A Changing World Order Confronts the United States

The symptoms are increasingly clear that the United States is losing its ability to be a game changer in world events. It is equally clear that they neither accept nor even necessarily recognise the decline in their status. Some recent examples illustrate the point.

Prior to his meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Geneva, the United States president Joseph Biden gave an interview on United States television. In the course of the interview, he made the extraordinary claim that his Russian counterpart was “a killer”. Not only was this an extremely ill-judged comment, it is patently absurd for any US president to label his opponent “a killer”.

Since at least the end of World War II 76 years ago, the United States has been the unquestioned leading power in making chaos throughout the world. In the course of those decades the US has been responsible for the deaths of multiple millions of people in every continent. In this context, for any US president to label his opponent a killer is a sick joke.

A second symptom of a declining power is to denigrate the opposition. Again, the Americans are in a class of their own. Former president Obama was rudely dismissive of Russia’s industrial progress, suggesting they produced little more than armaments. In this he echoed former United States Senator the late John McCain who similarly dismissed
Russia’s economy.

The Russian economy is in fact extremely resilient, but in this context one of the most important markers is its ability to produce world-class weaponry that is a generation ahead of its US equivalent. The American intelligence services are not so stupid that they fail to recognise that in the formulation of recent weapons the Russians are well ahead of their American counterparts.

What the United States reaction does suggest is that they fail to appreciate just how far behind they are. They still conduct themselves with an amazing degree of arrogance, whether in Europe against Russia or in the Far East against China.

This manifests itself in such exercises as so-called freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea. The fact that they are unable to point to a single example of the passage of their ships being hindered is a fact that seemingly escapes western journalists who are almost unanimous in supporting these blatantly provocative exercises.

The fact that the Chinese are seemingly increasingly losing their patience with these blatantly provocative exercises is not a point to be ignored. Recent Chinese statements have made it clear that there is a limit to their patience. Recent United States gestures in support of Taiwan have clearly caused the Chinese some upset. This upset has been reflected not only in their increasingly strong rhetoric, but also in more and more frequent intrusions by Chinese warships into the waters close to Taiwan. The rhetoric has also become stronger and more pointed. It would not be a surprise to see some definite military moves by the Chinese to assert their backing the rhetoric of “one China” with actual military action.

At his meeting with Putin in Geneva, Biden made a number of conciliatory gestures. Unfortunately, words were all that happened. There has been no reduction of the sanctions that the United States has imposed on Russia, and in fact they were enlarged following the Geneva meeting.

The ostensible reason for this was Russia’s alleged actions against Ukraine, and the Russian insistence that the waters adjoining Crimea are Russian territory. The British were the latest to challenge this assertion by sending a warship within Crimea’s territorial waters. The British position was that the waters were in fact Ukrainian territory and they were therefore entitled to sail within them.

The apparent basis for the British belief that Crimea is part of Ukraine, apparently stemming back to the 1950s transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. This is a classic example of British (and Western) blindness to both history and the democratic process.

The British have conveniently ignored the fact that they fought a war against Russia in the 1850s, known in Western history books as the Crimean War. The attitude also ignores the fact that in 2014 Crimea voted overwhelmingly (by 97% with an 87% turnout) to depart their brief adherence to Ukraine and return to Russia. “Return” is the operative word.

British (and Western) complaints about that exercise also ignore the precedent in Kosovo, which similarly voted to leave Serbia and assert its independence status. The West ignoring the Kosovo precedent probably owes more than a little to the fact that Kosovo is now one of the United States’ largest foreign military bases. It is also an important way station for the (again American) dominance of Afghanistan’s heroin trade.

Part of the United States motivation for its partial change of behaviour to Russia is the belief by the Americans that they can separate the Russians from their relationship with China. That relationship recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. The United State is pursuing a chimera into thinking that can separate China and Russia.

The closeness of the ties between the two states can be seen for example, in a unified approach to Afghanistan. The Americans are allegedly withdrawing from Afghanistan, although it is not obvious from their behaviour, which includes maintaining a tight grip on the heroin trade, and their bombing flights to attack Taliban (organization banned in Russia) positions. The Americans seem to have completely forgotten their 2020 agreement with the Taliban. They seem determined to pursue a policy of maintaining the current Kabul government, whose future can now be measured in weeks.

Both the Russians and the Chinese are dictating the future of the incoming Taliban government. This includes a determination that the Taliban repeat their 1990s policy of eliminating the heroin traffic from within its borders. The Russians have also strengthened the National borders of the former Soviet states that are joined to Afghanistan. There is no real concern about Afghanistan wanting to violate these borders, but the concern is that terrorist groups
will seek to violate the borders and exercise terrorist actions, particularly in China’s Xinjiang region, a major target of western propaganda that asserts baseless claims of genocide in that region against the Uighur population.

A recent vote of independent states overwhelmingly confirmed that China’s policy was a matter for the Chinese, completely overshadowing an earlier vote of some western nations that sought to condemn China.

What these examples all illustrate is that the days of United States hegemony are over. The world, led by Russia and China, are forging a new path, most clearly represented by overwhelming world support for China’s Belt and Road Initiative. In getting the United States to recognise these changes in the balance of world affairs is the major challenge of the present decade. The United States will be reluctant to accept this reality. In that, the world faces its greatest challenge.

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