**Guy Fawkes Day, 11/11/11 and American Politics**

[Harlan Ullman](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/harlan-ullman/)

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While yesterday’s elections will understandably consume today’s media, this column takes a different and historical tack. Two November holidays are eerily relevant to current American politics and the war in Ukraine. Both deserve attention.

Guy Fawkes Day and its slogan “Remember, remember the Fifth of November: Gunpowder, Treason and Plot” are not celebrated here. In 1605, outraged with James I’s refusal to grant greater tolerance to their religion, radical English Catholics concocted The Gunpowder Plot to blow up Parliament. The plot was discovered and the conspirators were arrested. One of the main conspirators was Guy Fawkes who was captured, tried and executed. Parliament would declare November 5th a British holiday.

Consider some parallels with Guy Fawkes Day, modified by the passage of four centuries. Misinformation and disinformation fired across social media, and not gunpowder are the explosive ingredients today. The targets are not Parliament but the other political party and whatever cohesion remain across American society. Unlike 17th century England, plotters are not limited to a single radical faction.

Intolerance of facts and truth has turned misinformation, disinformation, outright lies and falsehoods into the new political coin of the realm. Denial intensifies their destructive power by creating false narratives and alternative realities. Reality is now defined by what one says and not what is real. Democrats are fixated on the threat to democracy posed by “MEGA MAGA” Republicans who deny the 2020 election results and are plotting to overthrow the 2024 presidential election by any and all means if they lose. Yet, in some polls, a majority of Americans regard extreme social views expressed by some Democrats as the larger threat to democracy.

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Republicans are fixated on Democrats as the enemy, who reciprocate that hostility. “Wokeness” is used as a slur to attack and exaggerate over imposing critical race theory; diversity; transsexual education; choice; defunding police; immigration; and other social issues and culture across society. That makes civil discourse and tolerance impossible.

Contenders for playing the roles of either Guy Fawkes or James I, depending on whether you are a Democrat or Republican, are Donald Trump and Joe Biden. But there is one difference. The highest priority of both parties is delegitimizing the other. Who then is responsible for maintaining authority and governing? The answer is no one. That is the real threat and in this case, a current-day November 5th plot that could make the government even more dysfunctional.

Armistice Day marked the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 that brought World War One to a halt, becoming Veteran’s Day in 1954. By the end of 1918, the Germans and Franco-British allies had fought to exhaustion. A combination of the US entry into the war in 1917 tipped the balance, surprisingly assisted by the Spanish Flu that took a greater toll on the Kaiser’s army than its western adversaries.

Similarly, the 11/11/11 armistice fits how the war is being waged between Russia and the West in Ukraine and eventually ends. Russia and Ukraine may not be yet approaching exhaustion. They will. While Covid-19 has not had the impact of the Spanish Flu on the German army, Russian attacks on Ukraine’s energy and water infrastructure may erode Ukrainian will. And the engagement of America as in 1917 and NATO could shift the balance.

One of the disastrous consequences of 11/11/11 was the failure to impose a fair and lasting peace. Germany never surrendered. But Germany was forced to accept crippling reparations ultimately leading to Hitler’s appointment as chancellor in 1933 and World War II. Will the end of the Ukraine War follow that path with unsurvivable peace? Or will concessions be made that, while not totally satisfactory to all, do not sow the seeds for further violence?

Reportedly, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has held exploratory talks with Ukraine about the next steps and with Russia to prevent escalation and the use of nuclear weapons. These talks suggest that negotiations will follow at some point. But any diplomatic missteps could be explosive and extend or escalate the conflict. And negotiations will be branded by opponents as appeasement and capitulation no matter how vital they are.

11/11/11 only deferred a second catastrophic war. An extended or second Ukrainian War must be averted. This may be the supreme test of Biden’s foreign policy. And an American version of Guy Fawkes Day that threatens government may make that test even more formidable.

*The writer is a senior advisor at Washington, DC’s Atlantic Council and a published author.*