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PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin



The Heart of the Matter

IN OCTOBER, THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION RELEASED ITS *NATIONAL Security Strategy*. Failing to address adequately the swelling military powers of hostile, ambitious regimes, it offered the strange, woke gobbledygook hosed into four-hour graduate seminars by students who somehow are there even though they don't have to avoid the draft.

Napoleon's maxim about isolating and acting upon the heart of the matter—“*Frappez la masse, et tout le reste vient par surcroît*,” or (freely translated) “Strike the center, and the rest will follow,” escaped the authors, who, rather than strategize, expatiated upon almost everything else: climate change, “gender,” protecting “our democracy,” “inclusion,” “transparency,” “investing...in women and girls,” the “Africa Build Together” campaign, “exposing disinformation,” “the fight for dignity.”

Really, this is what they came up with even after correctly recognizing China as the chief threat to the United States. Their seemingly random walk proceeds not only from an inability to grasp the essence of an urgent question but from the common ancestors it shares with isolationism: that is, an underdeveloped threat perception, and the neglect of the lessons of history perhaps because they believe themselves above history, are ignorant of it, or both. American isolationism stems largely from the fact that, despite close calls in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, we have never been conquered. The indigenous people who were here, however, were most thoroughly conquered, just as almost every region, territory, and nation on earth, some time and again, and many within recent memory (such as, yesterday), has been invaded and oppressed at great and tragic cost.

But not us. Why? First, the oceans. But the oceans never were wholly protective and have become steadily less and less so, as Britain's and subsequently America's successful hurling of armies all over the world attest, and strategic weapons confirm. And then the combination of America's enormous military power with the practice of keeping conflict at a distance (i.e., interventions abroad). It hardly follows that because immense power and preemption elsewhere have kept us safe we no longer need either. And yet, conscious or not, this is the supposedly evidence-based conclusion of isolationists and advocates of “soft power,” a term used to camouflage abandonment of and/or hostility toward hard power.

Indeed, the military sphere is sheaved off into another report. In the *National Security Strategy* it is an orphaned child, “the last resort,” used only when “consistent with our values and laws, alongside non-military tools.” One might wish that alongside such potentially exquisite distinctions some weight might be given to the essential interests of the United States, much less its existence as an independent sovereignty absent external domination. But we are far from fundamentals here, and all you get is the Ivy-speak equivalent of Clinton Administration aide Dee Dee Myers saying, “We don't talk to the military.”

China is a steam locomotive with a blinding light, coming at us at 100 mph. And you don't have to be Napoleon to know that the only effective response, dictated by the urgent need to balance and deter,

has nothing to do with “the fight for dignity,” and can be concisely expressed in four parts. Of course, to get there, many conditions precedent—such as the renovation of the defense and general industrial bases—must be satisfied, for which, as night follows day, a thousand other necessities must fall in place. But one doesn't start, like this addled administration, with “the needs of...the LGBTQI community.” You point to where you must go.

1. GIVEN CHINA'S RAPIDLY ACCELERATING STRATEGIC WEAPONS buildup, isolating competition and conflict from the nuclear dimension can be accomplished only by reshaping America's nuclear deterrent to make an enemy first strike impossible of success. This requires mobile land-based missiles, more ballistic-missile submarines on patrol at any one time, more and better-dispersed penetrating bombers, and effective defenses to protect counterforce second-strike assets—and as much as is possible to protect countervalue cities and industry—from missiles, hypersonics, cyber, and EMP.

2. China's navy is already larger than ours. When its fast-maturing technology is sufficiently developed, it can use its 100 suitable shipyards—to our six—to surge production of a fleet so massive that it will be able to expel the United States from the Pacific. The same dynamic is at work to the detriment of American long-range airpower, which lacks the numbers, quality, and secure bases required to overcome the Pacific's tyranny of distance. Though it may shock pacifist sensibilities, the strengths of the Navy and the Air Force should be doubled.

3. If they are not to be made vassals of the Middle Kingdom, then Japan, Australia, South Korea, and India must re-garrison their societies and join themselves to the U.S. at the hip. Should they fail, they will fall, and so will we. This will require, rather than the desultory business as usual, a diplomatic triumph rivaling that of the Concert of Europe.

4. Any grand strategy must provide redoubt, refuge, and reserve. As a new world takes shape, for us this is naturally the Western Hemisphere, still protected by the oceans to the extent of our naval power, and rich in resources and population. It is not only our home turf but, as Winston Churchill would have it, its southern portion is America's soft underbelly. Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence, client states, revolutionary activity, and, eventually, basing, cannot be tolerated. Now is the time, no matter the risk (and newly coupled with generous aid and respectful diplomacy), for the revival—with *éclat*—of the Monroe Doctrine.

China is facing demographic and—as a result of the ineluctable contradictions of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”—major systemic headwinds. Rather than exploiting this by taking advantage of our free markets and free society, in the process of eroding both we find ourselves instead facing headwinds of our own gratuitous creation. Foolishly deluded, distracted, and unable to face the heart of the matter, with vision blurred and direction confused, we have begun to stumble toward a future of servitude and oppression.

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