**A Few Basic Foreign Policy Questions**

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In the UK, prime ministers undergo “Question Time” in Parliament. This can be a knockdown event despite the civility of addressing each other as “The Right Honorable Gentleman or Lady.” US presidents endure press conferences. The difference is that presidents can choose the time and place or choose not to hold any. Prime ministers do not enjoy that freedom.

Assuming President Joe Biden would be willing, here are three foreign policy questions that beg answers. The first concerns Ukraine. For the president, what exactly is the US strategy for Ukraine? Some argue that it is to supply Ukraine with just enough weaponry and support to stay in the fight.

That would explain why the US was initially hesitant to send M-1 tanks and currently is not prepared to provide Ukraine F-16 fighter jets. Maintenance of both weapons systems is substantial. Yet it appears that the tanks will not be delivered possibly until next year. And will the decision by Poland to send jets affect America?

There is the matter of rebuilding Ukraine’s economy which Russia is in the process of destroying. What is the US strategy and plan for Ukrainian economic renewal? After approving about $100 billion to support Ukraine, the public must be more fully informed on the strategy, plans and why this aid is so important.

While the Vietnam War was raging, President Richard Nixon’s initiative to use “triangular politics” not only worked. It worked very well.

Second, Vladimir Putin has threatened to deploy nuclear weapons on Belarus. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia moved quickly to retrieve nuclear weapons stationed in former republics including Ukraine. This reversal of policy is obviously meant as a threat to the US, NATO and Ukraine. But how safe and secure are these weapons?

The USSR has not had a perfect safety record regarding nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors, with Chornobyl being the worst disaster. As the Russian military has not performed well in Ukraine, what safeguards and assurances can Moscow give that this incompetence will not apply to these new deployments? Indeed, what assurances can Belarus provide about guaranteeing the security of any nuclear weapons Russia might deploy to that country?

Last, the summit between President Putin and Paramount Leader Xi Jingping in Moscow last week reinforced US fears of the alliance’s ability to challenge the rules-based international order currently in place. As US-Chinese relations continue to worsen and as the US moves to impose more penalties on China possibly disallowing Tik Tok to operate inside America, that suggests even further incentives for the Russo-Sino alliance to strengthen.

During the Cold War and while the Vietnam War was raging, President Richard Nixon’s initiative to use “triangular politics” and China as a lever against the Soviet Union not only worked. It worked very well.

Nixon not only went to China in 1972 to meet with Mao ZeDong beginning a rapprochement that lasted for four decades. He also went to Moscow where the US and USSR agreed to the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and limitations on strategic nuclear weapons. That raises the third question.

What is the US doing to weaken the ties between China and Russia? Some may argue this is a fool’s mission. What leverage does the US have? It is in the best interests of China and Russia to support each other.

China needs Russian energy and foodstuffs. Russia needs Chinese technology and currency as well as access to foreign markets made more difficult by sanctions. Further, the vast border between the two states has historically been a source of tension and the two did have a number of border clashes, the most serious in 1969 at the Ussuri River.

Despite the forces that have motivated this unlikely alliance and indeed the internal centrifugal forces that have not all been contained, there are many weaknesses in it. So do China and Russia. So why not use Russian and Chinese techniques against both? China’s military buildup was largely dependent on Ukrainian technology. China’s first aircraft carrier, made into a cruise ship by Ukraine, was purchased from Kyiv. Both signed a Treaty of Friendship in 2013 in which China recognized and assured Ukrainian sovereignty. Why has China not been called on that?

Further, through clever diplomacy and messaging, the inherent rivalries and cultural differences between China and Russia can be made known to both publics questioning the alliance. And using Telegraph, the Russian equivalent of Twitter, with phrases such as “send a boy to Ukraine and get a body bag back” can work. That leads to a fourth question: why have the first three not been asked or answered? That by itself is revealing.

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