self-promotion (translatable into advancement) depend on your contacts, which as a foreign agent you are unlikely to have in Washington.

Sex comes into play as an encouragement to bonding and an ensuing lubricant that loosens tongues. Blackmail scenarios are pretty much excluded, as are overt quid pro quos. If you yourself are the emolument, befriend a few people on 'K' Street to learn the appropriate modus operandi. Do keep in mind the experience of Anna (Vasilyevna) Chapman – the stunning Russian deep agent who never was activated and who never exploited her charms. She lived an agreeable life in London and then the New York suburbs for years before being 'uncovered' by the FBI. (It was pure happenstance. A Bangladeshi meter maid checking her ID for parking in a yellow zone outside Gucci's in the Trump Tower found her in an DHS data bank). Her only known missions were sending back to her Moscow boss occasional packages of high fashion items from Bloomingdale's. A quick exchange followed for an equally useless American 'spy' caught in Red Square with a folding map of central Moscow asking pedestrians for directions to the Lubyanka. A kindly policeman escorted him there. Reportedly, the transaction took place in the fitting room at Escada on the KU-DAMM in Berlin on a chill, foggy November evening. The redhead arrived in Moscow as a celebrity. That led to her being exposed as a center-fold in some Russian "gentleman's magazine." Ms "Chapman" has now disappeared from view – unlikely to surface again unless she accuses the FBI agent who grabbed her of sexual harassment. In that event, she would become a New York Times feature in the Sunday Review worth 5,000 words – replete with her personal op ed: "Gender Abuse in the New Cold War – A Survivor's Story." Oprah surely would be next – she can count on a 2-hour special were she to marry a Romanov.

## 5. Practical Tips

- a) Cover is the key (see above); no need for disguises. You're not a celebrity – and nobody pays any particular attention to anybody in America these days.
- b) Drop boxes, on occasion, may still have some utility. Washington offers limitless possibilities. Three come highly recommended. First, the imposing statue of Mohandas Gandhi that stands in front of the Indian Embassy on a small traffic island formed by Massachusetts Avenue, and “Q” Street. Its wide plinth is usually strewn by small floral bouquets and token gifts of various sorts. Few dare remove them. Hence, a perfect place for secreting communications.

Then there is the Cosmos Club just a few feet away. This grand building encloses all sorts of nooks and crannies. At the end of a long corridor on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, there is a hide-away called the Writer's Room. This dusty space looks to be preserved in time – circa 1951. On the wall are sepia framed photos of writers like Sherwood Anderson and Archibald MacLeish. A slip of paper or microfiche or thin thumb drive easily can be inserted from behind into a crack in the frame where it will lie undisturbed until retrieved. In fact, were the assigned agent to wind up in the federal pen, this location will keep it intact until Edward Snowden and Anna Chapman enter an assisted living together. The only risk is that your agent may reach behind that framed photo of Sherwood

Anderson to find a couple of thumb drives already in place – or a bit of micro-fiche put there by Alger Hiss.

Finally, a somewhat more daring option is the book shop at the Brookings Institution – across Dupont Circle down Mass Ave. This is a very public space where one can browse and, on special occasions, buy a Brookings publication. The collection is comprehensive. That means “classics” from years back that made a splash are available – if mainly for decorative purposes. There, one will find books by Kenneth Pollack and Michael O’Hanlon laying out verbose arguments for invading some country or other in the Middle East. These intellectual embarrassments are displayed in the evident belief that celebrity is success in Washington. Anyway, a secreted message could easily be placed at page 141 (Pollack) where he predicts Arab autocracies falling like dominoes in the wake of Iraq’s historic transition to democracy or at page 97 (O’Hanlon) where he presents his latest rosy assessment of the potent Iraqi army trained by David Petraeus

On the whole, Pollack is the better bet. His books are so thick that even if one were to crash onto the floor, your cryptic message should remain securely hidden. With O’Hanlon there is the additional risk, however slight, that some hard-pressed writer for Saturday Night Live might peruse one of his screeds looking for useful material.

Caution is in order in following these recommendations since their presentation here could alert the FBI to the danger they pose to the nation’s security. No need to worry unduly, though. To the best of my knowledge, no active member of the United States’ Intelligence or Counter-Intelligence agencies ever reads these commentaries.



The Trump Factor (This section was written when the Orangutan still was honoring the White House with his presence. Its value is mainly historical – unless Americans opt for a rerun of “The Creature From The Black Lagoon”).

The analyses and counsel presented thus far are not individual or administration specific. They remain generally applicable. However, the cardinal reality in today’s Washington is that almost everything is personalized. While policy orientations may be discerned by tried-and-true methods, there is no way to anticipate individual policy decisions. No one knows what they will be – even the President himself. It follows that one should prepared for anything and to expect the worst.

The pinnacle of a spy’s success in the Trump years would be to bribe a waiter at the Metropolitan Club to secrete a video recorder to register the quartet that met (and still meets?) for a prayer breakfast every Thursday in a private room over eggs & bacon with bagels. It comprised Jared Kushner, Mike Pence, Saudi Ambassador Khalid bin Salman Al Saud and UAE Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba. (True)That should earn a corner office back in Ankara or wherever you call home.

So: the savvy observer avoided the lure of the rumors circulating around Dupont Circle that there existed a secretive foreign policy design or plans that gave all these seemingly random actions a logical form. Quite beside the

manifest fact that anything of the sort would be beyond Trump's comprehension, and rejected as a constraint on his irrepressible will, none of the principals was up the task of formulating one. The same could be said of the Biden administration. Anthony Blinken or Wendy Sherman or Kamala Harris or Jake Sullivan as a grand strategist and/or master diplomat is a hallucination.

The practical implication is this. In the event that you find yourself in a close encounter in the dim recesses of a bar with an aide to one of these people who confides her understanding of the administration's underlying strategy, do not dismiss it as calculated disinformation no matter that it sounds so disjointed as to border on the unintelligible. Rather, discernible coherence and plausibility is a sure sign that it is simply a fabrication by another D.C. wannabe.

Trump's departure has opened an opportunity to gain some insight into his White House's inside game. The departed have started talking – with the sort of candor associated with escapees from a mental institution. They want to set the record straight; they are keen to avoid being scapegoated; they are bent on settling scores. Moreover, all of those above personalities are voluble. They have an inborn impulse to shoot their mouths off. A veritable Yellowstone geyser. That is the moment to make every effort to be in their company in order to catch the spray.

“And laugh at gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,

Who loses and who wins; who's in and who's out;

And take upon us the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies,  
And we'll wear out packs and sects of great ones,  
That ebb and flow by the moon" LEAR

In the message accompanying the commentary I sent out a short time ago, this phrase appeared: "most definitively when the CIA disbanded its networks of agents in the early 1990s."

That is not quite accurate. "Disband" was poetic license. What actually happened was the acceleration of a process begun in the 1980s under CIA Director Bill Casey (Reagan)- following a period of consolidation under Admiral Turner (Carter). Casey's rampant politicization of the Agency's work had, among other deleterious effects, the erosion of morale and sense of intellectual autonomy among many area specialists and some field operatives. A number took early retirement or left for lucrative private sector jobs. The growth of technology- based information gathering accentuated the process of declining capabilities. As I have been told by a number of people who were associated with the Agency during this period, the institutional culture underwent an enduring change. "Careerism" came to dominate; independence of judgment and assessment was curbed. Analysts and field operatives (such as those placed in U.S. Embassies) held their fingers to the political winds. This process led to the scandalous abuse of Intelligence by George Bush on Iraq.

I also understand that reliance was placed more and more on Intelligence provided by allied governments - most particularly in the Middle East. For

example, Richard Helms, Ambassador to Iran 1973-1977, thought it improper to run operatives in the country for fear of offending the Shah. Khomeini's people were not a target. That contributed to the shocked surprise when the Islamic Revolution turned the country upside-down. Similarly, we refrain from independent operations (other than some technology-based ones) in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan. Pretty much whatever they tell us, we accept; such verification as we try to do is handicapped by the absence of independent HUMINT.

Would you buy an Old Master painting from Mohammed bin-Salman? Would you buy a diamond tiara from Bibi & Sarah Netanyahu? In fact, we have been buying far more valuable things from those sources without independent verification. The results are self-evident.

- On one such casual occasion, I encountered Zbig Brzezinski who was in the building campaigning strenuously for rapid and far-reaching NATO expansion. Indeed, he asked for my advice in a pending decision. Without the slightest hesitation, I told him: "I recommend the chocolate chip." From that moment onward, not a day has passed without my asking myself ruefully whether I might have changed the course of European history if instead I'd said: "The French vanilla is always quite good."

## *SINEWS OF PEACE*

A remarkable document has come to my attention which I feel obliged to share with you. It is a highly classified transcript of remarks made by Vladimir Putin to a select audience of Russian elites in the Terem Palace at the Kremlin. The secret conclave was held on the eve of the virtual summit with Joe Biden.

For our privileged access to this English translation, we are indebted to our old friend Anna Chapman (*Анна Васильевна Чапман*) whose singular access to Kremlin policy circles is unmatched. That honor owes to her decorated service as the FBS' head of station in Bloomingdale's for more than a decade.

## '46 – '21: SINEWS OF PEACE

A shadow has fallen upon the European scene so lately lighted by the end of the Cold War. Nobody knows what America and its military organization NATO intend to do in the immediate future or what are the limits - if any - to their indefinite expansive and proselytizing tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant trans-Atlantic peoples. There is sympathy and goodwill here in Russia towards the Americans- and I doubt not also towards all the peoples of the West. Their wish is to preserve peace – despite many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships and inter-state comity. We understand the Westerners need to feel secure by the removal of all possibility of terrorist attack. So, we welcome them in our common fight against the forces of violence and disorder. Above all we welcome constant, frequent and growing collaboration in

the campaign to suppress those global elements which seek to sow discord. It is my duty however, for I am sure you would wish me to state the facts as I see them, to place before you certain discomfoting facts about the present situation in Europe.

From Vilnius in the Baltic to Dnipropetrovsk on the Dnieper, an opaque curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie the principal cities of the ancient states of Central Europe. Krakow, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Pressburg, Lemberg, Trieste, Kyiv, Chernivtsi. All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the United States sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to American influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Washington. Athens, too, with its immortal glories, has been yoked to the juggernaut of Western finance – indentured in debt servitude. They are not free to choose truly egalitarian democracy instead of an imposed, exploitative neo-liberalism – with a neo-Fascist future looming over them. Their political institutions are subverted through the machinations of so-called NGOs who, in alliance with dissidents, seek to topple legitimate governments via their confected ‘color revolutions.’ Rejected at the ballot box, these agitators are prepared to revert to anti-democratic coercive measures to seize power.

We should bear in mind, that these subversive methods have long been used by the United States in the Middle East and Latin America. Here is a sampling of episodes from the 21<sup>st</sup> century alone: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Somalia, Yemen, Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay as well as neighbors and cousins Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia. Just a short time ago, Russia itself was the target of such an insidious plot. We

must stay on our guard, ready to protect ourselves against this hostile meddling.

The predatory capitalist and plutocratic parties, which historically were very small in the central European states, have been raised to pre-eminence and power by money and agitation from abroad, and are seeking everywhere to obtain economic control. Commanding Finance and Big Tech are prevailing in nearly every case – except Iceland. Turkey and Persia are both profoundly alarmed and disturbed at the claims which are being made upon them and at the pressure being exerted by the Washington Government. A particularly audacious attempt is being made by the Americans in Ukraine to build up an autocratic regime by showering special favors on groups of extreme right-wing Ukrainian leaders. They include unabashed neo-Nazis dedicated to stirring up the ghosts of tyrannies past. Whatever conclusions may be drawn from these facts – and facts they are – this is certainly not the Europe whole, free and at peace – grounded in cooperation and cordial engagement – that we thought was on the brink of achievement in 1991. It is a regrettable but demonstrable fact that the foundation agreements reached at that time on a continent of equals, observant of the solemn pledges made to subordinate military blocs to the common security, are being progressively violated.

...

From what I have seen of our American friends and their vassals over the past 30 years, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially moral weakness. For that reason, the old doctrine of peaceful, constructive engagement is unsound. We cannot afford to work on narrow margins of goodwill, offering temptations to a relentlessly expansive American-led West. If the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization stand together, though, in

strict adherence to the principles of international law, their influence for furthering these principles will be immense and no one is likely to menace them or molest them. If however we become divided or falter in our duty, and if these years are allowed to slip away in drift and distraction, then indeed we will be in mortal danger, and our cherished identity and autonomy in an interdependent yet diverse world is at risk of being obliterated.

Here and now, we take a solemn oath that this shall not pass. We will resist these reactionary forces in every domain at every level. We shall defend ourselves, whatever the cost may be.

We will fight them on the energy markets, on the currency exchanges, on social media, on the Black Sea - if necessary, on the seabed. We shall persevere; we shall prevail.



## *RENDEZ-VOUS WITH DESTINY*

Presidential speeches are typically bland – bland to the point of insipidness. We are treated to the hollow, mock sermon of the Inaugural Address and the tedious monotony of the annual State of the Nation. Whatever that state might be at the outset, at the conclusion it is unavoidably one of drowsy apathy.

Admittedly, we recently were subjected to quite the opposite in the form of Donald Trump’s outpouring of snarls, growls and primal screams. We can only hope that it is the exception to the norm of hum-drum platitude.

It was not always so. Our history is studded with the indelible oratory of Lincoln, of Teddy Roosevelt, of FDR and of John Kennedy. The last is memorable for its conviction, its exhortation and its phrase-making. There was little in the content that deviated from the prevailing sentiments of that Cold War time.

That was to come in the far more significant (albeit forgotten) address at American University on the challenge of nuclear weapons in June 1963. Still, it reminds us that how you deliver a message can have a dramatic effect on an audience independent of what exactly is said. That is what is so lacking these days. Conviction exists only in the perverse minds of the country’s demagogic Right. Rhetorical force is limited – capable only of moving us to tears of boredom. As for memorable words, none stand out – unless your blood is stirred by such dramatic lines as : “change you can believe in.”

It is an instructive exercise to imagine what a Kennedy Inaugural address

could be like nowadays or at any point since America's triumph in the Cold War with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Here's a draft.

"We observe today a celebration of freedom--symbolizing a beginning as well as an end. Our triumph over the forces of tyranny signifies not just liberation but renewal.

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new cohort of Americans-- unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Be it in China, in Russia, in Belarus, in Iran, in Venezuela, in Cuba, in Syria, in Afghanistan, in Nicaragua, OR ~~in Saudi Arabia, in Qatar, in the UAE, in Ukraine, in Colombia, in Honduras, in Egypt, in Yemen, in Iraq, in Kurdistan, in Turkey, in Israel.~~

Let every nation know that we shall do whatever we might manage at a reasonable cost, and a casualty sensitive army permits, to support most any friend, oppose most any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the protection due loyal and faithful vassals. To those newly independent states of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of alien control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by another insidious form of servitude. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view -- just most of the time, and especially on those things that really count. Above all, we shall always hope to find them strongly defending their own freedom--and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought security by riding the back of the bear or the dragon ended up inside.

Rest assured, at the very least you have our fulsome best wishes as you try your luck at some facsimile of democracy.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge--to convert our good words into good deeds--in yet another alliance for progress--to assist free men and free governments to resist the deceptive lure of false populism. Hope for a better tomorrow cannot become the prey of malign powers hiding their malevolent intentions behind the mask of benevolence. Let every other power know that this Hemisphere remains committed to maintaining the ring fence around our community and to enforce the No Trespass warning sign written into the OAS Covenant.

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our weapons are sufficient beyond doubt - whether arms, economic sanctions, money, or righteous denunciation - can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed. Our goal: a rule-based international order; our means: whatever is required.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. Now the trumpet summons us again - to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, against menacing forces known, forces concealed, forces we dare not underestimate. So, millennials, get those buds out of your ears, sort out your gender issues and steel yourselves for a rendezvous with Destiny.

Friends & Colleagues

I ask your indulgence in my distribution of two commentaries within 72 hours. This is not a bid for an op ed slot in The New York Times. The sequence and interval between them was supposed to be different. However, this Ukraine piece somehow disappeared into the electronic ether. So, I gave in to the pleas of the Ghost Dancers to have another shot at fame after their flop at the box office when first released a couple of years ago. I don't know how this colorized, updated reissue is faring, but I could not put off sending these comments on the Ukraine psychodrama. After all, nothing quite this surreal has come along in recent memory. The piece has been retrieved from the black hole of the hard drive by a benevolent spirit who insists on anonymity.

Cheers

### *UKRAINE: GUIDES TO REFLECTION*

American behavior in the year-long Ukraine crises has been bizarre – even by Washington standards. It flared in April without any apparent catalyst. Rhetoric and action only tenuously related. Each erratic with quick shifts in tone and evident intent. One day belligerent, the next mollifying. The fire seemed banked at one moment only to burst into a menacing blaze the next. All spiced with large infusions of Orwellian language that would make George himself blush.

Baffling questions leave us perplexed. That is many foreign governments (now including the one in Kiev), their confused populaces and analysts who struggle to find the thread of logic that runs through this crazy-quilt affair. Can you hold a war if the other side doesn't show up? Are we being treating to an extreme exercise in psychological 'project?' After all, Russian leaders have declared, to their own people as well as other governments, that they have intention or reason to invade Ukraine. Indeed, the present crisis atmosphere originated in Ukraine's

move of large forces to the contact line with the Donbass accompanied by bellicose oratory. The Kremlin's consistent position since last March/April has been that that any attack would be intolerable, to be met with active resistance on their part.

Are we seeing a 'parthenogenetic' conflict/war/crisis? A first - to my recollection. A geostrategic Virgin birth? A reminder that there are more things under the Heavens than in our theories?

Then, we have the juxtaposition of war hysteria sweeping the country – our political elites, anyway, on the one hand and, on the other, an empty arsenal. All parties know that we, our allies and the Ukrainian army couldn't defend against a hypothetical Russian advance for more than a few days, at which time the Kremlin would dictate terms to a truncated Ukrainian virtual state. There is much chest-thumping talk of imposing the 'Mother of all sanctions' on Russia even as evidence mounts that the measures highlighted would hit Western Europe harder than Russia – a Russia that has been assiduously erecting its defenses since 2015 when the then 'devastating sanctions package' were put in place.

In a comic coda, Biden last week unveiled his ultimate secret weapon: 'personal' sanctions against Putin personally - perhaps, a lifetime ban on visiting Disneyland among other telling blows. Blacklisted! Sleepless nights ahead?

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Much of what the United States does in the global arena these days is simply silly – when it is not harmful. We could chalk up the entire Ukraine crisis II to a bout of silliness induced by the heady experience of our head of state actually sitting in the Oval Office after striving for 33 years to get there. On reflection, though, I believe that there is in fact a certain strategic logic behind American behavior – however primitive it

might be. It's been staring us in the face for the past 10 months, we've seen the signs, but the inductive conclusion somehow has eluded most of us. To put it simply: the crisis is rooted in Washington's obsession with Russia. It has very little to do with Ukraine per se. That benighted country has provided the occasion, not the cause.<sup>1</sup>

For the past 30 years, the denaturing of Russia as a significant power on the European scene (much less the global scene) has been a bedrock objective of American foreign policy. The country's Phoenix-like rise from the ashes has been unsettling to Washington – politicians, policy-makers, think tankers alike. Even the far more menacing threat to the United States' hegemony posed by China has not cooled the ardor of the pervasive, and passionate, Russo-phobia. The sources of that phobia of multiple and varied. Their examination the proper subject of a separate essay.

Objectively speaking, the country is more secure from external danger than at any time since before World War I. It has no enemies capable or desirable of using military force against either national territory or its core interests abroad. China is not an avatar of Imperial Japan and poses quite a different order of challenge. Putin's Russia is not an avatar of the Soviet Union in ideological terms or great power terms. Its defense of its national interests and dedication to securing its place as a significant player on the world stage is what big countries always have done.

Russia has rebelled against the American strategy of isolating it, diminishing it, and denying it any influence in areas of traditional concern: Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia and parts of the Near East. We find that intolerable. Hence, the inflation of Russian behavior in Ukraine (where Washington organized a coup against a democratically elected government because we disliked its political complexion) and Syria (where Russia's intervention is at the request of the established government while our commitment to occupying parts of it has no legal basis).

The situational logic of the emerging international constellation of forces pointed to two possible American strategies. The most obvious would aim at preventing the solidification of an alliance between Russia and China. Together, they represent a formidable bloc now capable of challenging the U.S.-led Western bloc in just about every sphere. Its steady strengthening means that time is on their side – crudely put. Such an approach carried in its train the judgment that the cultivating tolerably cordial relations with Moscow was an imperative. That is the strategic logic that Nixon/Kissinger followed in 1972 when they went to Beijing to bury the hatchet with MAO – a far more daring initiative with a far less compatible party. That idea has floated around policy circles for a while, but it never gained traction among the movers-and-shakers of the Washington/New York Establishment. We do not know if it had an advocate within the nascent Biden administration. If it did exist, that

person or persons were not to be found in charge at the State Department, at the Pentagon, at the National Security Council, at the CIA or in the White House proper.

The alternative strategy was to ratchet up pressure on Russia so as to nip in the bud Putin/Moscow's aspiration to become once again a major player – one dedicated to denying the United States its privileges as global hegemon and sole master of Europe. The driving force came from the ardent Victoria Nuland and her neo-Con comrades ensconced in the power agencies, in Congress and in the MSM. Since Anthony Blinken and Jake Sullivan were themselves partisans of this confrontational strategy, the outcome of whatever modicum of debate occurred was preordained.

By the end of March, Ukraine became the focal center for the strategy. Let's recall, that Joe Biden had been Obama's man in Kiev after the 2014 coup. He directly oversaw the program for creating a pro-Western ally, tied to the United States (preferably via membership in NATO – as first proposed by George Bush in 2008) and to the European Union with its economy disengaged from Russia's. He travelled to Kiev frequently and reportedly was on the phone with President Poroshenko at least once a week.

Since the Maidan coup, Ukraine has experienced political turmoil - now under accidental President Vladimir Zelensky, the former comedian who made become a public figure by mocking impersonations of then President Yanukovich. Running on a platform that promised an



attempt at reconciliation with Russia (winning him the vote in the Donbass and other Russian-speaking regions), he had been firmly brought into line by the menacing ultra-Nationalists and neo-Fascists, the security establishment and Washington. The economy was a shambles; living standards and GDP has never even reached the 1991 level. Exactly how this domestic state-of-affairs played into Kiev's readiness to join the United States in a scheme to provoke a fresh crisis along the contact line with the Donbass is unclear. We can be sure, though, that people like Victoria Nuland – of Maidan Square cookie fame – were pressing the buttons in both Washington and Kiev. Moreover, we know with certainty that Washington began supplying a substantial number of new weapons systems to the Ukrainian army: e.g. Javelin missiles along with launchers, and other anti-armor tank guns. We also know that there was a large deployment of Ukrainian troops to the contact line. Those acts were accompanied by bellicose oratory. Hence; “a crisis, we have a crisis.”

The events of April kicked-off the turbulent maelstrom that we've experienced to this day. What scenario did the Biden people want to see unfold? Any attempt at an answer must take account of the cardinal fact that nobody in official Washington cared very much what it meant for the stability of Ukraine or the welfare of the Ukrainian people. Their eyes were fixed on Russia. Their objective was to create a reason for imposing a crippling load of economic sanctions<sup>2</sup> that would put paid to Putin's supposed ambitions in Europe – and beyond. At least, that

would free the West to devote its full energies to dealing with China. Ideally, it would return Moscow into a beggared facsimile of the pliable Yeltsin model or an innocuous neo-liberal satrap. Everything the United States has done vis a vis Ukraine over the past year has been dictated by that overarching goal.

They set about manufacturing a scenario that would enable them to reach that end.<sup>1</sup> The key would be some Russian counter-action to a Ukrainian provocation, of uncertain magnitude, that could serve as a *casus belli* for the draconian sanctions and for gaining the full cooperation of its allies. The unexpectedly forceful, unaccommodating response from Moscow threw a monkey-wrench into the plan, but did not alter the course Washington was committed to. Biden himself, encouraged by some of his more sober political advisers, came to realize that a conflict in the Donbass could get out of hand – a risk accentuated by the strong influence of ‘crazies’ in Kiev and along the contact line. That would doom prospects for the already unpromising mid-term elections. The American political class might be all lathered about the possibility of a stand-off that would kick the Russian bear where it hurts; however, the public clearly had no stomach for yet another war. The former also might like to remedy the humiliation of Afghanistan; the latter could envision another embarrassing fiasco. So, Biden took the initiative of calling Putin with the message that it served both men’s interest to cool things – so let’s get together in Geneva and talk things over. Their summit encounter in June did calm the waters – for a while.

The next 4 months, though, were not used to follow up the summit with earnest efforts to resolve the Ukrainian standoff. Instead, Washington continued to stir the pot with belligerent anti-Russian rhetoric, a relentless diplomatic campaign to erase the Minsk II accords (never implemented by Kiev under American pressure) and substitute a direct negotiation between Russian and Ukraine that would serve the dual ends of eliminating any obligation on the part of Kiev and signaling that Russia was a responsible party to the conflict in the Donbass. Simultaneously, the Biden people went all-out to convince the continental Europeans that they should sign onto a package of severe economic sanctions that would be triggered with near automaticity were the Russians to do something egregious. They assumed that Washington would make the judgment as to what constituted an egregious action.

#### The European Factor

German, France and Italy inter alia refused to go along with this trip-wire strategy. They don't trust Washington, they don't want a confrontation with Putin, and they dread the disruptive impact on their own countries of sanctions (with evident domestic political consequences). Germany's reluctance to line up obediently behind Washington was especially frustrating.

Just after the Maidan coup and the breakaway of the two Donbass provinces (Lugansk and Donetsk), German Chancellor Angela Merkel

had flown to Moscow to meet with Putin. Both were worried about the military assault being planned by newly installed President Poroshenko to suppress the secession. Merkel promised that she would exert her considerable influence in Kiev in an attempt to forestall it. She reneged on that commitment, refraining to intervene, under pressure from the Obama administration and anti-Russian elements in her own coalition government. The decisive element in her decision was a document prepared and delivered by the CIA and the German BND that the American designed sanctions would cut the ground under the Russian economy, motivate the oligarchs to force Putin to change course on Crimea/Donbass or be dethroned. Surprise, Surprise! – Langley got it completely wrong.<sup>2</sup>

That judgment assumes that the appraisal was a good-faith effort to ascertain objectively what the impact would be. More likely, the Intelligence people connived with the Russo-phobes in Washington and Berlin to sway Merkel's calculations toward confrontation. Truth is an irrelevancy under those circumstances. The truth has lost its a priori claim to preeminence – whether in declarations or, one suspects, often in the minds of those who purvey their subjective rendering of reality.

That pattern was repeated after the signing of the Minsk II accords in February 2015. Germany and France were joint underwriters if the plan hammered out by the Normandy four: the Ukraine leadership,

representatives of the Donbass secessionists, Berlin and Paris. Its principal provisions called for a revision of the Ukrainian constitution to give the Donbass region a high degree of autonomy, steps to secure the status of the Russian language, the holding of fresh elections, and direct talks between the two Ukrainian parties to set terms of their implementation. The Kiev government, controlled (and threatened) by hardline elements, almost immediately set on a course of ignoring the accords. No official action was ever taken to executive the agreed measures. As far as Kiev has been concerned, Minsk II was null and avoid from day two.

Although that rejection was almost immediately evident, the two underwriters exerted no pressure whatsoever from the signing until this day. This was despite another hurried Merkel visit to Moscow where she again reassured Putin of her full support for moving forward ratification of Minsk II. Once again she reneged. Washington, which had been absent from the Normandy process, was furious at what they charged was a sell-put to Russia. They demanded that Merkel withdraw Germany from its role as underwriter. They threatened her with an all-out campaign to block the vital (for the German economy) of Nordstrom II via severe sanctions and political agitation. Merkel caved in. In effect, she bartered Minsk II for natural gas from Russia. That bargain dictated German attitudes until the peaking of the fabricated

crisis last year. It is a sword that Washington still holds over the Berlin government's head.<sup>3</sup>

Back to the present. To make their case to Germany, France and like-minded allies, Biden, Blinken et al began in October to stoke the war fever with dire predictions of an 'imminent' Russian invasion. They conjured a "lightening strike," – i.e. the sort of 'cold start', straight to the Channel, that agitated NATO planners back in the Cold War days. Bad metaphors never die, they just await the next paranoid episode.

Washington was thrown off stride when Moscow refused to play the role assigned to it. They said and did nothing to substantiate the claim. The Russo-phobia had taken on a life of its own that left the White House painted into a corner. The level of desperation was evinced by the CIA Director William Burns' tour of European capitals with a briefcase filled with CIA generated 'infallible' evidence that an invasion was in the offing – and that, therefore, the Europeans immediately should commit to the trip-wire sanctions so as to deter the in fact fantastical invasion. The hottest material were satellite photographs purporting to show Russian armored units in battle formations "at the Ukrainian border" (just 180 miles away). We now know that the photographs were doctored.<sup>2</sup> The tanks and other equipment were at their permanent bases adjacent to barracks and other fixed facilities. The CIA's pictures had been cropped. The CIA, the White House and attendant

Washington agencies were trying to palm off fraudulent goods whose sophistication was worthy of a 5<sup>th</sup>-grader.

With tensions growing more acute day-by-day, the floundering Biden administration tried a brief *fuite en avant* via two daring telephone calls: Biden's to Zelensky, and Blinken's to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Both were fraught; each exacerbated the American dilemma. The Kiev leadership had become upset by the mounting beating of the war drums from Washington fueled by claims that Russia was likely to strike soon. That assumption did not confirm with Ukrainian Intelligence. Moreover, Zelensky was deeply worried by the damaging impact on Ukraine's fragile economy. He went public with remarks distancing himself from the American portrayal of the threat and calling attention with alarm to the spreading 'panic.' Capital was fleeing the country, the currency was falling, investment deals were being suspended, and the emigration flow that already has witnessed the departure of millions of mainly young people is accelerating. Ukraine faced a tanking of the national economy. Biden vehemently rebutted Zelensky's criticisms, bluntly reminded him what he and his colleagues owed the United States, and in raised voice told Zelensky to straighten up and fly right. The conversation ended in a row with a resolution of the crisis further away than ever.<sup>4</sup>

(Highly placed Biden officials have been quoted as saying that their patience was running out with a Zelensky who was “Irritating,

infuriating and unreliable.” He himself has expressed worries about a possible coup. One can imagine Nuland taking down her cookie baking tray.)

The Blinken-Yi exchange proved even more acrimonious. Washington's supposed objective was to convince Beijing to use its influence in Moscow to persuade Putin to cancel the looming 'invasion.' It also offered an occasion to sound out the Chinese as to their latest thinking about Asian-Pacific geopolitics. He took the standard American line - adding that the disruption in global economic life ensuing from a sanctions war would negatively impact China, too. What he got in return was a blast of complaint and accusation from Yi - pronounced in atypically sharp language. He made it clear that China fully backed Russia in every respect, blamed the U.S. for destabilizing Europe, pledged all manner of tangible support for Russia were the West to act on its threatened draconian sanctions. Yi also pointed out that the economic pain would cut deeper in Western Europe than in Russia - let alone China. The Chinese people, he declared, were prepared to bear any cost out of solidarity with their Russian partner.

Yi's dressing down moved on to Sino-American relations. He accused Washington of pursuing an all-out anti-China strategy whose actions ran directly counter to the emollient line taken by Biden in his conversation with Xi months earlier. On Taiwan, on the American



campaign to undermine the 'winter Olympics,' on trade issues, on the forging of mini-alliances in Asia - on all these matters, Yi denounced American ill-will toward China while warning that this was a dangerous strategy that promised a competition that the West could not win.

This angry reaction should have been foreseen. After all, the United States was asking its sworn enemy, against whom it was conducting a no-holds-barred campaign of vilification, to intercede on its behalf with America's other main enemy who happened to be China's close strategic partner. An extrication from a dilemma of Washington's own assiduous making. Its 'carrot' was a reiteration that Washington didn't want a war; its 'stick' vivid reminders that severe sanctions against Russia would hurt China as well. It frankly hard to imagine what manner of thinking lay behind this futile ploy. As remarked by Metternich when given the news that Talleyrand had died: 'I wonder what his motive was!' In this case, there is little point in looking for a logical motive. American policy-makers live in a nihilistic mental universe that encourages the indulgence of all kinds of fantasies.<sup>5</sup>

Neither of these cardinal diplomatic encounters, which carry profound implications, has been reported in the Western media or given serious attention in the banal official communiques issued in Washington of the conversations. They are described in detail (with language apparently

being slightly moderated) in Global Times, the unofficial English-language outlet for the Beijing leadership, and the readout provided by China's Foreign Ministry. This cavalier disregard for the historic geostrategic rearrangement that has occurred in recent years is apiece with the parochial, introverted outlook of the American foreign policy establishment - still cultivating such archaic ideas as driving a wedge between Russia and China at the United States' convenience.

We do we go from here? God only knows. One used to say that God looked after puppies, little children and the United States of America. Let's hope that the puppies are receiving more attentive care.

A reasonable surmise is the following. There will be no armed conflict across the contact line in the Donbass. If the local Ukrainian crazies do something reckless, the Russians will recognize its derivation and react with measured caution. There will be no massive economic sanctions. The Biden administration will proclaim loudly that the Russian bear's hand was stayed by the steadfast, credible threat of retaliation. Western unity was the cement. Moscow's demands for a reconstitution of Europe's security architecture will produce nothing tangible beyond desultory discussions until the Kremlin gets fed up; then, we'll see what initiatives they might take. Russo-phobia will remain a hallmark of the United States' foreign policy. The Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership' will tighten and deepen. American strategy will become progressively

more disengaged from reality. Our leadership as blinkered, our thinking dogmatic, our diplomacy amateurish and accident-prone.

So it goes.

1. The war hysteria fostered by a U.S.-led West is a classic example of PROJECTION. Witting on the part of some in Washington and London; sub-conscious on the part of others. It has been a phenomenon generated by our political elites, not of the public.

“Psychological projection is the process of misinterpreting what is ‘inside’ as coming from ‘outside’. It forms the basis of empathy by the projection of personal experiences to understand someone else's subjective world. In its malignant forms, it is a defense mechanism in which the ego defends itself against disowned and highly negative parts of the self by denying their existence in themselves and attributing them to others, breeding misunderstanding and causing untold interpersonal damage. A bully may project their own feelings of vulnerability onto the target, or a person who is confused may project feelings of confusion and inadequacy onto other people. Projection incorporates blame shifting and can manifest as shame dumping. Projection has been described as an early phase of introjection.” Wikipedia

2. Economic sanctions carry the potential of influencing the behavior of the target when two crucial conditions are met. One, they harm the adversary more than yourself – a function of both economic vulnerability and vulnerability to loss of political authority at home. Two, the adversary lacks the means to retaliate in ways that strike your own vulnerabilities. Neither condition is met in this instance.

3. **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Sputnik, [...], Moscow, January 28, 2022 - Foreign Ministry of Russia**

› Kiev realised that Berlin and Paris would not insist on it complying with the Minsk agreements. President Zelensky said he didn't like the Package of Measures, but it was nonetheless important, because it keeps Western sanctions on Russia in place. That's all there is to it: nothing but crude cynicism. Ukraine realises that it can do anything now.

Vladimir Zelensky and his regime are being used (primarily by the Americans) to escalate tensions and to engage their underlings in Europe, who are playing along with the Americans as they pursue their Russophobic undertakings. The future of Ukraine is not Washington's main goal in this particular case. It is important for the United States to escalate tensions around the Russian Federation in order to "close" this issue and then "deal with" China, as US political scientists are saying. How do they plan to "close" it? I have no idea. If there are any reasonable political strategists still out there, they must realise that this road leads nowhere

4.. At one point, Biden reportedly started screaming at Zelensky who placatingly told him to 'calm down.' That is not far-fetched.; it has precedent. In Kabul on one occasion, then Vice-President was dining with President Karzai in the Presidential mansion when some remark lit his fuse and he shouted at Karzai before throwing down his napkin and angrily storming out. Nation-building American style.

5.



## *GHOST DANCERS*

There is a seeming resemblance of Trump rallies to the Ghost Dances of the plains Indians.\* That may be true in one sense, but not in another.

The GHOST DANCE was a sacrilized ritual that spread among the native American tribes in the West at the end of the 19th century. It was a plangent *Cri de Coeur* of peoples whose identity was being erased by the White Man. It expressed longing for restoration of a fading culture along with a desperate hope for salvation in another life. A last gesture of those whose resistance already had been broken. It originated in 1869 with a series of visions experienced by an elder, Wodziwob. These visions foresaw renewal of the Earth and help for his Paiute peoples as promised by their ancestors. A generation later, a prophet from the Northern Pauite of Nevada, Wovoka, provided the charismatic inspiration that launched the movement. He told of having communed with the Great Spirit who conjured an idealized image of a land free of the invading aliens, one bountiful in natural riches, marked by serene security. All of the tribes would be harmoniously united as one people. To reach that blissful state they must bond together to defy the body and spirit of the White Men. A special circle dance was one of the rituals that was prescribed in order to usher in this New Age. The Ghost Dance is memorable for its adoption by the Lakota Sioux in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee massacre.

Similarly, Trump supporters are stray souls who feel themselves victims of uncontrollable, hostile forces which have cut the ground from under them. Disorientation and suspicion pervade their social encounters. As they see it, the assaults on their way of life and self-esteem come from

globalization, the suppression of patriotism, cultural relativism, the marginalization of Christian religion, dictation from government autocrats in Washington. They personalize those forces: immigrants, Blacks, liberals, Ivy League elitists. Their sense of abandonment and deprivation has more to do with the intangibles than the material – even though many have suffered the corrosive effects of economic predation while not recognizing its sponsors. Gnawing sensations of status decline are intimately bound up with the feeling that the United States is no longer theirs. From the country's founding, an individual's sense of worth has drawn critically from the belief that they were participants in a unique enterprise – original, superior and somehow endowed with a Higher Meaning. A shift in the complexion of their American universe calls all that into question.

The Trumpites' vision of the Promised Land is fixed on an idealized image of a past that is disconnected from current reality. There is nothing conservative about this; the universal use of that term speaks to the intellectual slackness of the country's political class. The movement is reactionary in purpose. And since it is prepared to use drastic means to regain something that manifestly cannot be restored, they are radicals. It is energized by blind faith that their mission will succeed. Unlike the plains Indians, they do not live in poignant despair.

The dread about the present felt by hard core Trumpites stems from the inability to compensate for the impoverishment of their personal lives by glorying in American greatness. Little in our post-modern society

resonates with them as authentic; our sterile work yields an invisible product. The drama of the American experience, our collective pageant of progress, used to be the great booster of morale and imparter of meaning. That tonic has lost much of its potency- in good part because it's not the same country. So, restoration becomes the imperative for impoverished individual self-esteem. It is those others who are errant. Joining a passionate movement to fuse with others who share your anger, the same grievances, the same desperation itself acts as a nostrum. One no longer agonizes alone, our indictments are confirmed, and we can lose our unhappy self in the clamor of mass enthusiasm.

To get a better fix on this psychology, let's return to Eric Hoffer's classic: *THE TRUE BELIEVER* (Mentor 1951). Here are a number of particularly pertinent points.

1. The appeal of the mass movement is not as a vehicle for self-advancement – except for the audacious few with an itch to command and a thirst for adulation. “*All forms of devotion and self-surrender are in essence a desperate clinging to something that might give worth and meaning to our futile...lives.* The faith we have in the nation [or ideology] has to be extravagant and uncompromising.”(24) Lack of political experience and ignorance help feed this mindless dedication to a cause and its leader. **“A rising mass movement attracts and holds a**

**following not by doctrine....but by the refuge it offers from the anxieties, barrenness of an individual existence”. (4)**

***2 The catchword is ‘liberty;’ in fact, those who see their lives as despoiled crave fraternity and uniformity more than they do freedom. They are uniform in their animus, in their objects of worship – and obedient to their leaders. They are anything but autonomous.***

***3. The militants, the physically aggressive, are a subset of the above. They are the restless sociopath, the bully, the enforcer. They are misfits who live on the margins – estranged from everything except a small coterie of fellow mavericks. Ultimately, they are estranged from themselves. Violence satisfies the impulse to destroy since they have no conception of what it means to build or create. They are the recruiting ground for the black shirts, the brown shirts, the neo-Fascist gangs, the White Supremacists. Their belligerence tugs on the emotional strings of those in the movement who themselves lack the courage to act; and it prods the leader to raise the level of hostility and castigation of enemies in his rhetoric. “Violence breeds fanaticism as fanaticism begets violence.” (99)***



**4. *The present is comprehensively depreciated as the source of corruption and perversion of the idealized, sacred past.*** Hence, appeals to respect for existing institutions and practices fall on deaf ears. For they are heard as praise for falsified Truths – the Devil masking himself in the garb of angels. The ‘demi-urge ’in religious terms.

**5. *Blind devotion to a cause never is fully satisfying.*** “*The fanatic is perpetually incomplete and insecure.*” (90) Hence, the need for a constant escalation of vehemence in language and action – the harangue, the clenched fist.

**6. *Trump and his henchman traffic in hate*** – like all neo-Fascist demagogues they know instinctively that raw meat provides more emotional protein than anything else. So it’s “lock her up!; lock him up.” Insult, denunciations and ridicule. That provides catharsis as anger is vented, the adrenaline flows and we ‘punish the enemy’ the way Hajis on pilgrimage to Mecca throw stones at the Devil. Primitive, but it works – we are dealing with primitive emotions.

7. *“Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents....The fanatic quivers with a craving to fuse and coalesce with his like into one flaming unit.”* A mass movement can do without a god “but never without belief in a devil.” (85) A scapegoat is imperative. All the better if it is some group that you have wronged. A flight from blame is all the more intense if all faults can be transposed. That explains not only the recrudescence of racism, but also the support for more and more abusive treatment of Latino immigrants which exceeds by magnitudes the treatment meted out to Nisei in WW II detention camps. The more acute the atrocities revealed, the greater the escapist reaction.

8. ***Chaos is welcomed.*** This is so not only due to rejection of the order that is in place; also because in chaos egalitarianism reigns. One’s sense of failure, of inadequacy is lost in the maelstrom of tumult and destruction.

9. ***“Charlatanism ....is indispensable for effective leadership” of a fanatical mass movement.*** Deliberate misrepresentation of the

facts is necessary because declarations must be simple and direct, unencumbered by qualification or exception. It is the narrative drama that counts, not factual accuracy. The tensile strength of the movement is tempered by the white heat of hostile words and deeds. **Blind trust in the demagogic leader requires no collateral.**

**10. *The demagogic leader is at once born and self-made.*** Born in the sense that it is his twisted personality that disposes him to aberrant ways of viewing himself and the world. Trump's psyche is deeply scarred by narcissism – exacerbated by an array of other mental disorders. Those perverse traits can lead to sociopathology, a distorted divorce from reality, an infinite ability to manipulate and to hurt others. Initial success in gaining power and a following, facilitated by the tolerance acquiescence of those you abuse and bystanders alike, strengthens all those impulses and actions. You yourself become the true believer in the mad persona you have concocted for yourself.

Recently, we saw newly revealed pictures of Hitler in the mid-1920s standing before a mirror practicing his wild rhetorical gestures. By 1933-34, there was no need for practice. The

gestures were Hitler. So, today, we see the deterioration in manner and speech in a Trump who progressively has become a caricature of his own twisted self. So, too, we see Ted Cruz – once sane if an ideological fanatic – degenerate into a scurrilous hate-monger who sparks insults, lies and accusations at random.

*Hence, a fanatical mass movement can only intensify and reach new heights of extremity. It can be suppressed – but it cannot moderate.* Once it reaches a certain threshold its own momentum will propel it to a climax of one sort or another - invariably a destructive climax.

*Can the Trumpian movement succeed?* NO – in the sense that it's not possible to summon back the past. YES – in the sense that it can inflict irreparable damage on our liberal democracy, it can hurt persons and institutions. In short, it can destroy both the America that is and the essence of the 'original 'America that they presume to cherish and long for but never have understood or appreciated. Already, the harm to our public institutions is so great – at the state as well as national level – that it is not hyperbolic to say that we are living in post-Constitutional America. In short, the Trumpites whose ecstasies supposedly embrace

their version of the Great Spirit are in effect devotees of Kali's *danse macabre*.

*There is ample evidence that a peculiar form of American Fascism is now implanted in the body politic.* The Trump phenomenon, to use a shorthand expression, is unprecedented in breadth and depth. It has penetrated the very marrow of our public institutions and political culture. The open question is how far it will spread, the strength of the antibodies it generates and the society's capacity for regeneration. There are three protagonists in this drama.

One is the Americo-Fascist movement itself. The second is the traditional opposition by which we mean the Democratic Party. Sadly, there is little reason to place much faith in it. Sclerotic, poorly led, bereft of conviction, timid, unable to promote an alternative vision or narrative, it served in the 2020 Presidential election as little more than the lever you pulled if you wished to vote 'NO' on what was more a referendum on Trump than a conventional presidential election. Moreover, its paralyzed lack of will casts it as easy prey that stirs the bloodlust of its voracious Republican predators. In 2022, it will be trounced.

The third, and probably critical element, are the Republican loyalists who have demonstrated an unbecoming readiness to accept their party's (and the country's) bondage to the Trumpites. A few prominent names aside, the mass of Republican voters seem prepared, by all accounts, to remain loyal to the standard-bearer. The polls clearly support that conclusion. So, too, does the lock-up step discipline of Congressional

Republicans who resemble the old Communist Party delegates to the Supreme Soviet. Who they are – and why they have sold out so totally – are the great unanswered questions. Functionally, this silent party majority forms a league of Franz von Papens. Amazingly, their obstinacy stiffens even though there is no threat – domestic or externally – to their dominating interests, even though their goonish shock troops act with intensifying atrocity

The hard core Trumpites, spawn of the Tea Party (including the Christian Right), represent probably no more than 10-15% of the public. Let's add most members of the upper crust (10% or so) whose financial self-interest overshadows all other considerations. In today's culture, their raw greed is all-consuming. Since their turnout exceeds that of any other socio-economic stratum, let's make that around 12%. (Sub-total: 25%) Then there are the conglomeration of small government ideologues, those who disdain support for the poor and indigent (a majority of whom happen to be people of color), the Right-to-Life single issue fanatics, the paranoid security obsessives. Together, do they constitute about 20% or somewhat more of the electorate, if we avoid double counting.<sup>1</sup> They are so loyal to the Republican Party and obsessed with what agitates them, that they will set aside good sense and the good of the Republic to subject the country to an obviously deranged, corrupt and lawless ego-maniac and his horde. To state it bluntly, they have little social conscience. Many are ambitious, many are

grasping, many are selfish, and most important – like the ‘deplorables’ - they too lack the core self-esteem to act responsibly.

We must keep in mind a central feature in the picture that tinges everything having to do with public life. *That is the extent to which the collective American super-ego has shriveled.* The implicit guidelines that shape and constrain behavior no longer exercise the influence that they did. We think and act in a quasi-nihilist environment. The absence of a generally recognized, logical order means that many of us inhabit a variety of make-believe worlds. All of us experience the resultant static – static that makes it difficult to think more-or-less clearly and to act more-or-less rationally. In this setting, the most disadvantaged commodity is the truth. For truth-telling means forcing ourselves to recognize that we are mistaking a hall of mirrors for reality. And those mirrors - if ever aligned - form an infinite regression to nowhere. Such is the aversion to truth that critical comment about some obvious falsity is taken as stunning blasphemy – by most, or an audacious act of courage – by a few.

Who will be performing the GHOST DANCE a decade from now?

It will not be the Trumpites. For their fate is all or nothing – now or never. They’ve rolled the dice. Yes, the movement will grow unabated. In fact, it may gather strength from a widespread belief that 2020 was rigged against him. If the Republicans were to regain control of the Congress, they will use their power to block the Biden administration at every turn – no holds barred. Even now, lacking formal majorities, they

bend every sinew to buy-off or intimidate the one or two Democrats needed to neutralize that nominal majority – as they did under Obama. In any circumstances, the Trumpites will redouble their nation-wide guerrilla war. They are well-placed to do so. A large part of the federal judiciary already is prepared to do their bidding at the drop of a legal appeal. They have 4 or 5 propagandistic ‘news’ networks at their disposal along with an even denser network of talk-radio outlets. Funding is unlimited. They are highly organized at every level of government. In every one of these respects, their battle fleet vastly outguns the Democrats’ scattered flotilla.

After unseating Trump, the Democrats enthusiastically launched into a celebratory jig. Joyful that the Republic has been saved, that democracy had triumphed, and that the country has rediscovered its good sense. Only slowly is it dawning on some that a demonstrable reconstitution of a decent liberal polity has not been achieved. Their only modest achievements are in the realm of ‘identity politics’ through executive action.

As for the non-Trumpite Republicans, they smile contentedly secure in their financial status, looking on indifferently as the Democrats struggle to advance an agenda recognizable from its ‘moderate’ Republican ancestry, and complacent in the assurance that their daughters could always get an abortion in Canada. In short – *they don’t give a damn! Americans have been abandoned by their elites.*



*There will be GHOST DANCERS. Scattered bands of downcast greybeards with faded memories and pale visions of what might have been – of what should have been. Their step will be slowed by age and their rueful knowledge that there is no Great Spirit to rescue them.*



*\*<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2017/11/james-mooney-recordings-ghost-dance-songs/#:~:text=The%20Ghost%20Dance%20was%20a,as%20promised%20by%20their%20ancestors.> (Audio)*

*1. There has been no evidence of a dramatic shift in partisan preferences. There is much mythology about this. Conventional wisdom has it that the white working class has abandoned the Democratic Party wholesale and thrown in their lot with Trump. We should recall that Hillary in 2016 not only polled 3 million votes more than did Trump, but her percentage of the total was only a few points lower than Obama's (48.2 vs 51.1%). That hardly constitutes a political sea change. The differential would have been half that had black voters turned out in the same numbers as they did for Obama. Moreover, the Democrats were handicapped by a maladroit candidate and an overall party leadership that was, and is, abject.*

## ***SOMETHING HAPPENED***

My muse knocked at dawn. Exhausted after catching the redeye from Moscow and then diverted over Finland. He insisted on a full breakfast before whispering in my ear. A week pulling up the grass roots from the permafrost in Gorky Park while subsisting on borscht and boiled cabbage had drained him.. Reanimated, the Truth began to flow – in short, staccato sentences with none of the usual refinements and subtle similes.

1. Context and background are everything in understanding the Russian attack. Look at the process of decision as dynamic over time rather than sharply focused in the immediate. Too, dynamic in terms of intense interaction with Western governments
2. Putin is not a dictator. He cannot simply fix on a course of action and give commands a la Stalin. Never has been. He has great authority; yet, at the same time, he represents the underlying convictions, thoughts and interests of powerful people in and around the government. Most of them were seated in that semicircle at St. Catherine's Hall for the televised meeting of the Russian Security Council.

3. They, along with most all of Russia's political cum business class, have felt deeply humiliated by what they experienced as the shabby, patronizing treatment they have received from the West – led by a crass America – since 1991. The insults in word and action have hit them nonstop since 2014, reaching a crescendo from March 2021 onward. They have known full well that the aim is to denature Russia as a political cum diplomatic power in Europe – and beyond. The West want it neutralized and marginalized so that the U.S. can remain master of Europe as it prepares for a titanic struggle with China for global supremacy. Unfettered access to Russia's wealth of natural resources is a bonus,
4. Concrete security concern have sharpened progressively as Washington has broken a series of major arms control agreements, expanded NATO, connived to replace friendly governments with American proxies via the notorious "color revolution," sought to undercut energy ties with European states, and deployed advanced weapons systems (above all, the anti-missile systems in Poland and Roumania able to be converted into offensive missile launchers), and via its 'rules-based international order' sloganeering and democracy vs autocracy campaign make explicit its intention to do everything possible to rig the game of world politics in its favor.
5. Ukraine, they believe, became the occasion (not the cause) to pin down a Russia whose growing strength discomfited and annoyed the Americans. It represented a conscious decision of the Biden administration under the sway of reborn Cold Warriors in State, the NSC, the CIA and the Pentagon. The triumph of their will in a government bereft of contrary voices and led by a weak, manipulable President was a sure thing. The Ukraine anti-Russia operation began in March with the Washington encouraged build-up of Ukrainian military forces along the Donbass Contact Line, delivery of large quantities of arms including Javelin anti-armor weapons, renewed talk of heavy economic sanctions, and a chorus of shrill rhetoric from all quarters in Washington and Brussels.
6. The American objective of putting Russia back in its subordinate place was taken as an obvious given by the Kremlin. Uncertainty existed on the question of what initiatives on the ground to expect: a major assault on the Donbass or provocative acts to force a Russian reaction that could be used

as a pretext for imposing sanctions (above all, the cancelling of NORDSTROM II).

7. It is likely that senior policymakers in Washington themselves had not made a definitive judgment on the issue. Divisions among individual players and a wavering President could very well have left important matters unresolved within a soft, cloudy consensus. There was visible evidence of this in the repeated juxtaposition, and alternation, of bellicose rhetoric and Biden's mollifying words in public and the "let's not go to war" telephone conversations he initiated to Putin and reaffirmed at their Geneva Summit.
8. In Moscow, there likely also were differences of opinion – or, more accurately, of emphasis. They surely led to some divergences over what actions Russia should take. It is essential to bear in mind that Putin himself seems to have been closer to the dovish end of the continuum among Security Council members on the overarching issue of how to deal with the U.S., with the West, and particularly Ukraine. One could imagine a gradual hardening of thinking among all individuals as tensions mounted and frustrations grew in the Kremlin. A Putin, who might have been trying to fashion an approach that reconciled his own wariness about military confrontation with genuine worry about the threats to Russian security presented by Washington's hardline, might have found himself in a quandary.

That could explain the promulgation of that strange demarche/position paper wherein he laid out in detail a list of demands for a drastic revision of Europe's security configuration punctuated by an emphasis on time urgency. That is to say, a Hail Mary to stay the hand of a growing consensus that the time had come for Russia to hit back at the West in the Ukraine. Two things tipped Putin's thinking into accepting the necessity of doing what he did. One was the West's unbending and unaccommodating response. The other, was the Ukrainian' launching an unprecedented artillery and mortar barrage against the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. Who took that fateful step? Elements of the Ukraine Army and the Security Council? The AZOV brigade and associated parties? Zelensky? With how much encouragement from the CIA and/or the White House?

## *ON HUMILIATION*

The Mafia are not known for its creative use of language beyond terms like 'hitman,' 'go to the mattresses,' 'living with the fishes' and suchlike. There are, though, a few pithy sayings that carry enduring wisdom. One concerns honor and revenge: 'If you are going to humiliate someone publicly in a really crass manner, make sure that he doesn't survive to take his inevitable revenge.' Violate it at your peril. That enduring truth has been demonstrated by Russia's actions in the Ukraine which, to a great extent – are the culmination of the numerous humiliations that the West, under American instigation, has inflicted on Russia's rulers and the country as a whole over the past 30 years.

They have been treated as a sinner sentenced to accept the role of a penitent who clad in sackcloth, marked with ashes, is expected to

appear among the nations with head bowed forever. No right to have its own interests, its own security concerns or even its own opinions. Few in the West questioned the viability of such a prescription for a country of 160 million, territorially the biggest in the world, possessing vast resources of critical value to other industrial nations, technologically sophisticated and custodian of 3,000 + nuclear weapons. No mafia don would have been that obtuse. But our rulers are cut from a different cloth even if their strut and conceit often matches that of the capos in important respects.

This is not to say that Russia's political class has been bent on revenge for a decade or two – like France after its humiliation by Prussia in 1871, like Germany after its humiliation in 1918-1919, or like 'Bennie from the Bronx' beaten up in front of his girlfriend by Al Pacino in *Carlito's Way*. Quite the opposite, for almost a decade Boris Yeltsin was content to play Falstaff to any American President who came along just for the sake of being accepted into his company (and allowing himself to be robbed blind in the process – economically and diplomatically). The West nostalgically celebrates the Yeltsin years as the Golden Age of Russian Democracy – an age when life expectancy dropped sharply, when alcoholism rose and mental health declined, when the tanking economy threw millions into poverty, when the oligarchs strutted their stuff, when the Presidential chauffeur was the most influential man in the country, and when everyone was free to shoot his mouth off since nobody else heard him in the din of their own voices. *You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs* – to coin a phrase.

Vladimir Putin, of course, was made of sterner stuff. He put an end to the buffoonery, successfully took on the Herculean task of reconstituting Russia as a viable state, and presented himself as ruler of an equal sovereign in cultivating relations with his

neighbors. In addition, he insisted that the civil rights and culture of Russians stranded in the Near Abroad be respected. Still, he gave no sign by word or deed that he contemplated using coercive means to restore the integration of Russian and Ukraine that had existed for more than 300 years. True, he opposed Western attempts to sever the ties between the two by incorporating Ukraine into their collective institutions – most notably the NATO declaration of 2008 stating that Ukraine (along with Georgia) were in the alliance’s antechamber being readied for entrance. Putin’s restraint contrasted with the audacity of Washington and its European subordinates who instigated the Maidan coup toppling the democratically elected President and promoting an American puppet in his place. In effect, the United States has been Ukraine’s overseer ever since – a sort of absentee landlord.

Putin’s views about the preferred principles of organization and conduct that should govern inter-state relations have been elaborated in a series of speeches and articles over the years. The picture it draws is far different from the cartoonish distortion created and disseminated in the West. It clearly delineates ways and means to constrain and limit the element of conflict, above all military conflict, the requirement for rules-of-the-road that should serve as the systems software, the necessity of recognizing that the future will be more multipolar – yet more multilateral – than it has been since 1991. At the same time, he stresses that every state has its legitimate national interests and the right to promote them as a sovereign entity so long as it does not endanger world peace and stability. Russia has that right on an equal basis with every other state. It also has the right to order its public life as it deems best suits its circumstances.

Western leaders, and political class generally, have not accepted those propositions. Nor have they ever shown a modicum of interest in accepting Moscow’s repeated, open invitation to discuss them.

Rather, every attempt by Russia to act in accordance with that logic has been viewed through a glass darkly – interpreted as confirmation of Russia as an outlaw state whose dictatorial leader is bent on restoring a malign Russian influence dedicated to undermining the good works of the Western democracies.

This attitude has progressively lowered the bar on accusation and insult directed at Russia and Putin personally. For Hillary Clinton he was “a new Hitler” as far back as 2016, for Joe Biden he was a ‘killer,’ for Congress members a Satan using a bag of diabolical instruments to corrupt and destroy American democracy. For all of them, a tyrant turning Russia back to the political dark ages after the glowing democratic spring of the Yeltsin years, an assassin – albeit an inept one whose targeted victims somehow survived in unnatural numbers, for the Pentagon a growing menace who moved rapidly up the enemies list – displacing Islamic terrorism by 2017 and vying with China for the top spot ever since.

The obsession with Putin the Evil spread as Washington pushed its allies hard to join in the denunciation. The grossness of their personal attacks on Putin matched the ever-expanding scope of the accusations. In recent years, no election could be held in Europe without the levelling of charges that the Kremlin was ‘interfering’ by some unspecified means or other – and at Putin’s personal direction. The absence of evidence was irrelevant. Russia became the *pinata* there to be smashed whenever one felt the urge or saw a domestic political advantage.

None of the above discussion is meant to suggest that Russia’s foreign policy, in particular the invasion of Ukraine, can be personalized or reduced to the level of feelings and emotions. Putin himself constantly displays an exceptional emotional and intellectual discipline. Putin is not a ‘Benny from the Bronx.’ He does not act on impulse nor does he allow his judgment to be clouded by considerations of a purely individual nature. Russia had tangible



grounds for concerns about the implications of developments in Ukraine and trends in Eastern Europe generally that jeopardized the country's security interests. The thinking of Putin and his associates about how to deal with them expressed carefully thought out analyses and strategies – as surely did the eventual decision to take military action.

Revenge *per se* was less significant than what Western treatment of Russia since 1991 augured for the future. In other words, the constant reinforcement of hostile images and intentions, as felt by Moscow, via the steady barrage of attacks and accusations colored the way that Russian leaders assayed the prospects for alleviating the threats they saw in Western actions – including their conduct throughout 2022.

### ***Conclusion***

The West had a variety of options for addressing the Russia question after 1991. One was to take advantage of its weakness to the fullest and to treat the country as a second-class nation in the American directed world system. That was the strategy we chose. It inescapably meant humiliation. What we didn't recognize is that in doing so we were planting the seeds of future hostility. Over the years, every sign of a Russia rising from the ashes fed latent, if inchoate, fears of the bear coming out of hibernation. Instead of recognizing that the post-Yeltsin political elite resented the decade of disparagement and humiliation, and taking steps to compensate for it (e.g. carving out a place for Russia in Europe's post-Cold War political configuration), anxiety led the West down the exact opposite course. Putin's Russia was painted in ever more frightening caricatures while shunning became the order of the day. Demonstrations of Russia's growing self-confidence, and unwillingness to be pushed around – as in southern Ossetia in 2008 and then more stunningly in Syria in 2015, quickly evoked all the old

Cold War images and set the pre-primed alarm bells ringing. Ignorance of Russian realities, coupled with the demonization of Putin whose actual thoughts didn't interest them, Western leaders and pundits fretted that their master plan for an American overseen global system was being jeopardized. Now from the old enemy – Russia, and the new enemy – China. One set of anxieties reinforces the other.

Back in the 1990s, the humiliation of Russia logically could have been followed by the traditional mafia act of termination. Forestall any form of retaliation by killing off the victim. Of course, it is a lot harder to liquidate a country than an individual and his close associates. It has been done, though. Think of Rome razing Carthage. After victory in the Second Punic War, the Romans were in a position to act on Cato's admonition: "Carthage must die!" Legend has it that they sowed the fields with salt. That, of course, is nonsense – the Romans were not that dumb. The Carthogenian lands became one of the empire's two great granaries. They reconstituted the state and put in place a security apparatus that served their practical interests. (Rome didn't even have to repopulate the place since most of the inhabitants were partially 'Punicized' ethnic Berbers who gradually became partially Romanized Berbers. As, today, Maghrebis are Arabized Berbers for the most part). Roman pragmatism, in this respect, can be contrasted with Germany's readiness to cut itself off from vitally needed Russian natural gas supplies; admittedly, the Romans were not obeying orders from a United States that doesn't rely on energy resources from Russia.

Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde, too, acted in accordance with their version of the liquidation strategy. It worked. The Abbasid dynasty and all the other states they destroyed never were in a position to wreak revenge. The Mongols and their Turkic auxiliaries

avoided retribution and suffering at the vengeful hands of the countries they ravaged.

There are other methods as well for permanently eliminating a foe. Genocide is the most extreme – as implemented by Belgium in the Congo, the Germans in Namibia and the European occupiers of North America. Dismemberment is another. The tripartite division and annexation of Poland is the outstanding example. The total breakup of Ottoman Turkey as envisaged at Versailles is another. A few people in Washington did promote the idea of executing a similar strategy against the Soviet Union/Russia. Beyond enlarging NATO so as to render prospects for a Russian revival as a European power nugatory, they envisaged breaking up the country into a number of fragmented parts. The Polish-born Zbigniew Brzezinski is the best known of these Mongol acolytes. Washington's unrelenting efforts to build a permanent wall between Ukraine and Russia grows out of this soil; so, too, assiduous efforts to provide aid and comfort to anti-Russian elements in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Kazakhstan (as recent events in the last three signify).

The Western approach toward post-Soviet Russia which entailed marginalization and attendant humiliation was favored for a number of reasons, as summarized above. We should add that there was an additional, facilitating factor at work. The chosen strategy was much easier to implement – intellectually and diplomatically. Its simplicity appealed to Western leaders sorely lacking in the attributes of astute statesmanship. That disability skews their attitudes and policies to this day.

## *MORAL MATTERS*

***War and conflict are the enemies of truth.*** Accurate perception, precise language and objectivity are its first victims. For good reason. Emotion eclipses reason. The 'we/they' prism refracts and distorts our thoughts. The individual is swept up into the mass mood. Frenzy roils just below the surface.

Experiences of war and conflict, though, are not identical. They vary. Whose blood is being shed, in what quantities? Are we the direct protagonist or just the empathetic supporters of certain combatants? How closely and why do we identify with one side? How much do we hate the other side? Is our collective self ginger

and vulnerable or self-confident? What is the pre-existing anxiety level? Consequently, each situation is peculiar. A country's subjective response and attendant behavior, therefore, can be highly revealing.

Unfortunately, observation is blurred and selective. We are poor witnesses to ourselves. Sometimes, we never do gain the perspective needed for a clear rendering of what happened, how we felt and what we did. Oddly, the more peculiar the experience, the less the inclination and ability to reflect on it. Such is the case in regard to the current Ukraine affair. That singular feature is itself noteworthy. For that is not due to indifference – quite the opposite. Washington is the producer and would-be director of the drama as well as the co-star. The feature that cries out for our critical attention is the frenzy that the Ukraine conflict has engendered. This despite the absence of an American military presence, no obvious national interest of the first order at stake, and its erupting at a time when one would have thought the country's appetite for this sort of thing satiated by two decades of endless, failed wars in nearly every part of the world.

My principal concern here is not to answer the question of 'why?' I have tried to address that in previous commentaries. Instead, the

aim is to highlight those characteristics of our collective national persona brought into stark relief by our reaction to events.

**HYPOCRISY.** The air is rank with it. The overwrought emotional response to events, concentrated in D.C., spreads across the land – from sea to shining sea. As per usual, it is the MSM and the politicians who take the lead and set the tone. Sympathy for human suffering is admirable when genuine and the expression of sensitive, empathetic concern for our fellows., when we are moved by the occasion and not just the ritual. Honoring the victims of mass shootings, hate bombings, and natural disasters is moving and in a sense reassuring.

Today, we are seeing an outpouring of sentiment over the plight of Ukrainians. Most striking is the upwelling of vigils, prayer sessions and protests at universities. Demonstrative displays of feelings that are of this scope should set us to reflect on their full meaning. Here are a few things to consider.

Civilian casualties in Ukraine are relatively few. Despite the strenuous efforts to find them, actual numbers appear to be in the order of 300-400. For good reasons, Russian forces are calculatingly avoiding attacks on urban centers; after all, 40% of the population is

Russian and concentrated in the regions where the fighting is taking place. Moreover, Moscow has no interest in subjugating the country to its rule. In comparison, the Ukrainian army has been shelling the city centers of Lugansk and Donetsk, producing casualties estimated by a UN agency at more than 1,300 (3 or 4 times what objective observers estimate on the Ukrainian government's side of the battle lines). Also, the water system has been destroyed. Yet, these facts are unreported and unnoticed in the total absence of media presence in an area they have erased from their reportorial map.

A broader perspective is instructive. During the week of combat in Ukraine, a larger number of innocent civilians in other places have died from American actions. In Yemen, the unrelenting Saudi bombing and strangulation of the Houthi regions continues to take a heavy toll: from weapons, from starvation, from disease. This carnage could not have occurred without direct involvement by the U.S. military. Although the American contribution has diminished over the past year or so, we continue to play a considerable role in the Saudi onslaught. Our officers have sat in Air Force command posts in Saudi Arabia pinpointing targets, our planes have done the refueling of Saudi aircraft which, otherwise, could not have reached their targets, we have supplied the weapons and ammunition marked 'Made In U.S.A.' And we have participated in the embargo

that has prevented food and medicines from getting to the needy. Famine has added immeasurably to the casualties. Over the past 6 years, tens of thousands have been killed, maimed or invalidated by illness.

The carnage in Yemen to which we are accomplices is not collateral to the defense of any American national interest or the suppression of any threat. Its only rationalization is a dubious calculation that putting our arms around the shoulders of the psychopathic butcher Mohammed bin-Salman in Riyadh is worth the massive suffering of Yemeni innocents. That decision was made by President Obama and his Vice-President Joe Biden, reaffirmed by Donald Trump and continues to this day by President Joe Biden – the great humanitarian who last night shed copious crocodile tears for Ukraine.

Yet, one can search high-and-low for a vigil, a wake, a memorial service to honor the victims of our own government's callous disrespect for human life in Yemen. None at our institutions of higher learning, almost none in our places of worship, just fleeting platitudes by a few folks on Capitol Hill. Certainly, no apologies to orphans, widows and invalids. The blood on our hands is invisible,



the blood on Russian hands undergoes microscopic examination.  
Hypocrisy in caps.

Let us look at the wider record to see what it says about the American attitude toward law, a 'rule-based international system,' and criminal acts. The United States invaded and occupied the sovereign state of Iraq with no legal mandate whatsoever, no legitimate claim – however stretched – of self-defense, and with no expression of approval from the Iraq people. The results: tens of thousands killed directly by our military and their mercenaries, hundreds of thousands killed in the ensuing violence we provoked, untold wounded, and razing into moonscapes Falluja (twice), Mosul, Raqqa, sections of Baghdad and numerous smaller towns. The U.S. Marines alone fired 20,000+ artillery shells into densely populated Mosul – separate from weeks of aerial bombing. Empathy? Our government waited 3 years before making the reluctant 'admission' of 483 civilians dying in Mosul. By the standards applied to Ukraine, as headlined in *The New York Times*, that last figure would be publicized as a million or so. In fact, the true figure has been estimated as well over 10,000.

Then, there is ISIS. We are responsible for its very existence and, therefore, its grisly deeds. Its birthing was in the prison (Camp

Bucca), set up by General Stanley McCrystal, where we cooped up many thousands swept up indiscriminately. The grim conditions were the breeding grounds for its leadership and their recruiting paradise.

In Afghanistan, the thirst for revenge for 9/1 drove us to spend 20 years generating violent chaos – 19 of them directed at the Taliban, not al-Qaeda. To this day, the Taliban has not killed a single American outside of Afghanistan. We have killed tens of thousands and inflicted suffering on many more. Now, in the wake of our shameful flight, the country is starving. Desperate women are selling their kidneys to organ traffickers in order to feed their kids. A decent society, with a person of integrity at its head, would invite one of those women to attend the President's State of the Union Address as an honored guest – perhaps seated next to Jill Biden along with the Ukrainian Ambassador. Such a symbolic gesture would do more to advance America's reputation and influence around the world than all the hollow posturing by Biden's bunch of stumbling amateur foreign policy makers.

We have responded to those dire conditions by imposing economic sanctions. In a move that should be inscribed in its own page of infamy, humanitarian Joe Biden literally stole \$8 billion of Afghan

money held in U.S. based banks and the Federal Reserve. That is not Taliban money, and it is not just the state's money either. Most belongs to small merchants and individuals whose deposits were transferred to the Afghani central bank for safe-keeping. That is as close as you can get to actually taking bread out of a baby's mouth. Willi Sutton never had it so good – nor was he so morally crass as to boast of his humanitarian instincts.

Finally, let us not forget America's full, unwavering endorsement of Israel's repeated bloody campaigns to 'mow the lawn' in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories. There, each 'mowing' causes thousands of casualties. There, schools, hospitals and the offices of disobedient journalists are indeed targeted.

The bill of indictment is a long one. We haven't even touched on the torture regime that we organized on a global basis – in explicit violation of international law, treaties and American statutes, too. A 'rule-based international system,' indeed.

All of the peoples victimized, neglected and forgotten who are noted above share one common trait. I'll leave its identity to your imagination. A hint: throw into the mix the Bosniaks?

**LYING**

Lying is the handmaiden to hypocrisy.

We Americans gradually have become used to lying and deceit from our leaders – whether in government or other big, powerful institutions. Even the CDC has succumbed to the fashion – losing its immunity in the course of the epidemic. We call it disinformation because ‘lie’ strikes many as too blunt for our sensitive eyes and ears. The *NYT* has a strict rule, in fact, not to use the word ‘lie.’ Not even Donald Trump has ever ‘lied’ insofar as its editors are concerned. In a sense, we have become inured to lying since it is so commonplace. Only the incurable innocents believe what is told them by political candidates or purveyors of electronic gizmos. Moreover, the line between truth and fiction has become so blurred that reality has lost much of its previous claim to preeminence. Everything, we are advised, is subjective; whatever you want to believe is the truth. So, despite the record of massive mendacity chalked up by the CIA, the Pentagon, the State Department and White House spokespersons over the years, the MSM swallow whole whatever is being sold and then they repackage it as reporting and sell it to us word-for-word.

Here’s a stark example. On March 2 President Biden was asked whether Russian forces are deliberately targeting civilian areas in Ukraine, the president says, “It’s clear they are.” An outright lie – picked up and

transmitted without comment. The wrinkle in this instance that this is the same lie that the MSM had been disseminating for days. Two-way mendacity between the chief executive and the so-called Fourth Estate. Cozy. Those who know better will be kept at bay – non-persons.

So, we read in the august *NYT* that *Russia Launches Missile Attack On Ukrainian Cities. Civilian Casualties Mount, Russian Offense on Kharkiv Stalls, Russia's Pounding of Key Ukrainian Cities Is Escalated*, etc., etc. All nonsense, all lies. Never corrected. They are just sub-heads in a fictional story designed to mythologize, to entertain, and to control thought. Straight out of *1984*; who needs censorship? A body politique incapable of enunciating and observing reasonable ethical standards of behavior should still find it within itself to engage in an honest discussion and debate on matters of supposed national consequence. Ukraine has shown, once again, that we are not so capable.

Why does a President so casually lie in public? Well, for one thing, long experience tells him that he could get away with it. After all, most Americans still take at face value whatever they are told about the international scene despite their being lied to and deceived by their leaders. They lied about WMD in Iraq; they lied about the

reception to be expected from the Iraq people, they lied repeatedly about the insurrection, they lied repeatedly about torture, they lied about Petraeus' magnificent Iraqi national army that fled before Mosul. They lied for 20 years straight about progress in Afghanistan; they lied about our dealings with al-Qaeda and associated jihadist groups in Syria, they lied about the critical support given ISIS by Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. They also lied in denying the comprehensive electronic surveillance of Americans' communications. So why should we take their word for what they say about events in Ukraine? Yet we do – for several reasons. One, we have become a gullible people. Two, we hold a picture of reality that has been shaped by the MSM which does not prize accuracy. Three, we really are not terribly interested in the truth. What we want is conformity to the story line that has been laid out for us, that compliments the United States, that we have been conditioned to believe, that doesn't either strain our mental faculties or challenge our beliefs. Joe Biden knows all of that. Does he also know that American credibility suffers as a consequence among other governments that you are going to have to deal with? To paraphrase that master diplomat Victoria Nuland: "Fuck the Russians! Fuck the Chinese! Fuck the Indians!" And don't even bother to fuck our European allies since they already have fucked themselves.

**The current passion and range of the reaction in the West calls for close examination.** Here, we are in the realm of social psychology and mass behavior. Hysteria – at times, in its extreme expressions. Bicocca University in Milan canceled a course on Dostyevsky taught by an Italian professor. The Munich Philharmonic has fired its acclaimed Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, because he refuses a diktat that he criticize Putin and the Ukraine invasion. They are seconded by orchestras in Rotterdam, New York, Vienna, and la Scala which have canceled all his engagements. Silence is not tolerated.

Equally outrageous, the famed soprano, Anna Netrebko, has forced to drop appearances at the Zurich opera House because she is deemed irremediably tainted by having received an award for artistic achievement from Putin personally and having voted for him in a past election. Long resident in Vienna, married to a Uruguayan baritone, she in fact has issued a statement condemning the war as senseless “aggression” and calls on “Russia to end it right now.” Even that cut no ice with the Inquisition. The general manager of the New York Met, Peter Gleb, who has assumed the authority of New York’s Gauleiter for cultural purity, declared that “denouncing the war is not enough.” Presumably, he wants Netrebko to arm herself

with Madama Butterfly's knife, infiltrate the Kremlin, and kill Putin in his pajamas. The threat to cancel her spring appearances make as much sense as cancelling performances by Itzhak Perlman at Carnegie Hall because he has dined with Bibi Netanyahu at a time of a Gaza onslaught, and there shook the hand of Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman whose solution to the Palestinian problem is to expel all Arabs from the Holy Land into the desert, i.e. the Armenian solution.

If Netrebko's long-time colleagues in the music world had any principles or guts, they would issue an ultimatum, quite her persecution or we'll all boycott the Met's entire season. Within 24 hours, the curtain would drop on this despicable affair. Of course, that never will happen – these days, all spheres of Western society are permeated with cowardice.

These distinguished personages thereby join the ranks of the know-nothings like the restaurant owners who are renaming Russian dressing as *Ukrainian dressing* and Beef Stroganoff as *Beef Zelensky*. There is precedent, the solons of the U.S. Congress back in 2001 changed their menu to substitute *Freedom Fries* for the unspeakable *French Fries*. And in WW I, sauerkraut became *Liberty Cabbage*. Children will be children.



Then there is the Czech government issuing a decree that declares the expressing a favorable opinion about the Russian intervention a crime that will make you liable to prosecution and imprisonment. Even the Prague regime is overmatched by this blow struck for peace and freedom: the International Federation of Felines (FIFe) on Tuesday ordered a ban on the importation of Russian-bred cats, presumably anywhere in the world. “No cat bred in Russia may be imported and registered in any FIFe pedigree book outside Russia, regardless of, which organization issued its pedigree,” the FIFe board said in a statement.

To search for an explanation of this behavior, one would have to dive into the turbid depths of the human mind. That is beyond the scope of this essay. A couple of thoughts do come to mind. One is that this overreaction may be propelled in part by hidden feelings of guilt about the West’s irresponsible abstention in doing next to nothing to prevent or even mitigate the atrocities in Bosnia. Silence, then, was golden. (And public lies the order of the day: e.g., German President Franz-Walter Steinmeier and then Foreign Minister outstanding among them). Perhaps, those feelings were strengthened by the excesses of the American ‘War On Terror’ in which the Europeans were accomplices in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. In addition to the provision of tangible aid, every NATO government was an accomplice in the rendition program, in one way or another – with the sole exception of France. They, thus, found

themselves on the wrong side of a line of blood. Crossing back is important for a group of nations whose self-identity, and their one card in playing the game of international politics, is their proclaimed virtue and enlightenment.

A second, related point of conjecture is that these people have lived 'non-moral' lives in an ethically sterile environment. That is to say that they never were placed in or sought circumstances where they faced difficult moral choices – where they had to affirm through action the ideals and virtues to which they nominally adhere. At some level, certain of these well-educated enlightened elites felt that void to varying degrees. Suddenly, out of the blue comes a golden opportunity to do so. To do so without pain or serious cost, with the mutual support of a large consort of cosmopolitan fellows. There may be unwelcome consequences, but in the moment of exhilaration they are sublimated. The one negative that may enter the margins of consciousness is that people will freeze/sweat in the dark. Even then, well-heeled elites don't freeze or sweat – unless they live in Texas.

As so often is the case in present times, the 'problem' lies not out there but rather in ourselves.

## **GROUP THINK**

We Americans pride ourselves on our independence, our individualism, our autonomy as citizens. “Don’t tread on me! Don’t mess with Texas! I’m from Missouri! Prove it!” Once upon a time, they might have been a semblance of truth to this. There no longer is. We long ago achieved a herd mentality. Our skepticism, our readiness to question, our ability to apply an elementary yet useful common logic – all that has become nothing but faded memory and legend. Commercial advertising, TV, and the dumbing down of education have done their work well. Public discussion on matters of public interest is shallow and dropping steadily year by year. Our leaders are at once effect and reinforcing cause of this phenomenon.

We find it far easier, comfortable and convenient to inhabit the same world of fable and fantasy that our fellows inhabit. This is most strikingly true in regard to our national identity, our place in the world, and our dealings with other nations.

As the gap between fantasy world and actual world realities widens, the need for reinforcement through manifestations of consensus gets stronger. So, too, the intolerance of dissent – its logical corollary. We saw that during the active period of the War on

Terror. We see that today in regard to Russia and in regard to China. This group think is policed with a light hand because it is so enveloping and the outcome of willing adherence to the fantastic creations to which we are donors and observers alike.

An illustrative anecdote. Some of my recent commentaries have evoked an unusually large number of replies: as many as a dozen out of 5,400 recipients (The Age of Communication?) A couple received last week are worth noting. They are both from retired ambassadors with whom I had had friendly exchanges previously, one of whom bears a name that many of you would recognize for notable accomplishments in the past. He writes undiplomatically: ***“How much were you paid to write this? You are going to lose what little standing you have left as a serious academic.”***

The other retired diplomat wrote this:

***“Forgive me, but you’re sounding like a number of old FSO’s, so-called strategic foreign policy ‘Russian experts’ with whom I’ve lost patience. We are NOT still in the 20th c., generations and history and modernity have moved forward ....It is NoT humiliated, historic Russia in the abstract that is choosing to invade Ukraine now; it is Vladimir PUTIN in particular..... It is about the man, more than the country or its interests and government. The main problem is that both our law***

***and international law and order have never been able to deal with damaged, insecure and delusional Aging leaders a priori!! "***

So it goes. Enough said.

### ***Friends and Colleagues***

***Some measure of coherence might be lent the frenzied discourse about Ukraine by distinguishing among 5 aspects of the subject. They are: 1) background/context/ circumstances; 2) the lead-up to the war - heightened crisis November - February; 3) the Russian decision to go to war, its conduct, and attendant moral questions; 4) the reaction to the hostilities; 5) consequences and implications - economic and geostrategic. That is not being done. Instead, any attempt to do so provokes condemnation for failing to make a ritual denunciation of Russia and all things Russian - including sopranos (above all the attractive ones guaranteed to stir the mob gathered to savor the Auto-da-Fé). As a result, collective emotion bordering on the hysteric distorts and colors consideration of all of them beyond recognition as serious reportage or analysis. It is a sad demonstration of the total lack of discipline in the MSM, among the politicos, and denizens of the incestuous think-tank world. Irresponsible and unforgiveable.***

***Attached is an essay by Chris Hedges that separates the ethical issues from the political ones while placing both in perspective.***

***Below are two references (URLs) that look skeptically at the latest hot-button headline story: the alleged bombing of a maternity hospital. As***

*it turns out, this "Russian atrocity" is a fabrication. That should have been obvious to anyone capable at paying concentrated attention to the videos and the logically contradictory accounts. E.g. you can't drop 500-pound bombs or barrages of artillery shells on a huge hospital complex and produce either zero or 3 deaths, depending on which version you hear. Just as you cannot produce carnage without leaving a drop of blood in sight or blow out several score windows in a vast building without doing structural damage. Our leaders surely know this since even Western security services are capable of such elementary observation. Knaves &/or fools.*

*For the true believers in what governments, and the Facebook/Twitter censors tell them: I have available for inspection a portfolio of photographs that include fine-grained pictures of Saddam's mobile biological weapon lab, Vietnamese patrol boats firing on U.S. naval vessels in the Tonkin Gulf, and graphic images of the 13 times that Syria/Russia destroyed "the last hospital in Aleppo/East Damascus."*

*There was a time when we as a people were secure enough in our self-identity that we thought it instructive to hear German broadcasts (and even Hitler's harangues) on the radio. When nobody sought to block Tokyo Rose. But, today, viewing RT or accessing the Kremlin website or communicating about an official statement by the Russian government is suppressed as unpatriotic, if not downright subversive. This is something to ponder. What or whom are we afraid of?*

## *PRIDE & PREJUDICE*

Among the many oddities of the Ukraine affairs, the most astonishing is the frenzy of hostile passion directed at Putin, Russia and everything Russian. Nothing close to this has been seen since World War II when Hitler and the Nazis were Satan incarnate. Even then, it was not everything German that was cast as evil. That total condemnation was reserved for the Japanese. During the depths of the Cold War, it was Communism and the Soviet Union that were the object of fear and antipathy – not quite completely synonymous with Russia.

This puzzling phenomenon cries out for explanation. The first thing to be said on this score, is that the passion and drive have come from American elites. There has been no great wave of popular outrage, no mass demonstrations, no blood-curdling calls for revenge and punishment. No post-9/11 national trauma. Instead, the fury is generated by our government leaders (Blinken, Sullivan, Nuland, Harris, Pelosi, Cruz); from the media world's clueless news presenters *cum* propogandists, from the demonically possessed editors of *The New York Times* who have discovered the thrills of

'yellow journalism,' from the likes of Peter Gelb, from the scores of Nobel Prize winners who in concert have lent their weight to the crusade; from the university presidents presiding over pious vigils who are thankful that the spotlight is shifting away from the unnumerable scandals they are paid hefty sums to whitewash; and Gold Medal to the IOC who ban crippled athletes from competing in the Winter Paralympics because their passport says '*Russia*'. All are hugely self-satisfied. None of them ever blinked an eye as the United States for 20 years has killed, maimed, starved and tortured hundreds of thousands in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria *et al* in exercises of brutality that have left the country's security in a more precarious state than when the onslaught began. Doubtless, we soon will read that Zuckerberg has forbidden use of the term "*Russian roulette*." When he does, how about '*Neo-Con roulette*' as a substitute.

This essay is in two parts. Part I examines a number of hypotheses as to the reasons for the irrational reaction. Part II takes a critical look at the public letter sent by over 200 Nobel Laureates castigating Putin and Russia.

## *I. WHY?*

### **HISTORICAL HOSTILITY**

The United States and Russia have never fought a war. No bad blood is between them. The one, minor American expeditionary force deployed near Archangel and at Vladivostok during the Russian civil war in 1918-1919. This symbolic gesture led to just a handful of casualties. There also were a few dogfights over the Yalu River in Korea where some MIG pilots reportedly were Russian. That's it. It is doubtful that more than 1 American in a thousand ever heard of those incidents. The Cold War, admittedly, was a multi-layered



hostile confrontation that lasted for 40 years. But military combat was limited to proxies. Then, too, the two countries were allies in the great test of WW II – without Soviet/Russian fortitude and sacrifice, Germany may not have been defeated.

In other words, one sees no basis for the visceral antagonism toward Russia and Russians now being demonstrated. Among many, even at the highest levels, emotions shade into outright hatred. It is hard to find equivalents; that is to say, analogous passions certainly are to be found in the annals of history, but never against an essentially benign background.

### **ASCRPTIVE DIVISION**

Societies all have affinities and aversions with others based on race, ethnicity, language, ideology or religion. They can lead to empathy and bonding or a sense of separation and distaste. Often, the latter sentiments have fueled or aggravated competition and conflict. The examples are too numerous and obvious to denote. When we turn our attention to Russo-American mutual perceptions, we observe little in the way of rooted ascriptive divisions. Both are overwhelmingly Caucasian and Christian in heritage. Catholic vs Orthodox rivalries are distant in time and place. Ethnically, Slavic Russia does not stand in stark contrast to the multitudinous American mix. The contrasts and divergences derive from the all-out ideological war between the Soviet Union's aggressive secularism accompanying Communism's threat to Western politico-economic foundations.

Bolshevism, and the Soviet system that it fathered, was singularly thin on ascriptive characteristics. Sure, in important respects, that condition emerged from the *Russian* empire where Russia predominated throughout. A scan of the roster of the USSR's elites reveals just how multinational it was. Brezhnev, Voroshilov and

Trotsky were from Ukraine – as were hundreds of senior officials in all spheres. The large Jewish presence in the Bolshevik leadership ranks is well-known: Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek, Yagoda, Kaganovich, Sverdlov. Lenin himself reportedly was ¼ Jewish, Russian. German and Swedish in terms of ethnic ancestry. Molotov and Dzerzhinsky (the Polish nobleman who founded the Cheka/NKVD) had Jewish wives. Stalin and Beria, of course, were Georgians; Mikoyan was Armenian; Yezhev was Lithuanian – and so on. The political leadership of the country today is distinctly more ethnically Russian, leavened by a fair number of ethnic Jews who survived and didn't emigrate (e.g. the Deputy Foreign Minister and the 2 high-ranking officials who head the Russian delegation in negotiations with Ukraine). So, it would be far-fetched to seek explanations for the American political class's fierce anti-Russian antagonism to some kind of atavistic aversion.

## **FEAR & DREAD**

Americans do not see a threat to their national security from any conventional Russian military menace. In this sense, minds and moods differ fundamentally from where they were during the Cold War. Sure, Russia still has the physical capability to destroy the United States with nuclear weapons. However, we have come to live with the Bomb and post-Soviet Russia never was cast in the same dark colors. Admittedly, the Pentagon placed Russia at Number 2 in its threat rankings as early as 2017 – in the aftermath of its intervention in Syria. But that had more to do with budgets and wounded pride at having failed a mission once again than it did serious worry. Russia was more a surprising than a threat.

That explains why the Ukraine affairs was viewed as a serious concern by only 26% of the public at the end of last year. That is to say, before the vast propaganda campaign got into full gear. Most

were as familiar with the country, and took as much interest in it, as they did Madagascar. (Nancy Pelosi could place it in Europe, but its exact geography eluded her). Even today, there is no rush to build bomb shelters or check with distant relatives the availability of housing deep in the sticks. Here, again, we have a discrepancy between public attitudes in general and our political elites – especially the foreign affairs community. Its pivot is less intellectual than it is one of feelings: pride, self-esteem and national esteem. It is among the latter that we find an acute concern about America's standing as Number 1 in the world: supreme, dominant and hegemonic. A gnawing sense that we are losing that status, that we are becoming an 'ordinary' power is unsettling. China's rise, financial turmoil, job insecurity, the growing signs that fewer countries now bow instinctively to our will as readily as they did in the past – together, they undercut personal self-regard which, throughout American history, has drawn strength and credibility from the country's standing as the trailblazer of human progress. Hence, a creeping sense of dread, i.e. free floating anxiety. Its shifting fixation moves from Islamic terrorism, to China, to Russia with stopovers at Iran, Venezuela, Cuba. Everything bugs us disproportionately – even the crickets in Havana.

## **INDIVIDUAL/GROUP PSYCHOLOGY**

To search for an explanation of this behavior, one would have to dive into the turbid depths of the human mind. That is beyond the scope of this essay. A couple of thoughts do come to mind.

One is that this overreaction may be propelled in part by hidden feelings of guilt about the West's irresponsible abstention in doing next to nothing to prevent or even mitigate the atrocities in Bosnia. Silence, then, was golden. (And public lies the order of the day: e.g., German President Franz-Walter Steinmeier and then Foreign Minister outstanding among them). Perhaps, those feelings were

strengthened by the excesses of the American 'War On Terror' in which the Europeans were accomplices in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. In addition to the provision of tangible aid, every NATO government was an accomplice in the rendition program, in one way or another – with the sole exception of France. They, thus, found themselves on the wrong side of a line of blood. Crossing back is important for a group of nations whose self-identity, and their one card in playing the game of international politics, is their proclaimed virtue and enlightenment.

A second, related point of conjecture is that these people have lived 'non-moral' lives in an ethically sterile environment. That is to say that Western elites rarely were placed in or sought circumstances where they faced difficult moral choices – where they had to affirm through action the ideals and virtues to which they nominally adhere. They grew up in pedestrian circumstances. At some level, certain of these well-educated enlightened elites have felt that void to varying degrees. Suddenly, out of the blue comes a golden opportunity to do so. To do so without pain or serious cost, with the mutual support of a large consort of cosmopolitan fellows.

### ***THE TENDER AMERICAN EGO***

As I have written in an earlier commentary:

*'Americans are struggling to draw into focus their exalted image of themselves and reality. They are not doing a very good job of it. The gap is wide and growing. Fading prowess is one of the most difficult things for humans to cope with – whether it be an individual or a nation. By nature, we prize our strength and competence; we dread decline and its intimations of extinction. This is especially so in the United States where for many the individual and the collective persona are inseparable. No other country tries so relentlessly to live its legend as does the U.S. Today, events are*

occurring that contradict the American narrative of a nation with a unique destiny. That creates cognitive dissonance.

America's idealized sense of self is rooted in the belief that we are pacesetters and world beaters in every domain. The state of affairs sketched above - marked by impulsive enterprises that underline our foredoomed, audacious ambition to gain global dominance - does not represent cool strategic judgment. It is the national equivalent of ostentatious iron-pumping by bodybuilders worried about losing muscle tone. Those worries never disappear, though, even as one becomes muscle-bound striving ever more energetically to reassure oneself that nothing is creeping up behind you. The mirror is much preferred to the backward glance.

Americanism acts as a Unified Field Theory of self-identity, collective enterprise, and the Republic's enduring meaning. When one element is felt to be jeopardy, the integrity of the whole edifice becomes vulnerable. In the past, American mythology energized the country in ways that helped it to thrive. Today, it is a dangerous hallucinogen that traps Americans in a time warp more and more distant from reality.

At the psychological level, this approach is understandable since it plays to the United States' strength: overweening self-confidence coupled to material strength - thereby perpetuating the national myths of being destined to remain the world's No. 1 forever, and of being in a position to shape the world system according to American principles and interests. The tension for a nation so constituted encountering objective reality does not favor heightened self-awareness or a change in behavior.. Today, there is no foreign policy debate whatsoever. In addition, our vassal governments in Europe and elsewhere either have a national interest in preserving the warped American view of the world (Israel, Poland) or have been so denatured over the decades that they are incapable of doing other than to follow Washington obediently - despite already having tumbled over a number of cliffs and staring at a potentially fatal abyss re. China and Russia

## **NIHILISM**

Finally, there is the facilitating factor: a society in which anything goes. Where norms, standards, codes of decent conduct are so diluted as to be inoperative. In our state of generalized alienation,

each of us is permitted – indeed, encouraged – to ‘do our own thing.’ Feelings of embarrassment, of shame, of guilt are weak or totally absent. Impulse, emotion, and – not -least – the enormous pressures of uniformity void that nominal freedom of meaning. Few have the wherewithal to work out an individual structure of values, of rights & wrongs. Whatever primitive benchmarks we walk around with, they obviously are inadequate to guide us when faced with complex issues, value contradictions, or the need for subtle, qualified judgment.

In these circumstances, it is unsurprising, if not inevitable, that “fuck the Russians” becomes the universal order of the day – for Nobel laureates, university presidents, pundits, editors, or wannabe moralists of every stripe. Not an edifying spectacle – or reassuring harbinger of what’s to come.

*P.S. In accordance with the principle of absolute candor in discussing these issues, we should consider the possibility that some of the over-the-top attacks on all that is Russian, from certain persons prominent in the anti-Russia campaign, could arise from family history – namely, a great-grandmother assaulted by Czarist-inspired Russians during the frequent pogroms in the Russian Empire, or some similar incident. Let me say in this regard that my paternal grandmother was indeed assaulted by Cossacks in the Ukraine in 1915. Yet, I never felt that was reason to freeze-dry my brain on all matters concerning either place OR to take revenge on Anna Netrebko, Daniel Medvedev, or those brave ‘Russian’ men and women who have been given the bum’s rush at the Paralympics. Anyone who does should be automatically disqualified from this discourse and their loudly advertised devotion to human rights placed in brackets.*

## *II. NOBLE NOBELS?*

*For people like the Nobel Laureates, signing one's name to a full-page add denouncing the vices of Russia may be experienced as a last-chance ethical saloon (or altar/lectern) – a god-given opportunity to secure one's place on the side of the Angels. That high stakes psychological motivation carried the implication that, in order for the moral uplift to take full effect, the subject of moral objection had to be exaggerated – to cartoonish extent. It is the fate of such expedient lunges for salvation to boomerang. The 200 or so Laureates put themselves in the position of adding fuel to the bonfire of anti-Russian passions. Perhaps the most disgraceful episode in this pogrom has been the banning of Russian athletes from the winter Paralympics on the grounds that their very presence would sully the games' moral purity.*

*On March 3 – a few days before the opening ceremony – the International Paralympic Committee told the Russians that they should get back into their wheelchairs and roll back to Moscow. This brutal action reversed, under intense Western pressure, an earlier decision to permit their participation. Let's make no bones about it: this is as morally atrocious conduct as is imaginable – obscene as taken in the name of ethics. Ethics as defined and shaped by elites, like many of the Laureates, whose morality arises from a calibrated, self-serving motivation rather than genuine empathy for the victimized. The outcome: they are accessories to the crime of inflicting incalculable pain on men and women whose lives have exceeded by far the normal measure of pain any human could expect; they insulted courageous persons whom we should honor and respect; they punctured hopes and dreams fashioned from a thousand hours of grueling perseverance; they pronounced guilt on the innocent. Their self-centered, obtuse try at exalting themselves has diminished them. They have added to the degraded spectacle of collective indecency.*

*God forgive them – for they know not what they do.*

*This is the end-point of a contrived and debased humanism that is a hallmark of our times. A humanism that places less value on fresh and blood*

*sentient people than it does on a doctrine, on self-gratification, on the political or emotional need for an enemy, on a public posture, on parochial interest. That is the mindset that, in modern times alone, has sent tens of millions to an early grave.*

**The Nobel petition** is meant to impress – and it does, representing the common opinion of over 203 persons of scholarly distinction. Still, I do not believe that it is disrespectful or a denigration of their academic accomplishment, to take a searching look at the authoritative basis for what they write, and the grounds for arguing that the public should accord them exceptional value. Such an inquiry can be organized in the form of a set of inter-related questions, i.e. the scientific method of dispassionate investigation and analysis.

1. What are the credentials of the 203 in making the **political judgments** that underlay their appeal? Do they possess exceptional information about the Ukraine-Russia affair? Have they studied the matter? How much of the factual data have they assimilated? There answer is none; that is to say, no more than that possessed by any educated person of superior intelligence who follows the news. Moreover, on all counts it is far inferior to that of truly knowledgeable persons (e.g. Ambassador Jack Matlock who played a central role in navigating the break-up of the Soviet Union) who have spent a lifetime studying Russia in all its dimensions. His outlook on the entire year-long crisis diverges in quite critical ways.

2. What are the credentials of the 203 in making the severe ethical judgments boldly stated in their letter? Are they versed in the **daunting complexities** of applying ethical standards to relations between states? How much knowledge of history do they have? Have they pondered the philosophical questions of guilt & innocence, of just & unjust war, of individual morality & the ethic of public responsibility? Here again, a fair assessment is that there is no evidence of their having acquired exceptional insight or experience. Of course, one would have to be familiar with the backgrounds of each of the signatories to reach a



definitive conclusion. However, it seems reasonable that in aggregate the 203 do not meet the standards that would qualify them as expert.

3. An essential trait of the scientific methods is to review all available empirical evidence gathered from diverse sources before making pronouncements – whether in the form of general laws or in assessment of particular cases. Let's get down to brass tacks.

Have the Laureates investigated other instances of inter-state violence? Whether or not they have, is there a record of judgments made publicly that are consistent with those they are making about Russia, Putin, and the conduct of the Russian military in Ukraine? To put in bluntly: what exactly have they said/written in regard to: a) the use of violence by the United States government in Iraq, in Yemen, in Syria, in Libya, in Somalia, in Afghanistan; b) the use of violent force by the state of Israel in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories and in Lebanon; c) the material American support given to repression regimes that kill, maim, torture and imprison their citizens (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Honduras, Guatemala, El-Salvador *inter alia*)?

4. The Laureates finely tuned sense of ethics presumably ranges far and wide. Presumably, it is applied with even greater vigor and rigor close to home. So, let's ask them: a) to Harvard professors: when and by what manner did you protest your institution's close, honored and lucrative relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, one that was publicly known and involved 3 Presidents?; b) to MIT Professors: when and by what manner did you protest your institution's receipt of substantial funds from Mr. Epstein – after his sordid criminal acts were on the public record?; c) to Yale Professors: which of you have protested your institution's summary firing of Dr. Bandy Lee for the sin of offering a professional judgment of our dangerous psychopathic President Trump – based on credentials infinitely superior to any you can boast on Putin's mental state/Russia/Ukraine, or hiring General Stanley McCrystal to a distinguished faculty position despite his having been the initiator and overseer of torture in Iraq and Afghanistan, or selling an academic piece of your university (Grand Strategy program) to two predatory billionaire

from the world of financial buccaneering in exchange for their right to censor curriculum and faculty assignments – culminating in the forced departure of its director last year? d) which of you have condemned the abuse of every academic ethical code by the American Psychological Association for entering into contracts with the CIA and the Pentagon to instruct them in torture techniques forbidden by American law, the U.S. Constitution and International Conventions to which we are signatories?

5. You proclaim the principle that every people has a right to existence as an independent country. What efforts have you made, in aggregate or individually, to promote the independence of Palestine, of Kashmir, of Tigray, of Kurds, of Chechnya?

6. You state: ***“In a move that recalls the infamous attack of Nazi Germany on Poland in 1939 and on the Soviet Union in 1941, the government of the Russian Federation, led by President Putin, has launched an unprovoked military aggression –.....”*** And then you have the audacity to claim: ***“We choose our words carefully here....”*** Let’s hope not!

What is the objective, evidential basis for drawing and highlighting this parallel? What data or logic support the implied contention that Putin/Russia aims at conquering all of Europe, of murdering millions of its civilians in organized death camps, in imposing an oppressive totalitarian rule, to giving all power to a superior race of Russians? The answer: you have none. And in an act of staggering indecency &/or abysmal ignorance, you use as model one of the greatest crimes of history that killed roughly 15 million Russians (and Ukrainians, Byelorussians -among other ethnic groups). Why then do you conjure false images and make the most elementary errors of comparative analysis? Can you honestly say that it is not an anti-intellectual device for demonizing a foe by deploying a gross insult and evoking the most horrific images from modern history?

If I were to compose a similarly crude screed in support of my views regarding genetics and racial intelligence, the potential for ‘cold fusion,’ or harnessing nuclear power so easily that energy would be available so

cheaply that it wouldn't even be worth the cost of metering it – if I wrote any of those, should the world stand up and take notice and honor my conclusion just because I won a prestigious prize in the Social Sciences? No - you would tell me: “Get out of here; we're not interested!”

6. In the light of the above, what plausible reason is there for your fellow citizens, our government leaders, and parties in other countries to have their conclusions, judgments and opinions about preferred action re. Russia influenced by your brief but bold public letter – disproportionate to other persons? Is it simply a matter of celebrity and name recognition? Why not give equal weight to other stars in the nation's over-populated galaxy of celebrities? – why not Tom Brady, Meryl Streep, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Oprah Winfrey, Tucker Carlson, Adele, Deepak Chopra, Lady Gaga, or Kenya West?

## *PRIDE & PREJUDICE*

Among the many oddities of the Ukraine affairs, the most astonishing is the frenzy of hostile passion directed at Putin, Russia and everything Russian. Nothing close to this has been seen since World War II when Hitler and the Nazis were Satan incarnate. Even then, it was not everything German that was cast as evil. That total condemnation was reserved for the Japanese. When Max Schmeling came to New York for the rematch with Joe Louis in June 1938, nobody demanded that he denounce Hitler and the Nazis before getting into the ring. During the depths of the Cold War, it was Communism and the Soviet Union that were the object of fear and antipathy – not quite completely synonymous with Russia.

This puzzling phenomenon cries out for explanation. The first thing to be said on this score, is that the passion and drive have come from American elites. There has been no great wave of popular outrage, no mass demonstrations, no blood-curdling calls for revenge and punishment. No post-9/11 national trauma. Instead, the fury is generated by our government leaders (Blinken, Sullivan, Nuland, Harris, Pelosi, Cruz); from the media world's clueless news

presenters *cum* propogandists, from the possessed editors of *The New York Times* who have discovered the thrills of ‘yellow journalism,’ from the likes of Peter Gelb, from the scores of Nobel Prize winners who in concert have lent their weight to the crusade; from the university presidents presiding over pious vigils who are thankful that the spotlight is shifting away from the unnumerable scandals they are paid hefty sums to whitewash; and Gold Medal to the IOC who ban handicapped athletes from competing in the Winter Paralympics because their passport says ‘*Russia*’. All are hugely self-satisfied. None of them ever blinked an eye as the United States for 20 years has killed, maimed, starved and tortured hundreds of thousands in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria *et al* in exercises of brutality that have left the country’s security in a more precarious state than when the onslaught began.

Doubtless, we soon will read that Zuckerberg has forbidden use of the term “*Russian roulette*.” When he does, how about ‘*Neo-Con roulette*’ as a substitute.

This essay is in two parts. Part I examines a number of hypotheses as to the reasons for the irrational reaction. Part II takes a critical look at the public letter sent by over 200 Nobel Laureates castigating Putin and Russia.

## *I. WHY?*

### HISTORICAL HOSTILITY

The United States and Russia have never fought a war. No bad blood is between them. The one, minor American expeditionary force deployed near Archangel and at Vladivostok during the Russian civil war in 1918-1919. This symbolic gesture led to just a handful of casualties. There also were a few dogfights over the Yalu River in Korea where some MIG pilots reportedly were Russian. That's it. It is doubtful that more than 1 American in a thousand ever heard of those incidents. The Cold War, admittedly, was a multi-layered hostile confrontation that lasted for 40 years. But military combat was limited to proxies. Then, too, the two countries were allies in the great test of WW II – without Soviet/Russian fortitude and sacrifice, Germany might not have been defeated.

In other words, one sees no basis for the visceral antagonism toward Russia and Russians now being demonstrated. Among many, even at the highest levels, emotions shade into outright hatred. It is hard to find equivalents; that

is to say, analogous passions certainly are to be found in the annals of history, but never against an essentially benign background.

#### ASCRIPTIVE DIVISION

Societies all have affinities and aversions with others based on race, ethnicity, language, ideology or religion. They can lead to empathy and bonding or a sense of separation and distaste. Often, the latter sentiments have fueled or aggravated competition and conflict. The examples are too numerous and obvious to denote. When we turn our attention to Russo-American mutual perceptions, we observe little in the way of rooted ascriptive divisions. Both are overwhelmingly Caucasian and Christian in heritage. Catholic vs Orthodox rivalries are distant in time and place. Ethnically, Slavic Russia does not stand in stark contrast to the multitudinous American mix. The contrasts and divergences derive from the all-out ideological war between the Soviet Union's aggressive secularism accompanying Communism's threat to Western politico-economic foundations.

Bolshevism, and the Soviet system that it fathered, was singularly thin on ascriptive characteristics. Sure, in important respects, that condition emerged from the *Russian* empire where Russia predominated

throughout. A scan of the roster of the USSR's elites reveals just how multinational it was. Brezhnev, Voroshilov and Trotsky were from Ukraine – as were hundreds of senior officials in all spheres. The large Jewish presence in the Bolshevik leadership ranks is well-known: Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek, Yagoda, Kaganovich, Sverdlov. Lenin himself reportedly was ¼ Jewish, Russian, German and Swedish in terms of ethnic ancestry. Molotov and Dzerzhinsky (the Polish nobleman who founded the Cheka/NKVD) had Jewish wives. Stalin and Beria, of course, were Georgians; Mikoyan was Armenian; Yezhev was Lithuanian – and so on. The political leadership of the country today is distinctly more ethnically Russian, leavened by a fair number of ethnic Jews who survived and didn't emigrate (e.g. the Deputy Foreign Minister and the 2 high-ranking officials who head the Russian delegation in negotiations with Ukraine).

So, it would be far-fetched to seek explanations for the American political class's fierce anti-Russian antagonism to some kind of atavistic aversion.

## **FEAR & DREAD**

Americans did not see a threat to their national security from any conventional Russian military menace. In this sense, minds and moods differed fundamentally from where they were during the Cold War. Sure, Russia still has the physical capability to destroy the United States with nuclear weapons. However, we have come to live with the



Bomb and post-Soviet Russia never was cast in the same dark colors. Admittedly, the Pentagon placed Russia at Number 2 in its threat rankings as early as 2017 – in the aftermath of its intervention in Syria. But that had more to do with budgets and wounded pride at having failed a mission once again than it did serious worry. Russia was more a surprising annoyance than a threat.

That explains why the Ukraine affairs was viewed as a serious concern by only 26% of the public at the end of last year. That is to say, before the vast propaganda campaign got into full gear. Most were as familiar with the country, and took as much interest in it, as they did Madagascar. (Nancy Pelosi could place it in Europe, but its exact geography eluded her). Even today, there is no rush to build bomb shelters or check with distant relatives the availability of housing deep in the sticks. Here, again, we have a discrepancy between public attitudes in general and our political elites – especially the foreign affairs community. Its pivot is less intellectual than it is one of feelings: pride, self-esteem and national esteem. It is among the latter than we find an acute concern about America's standing as Number 1 in the world: supreme, dominant and hegemonic. A gnawing sense that we are losing that status, that we are becoming an 'ordinary' power is unsettling. China's rise, financial turmoil, job insecurity, the growing signs that fewer countries now bow instinctively to our will as readily as they did

in the past – together, they undercut personal self-regard which, throughout American history, has drawn strength and credibility from the country’s standing as the trail-blazer of human progress. Hence, a creeping sense of dread, i.e. free floating anxiety. Its shifting fixation moves from Islamic terrorism, to China, to Russia with stopovers at Iran, Venezuela, Cuba. Everything bugs us disproportionately – even the crickets in Havana.

#### INDIVIDUAL/GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

To search for an explanation of this behavior, one would have to dive into the turbid depths of the human mind. That is beyond the scope of this essay. A couple of thoughts do come to mind.

One is that this overreaction may be propelled in part by hidden feelings of guilt about the West’s irresponsible abstention in doing next to nothing to prevent or even mitigate the atrocities in Bosnia. Silence, then, was golden. (And public lies the order of the day: e.g., German President Franz-Walter Steinmeier and then Foreign Minister outstanding among them). Perhaps, those feelings were strengthened by the excesses of the American ‘War On Terror’ in which the Europeans were accomplices in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. In addition to the provision of tangible aid, every NATO government was an accomplice in the rendition program, in one way or another – with the sole exception of France. They, thus, found themselves on the wrong side of a line of blood. Crossing back is important for a group of nations

whose self-identity, and their one card in playing the game of international politics, is their proclaimed virtue and enlightenment.

A second, related point of conjecture is that most Westerners have lived 'non-moral' lives in an ethically sterile environment. That is to say that Western elites rarely were placed in or sought circumstances where they faced difficult moral choices – where they had to affirm through action the ideals and virtues to which they nominally adhere. They grew up in pedestrian circumstances. At some level, certain of these well-educated enlightened elites have felt that void to varying degrees. Suddenly, out of the blue comes a golden opportunity to do so. To do so without pain or serious cost, with the mutual support of a large consort of cosmopolitan fellows.

### *THE TENDER AMERICAN EGO*

As I have written in an earlier commentary, *'Americans are struggling to draw into focus their exalted image of themselves and reality. They are not doing a very good job of it. The gap is wide and growing. Fading prowess is one of the most difficult things for humans to cope with – whether it be an individual or a nation. By nature, we prize our strength and competence; we dread decline and its intimations of extinction. This is especially so in the United States where for many the individual and the collective persona are inseparable. No*

*other country tries so relentlessly to live its legend as does the U.S. Today, events are occurring that contradict the American narrative of a nation with a unique destiny.*  
*That creates cognitive dissonance.*

*America's idealized sense of self is rooted in the belief that we are pacesetters and world beaters in every domain. The state of affairs sketched above - marked by impulsive enterprises that underline our foredoomed, audacious ambition to gain global dominance - does not represent cool strategic judgment. It is the national equivalent of ostentatious iron-pumping by bodybuilders worried about losing muscle tone. Those worries never disappear, though, even as one becomes muscle-bound striving ever more energetically to reassure oneself that nothing is creeping up behind you. The mirror is much preferred to the backward glance.*

*Americanism acts as a Unified Field Theory of self-identity, collective enterprise, and the Republic's enduring meaning. When one element is felt to be jeopardy, the integrity of the whole edifice becomes vulnerable. In the past, American mythology energized the country in ways that helped it to thrive. Today, it is a dangerous hallucinogen that traps Americans in a time warp more and more distant from reality.*

*At the psychological level, this approach is understandable since it plays to the United States' strength: overweening self-confidence coupled to material strength - thereby perpetuating the national myths of being destined to remain the world's No. 1 forever, and of being in a position to shape the world system according to American principles and interests. The tension for a nation so constituted encountering objective reality does not favor heightened self-awareness or a change in behavior.. Today, there is no foreign policy debate whatsoever. In addition, our vassal governments in Europe*

*and elsewhere either have a national interest in preserving the warped American view of the world (Israel, Poland) or have been so denatured over the decades that they are incapable of doing other than to follow Washington obediently – despite already having tumbled over a number of cliffs and staring at a potentially fatal abyss re. China and Russia*

## NIHILISM

Finally, there is the facilitating factor: a society in which anything goes. Where norms, standards, codes of decent conduct are so diluted as to be inoperative. In our state of generalized alienation, each of us is permitted – indeed, encouraged – to ‘do our own thing.’ Feelings of embarrassment, of shame, of guilt are weak or totally absent. Impulse, emotion, and – not -least – the enormous pressures of uniformity void that nominal freedom of meaning. Few have the wherewithal to work out an individual structure of values, of rights & wrongs. Whatever primitive benchmarks we walk around with, they obviously are inadequate to guide us when faced with complex issues, value contradictions, or the need for subtle, qualified judgment.

In these circumstances, it is unsurprising, if not inevitable, that “fuck the Russians” becomes the universal order of the day – for Nobel laureates, university presidents, pundits, editors, or wannabe moralists of every stripe. Not an edifying spectacle – or reassuring harbinger of what’s to come.

P.S. In accordance with the principle of absolute candor in discussing these issues, we should consider the possibility that some of the over-the-top attacks on all that is Russian, from certain prominent persons prominent in the anti-Russia campaign, could arise from family history – namely, a great-grandmother assaulted by Czarist-inspired Russians during the frequent pogroms in the Russian Empire, or some similar incident. Let me say in this regard that my paternal grandmother was indeed assaulted by Cossacks in the Ukraine in 1915. Yet, I never felt that was reason to freeze-dry my brain on all matters concerning either place OR to take revenge on Anna Netrebko, Daniel Medvedev, or those brave ‘Russian’ men and women who have been given the bum’s rush at the Paralympics. Anyone who does should be automatically disqualified from this discourse and their loudly advertised devotion to human rights placed in brackets.

## II. NOBLE NOBELS?

*For people like the Nobel Laureates, signing one’s name to a full-page add denouncing the vices of Russia may be experienced as a last-chance ethical saloon (or altar) – a god-given opportunity to secure one’s place on the side of the Angels. That high stakes psychological motivation carried the implication that, in order for the moral uplift to take full effect, the subject of moral objection had to be exaggerated – to cartoonish extent. It is the fate of such expedient lunges for salvation to boomerang. The 200 or so Laureates put themselves in the position of adding fuel to the bonfire of anti-Russian passions. Perhaps the most disgraceful episode in this pogrom has been the banning of Russian athletes from the winter Paralympics on the grounds that their very presence would sully the games’ moral purity.*

*On March 3 – a few days before the opening ceremony – the*

*International Paralympic Committee told the Russians that they*

*should get back into their wheelchairs and roll back to Moscow. This brutal action reversed, under intense Western pressure, an earlier decision to permit their participation. Let's make no bones about it: this is as morally atrocious conduct as is imaginable – obscene as taken in the name of ethics. Ethics as defined and shaped by elites, like many of the Laureates, whose morality arises from a calibrated, self-serving motivation rather than genuine empathy for the victimized. The outcome: they are accessories to the crime of inflicting incalculable pain on men and women whose lives have exceeded by far the normal measure of pain any human could expect; they insulted courageous persons whom we should honor and respect; they punctured hopes and dreams fashioned from a thousand hours of grueling perseverance; they pronounced guilt on the innocent. Their self-centered, obtuse try at exalting themselves has diminished them. They have added to the degraded spectacle of collective indecency.*

*God forgive them – for they know not what they do.*

*This is the end-point of a contrived and debased humanism that is a hallmark of our times. A humanism that places less value on flesh and blood sentient people than it does on a doctrine, on self-gratification, on the political or emotional need for an enemy, on a public posture, on parochial interest. That is the mindset that, in modern times alone, has sent tens of millions to an early grave.*

The Nobel petition is meant to impress – and it does, representing the common opinion of 203 persons of scholarly distinction. Still, I do not believe that it is disrespectful or a denigration of their academic accomplishment, to take a searching look at the authoritative basis for what they write, and the grounds for arguing that the public should accord them exceptional value. Such an inquiry can be organized in the form of a set of inter-related questions, i.e. the scientific method of dispassionate investigation and analysis.

1. What are the credentials of the 203 in making the *political judgments* that underlay their appeal? Do they possess exceptional information about the Ukraine-Russia affair? Have they studied the matter? How much of the factual data have they assimilated? There answer is none; that is to say, no more than that possessed by any educated person of superior intelligence who follows the news.

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A corollary question: did the Laureates protest Biden's outright theft of \$8 billion from the Afghan Central Bank at a time when millions are

starving after 20 years of America escorting them down the garden path that led to the illusory land of milk & honey we promised them?

4. The Laureates finely tuned sense of ethics presumably ranges far and wide. Presumably, it is applied with even greater vigor and rigor close to home. So, let's ask them: a) to Harvard professors: when and by what manner did you protest your institution's close. Honored and lucrative relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, one that was publicly known and involved 3 Presidents?; b) to MIT Professors: when and by what manner did you protest your institution's receipt of substantial funds from Mr. Epstein – after his sordid criminal acts were on the public record?; c) to Yale Professors: which of you have protested your institution's summary firing of Dr. Bandy Lee for the sin of offering a professional judgment of our dangerous psychopathic President Trump – based on credentials infinitely superior to any you can boast on Putin's mental state/Russia/Ukraine, or hiring General Stanley McChrystal to a distinguished faculty position despite his having been the initiator and overseer of torture in Iraq and Afghanistan, or selling an academic piece of your university (Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy) to two predatory billionaires from the world of financial buccaneering in exchange for their right to censor curriculum and faculty assignments - culminating in their forcing the resignation of the director last year? d) which of you have condemned the abuse of every academic ethical code by the American Psychological Association for entering into contracts with the CIA and the Pentagon to instruct them in torture techniques

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The *Dark Ages* are commonly referred to as *The Age of Faith*.

Appropriately so. For it was the avowal of belief that counted above all else. A testament in words as to the state of your soul eclipsed what you did and determined your fate and prospects for Salvation. When a Church prelate encountered ‘evil’ behavior &/or speech – of a sinner, of a pagan, a heretic, an apostate – the immediate reaction would be to clutch his pectoral crucifix in his left hand and make the sign of the cross with the right – left to right; right to left if Orthodox (as Putin and Kiril do). He then would issue an interdiction prohibiting any communication with the brethren until the spiritual miscreant had taken a blood oath of fidelity to the prescribed doctrine and authority.

In this supposedly enlightened, secular age, we are reviving the practice in modified form. Discourse about Russia/Ukraine is the outstanding case in point these days. Any public commentary about the matter, discussing any aspect of the complex situation, is required to be prefaced by a declaration of belief: a blunt denunciation of Russia, Putin and the invasion of Ukraine followed by praise to the glory of Ukraine’s stellar ‘democracy’ and the person of Vladimir Zelensky (the Sainted martyr, who doesn’t cross himself – that’s progress). Without that avowal, whatever has been said or written is placed beyond the pale – ignored, denied relevance, and interpreted as *prime facie* evidence of the author’s blasphemy.

Someone who is averse to offering testaments of faith in order to be qualified to participate in the rites of public discourse is placed in a quandary. Take the vow and then move on with serious thinking OR remain silent OR suffer the slings and arrows from the outraged Faithful.

To come down from those lofty heights, and to personalize it, my experience of the past several days confirms the suspicion that the Dark Ages are making a comeback. For anybody who cares, let me note that nowhere have I stated that I approve or support the Russian military move into Ukraine. However, I see no good reason to take the formulaic vow as a precondition for people to pay as much attention to my writing as they normally do. Nor do I plan to seek Absolution from Cardinal Biden or Archbishop Stoltenberg - even if each were not so heavily pockmarked by the wages of his own Sins.

***“ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE FOR ONE WHO BELIEVES. FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH. AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST.”***

***Proverbs 3:5 -***

## *ON BENDED KNEE*

*Late last week, Mitch McConnell indiscreetly revealed to the press what he had been told privately by Germany's new Chancellor Olaf Scholz about Berlin's prospective reaction to the fictive Russian 'invasion' of Ukraine – in particular the NORDSTROM II natural gas pipeline. Scholz had been asked about that repeatedly in the press conference held immediately after his meeting with Biden. He evasively left the answer obscure. So, we now know that he had been lying. He is caught between enormous pressure from Washington that prioritizes the projects cancellation as part of its strategy to isolate Russia and reduce it to a non-actor in European affairs, on the one hand, and the popular aversion to a confrontation with Russia from which Germany would suffer far greater economic damage than Russia on the other. (Indeed, it was Angela Merkel who persuaded a luke-warm Putin to go ahead with it in 2015). Predictably, he is making Germans' future hostage to the honesty of the Biden government in regard to who initiates "provocation" and who defines "invasion."*

*The American strategy is now crystal clear. Arrange a provocative incidence around the Donbass that sparks a Russian reaction that could be used to confirm the specious claims of a Russian plans for invasion. That means doing exactly what we are accusing Moscow of planning – clever ‘projection’ tactic. Then, force the West Europeans to go along with economic sanctions (including NORDSTROM II’s annulment) that would make them more dependent on the U.S. – confirming their vassal status as conferred 75 years ago. Craven European leaders will continue to accept their subordination in an inferior position since: 1) they never have overcome the traumas of Europe’s 30-year civil wars, 1914-1945); 2) psychologically, they are incapable of acting otherwise; 3) since 2001, they have set a standard of loyalty that leads Washington to expect – correctly – that the Europeans will follow the U.S. off any cliff however deleterious the military, diplomatic, humanitarian and financial consequences; 4) in sanctifying the principle of ‘unity’ – be it of the Atlantic or EU variety – as the inviolate, overarching goal invoked when a major issue is at hand, European leaders have found a ready excuse for either doing nothing, adopting anodyne least-common-denominator policies, or doing nothing at all; 5) when it comes to strategic thinking, the minds of Europe’s political elites are as arid – and monotone - as those in Washington.*

Mr. Scholz heads to the Kremlin this week. Here is what we may expect.

## ***HERR SCHOLZ GOES TO WASHINGTON***

### ***RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON***





### ***RETURN TO MUNICH AIRPORT FROM D.C.***



### **PUTIN to SCHOLZ in MOSCOW**

"Congratulations on your success in Washington. You know, *mein freund*, that there will be no invasion - the American's are just indulging their penchant for make-believe. Still, there is always the chance that some reckless act dreamed up by the cookie lady could lead to a serious conflict. So, let's put our heads together and think through what we'd do. I see that you implicitly have committed Germany to closing NORDSTROM II - that huge natural gas project that your predecessor

persuaded us to join in building to offset the loss of your nuclear power source. To get a better sense of the repercussions, I propose that we do a rehearsal, as a sort of dry-run. For 90 days, I'll stop all gas deliveries to Germany via current routes; that includes the one through Ukraine. You scramble for LNG on the international spot market while your American friends put the arm on Qatar to divert their current deliveries to Japan, China and the rest of Asia to you. At 6-8 times the current spot market price.

By the way, I noted that you also declared economic war on China whom you pronounced a strategic rival. Perhaps, you could satisfy my curiosity about one thing. China, I believe, is the largest market for Germany's heavy engineering products and machine tools which represent a very significant share of your export revenues and general economy. In fact, you coped better with the 2009 financial crash and with the COVID disruption because of stable demand from a still robust Chinese economy. You said that you'd substitute Asian democracies as markets. Did you have in mind the Philippines? Malaysia? Cambodia? New Zealand? or, are you looking farther afield - in places like Belize and Namibia? My experts tell me that - due to the supply chain backups - both are suffering a severe shortage of hammers, screwdrivers and pliers.

Do you prefer Vodka or schnapps?

Oh - forgot to mention. I'll let you know about the availability of palladium and cobalt for export after I meet with my Minister for Resources tomorrow.

## *RETURN OF THE LAUREATES*

We wait with bated breath for the candlelight vigils, the graphic photos (real & doctored), the righteous outrage, the boycott of Saudi oil and the freezing of Saudi financial assets, the severing of ties with all and any Saudi citizens, the exclusion of Saudi Arabia from the World Cup, the impounding of the super yachts owned by Saudi billionaires, British cancellation of the Newcastle FC's purchase by the Saudi government's sovereign fund - and the think tank world's rejection of all contributions from Saudi Arabia and the UAE (the unkindest cut of all!)

This afternoon, the word around the Long Branch Saloon was that the 200 Nobel Laureates were composing a new appeal/petition directed at the communion of world humanists calling for swift action to alleviate the plight of the Houthis in Yemen enduring the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the assault from Saudi Arabia and its allies. It excoriated

the House of Saud and their Crown Prince Mohammed bin-Salman for their savage atrocities.

The open letter has been quoted as saying: *“We choose our words carefully here....” for we do not wish to indict all the Saudi people. Yet, “in a move that recalls the infamous attack of the Crusaders on Jerusalem in 1099 that slaughtered many hundreds of Muslims, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, led by MBS, “has launched an unprovoked military aggression.....”*

*I unfortunately cannot say with confidence that reports of the Laureates' appeal are accurate. The noise level in the saloon was very high as the patrons repeatedly burst into loud applause watching the televised address from Sana'a by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Badruldeen al-Houthi to a joint session of Congress. So, if any reader who has more concrete information that confirms the letter's preparation, please let me know and I will forward it to the list.*

*In a later interview, an obviously moved Nancy Pelosi told the press corps that “All roads lead to Riyadh.” She was seconded by Hillary Clinton who tweeted that “MSB is another Osama bin-Laden!” She pledged that she and Bill will return the pair of ruby encrusted dueling swords they received from King Fahd at the time of their state visit in 1994.*

*The Laureates bold act of moral courage is certain to win them yet another badge of honor to add to the paeans of praise lavished on them in standing witness to the Calvary of Ukraine*

*SILVER SCREEN REVIEW      FEB 16 2024*

American cinema and theater have been in the doldrums. For many, the very thought going out to see the latest dreary creation from Hollywood or Broadway is enough to send them searching Netflix for the colorized rerun of *Lassie Finds A Home*. So, it is understandable that Washington – out of its deep concern for the mood of its citizenry – should go out of its way to provide us with a tension-laden, extravagant production worthy of comparison to *Thirteen Days* or *Zero Dark Thirty*. ***Showdown On The Dnieper*** was meant to be in that vein. A drama of heroic proportions to keep Americans, and much of Europe, trembling in dread as the Slavic dogs of war strain on their leash and the vise tightens on America, on Russia, on NATO and – of course - Ukraine.

Instead, we are offered a comic tragedy that faintly resembles *Dr. Strangelove* – on Valium. Here’s a review of “*War On The Dnieper*” in calm decompression. *Plot*: imaginative but fanciful. Dots not well connected – numerous incongruities hint at clever stratagems never revealed. Endless repetitions leave an empty feeling. *Script*: “hackneyed” and stale - lacks strong personalities. 100-word vocabulary cap gives sense of having seen this one before - Presidential ‘debate?’ *Directing*: ambitious but fails to live up to

excited expectations. Bloodless Action film doesn't hack it. Stock characters stilted, monotone. *Acting*: jarring combination of monotonous cue card recitation and overacting. Amateur cast. Exceptions are two key supporting players, seasoned professionals whose facial expressions hint at acute boredom: *"how did I ever get roped into something this tedious and silly?"*

*Soon, at a theater near you – maybe.*

### WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

*Joe Biden* teams up with the Obamas as co-producer of an HBO series of historical dramas titled: **When Conquer We Must**. The first program to air is **Havana** – to be followed by **Chapultepec, Tonkin Gulf, Shock & Awe** and **Rumors Of War**. The last comprises five segments: **Tehran, Benghazi, Damascus, Odessa, Quemoy & Matsu**.

**Tony Blinken** is closing in on Hillary's record performance as Secretary of State in chalking up most flight miles with no evident effect – at least his suit is, anyway. **Jake Sullivan** is deepening his anonymity as a highly placed administration source by cutting all ties with Facebook, Linked In, Instagram, Tik Tok and the Oprah book club. **Victoria Nuland** is settling in at NATO headquarters as its new Secretary General. In her inaugural address to the ambassadorial corps, she insisted that the Alliance should stop waffling on the grave issues that confront it – proclaiming: *"extremism in the cause of democracy promotion is no vice, moderation in pursuit of the West's rule-based international order is no virtue."*

**Boris Johnson** has announced that the Royal Navy will deploy a flotilla of miniature warships, with the aircraft carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth II* as flagship – in the Serpentine at Hyde Park. He proclaims that HMG wants to show all and sundry that Britain still punches above its weight (especially to those sundries who vote). The German government of **Olaf Scholz** falls as leaders of the 3 coalition parties cannot agree on a definition of key concepts: e.g. 'hopefully,' 'unity,' 'maybe.' A still rattled **Swedish government** petitions NATO to join the alliance, assuming that the 'open door' policy remains in force - bolstering their case by underscoring their nonpareil anti-submarine capabilities in shallow waters. **Jen Stoltenberg** opens a consulting firm in Washington following the model of his predecessor Fogh Rasmussen. Its specialty: "Conflict Resolution & Conciliation." **Liz Truss** opens a 'Special Relationship' consulting office named **GEO** with dual headquarters in London and D.C.- where she awaits the imminent arrival of **Kamala Harris** as her American partner. **Vladimir Zelensky** returns to his career as a comedian specializing in impersonations of public figures. His Café Bandara is a roaring success as a boisterous crowd of Azov veterans nightly applauds his imitations of Biden, Blinken, Austin, Nuland, Poroshenko, Macron, Stoltenberg, Erdogan and Scholz.

**Vladimir Putin** is still in the Kremlin – occasionally amusing himself by rewatching the famous *Battle On The Permafrost* scene in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* or planning for the annual celebration of February 16 at 3:00 A.M. in honor of the historic triumph in the **Mother of All Phony Invasions**. This year's special guest will be Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of *The New York Times*, who will lay a wreath at the **Monument to the Unknowing Journalist**.

**Xi Jinping** is said to be resting at a mountain clinic where he was treated for recurrent hiccups brought on by bouts of uncontrollable laughter.

## ***CONCLUSION***

**There is nothing more dangerous than a dim leader who has been convinced of his cleverness by willful schemers peddling a nostrum that promises to write his name in the history books forever**









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